Meeting the Ogham:

An Introduction to Celtic Tree Wisdom
History of the Ogham

The origins of the Ogham are unknown and much debated. Inscriptions have been found across Ireland and in the west of Britain, but the dates of their carving are uncertain. Some historians claim the marks date back only as far as the 4th century, while others cite dates as far back as 2000 BC. The truth is: we just do not know.

The ancient Irish text known as The Book of Ballymote indicates that the Ogham was a gift of the ancient, Celtic god Ogma:

“Ogma, being a man much skilled in dialects and in poetry, it was he who invented ogham, its object being for signs of secret speech known only to the learned, and designed to be kept from the vulgar and poor of the nation… It is called ogham, from the inventor, Ogma.”

However it came to be, as Nigel Pennick says in Magical Alphabets:

“Ogham is unlike any other European or Near Eastern alphabet. Instead of having separate characters, the symbols of ogham are arranged along a line. This is the ‘principal ridge’ or ‘stem line’, which is known as the ‘druim’. The characters are all in contact with this line, being scribed above, below or through it. Conventionally, ogham was usually written vertically, from below to above. When written horizontally, as on some ancient artefacts, the upper side of the druim is counted as the left-hand side, and beneath it, the right-hand side. Conceptually, then, the ogham script is written from left to right. When written on a standing stone, they are inscribed across the corner between flat surfaces, known as the arris. On stone, the vowels are formed by indentations or dots.”
Like other alphabets, the oghams are arranged in a specific character order. But the actual arrangement is like no other. Today, there are five basic divisions, each with five characters, making 25 in all, but originally there appear to have been only four divisions, making 20 characters… The fifth division appears to be a later edition to the ogham row, bringing in diphthongs.”

It seems that the ogham was used mainly for memorial writing and noting lists. Many stones with examples still exist throughout Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Over time, it seems, the Nordic Runes replaced the Ogham for memorial writing and list making. Even today the most common root of words related to writing in the Irish language is rún (pronounced ‘rune’).

But the Ogham also appears to have a magical aspect. That wisdom still calls to us today.
The Celtic Oghams
or
The Beth-Luis-Nuin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>aicme b (first aicme)</th>
<th>aicme h (second aicme)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>beith ['betwias'] - birch</td>
<td>uath - hawthorn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>luis - rowan</td>
<td>dair ['dairis'] - oak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fem ['jernea'] - alder</td>
<td>tinne - holly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sail ['salls'] - willow</td>
<td>coll ['coslias'] - hazel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nion - ash</td>
<td>ceirt ['k-eriti'] - apple</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>aicme m (third aicme)</th>
<th>aicme a (forth aicme)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>muin - vine</td>
<td>alin - white fir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gort ['gortas'] - ivy</td>
<td>onn ['rosen'] - gorse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ngéadal ['gregháil'] - reed</td>
<td>úr - heather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strait - blackthorn</td>
<td>eadhadh - poplar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ruis - elder</td>
<td>ioddhadh - yew</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fifth aicme</th>
<th>Other Symbols</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>éabhadh</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ór - gold</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uilleann - elbow</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ifin - pine</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>earannacholl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ea</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Image captured from http://polylinenews.blogspot.com
Getting to Know the Ogham

Beith / Beth
The first tree of the Ogham is the birch tree, a tree of purification known as being sacred to the Goddess. In the forest and in healing, birch clears the way for new beginnings. The birch and beith offer protection from all harm, physical and spiritual. It also clears away debris and energetic noise, to make way for new beginnings.

Luis
Luis corresponds with the Rowan tree, sometimes called mountain ash. Like the rowan, Luis offers powerful protection against attack or outside interference, physical, magical or energetic. Luis can teach an individual to align with the Sacred, both for protection and for sacred seeing.

Fearn
Fearn corresponds with the alder tree, the tree sacred to the Celtic god Bran. The whisperings of the alder are considered oracular and sacred. Fearn is a tree of fire that traditionally is used to free earth from water. Magically, Fearn offers a bridge to connect, resolve and set free.

Saille
Saille is the willow tree, the tree of sacred flowing. Saille restores harmonious flow and speaks of phases, the moon and the tides. Saille teaches ebbing and flowing in right relationship and awakens harmonious relationship with the Divine Feminine.

