

Creativity, Nature & Mental Health

A collection of art, poems and reflections

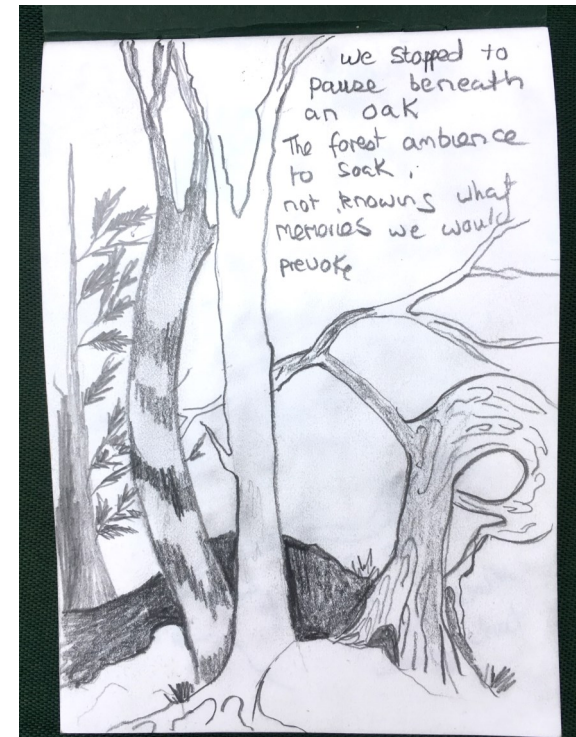


Getting creative is a fantastic way of engaging with places and people around us. Nature provides a perfect arena – offering ever-changing inspiration, and both the canvas and materials for natural arts and crafts.

Connecting with nature through creativity can offer valuable opportunities to help improve mental health and wellbeing – encouraging people to engage with their head, heart and hands; to try new things, build skills and improve literacy; to express personal feelings and emotions; to socialise and work with others; to observe and connect to surroundings; to encourage sharing and celebrating; to make memories and discover new interests.

Photography, natural artwork and sculpture, drawing and sketching, poetry, creative and descriptive writing, storytelling, campfire discussions, keeping journals and scrapbooks, woodwork and crafts, engaging the senses and mindfulness are common activities that can help individuals to take notice, tune in and feel connected to both nature and the people around them.

Over the following pages, this collection shares examples of art, poems, writing and reflections from adults participating in the [John Muir Award](#) through [Branching Out](#), Scottish Forestry's programme to improve mental health through nature connection.



"Well, here I am... cold up a hill... in the woods... again!!! Shivering like a leaf... but branching out all the same... breaking bread around the fire next to a flowing stream. My fingers and toes are cold but my thoughts are warm. Nature nourishes the soul, the body and the mind... and yet it leaves me hungry for more... until the next time."

Branching Out participant

JOHN
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AWARD

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Woodland inspiration

PoeTree, writing and feeling at home in the woods

Chanting pines,
Connecting, touching, feeling.
Singing birds,
Listening, soaring, freeing.
Cloudless sky,
Watching, calming, resting.
Woodlands walk
Bringing peace.

The Sycamore

Large, dark knots,
I see a face in my tree,
Beautiful green patterns,
A soft blanket growing,
Although seen from a distance,
Makes a better view,
Twisted arms pierce the air firmly,
Unknown furry green world,
Forked midway, striving for the light,
In amidst my woody neighbours
Straight lines can't be found
On the tree which pleases me
To know it's free.

In praise of a Western Red Cedar

Wonderfully big and woody tree,
Elephant foot placed majestically on the ground,
Powerfully thrusting upwards, branches like a spinning mop,
Searching for life,
Curved silken frond fan,
Efficient organism catching the sun,
Imposing almost dominates everything else around.

"I'm surprised at how still the woods are today, like the trees are playing a game of musical statues"

Even if there's no-one
To hear it, a tree
Cries out with a voice of THUNDER
As it falls.

