

The A-B-Tree Project

Using the Gaelic tree alphabet
to structure learning and creativity at UHI

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The Gaelic Tree Alphabet

An ancient connection between trees and writing



- Birch = Beithe = B =
- Rowan = Luis = L =
- Alder = Fearn = F =
- Ash = Nion = N =
- Willow = Seallach = S =
- Hawthorn = Huath = H =
- Oak = Darach = D =
- Holly = Tinne = T =
- Hazel = Coll = C =
- Bramble = Muin = M =
- Ivy = Gort = G =
- Blackthorn = Straiph = P =
- Elder = Ruis = R =
- Pine = Ailm = A =
- Gorse = Onn = O =
- Heather = Ur = U =
- Aspen = Eadhadh = E =
- Yew = Iasg = I =

A-B-Tree project

‘the potential of boundary encounters to generate new insights’ (Etienne & Bev Wenger-Trayner)

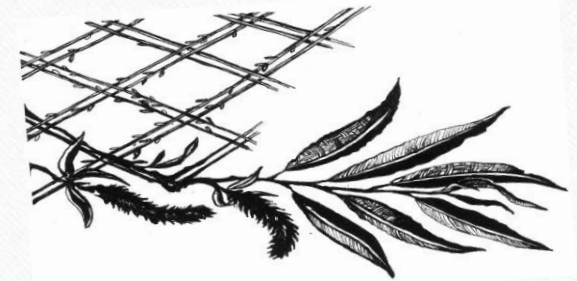
- 2011 International Year of Forests
- Edinburgh Royal Botanical Gardens, poet in residence
- *Into the Forest* anthology of poems
- Overton Prize for *A-B-Tree* poetry sequence
- A knowledge base of about a thousand tidbits
- From 2018 – bringing it into UHI
- 2019, Inverewe Garden, poet in residence



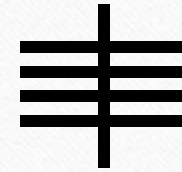
Research Questions and Methodology

1. What do students learn by writing creatively about trees?
2. How can we facilitate interdisciplinary learning, integrating scientific knowledge with creative practice?
3. Is the Gaelic Tree Alphabet a useful structure for creative and interdisciplinary knowledge sharing

- Methodology = poetic inquiry
- Stimulus, data, synthesis & results = poems (or poemish)