Nuin / Nion
The ash tree is Nuin, also called Nion in the Ogham alphabet. The ash is the world tree, the sacred tree that links all worlds and all possibilities. Ash and Nuin are associated with rebirth and with movement through time and space.
Huath /Uath
Huath is the sacred tree of sexuality and right relationship. It is sacred to the Goddess and is usually represented as the whitethorn or hawthorn tree. Huath is also the May tree, the traditional tree around which the May Dance is woven. To invoke Huath is to invoke the protection of the Otherworld, and to seek sacred relationship with the Divine Mother.

Duir
Duir is the oak tree, one of the most sacred and revered of the Celtic trees. In ancient times, oaks were grown in sacred groves and all parts of the tree had ritual and healing uses. Oak is both door and doorway… to the Mysteries, to the Otherworld and to Life. Oak offers strength, endurance and the capacity to stand in illumination. Oak allows entry or excludes as maintains right relationship.

Tinne
Tinne corresponds to the holly tree. This very male presence in the Ogham confers the strength that comes through unification and balance. Tinne is often associated with boldness and the rebirth of souls.

Coll
This letter of the Ogham is the hazel tree. As the ninth letter, Coll represents the power of three times three, or the trine of the trine, the sacred number of the Celts multiplied by the sacred number. As such, Coll offers deep, magical power. Traditionally, the hazel is associated with seeking and discovering… like the hazel wands used for diving water. It also acts to create magical boundaries, thereby delineating sacred space.

Quert
The final letter of the second grouping of Ogham is Quert, the crab apple tree. In the Celtic tradition the apple is directly associated with the sacred isle of Avalon, the summerlands, the land of eternal light. Greek and European traditions also associate apple with rebirth and beauty. Quert as an Ogham speaks of the eternity of life and the creative power represented in the pentagram, which hides at the heart of every apple.
Muin / Min
While associated with the grape vine, the word *muine* in Irish denotes a thorny thicket. As the grape vine is not indigenous to the British Isles, the thorny thicket may be an older representation for this Ogham. In any case, Muin gifts the ability to traverse a broad expanse while gathering what might be needed, and then to assimilate what has been gathered to cultivate self and wisdom.

Gort
Often represented as the ivy in bloom, the Irish word *gort* denotes a tilled field. As the flowering ivy, Gort speaks of the second harvest, meaning the harvest of fruits. Magically, however, Gort speaks of the changes that are needed for growth to occur, and teaches that all things must occur in relationship with the earth. We, all of us, need the earth to survive and we must honor and remember Mother Earth in everything that we do.

Ngetal
Ngetal is the reed. Often considered ornamental today, reed was an essential part of Celtic life. The reed was the traditional standard of measure, and was used to measure and mark sacred spaces. Reeds were used to thatch roofs, to cover floors and act as insulation in winter. Reeds were also used for writing. As the container and protector of home, thought and culture, Reed offers refuge. Reed also teaches the flexibility needed to recognize and acknowledge your current situation while maintaining your integrity.

Straif
The Blackthorn or sloe tree represents this letter of the Ogham. Straif is a tree of power, assisting in both the seen and unseen worlds. Straif empowers you to remain true to your soul, your will and your highest good, allowing you to resist and defeat adversity.

Ruis
Ruis is the elder tree, which signifies the threefold nature of the Goddess. Like the Greek Fates and the Norse Norns, the elder is associated with the threefold nature of existence... as past, present and future, as beginning, middle and end, as birth, becoming and rebirth. Elder teaches you the acceptance of all three aspects that is necessary for you to live a healthy, balanced, co-creative life. Elder teaches oneness... that all three stages are constantly unfolding, every moment, with every breath, and that each beginning is an ending, and that each ending is a beginning.
Ailm
The elm tree represents this letter, the first vowel of the Ogham. Ailm offers the strength to rise above adversity and to find a higher view. An elm can re-grow from its roots, so Ailm offers the gift of regeneration and healing from the core.

Ohn / On
The second vowel, Ohn is the gorse, a plant that is in flower almost all year long. Ohn speaks then of fertility and teaches you to persevere in your truth despite standing out or appearing different than the rest.

