

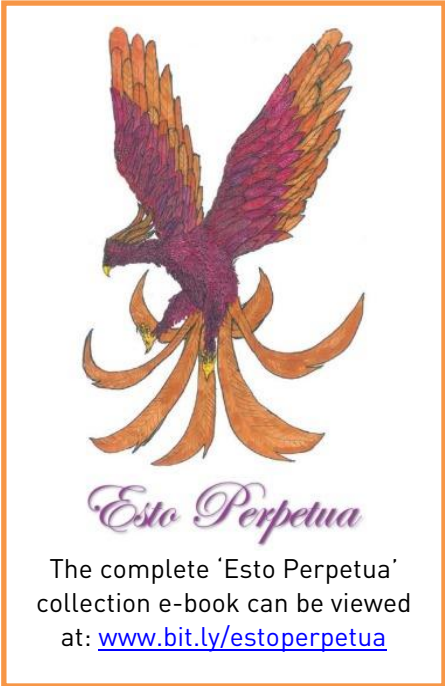
Outdoor Learning in Action

Larbert High School Writing in Nature

- The Carron Dams



"I've been delighted by the pupils' responses to an outdoor learning environment and feel that their writing and focus in English has improved as a result of engaging with nature."



Lorna Swinney, English Teacher at Larbert High School:
 "'Esto Perpetua' (Last Forever) is a collection of first year writing inspired by our local nature reserve, The Carron Dams. The Dams is where all first year students Discover, Explore, Conserve and Share as part of their Discovery level of the John Muir Award.

The Humanities department at Larbert High School leads all first years through the Award and, this year, we connected English with the project by 'sharing' experiences through various forms of writing. All pupils have responded to this opportunity with genuine enthusiasm and a growing respect for the environment.

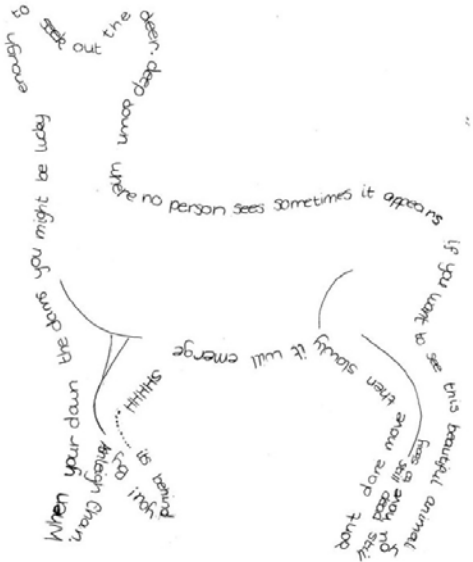
'Esto Perpetua' showcases the very best of this writing. Through 'Live Literature' funding from The Scottish Book Trust the English faculty were able to employ the services of Chris Powici, an environmental poet and creative writing tutor at The University of Stirling, to help guide all first year students in their creative exploration of The Dams."

Chris Powici, environmental poet:

"Nature isn't something to be admired from a distance - it's somewhere to make your hands dirty and your heart glad. The Carron Dams are as real as the sun and rain on your face and full of mystery. They free up something inside us that otherwise may stay hidden. As one of the pupils puts it:

*'These trees are whispering secrets to each other,
 These trees are life, pointing to the stars.'*

... John Muir couldn't have said it better himself."



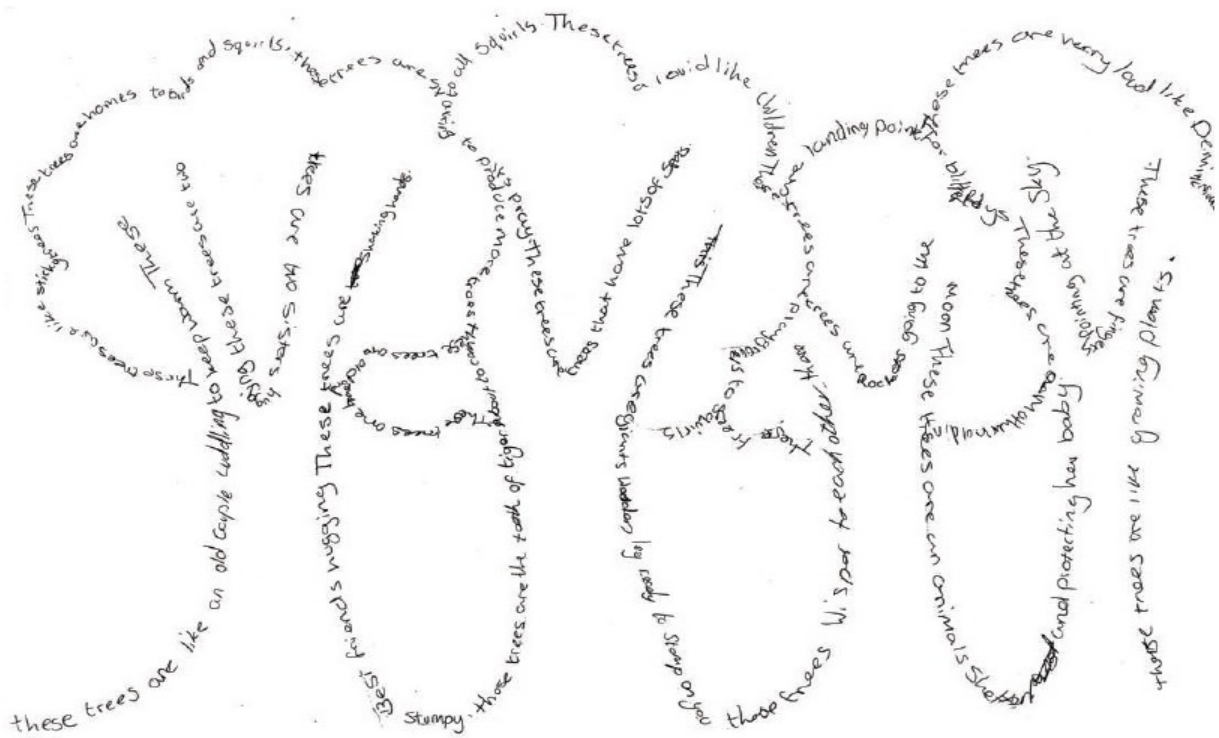
When you're down the Dams
 you might be lucky enough
 to seek out the deer.