Aspen – Eadhadh – E

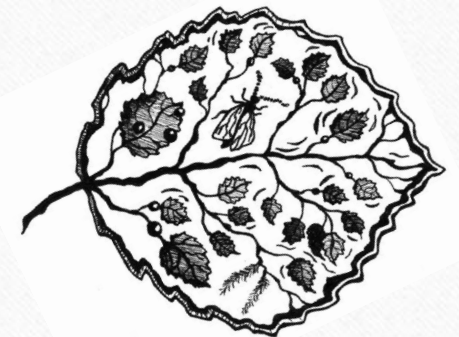


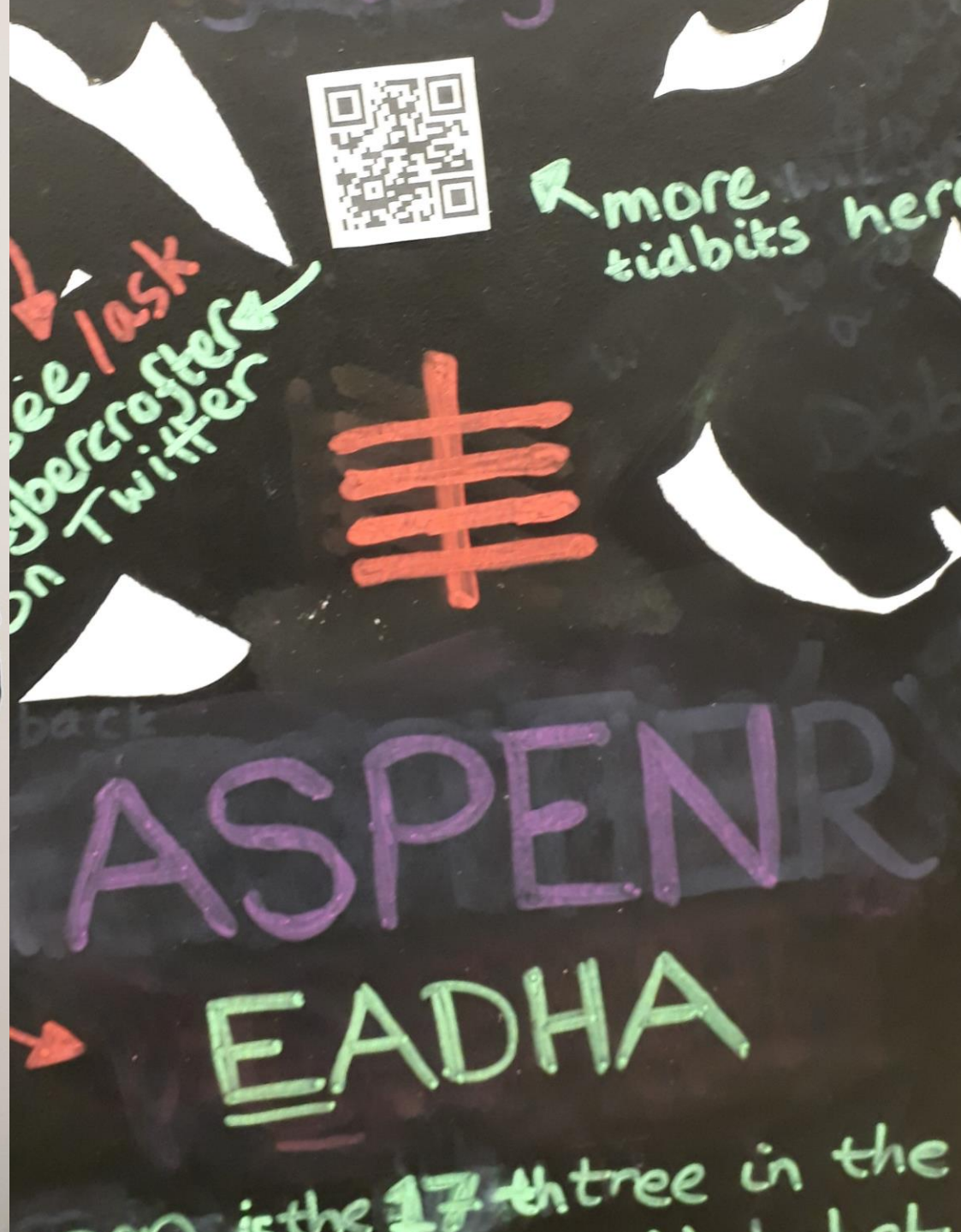
Christ was reputed to have been crucified on aspen, so it trembles in shame.



The largest organism on the planet is an aspen grove, nicknamed Pando, in Utah, USA. It covers 106 acres and weighs 6000 tonnes.