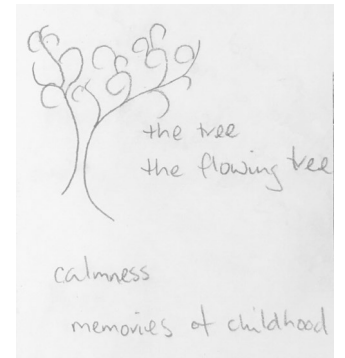
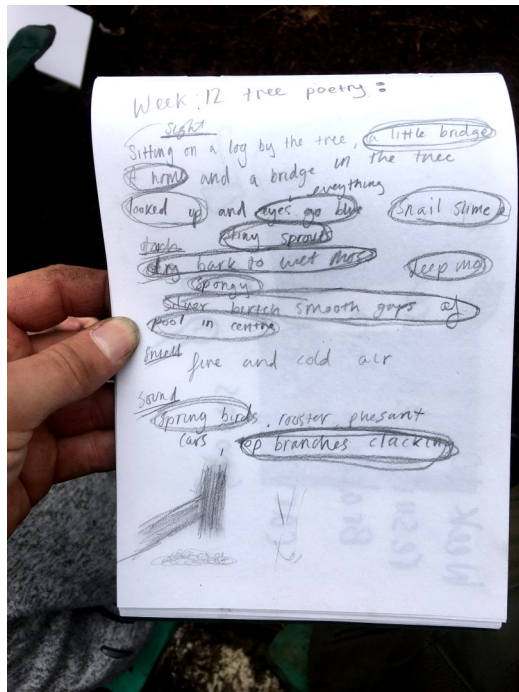
Of the earth,
From the earth,
Seedling, sapling, fruiting, flowering, full growth
And felled, to return to the earth.

In distant days, when my time comes,
Mark it not with stone-carved
Effigies, above my head, rather;
Plant a tree.

"I love being in the woods with others"



Branching Out
Positive Mental Health
Through Nature



**JOHN
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Observing nature

Appreciating wildlife, seasons, colours & senses



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Through Nature

"Today we were reflecting on colour and collecting as many different colours as we could see on our walk – the many shades and tones of colours are amazing... under our feet, above my head..."

Autumn heralds the colour change

Under foot, nuts crunch

Trees sway and shed their leaves

Up in the sky geese fly south

Moment of silence

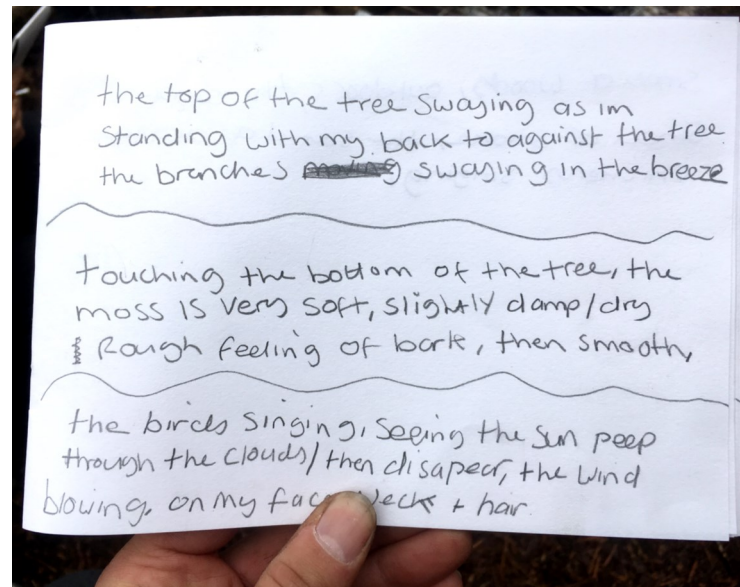
Nights get darker and cold

"Get a fire going quick. It's cold.

The woodland floor is afire in russets and golds; as autumn now bites. There are lessons to be learned here, if one maintains an open-enough mind for it."



© Urban Roots



the top of the tree swaying as im
standing with my back to against the tree.
the branches ~~are~~ swaying in the breeze

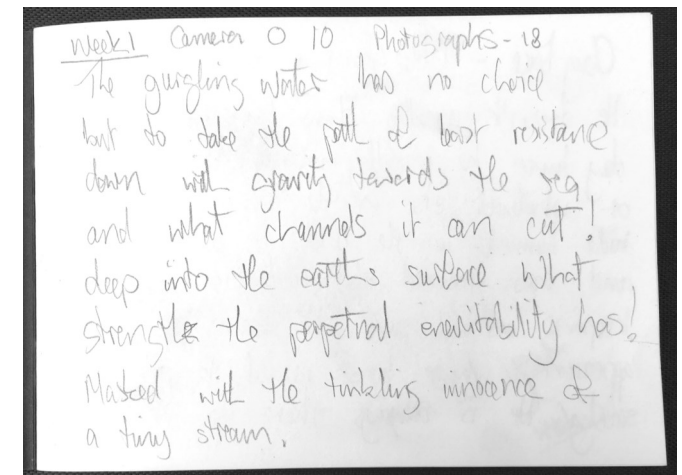
touching the bottom of the tree, the
moss is very soft, slightly damp/dry
the rough feeling of bark, then smooth

the birds singing, seeing the sun peep
through the clouds/ then disappear, the wind
blowing on my face, neck + hair.