Ur
Heather represents this the third vowel of the Ogham. Ur literally means fresh or new, and heather bestows newness, fresh air and luck to situations.

Eadha
The fourth vowel of the Ogham corresponds to the aspen or white poplar. Eadha assists in recovery and supports individual curative actions by providing access to the truth behind a situation. Eadha can also speak of the power of pure will, of the individual ability to overcome through mind over matter.

Ioho / Idho / Iubhar
The yew tree represents the fifth and final traditional vowel of the Ogham. The yew tree is deeply associated with regeneration, transformation and the unity of life and death. Ioho teaches about the mysteries of life, death and rebirth.

The last five letters of the modern Ogham are diphthongs, sounds added to accommodate changes in the Gaelic language. The tree equivalents and magical properties of these letters are less standardized.

Oi / Oir
Associated with the gooseberry bush or the spindle tree, Oi is associated with childbirth and guards over the birth canal, easing the journey from womb to world.

Ui / Uinleann / Phagos
Associated with the honeysuckle or the beech tree, Ui teaches the gifts of hardness and resistance. It speaks of the solidity of ancient wisdom, or the cultural or physical foundation that must be in place before any construction or development can begin.
Pethbol / Peith
This obscure and mysterious letter is represented by the guelder rose or snowball tree. Pethbol is often linked to the rune Peorth, which speaks of the potential gifted in the womb of the Mother and the power of the unknown possibility.

Péine / Amancholl / Mór
While several names have been associated with the letter of the Ogham, the Scots Pine is the tree. Esoterically and physically on land, the Scots Pine shows the way. Péine / Mór is the bringer of illumination, both intellectually and spiritually.

Divining with the Ogham
The mystical nature of the letters and trees of the Ogham lend themselves to use as an oracle or divination tool. The Ogham marks can be drawn on note cards, stones or, more traditionally, staves (small wands of wood). These can then be used to gain insights into personal issues and questions.

Remember, the Ogham acts only as a divination tool. The choice of what to do and how to respond remains yours.

Here are three easy divination techniques that you can try as you get to know the Ogham:

Daily Tree Insights
Each morning, before you leave for work or get started with your day, draw a single Ogham to offer you wisdom and guidance for that day.

Mix your Ogham in whatever way is easiest but prevents you from seeing the letters. Close your eyes and ask: What wisdom may be offered as loving guidance for this day? Either wait for the answering Ogham to fall out of the bundle or draw the Ogham without looking.
Wisdom of Three

This technique can be used to seek insights into a particular issue or question.

Think about your issue or question as you mix your Ogham letters in whatever way is easiest but prevents you from seeing the letters. Without looking at the letters, draw three Ogham and place them letter side up on a table or working surface. In order of drawing them from the mix, the letters offer the following wisdom:

First Ogham: Where am I coming from in this issue?

Second Ogham: Where am I currently headed in this issue?

Third Ogham: What is the best course of action for me now in this issue?

Aligning with Truth

This technique can best be used as a support during challenging times or situations.

Mix your Ogham in whatever way is easiest but prevents you from seeing the letters. Close your eyes and ask: What wisdom do I need to remember to stay in my Truth this day? Either wait for the answering Ogham to fall out of the bundle or draw the Ogham without looking.
Recommended Reading

About the Presenter...

...Jennifer L. Jacoby is a soul midwife, mystic and shamanic practitioner specializing in Celtic mystical techniques and practices. Her training in Celtic mysticism and shamanism includes extensive study with the Invisible Druid Order, the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids, the Foundation for Shamanic Studies as well as with Celtic practitioners internationally.

An award-winning, published poet, Jennifer gives voice to her Bardic craft through poetry and prose. Her writings explore the rhythms of life while honoring the Sacred Three.

Dance through the moon turnings with Jennifer and the Ancestors; read her blog at www.ThroughShamansEyes.wordpress.com.

Jennifer is also a Chinese medicine practitioner and a Minister of the Circle of the Sacred Earth, a church of animism fostering shamanic principles and practices. For more information about Jennifer, please visit www.CircleofHealingArts.net.

Follow your silver chord
and rediscover
the pathway of your soul