

An Litir Bheag

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 936 (which corresponds to Litir 1,240). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

We were looking at whisky names. They are in the book 'The A to Z of Whisky Place-Names' by Jacob King. There are plenty of them that have an artificial name. But there are some which have a name based on a real place-name. We'll take a look at some of them today.

The names on Islay are pretty much all based on real place-names. For example, Ardbeg is made near An Àird Bheag 'the small promontory'. Bowmore is from the largest village on the island. It's called Am Bogha Mòr in Gaelic. It means either 'the big reef' or 'the big bend'.

Bruichladdich is from the Gaelic Bruthach a' Chladaich 'the brae of the shore'. Bunnahabhain is from Bun na h-Abhainne 'the mouth of the river'. On the south-east coast of the island, there is Lagavulin. That name comes from Lag a' Mhuilinn 'the hollow of the mill'.

There is one distillery on Mull. A whisky called Tobermory is made there. The name comes from the village where the distillery is – Tobar Mhoire, 'the well of the Virgin Mary'.

Bha sinn a' toirt sùil air ainmean uisge-bheatha. Tha iad san leabhar 'The A to Z of Whisky Place-Names' le Jacob King. Tha gu leòr dhiubh air a bheil ainm fuadain. Ach tha feadhainn ann le ainm stèidhichte air fìor ainm-àite. Bheir sinn sùil air feadhainn dhiubh sin an-diugh.

Tha na h-ainmean ann an Ìle an ìre mhath uile stèidhichte air fìor ainmean-àite. Mar eisimpleir, tha Ardbeg air a dhèanamh faisg air An Àird Bheag 'the small promontory'. Tha Bowmore às a' bhaile as motha anns an eilean. Tha Am Bogha Mòr air ann an Gàidhlig. Tha e a' ciallachadh an dàrna cuid 'the big reef' no 'the big bend'.

Tha Bruichladdich bhon Ghàidhlig Bruthach a' Chladaich 'the brae of the shore'. Tha Bunnahabhain o Bun na h-Abhainne 'the mouth of the river'. Air cladaich an earra-dheas an eilein, tha Lagavulin. Tha an t-ainm sin a' tighinn bho Lag a' Mhuilinn 'the hollow of the mill'.

Tha aon taigh-staile ann am Muile. Thathar a' dèanamh uisge-beatha ann ris an canar Tobermory. Tha an t-ainm a' tighinn bhon bhaile far a bheil an taigh-staile – Tobar Mhoire, 'the well of the Virgin Mary'.

Back on the mainland is Tomatin, south of Inverness. That is from the Gaelic Tom Aitinn 'hillock of juniper'. Glenlivet in Moray comes from the Gaelic Gleann Lìobhaid. Jacob King tells us that it is likely that Lìobhaid came from a Pictish root. It means 'glittering' or 'shining'.

There is another Moray whisky which has a name that is somewhat strange to us as Gaels. It's written as one word – a-n-c-n-o-c. I would pronounce it 'an cnoc'. But the whisky's website tells us that it is pronounced 'a-nock'. It is made at the Knockdhu Distillery.

Finally, in Easter Ross there is a famous whisky called Glenmorangie. Does that really mean 'The Glen of Tranquility' as if it came from Gleann Mòr na Sìth? Jacob King tells us it doesn't. 'Glen' was added to Morangie, a local place-name that means 'big haugh place'.

Air ais air tìr-mòr tha Tomatin, deas air Inbhir Nis. Tha sin bhon Ghàidhlig Tom Aitinn 'hillock of juniper'. Tha Glenlivet ann am Moireibh a' tighinn bhon Ghàidhlig Gleann Lìobhaid. Tha Jacob King ag innse dhuinn gu bheil e coltach gun tàinig Lìobhaid bho fhreumh Cruithneach. Tha e a' ciallachadh 'boillsgeach' no 'gleansach'.

Tha uisge-beatha Moireach eile ann air a bheil ainm car annasach dhuinne mar Ghàidheil. Tha e sgrìobhte mar aon fhacal – a-n-c-n-o-c. Bhithinn a' fuaimneachadh sin mar 'an cnoc'. Ach tha làrach-lìn an uisge-bheatha ag innse dhuinn gu bheilear ga fhuaimneachadh 'a-nock'. Tha e air a dhèanamh aig Knockdhu Distillery.

Mu dheireadh, ann an taobh sear Rois, tha uisge-beatha ainmeil air a bheil Glenmorangie. A bheil sin dha-rìribh a' ciallachadh 'The Glen of Tranquility', mar gun tàinig e à Gleann Mòr na Sìth? Tha Jacob King ag innse dhuinn nach eil. Chaidh 'Glen' a chur ri Morangie, ainm-àite ionadail a tha a' ciallachadh 'big haugh place'.