The reeds rustle in the slight breeze
A heron flies over, majestic and elegant,
I think about geese returning for spring,
It makes me reflect on the stillness and coldness of winter.

Spring is on her way,
Birds are cooing and the ducks are pairing,
It makes me chuckle and cheerful inside
As we head into a new season
Its nearly spring and I can feel her presence all around.

"Listening to bird song in the distance, looking at all the variety of nature resting in a silence that most people are too busy to notice. I feel very fortunate to be able to enjoy this and escape the hustle and bustle of life."



Week 1 Camera 0 10 Photographs - 18
The gurgling water has no choice
but to take the path of least resistance
down with gravity towards the sea
and what channels it can cut!
deep into the earth's surface what
strength the perpetual inevitability has!
Masked with the tinkling innocence of
a tiny stream.

**JOHN
MUIR
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Environmental arts

Engaging creativity, memory & imagination



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If you go down to the woods today...

Clay face - Eddie Goom is my Dad's character. He doesn't usually show himself in the day time, he usually merges into a tree or whatever else in the environment to hide himself in the light. He looks tribal and has roamed the earth for eons keeping us all safe. He roams at night appearing where he's needed to guide us safely. He is always there for us. Week 5



**Eddie
Goom**

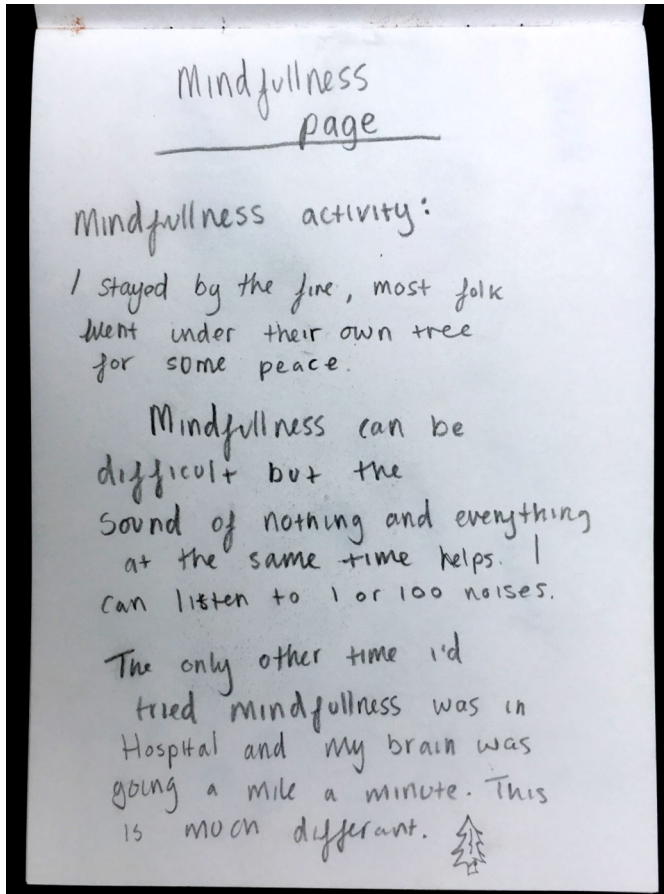


**JOHN
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Mindfulness in nature

Including meditation, tai chi & yoga in the woods

"What one small thing will you do this week as self-care or to treat yourself?"



Mindfulness -

Addressing our own thoughts and exploring our inner feelings

Forest so peaceful

Listening – the birds sing

The moss is a beautiful vibrant green

The sun shining through creating its own shadows and reflections

My mind is calm.

"Lovely day again with the sun shining and no noise except the tumbling pools of the stream and occasional birdsong. After a session of mindfulness/mental massage, we went for a short walk into a different part of the woods... I heard a woodpecker in the distance against the tranquillity of the silence. How fortunate I feel to enjoy such wonderful views and surroundings. It's almost like the re-charge of a battery feeling as regards my mental health and wellbeing. I'm so glad I found out about this group!"

"What a healing experience this is for my mind, leaving turmoil in my head behind, and meditating naturally on my surroundings, feeling the gentle warm breeze on my face."

Mindfulness is better outdoors as it has no walls or borders to contain your thoughts. They can be free like nature itself.