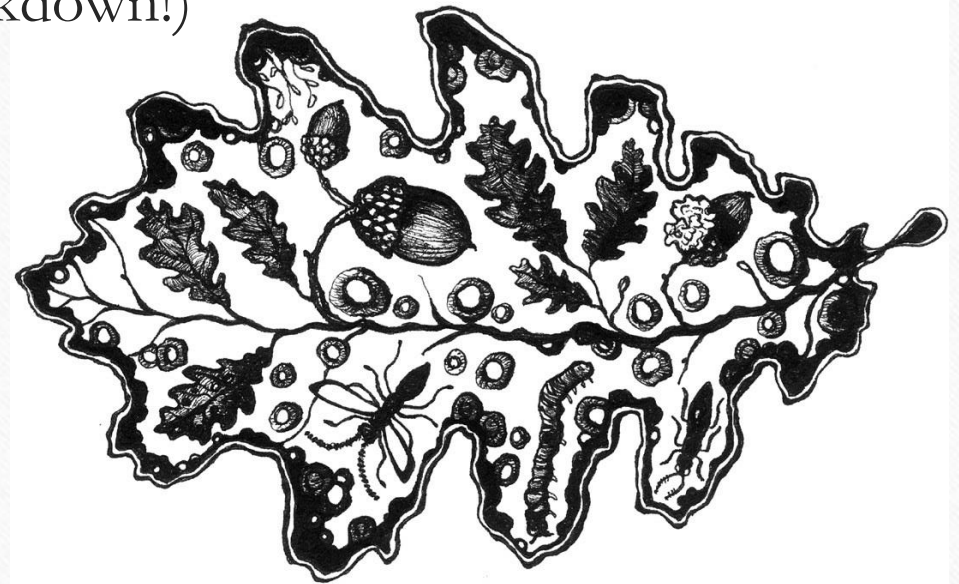
one gold
aspen coin
woodland currency
for a priceless
moment





Words and poems are my data

- We walk outside to meet the tree (until lockdown!)
- share titbits and poems
- write on leaves, using all senses
- read and write haiku, acrostics, mesostics
- do more sustained writing indoors
- make a 'Poetree'...



Poetic Inquiry analysis/synthesis => poems

- By participants: Ash, Blackthorn, Hazel, Hawthorn, Heather, Holly, Gorse, Ash
- Collective: Birch, Rowan, Alder, Willow, Ivy, Elder, Pine, Bramble, Yew
- With other artists: Oak



