

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 1,082 (which corresponds to Litir 1,386). Ruairidh can be contacted at fios@learnagaelic.scot.

There was more than one man called 'Murdo of the Goats' in the old Highlands. I'd like, in this Litir, to tell you about one of them.

He appears, with a picture of him, in an article in the periodical 'Scotland's Magazine'. That's in June 1960. The article is entitled 'The Last of the Highland Goat-herds'.

Murdo of the Goats – Murdo MacLennan – was born in Glenelg in the West Highlands. That was at the beginning of the 19th century. His father had a herd of goats, and Murdo would herd [tend] them.

He always wore the kilt. He had a good reason for that. When he was a teenager, he was driving a herd across a burn in Kintail. The burn was running swiftly. Murdo was expecting the 'snaodaire' – the 'lead' animal – to go across ahead of the others.

But the leader was a buck they called 'Satan'. Satan was exceptionally stubborn. He wasn't willing to go across. Murdo took hold of the goat's horns, and he dragged him into the stream.

Bha barrachd air aon duine air an robh 'Murchadh nan Gobhar' mar ainnm anns an t-seann Ghàidhealtachd. Bu mhath leam, anns an Litir seo, innse dhuibh mu fhearraca.

Tha e a' nochdadadh, le dealbh dheth, ann an alt anns an iris 'Scotland's Magazine'. Tha sin anns an Ògmhios naoi ceud deug is seasgad (1960). 'S e tiotal an uilt 'The Last of the Highland Goat-herds'.

Rugadh Murchadh nan Gobhar – Murchadh MacIllFhinnein – ann an Gleann Eilg air taobh an iar na Gàidhealtachd. Bha sin aig toiseach an naoidheamh linn deug. Bha treud ghobhar aig athair, agus bhiodh Murchadh gam buachailleachd.

Bha am feileadh-beag an-còmhnaidh air. Bha deagh adhbhar aige airson sin. Nuair a bha e na dheugaire, bha e ag iomain treud tarsainn allt ann an Cinn t-Sàile. Bha an t-allt a' sruthadh gu luath. Bha Murchadh an dùil gum biodh an snaodaire – am beathach a bha na 'cheannard' – a' dol tarsainn air thoiseach air an fheadhainn eile.

Ach b' e an snaodaire boc-goibhre ris an canadh iad 'Sàtan'. Bha Sàtan gu math rag. Cha robh e deònach a dhol a-null. Ghabh Murchadh grèim air adharcan na goibhre agus tharraing e a-steach don allt e.

Bha iad leteach tarsainn an uillt

They were halfway across the burn when the buck rose on his hind legs. Murdo was thrown into the water. His trousers were saturated, and the lad was very uncomfortable. He determined never to wear trousers again. Thus, he always wore a kilt.

Murdo's favourite drink was goats' milk. A cooper made him a small barrel. The barrel would be tied to his shoulders with a strap. That was where he kept his milk.

Murdo would be milking a goat twice a day. He was filling his barrel each time. He would drink that milk day and night. And he would eat porridge/gruel that was made with barley meal. He was putting honey on it sometimes.

Murdo was maintaining that he never suffered thirst or hunger, and that he was fit and healthy all his life. He died at the age of 81.

nuair a dh'èirich am boc air a chasan-deiridh. Chaidh Murchadh a shadail don uisge. Bha a bhriogais bog fliuch, agus bha an gille gu math mì-chofhurtail. Chuir e roimhe gun bhriogais a bhith air tuilleadh. Mar sin, bha am feileadh-beag air an-còmhnaidh.

B' e an deoch a b' fheàrr le Murchadh bainne nan gobhar. Rinn cùbair baraille beag dha. Bhiodh am baraille ceangailte ri a ghuailnean le crios. Sin far an do chùm e a chuid bainne.

Bhiodh Murchadh a' bleoghainn gobhair dà thuras gach latha. Bha e a' lìonadh a bharaille gach turas. Bhiodh e ag òl a' bhainne sin a latha 's a dh'oidhche. Agus bhiodh e ag ithe brochan a bh' air a dhèanamh de mhin-eòrna. Bha e a' cur mil air uaireannan.

Bha Murchadh a' cumail a-mach robh riagh pathadh no acras air, agus gun robh e slàn, fallain fad a bheatha. Chaochail e aig aois ochdad 's a h-aon.