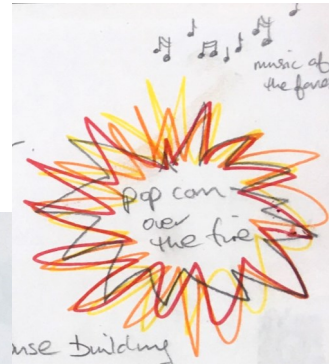
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Outdoor cooking

Building community through socialising and sharing together

Campfire greets us,
With a marshmallow welcome.
Canopy of trees,
Create a womb warmth.
Red squirrels dart in and out of our laughter.
Safe, secure, respectfully held,
Space to be.

Wild raspberries made into jam
on the fire and served with fire-
baked scones...YUM!!



Fire for warmth,
and for tea!

Food tastes so much better when cooked on an open fire and eaten outside! We all enjoyed this delicious feast. Pearl Barley Broth and Bannocks.



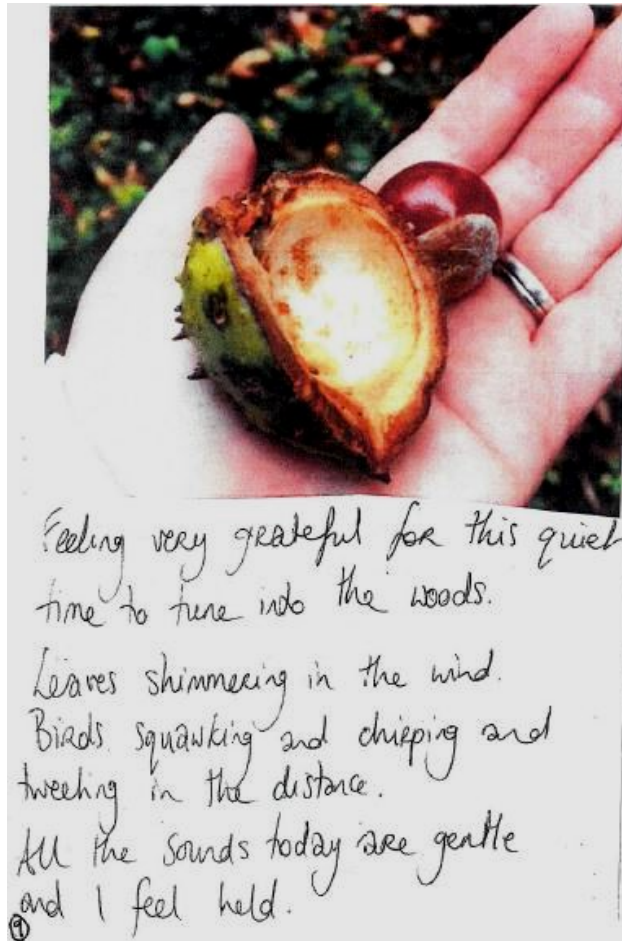
Feeling part of nature

Gaining a sense of belonging

“Run, not to give into the pain that we all encounter in our lives at times, to let go and know that I was held by the earth, nature, the softness of a gentle but cold breeze, understanding the quiet, still voice inside is our best friend, and I discovered it once more, and embraces the day and no matter what is brought I would not run as I was safe in the woods, in nature, just being me.”

“Soft, rough glances at the world outside connecting with the heart, soul, senses of human existence – shrieking calls of the spirit as birds sat and watched all around, treading soft on the earth as it bounced back under sole of foot, waters purely trickling in, dancing angles of light. I sat not separate but enveloped in the acceptance of nature to hold me as in the womb where I began, gently fed by the elements, the smells, touches and exhilaration of the pure air as I inhaled and exhaled with the rhythm of the heartbeat of the Mother Earth.”

“It’s a relief to be outside in the woods because I can actually live here. Winter jacket time! It feels like going back in time somehow. Definitely like I belong... I really need something like this.”



Out on this hillock
The mind can call for peace,
The wind helps to carry worry along its way
A gentle pull to silence inner monologues.
We stand firm and connect our roots,
Journeys and calls may find us later,
The present is the only reflection here,
Talk only of now,
Feel the green of spring
Bursting with light and energy,
Feel the ground, it is working with you now,
Tread easily, forget there is tiredness.

Sit-spotting amongst the trees
In deep wooded darkness
Peering out on the forest floor
Feeling the wind on my face
A smile broaches across it
Softly light bends through the branches
Inviting me out of this hole.

“The calming effect on just looking. Just looking. Not even naming. Just being. Sharpens the senses. The sounds, the smells, the feel. This is where we live, we are part of all of this. This land courses through our veins.”