It lives in the dams
 deep down where no person sees
 sometimes it appears.

If you want to see
 this beautiful animal
 you have to stay still.

Dead still don't dare move
 then slowly it will emerge
 Shhh! It's behind you.

Ashleigh Chan



These trees are...

an old couple, cuddling to keep warm.

These trees are two sisters hugging.

These trees are neighbours shaking hands.

These trees are two best friends, linking arms.

These trees are loud like children.

These trees are mothers, protecting their babies.

These trees are whispering secrets to each other.

These trees are life, pointing to the stars.

Sophie MacAllister

Leaves scatter the ground
sounds like the crunch of new snow
the crackle of them.

Olivia Urquhart

THE TREES ARE WHISTLING
HOLDING EACH OTHERS HANDS
LEAVES OF EVERY SHADE
WHY CANT YOU UNDERSTAND?
THE DAMS ARE BEAUTIFUL
NOT HORRID
WHY ARE YOU NOT CARING?
PLEASE DO
NOT ALL OF IT IS BAD
LETS TRY AND BE FAIR
THE DAMS ARE BEAUTIFUL
DARE TO BE MAD ABOUT THEM
SO STOP SPOILING THEM

Joanna Bateman

“In an increasingly urbanised world, where so much emotional ‘nourishment’ is streamed through TVs, computer screens and games consoles, we need places which teach us how to live in the grassy, woody, muddy, moist, earthy world we call ‘nature’.”

Chris Powici, Environmental Poet

A values-based approach

The [Common Cause for Nature report](#) (2013) is a guide for the conservation sector and others on how to ensure their work strengthens values that motivate people to protect and enjoy nature. Recommendations include showing how amazing nature is and sharing experiences of the natural world. It suggests doing this by creating and promoting accessible natural places and encouraging hands-on activity. These experiences have had significant impacts on individuals.

Pupil Ryan Wilson explains how first-hand experience has motivated him:

“My opinion on the Dams has changed so much since I have been down there. Most people would say that The Dams are a horrible place and that it looks like a dump (that’s what I thought) but then I went into The Dams! My opinion has changed so much since then. Now, when people say to me The Dams is a dump, I say NO it’s lovely and lots of people care about it. I feel honoured to have the experience of going down there... The Dams are a wonderful place and I hope you have the chance to see wonderful wildlife.”



Background...

Larbert High School is fortunate to have a nature reserve on its doorstep. The Carron Dams are a legacy of The Carron Iron Company, established in 1759. This company grew to be one of the biggest producers of iron goods in Europe and, at its peak, had around 2,000 employees making products which were exported all over the world: from ships’ hulls, to cannons, to cooking pots.

The Carron Iron Company needed water, and the river Carron was diverted into a lade which fed water to the area now known as The Dams. With the demise of the company, The Dams fell into disrepair and the site was partially drained.

But from endings, come beginnings. The phoenix appears on the original iron company logo along with the motto ‘Esto Perpetua’ (Last Forever). A mythical bird that is reborn from the ashes of its death seems a suitable metaphor for The Carron Dams where nature has now reclaimed what was once a site of heavy industry. The surrounding woodland and range of wetland and fen habitats have become home to a wide variety of animal and plant species. The area is managed by The Scottish Wildlife Trust which works in close partnership with the Humanities Faculty at Larbert High School, led by John Martindale. The site was officially opened as a local nature reserve on 17th May 2013 in a ceremony that demonstrated the myriad of ways that The Dams can be incorporated into teaching and learning at Larbert High School.

Useful resources

[Curriculum for Excellence and the John Muir Award](#) - The John Muir Award encourages people to connect with, enjoy and care for the natural environment. It supports experiential learning, and acknowledges and celebrates the achievement of people beyond formal qualifications.

The John Muir Award can be used:

- to meet a range of educational needs
- to help deliver Experiences and Outcomes
- to recognise achievement
- with themes across learning

[Literacy and Nature resource guide](#) - explore how learning about the natural world helps develop literacy skills.