

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 942 (which corresponds to Litir 1,246). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learngaelic.scot.

The Isle of Stroma is off the coast of Caithness. It's an amazing place. The houses are still standing, with [their] roofs on them. But nobody lives there today.

When there was a population there, the people were extremely capable as mariners. Some of the Stroma folk were famous as pilots. They were guiding vessels through the firths around the island.

Although the Western Isles are a bit away from Stroma, there were maritime links between the two places. I want to tell you about an occurrence in the autumn of 1891.

The Cupid, a vessel from Denmark, with five people on board, was making for Stornoway. She reached Stroma waters. She hoisted a flag. The crew were showing that they were looking for a pilot. A boat went out from Stroma. One of the Stroma men, David Banks, agreed to be a pilot for them. He went aboard the Cupid.

Things went well to start with. But a storm arose. The Cupid was driven towards Shetland. The sails were ripped to shreds. They lost a crew member over the side. They were in danger of sinking.

Tha Eilean Stròma far costa Ghallaibh. 'S e àite iongantach a tha ann. Tha na taighean fhathast nan seasamh, agus mullaichean orra. Ach chan eil duine a' fuireach ann an-diugh.

Nuair a bha sluagh ann, bha na daoine fìor chomasach mar mharaichean. Bha cuid de na Stròmaich ainmeil mar luchd-iùil. Bha iad a' stiùireadh shoithichean tro na caoil timcheall an eilein.

Ged a tha na h-Eileanan an Iar pìos air falbh bho Stròma, bha ceanglaichean mara ann eadar an dà àite. Tha mi airson innse dhuibh mu thachartas as t-fhoghar ochd ceud deug, naochad 's a h-aon (1891).

Bha an Cupid, soitheach às an Danmhairg le còignear air bòrd, a' dèanamh air Steòrnabhagh. Ràinig i uisgeachan Stròma. Chuir i bratach an-àirde. Bha an criutha a' sealltainn gun robh iad a' sireadh neach-iùil. Chaidh bàta a-mach bho Stròma. Dh'aontaich fear de na Stròmaich, David Banks, a bhith na neach-iùil dhaibh. Chaidh e air bòrd a' Chupid.

Chaidh cùisean gu math an toiseach. Ach dh'èirich stoirm. Bha an Cupid air a h-ìomain a dh'ionnsaigh Shealtainn. Bha na siùil air an reubadh às a chèile. Chaill iad ball dhen chriutha thairis air a' chliathaich. Bha iad ann an cunnart a dhol fodha.

<p><i>They were in crisis for weeks. They were swept to the Faroe Islands. The crew reckoned there was no escape. They were close to cliffs.</i></p> <p><i>But David Banks spotted a small fjord. They put the one piece of sail they still possessed up on the mast. Banks steered them to an anchorage.</i></p> <p><i>The Faroese gave them help. Banks reached Leith on a steamship. The people of Stroma were surprised when he reached the island. They were of the opinion that he [had been] lost at sea.</i></p> <p><i>The Cupid was repaired and finally she reached Stornoway. The crew was of the opinion that Banks had saved their lives.</i></p> <p><i>I have a sad postscript, however. Near the end of the Great War, David Banks and two others were returning to Stroma from Wick. They were drowned when their boat sank.</i></p>	<p>Bha iad ann an èiginn airson seachdainean. Chaidh an sguabadh gu na h-Eileanan Fàrach. Bha an criutha dhen bheachd nach robh dol-às aca. Bha iad faisg air bearraidhean.</p> <p>Ach chunnaic David Banks loch-mara beag. Chuir iad an aon phìos beag de sheòl a bha aca fhathast air a' chrann. Stiùir Banks iad gu acarsaid.</p> <p>Thug na Fàraich taic dhaibh. Fhuair Banks gu Lìte air soitheach-smùide. Chuir e iongnadh air muinntir Stròma nuair a ràinig e an t-eilean. Bha iad dhen bheachd gun robh e air a chall aig muir.</p> <p>Bha an Cupid air a càradh agus, mu dheireadh thall, ràinig i Steòrnabhagh. Bha an criutha dhen bheachd gun robh David Banks air am beatha a shàbhaladh.</p> <p>Tha càrr-sgrìobhadh duilich agam, ge-tà. Faisg air deireadh a' Chogaidh Mhòir, bha David Banks agus dithis eile a' tilleadh gu Stròma bho Inbhir Ùige. Bha iad air am bàthadh nuair a chaidh am bàta aca fodha.</p>
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