

## ABOUT DWELLY IMAGE

The series of images are, in part, informed by the question: Does language affect our perception of the world?

In my research I came across an article by Robert MacFarlane<sup>i</sup>:

*... Under pressure, Oxford University Press revealed a list of the entries it no longer felt to be relevant to a modern-day childhood. The deletions (from the Oxford Junior Dictionary) included acorn, adder, ash, beech, bluebell, buttercup, catkin, conker, cowslip, cygnet, dandelion, fern, hazel, heather, heron, ivy, kingfisher, lark, mistletoe, nectar, newt, otter, pasture and willow. The words taking their places in the new edition included attachment, block-graph, blog, broadband, bullet-point, celebrity, chatroom, committee, cut-and-paste, MP3 player and voice-mail ... For blackberry, read Blackberry.*

On the contrary, detailed observation of nature in Gaelic culture is demonstrated in words listed in *Some Lewis Moorland Terms: A Peat Glossary*<sup>ii</sup>. Two of my favourites include: “*rionnach maoim*” or “*the shadows cast on the moorland by clouds moving across the sky on a bright and windy day*”; and “*èit*” or “*the practice of placing quartz stones in streams so that they sparkle in moonlight and thereby attract salmon to them in the late summer and autumn*”.

As Dr MacFarlane succinctly says, “*Language deficit leads to attention deficit*”.

Furthermore, growing scientific research shows a strong link between time spent in nature and reduced depression, with lower activity in areas of the brain stimulated during thoughts focused on negative emotion; and lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol.

In an article published in January 2020 by The Yale School of the Environment<sup>iii</sup>, author Jim Robbins discusses how nature is necessary for physical health and cognitive functioning. Citing a study by The European Centre for Environment and Human Health at the University of Exeter, Jim Robbins draws attention to research which finds that nature has a robust effect on people's mental, emotional and physical health. Psychiatric unit researchers also found that being in nature reduces feelings of isolation, promotes calm, and lifts mood. Conversely, Nature Deficit Disorder<sup>iv</sup> is measured in diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses<sup>v</sup>.

Research carried out by the University of Ghent and the Flamme Marine Institute<sup>vi</sup> has found that seawater in the air interacts with human genes to slow development of lung cancer and cholesterol. Another survey of 26,000 respondents by the University of Exeter in 2019<sup>vii</sup> revealed mental health benefits of seaside living.

Nature is now an officially prescribed medication in some parts of the world. For example, in Shetland an innovative, official NHS GP's prescription can be, "to stand in the Atlantic wind with eyes closed for 10 minutes"<sup>viii</sup>. Wellbeing in the outdoors seems to be independent of exercise.

Early engagement with the natural world is evidenced in the 18 letters of the traditional Scottish Gaelic alphabet, each represented by the name of a tree or shrub. John Burnside writes in a Guardian review of Robert MacFarlane's book *Landmarks*<sup>ix</sup>: *Indigenous people have always known that language and the land are continuous*. In the early 1900's, Dwelly's Gaelic dictionary finds 73 translations for 'ocean wave', each describing a variation in season and formation. None of this can be expressed in one word in English. Nevertheless, seasons continue to shape landscape, and together they have a profound effect on contemporary everyday life.

The WWF report, *An Integrated Approach to Conserving the World's Biological and Cultural Diversity*<sup>x</sup>, finds that since the ecological knowledge accumulated by indigenous people is embodied in languages, language extinction is leading to loss of ecological knowledge. By including photographs from Dwelly's Dictionary with the landscape photographs, I am acknowledging this integral relationship.

So, if nature is at the heart of Scottish Gaelic, and language influences how the world is perceived, then we must surely celebrate Gaelic language. To protect the wilderness we need to know it, as did the Gaels.