Scratching
life
rustling

Trees
speak to
the world
They're
DRINKING
IN
SWEETNESS
Gratuitousness

sparrows
WHISPERING
slowly

MOVEMENT
STILL

le vent
PEACE
søstehaven
Pitter
patter

the wind
Musil
Swoosh
The sound
of the
see
HUSH
whole world
of
whispers

Calmsafe
Relaxed
are
are

contemplative
Thoughtful
somewhat
stressed
Thoughtful
Tired
Tired, sleepy

VERY GOOD
refreshed
Thankful
STILL
fiddly, happy
fiddly, happy

peaceful
peaceful
peaceful
peaceful

wild life
Life
Life
Life

Freedom
Ancient + wise
A treasure
of trees

Grounded
Trees reaching
up into the
sky and
down into
my heart
ANCIENT

Nature
Love
FRESH AIR

resilience
breath
Everything
HE DOES
NOT TAKE
THE ONLY
QUESTIONS

A SENSE
OF LOVE
SPACE
calming
baug

Connections

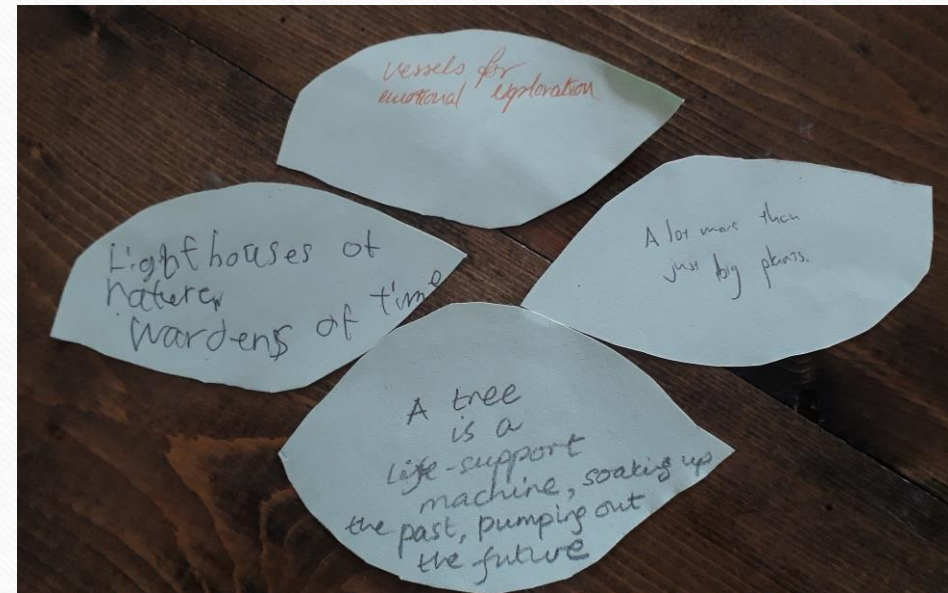
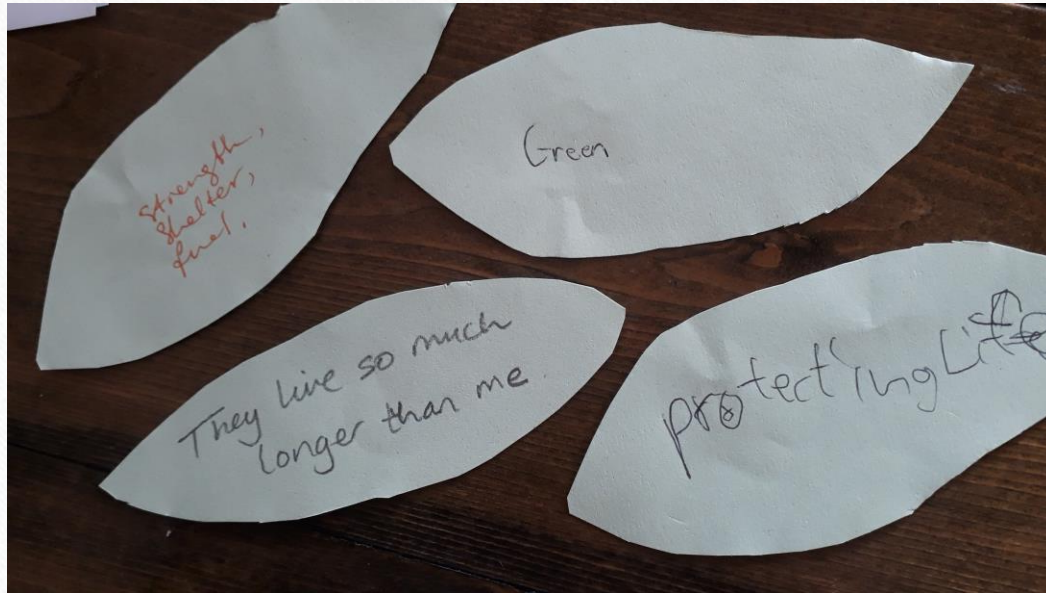
*From words generated by participants at the Shoormal conference, September 2019,
in answer to the question 'What do trees mean to you now?'*

I am not supposed to breathe the air
the way I am reputed to,
but as a forest interbeing
with memories of the future absence time,
we do.

Tree persons probably have a protection relationship
with inhabitants of Scotland,
German wolves and angels.
They are wisdom guardians,
deep wisdom guardians,
vital knowledge keepers for our safety.
Trees are mythical kinds of beings.

Learning, Creativity and Attitudes

'Trees make us feel happy' but does being creative change attitudes towards them?



Learning? Before...

Aspen otherness

Constructed from words generated by participants at an online workshop about aspen, November 2019, in answer to the question 'What do trees mean to you?' before and after the workshop. All the italicised words were written by the participants.

Even before we talk about aspen trees
the writers say trees mean
inspiration. Inspiration!

Clean air, clean air.

(Like thrushes, writers say everything at least twice!)

Quality of life, life, life.

Breathing.

