

In the Scottish highlands – SOLUTION (Author Babette Newsome)

	Gaelic name		English translations:
1.	Carn Dearg	j.	red hill
2.	Meall Dearg	o.	red lumpy hill
3.	Meall Garbh	a.	rough lumpy hill
4.	Sgurr Fiona	m.	white peak
5.	Sgurr na Ciche	l.	peak of the breast
6.	Sgurr Mhor	h.	big peak
7.	Creag Mhor	n.	big rock
8.	Garbh Bheinn	f.	rough mountain
9.	Fionn Bheinn	c.	white mountain
10.	An Teallach	k.	the fireplace
11.	Innis nan Damh	d.	island of the stags
12.	Carn Gorm	e.	blue hill
13.	Garbh Choich Mhor	g.	rough big breast
14.	Creag na Damph	q.	rock of the stag
15.	Beinn Teallach	p.	fireplace mountain
16.	Meall Gorm	i.	green lumpy hill
17.	Carn Mor Dearg	b.	big red hill

Notes:

- Like all Celtic languages, in Gaelic many words can show a grammatical change at the beginning of a word, which is known as “lenition” or “aspiration”. This is shown in the letter “h” which is added after the initial consonant. For example, the base word for mountain is “beinn”, but when it is preceded by an adjective as in “Fionn Bheinn”, beinn undergoes aspiration, “bheinn”.
- Gaelic has many more words for hill/mountain than English, so “meall” means a type of hill that is “lumpy” in appearance, as opposed to more rocky, regular shaped mountains and hills. As a result, English requires an adjective “lumpy” to distinguish the Gaelic “meall” from “carn”. Similarly, Gaelic “Beinn” (often anglicised as “Ben”) is frequently translated as “mountain” to distinguish it from “hill”. In fact, hill walkers, mountaineers, climbers and geographers have adopted some of the Celtic words to describe British landscape features in more detail. For example, the English “crag” (a rocky ridge on hill or mountain side) is a loanword from the original Celtic “creag”.

B. You probably noticed that Gaelic has many more words to describe different types/sizes of mountains than English; not surprising when you consider that most of the UK’s mountains are in Scotland. However, can you name the one Gaelic word for which English has two separate words?

“Gorm” describes both “blue” and “green”.

Note: A number of the world’s languages make do with only one adjective to describe colours in the blue-green (“grue”?) area of the visible spectrum, as after all, these colours are physically close in wavelength and how we humans perceive them. For example, Japanese “ao” describes both green and blue. This does not mean that speakers of Gaelic or Japanese can’t distinguish between blue and green – it is just that their languages do not make them use a different word. Interestingly, we as English speakers only have one word for “blue”, but Russian for example has two distinct adjectives to describe light blue (goluboy) and dark blue (siniy) – this does not mean that English speakers

cannot distinguish between different shades of blue – it just means that English doesn't make it compulsory to make this distinction – it is optional.

References / further reading:

Berlin, B. & Kay, P. (1999) *Basic Colour Terms: Their Universality and Evolution*. Stanford, CA, USA: CSLI Publications, 1991.

Deutscher, G. (20..) *Through the Language Glass: Why the world looks different ...*(an accessible read featuring a nice exploration of the colour adjectives research that has been keeping some linguists busy since the 1960s!)