Dìle bhàite	A heavy downpour
Sgùrachadh	Misty rain
Steallan uisge	Spatters of rain
Ceòban	Misty drizzling rain
Dòrtadh	Pouring rain
Plom	A spot of rain
Marcach sìne	Driving sheets of rain

On a hill that is

Meall Garbh	Bare, round, lumpy and rough
Aonach Eagach	A notched high ridge
Cnoc Gaothach	Small, rounded and windy
Coire an t-Sneachda	A snowy glacial hollow
Càrn na Còinnich	Stony and mossy
Caisteal Corrach	A lofty castle
Sìthean Mòr	A great fairy knoll
A' Chailleach <sup>xi</sup>	Like a stooped old woman,

Queen of the weather,  
Goddess  
who created Scotland.

## ABOUT DAIR /dari/ IMAGE

Inspired to explore the location of the first successful reintroduction of an extinct mammal into the UK, I travelled to Knapdale in Argyll, in search of beavers. Although the beavers remained elusive, it was enough to see the remarkable evidence of their activity, and to know they are there, amongst the ancient Atlantic oakwoods of Loch Barnluasgan. This is all the more fitting, because the oak in Celtic mythology is the tree of strength and resilience. It is said that the oak tree lends power so you might rebuild your life. *Dair*, the letter D in the traditional Gaelic alphabet, and written as =l in the ancient ogham alphabet, means Oak.

Only a short distance from Knapdale, across the raised bog of Mòine Mhòr National Nature Reserve<sup>xii</sup>, lies the ancient fort of Dunadd, a royal power centre of the Gaelic kings of Dál Riata. It is said two human footprints in the rock were used during inauguration ceremonies for new kings, who placed a foot on the print as a sign of their commitment to the land.

The whole area is one of national natural significance, with the transition of habitats ensuring a rich diversity of wildlife.

### FURTHER INTEREST

- A pan-European initiative to coordinate research into links between marine environment and human health and wellbeing at <https://www.ecehh.org/research/sophie-project/>
- The NHS Forest project at <https://sustainablehealthcare.org.uk/what-we-do/green-space/nhs-forest>
- Evidence of benefits at <http://nhsforest.org/evidence-benefits>
- Yale School of the Environment publication on Ecopsychology, January 2020, at <https://e360.yale.edu/features/ecopsychology-how-immersion-in-nature-benefits-your-health>
- Cambridge University Hillwalking Club, Gaelic words commonly seen in hill names <https://cuhwc.org.uk/page/meanings-gaelic-words-commonly-seen-hill-names>
- Gaelic place names of Britain at [www.getoutside.co.uk/guides/the-gaelic-origins-of-place-names-in-britain](http://www.getoutside.co.uk/guides/the-gaelic-origins-of-place-names-in-britain)
- With special thanks also to The Scottish Wild Land Group, in particular Beryl Leatherland, James Fenton and Dr. Peter Ewing at <https://www.swlg.org.uk/>

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/feb/27/robert-macfarlane-word-hoard-rewilding-landscape>

<sup>ii</sup> *Compiled by Anne Campbell in collaboration with Finlay MacLeod, Donald Morrison and Catriona Campbell. Published by FARAM in Glasgow, 2013.*

<sup>iii</sup> <https://e360.yale.edu/features/ecopsychology-how-immersion-in-nature-benefits-your-health>

<sup>iv</sup> Richard Louv, 2005

<sup>v</sup> Nature deficit disorder 'damaging Britain's children' By Richard Black Environment correspondent, BBC News Published 30 March 2012

<sup>vi</sup> Scientific journal *Scientific Reports*, with public access. [www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-36866-](http://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-018-36866-)

<sup>vii</sup> [https://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/featurednews/title\\_754908\\_en.html](https://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/featurednews/title_754908_en.html)

<sup>viii</sup> [https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/oct/05/scottish-gps-nhs-begin-prescribing-rambling-birdwatching?CMP=share\\_btn\\_link](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/oct/05/scottish-gps-nhs-begin-prescribing-rambling-birdwatching?CMP=share_btn_link)

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jun/24/landmarks-robert-macfarlane-review>

<sup>x</sup> <https://wwfeu.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/EGinG200rep.pdf>

<sup>xi</sup> The Cailleach – The woman that created Scotland <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0951mj8>

All names on this list are hills and mountains of Scotland

<sup>xii</sup> Raised bogs are one of Europe's rarest and most threatened natural wildlife habitats