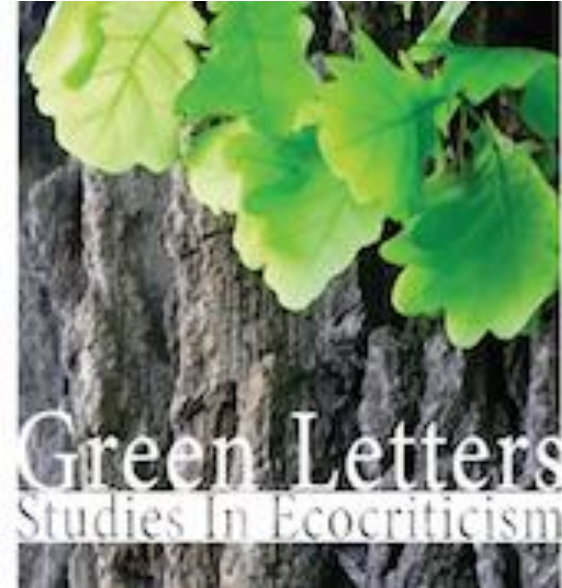
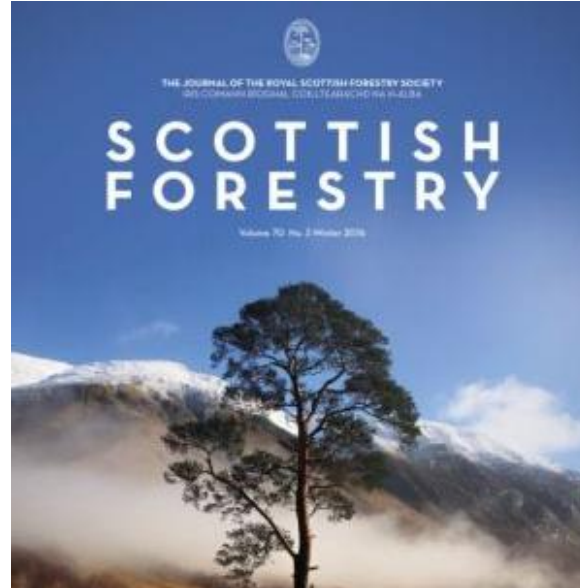
Recreation and employment.

Nature, wonder and peace.

Knots and tangles and space.

... after

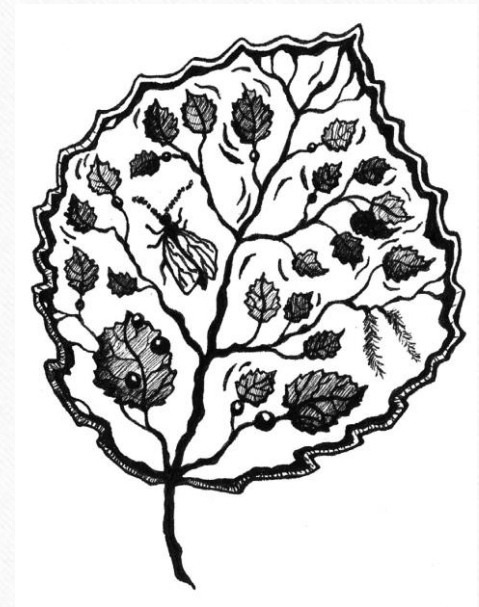
After they've looked and listened, written and talked,
trees still mean *recreation and employment,*
life, life, life and living,
nature and wonder
but now there is also
otherness, intuitions and survival.
They are awe-inspiring and beautiful
yet also *shelter, comfort and companionship.*
Trees feed us and clothe us.
They paid for Christmas to happen.
Among untold stories,
they are part of me,
something not human, wildness,
silence.



Impacts

What next...

- Currently – Wild Words for Woods – exploring how people feel about more trees, COVID-19, climate change
- UHI - curriculum options, blurring boundaries
- Digital – forest of tweets, more/better online interaction
- How best to combine outdoor (solo) together (online) learning?
- The book...



Do you want to join in?

- Do you want to join this community of practice? What do you find interesting here? Please give me advice!
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