Crafts and woodwork

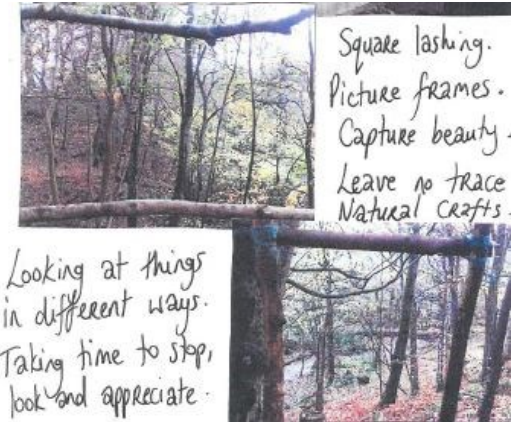
Building skills and trying new things



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Positive Mental Health
Through Nature



A November Day,
Cold, grey, dull,
But in a clearing in the woods
Its warm, fire bright.
Excited folk laugh, learn, have fun.
It's Woodland Bushcraft time.



Looking at things
in different ways.
Taking time to stop,
look and appreciate.



**JOHN
MUIR
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Reflecting on nature and self

Realising achievements & looking ahead



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"I know the 3 hours each week in this 'Branching Out' group, with all the lovely people and with me gaining a unique special place in time, have opened up new paths for me in my mind – today at first the panic and confusion I brought with me were threatening to overwhelm my mind and body – here I feel safe, connected to the air I breathe in the forest, the sky, the earth, the creatures – this is what is important to me, I want to do more..."

"Last day in the woods with the group – kind of sad, but my journey to finding myself and discovering more about where I want my life to take me – slowly I have learnt to connect with the most lovely people and I do hope to continue keeping in touch."

"I have had many favourite moments and have heard many memorable stories. One was an older gentleman in the Glasgow area who had grown up in orphanages around the country in the '50s. After a challenging childhood with no adults to trust he ended up living on the streets dependant on alcohol. Doing the John Muir Award was his first stepping stone away from homelessness and he went on to become a Peer Mentor for the programme. I once heard him tell his life-story at a public event, it was deeply moving and telling to how far he had come. It was then that I truly understood the strength of what we do enabling people to experience nature through the John Muir Award."

Nathalie Moriarty, Branching Out Manager

Branching out has allowed me to develop my confidence and believe I can do useful things. It has allowed me to meet new people and learn new skills. Being outdoors is also great and nothing beats having hot soup in the woods from a campfire. Most of all it has given me the belief that I can move on with my life and that I'm not useless. Overall a great healing experience.

**JOHN
MUIR
TRUST**

Branching Out & the John Muir Award

Improving mental health through nature connection

“At the centre of our ethos is to connect people with each other and with the landscape. We want to make lasting changes to individuals’ lives and for them to experience an increased quality of life.”

Nathalie Moriarty, Branching Out Manager

[Branching Out](#) is a 12 week programme of woodland-based activities for adults recovering from long-term mental health problems. Developed by Forestry Commission Scotland (now Scottish Forestry), it is delivered in partnership with organisations from environmental and mental health sectors across Scotland. Each programme is tailored to suit wild places across Scotland and individuals’ needs and interests. Common to all groups are opportunities to get out into wild places, experience them, try new things and put something back for nature. Activities typically include environmental art, photography, practical hands-on conservation tasks, bushcraft and outdoor cooking, green exercise and relaxation. Sessions also create space for socialising, sharing and building a sense of community within the group.

This approach is a natural fit with the [John Muir Award](#) which has been integrated into the Branching Out programme since 2008, offering valuable recognition of individual achievements. Since this time, over 2,450 John Muir Awards have been achieved by Branching Out participants.

Contributors

All extracts and examples in this collection are from Branching Out participants, in their own words and by their own hands – from journals, scrapbooks, group diaries and photo albums. Contributions have been received from programmes delivered by Branching Out Leaders at the organisations below - thanks to all involved in helping celebrate and showcase these outcomes:

Angus Alive Ranger Service, Borders Forest Trust, Bute Community Forest, Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, Dundee City Council Countryside Ranger Service, Earth for Life, Edinburgh & Lothians Greenspace Trust, Forestry and Land Scotland, Forth Valley College, Instinctively Wild, National Trust for Scotland, North Lanarkshire Council Countryside Ranger Service, Scottish Forestry, Urban Roots.



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**Scottish
Forestry**
Coilltearachd
na h-Alba

