

TOUCHSTONE

The journal of
**THE ORDER OF BARDS,
OVATES & DRUIDS**

September 2025 | Issue 337

This Issue

- ✿ The Tale of Chang'E
by Henry Hollerith
- ✿ Grab your Bin Bags: It's
World Cleanup Day
by Morgan Hollett
- ✿ The Turtle Mound
by Charles Hill
- ✿ Plus lots more!



Cover: "The Sacred Earth Grove" by Leyawen

On the Cover

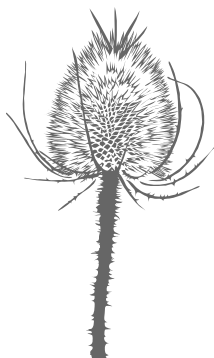
Our cover this month is by Leyawen, who regularly provides beautiful artwork for *Touchstone*. I asked her about the inspiration for this piece:

"The Earth Grove calls us to slow down, to pause, to come home to ourselves, and to the wisdom of Earth, to stand in the nurturing protective song of deep Earth and allow it to sing through us. A quiet sanctuary of stillness and strength, a nourishing, sheltered, protected space, it asks us to grow our roots deep into the ground, and to remember our place within the greater living body of Earth.

The wise bear guardian/guide of the starry heavens and the deep and fruitful earth watches over the cosmic tree of life, encircled by standing stones, the Ursa Minor and Ursa Major constellations above. The Bear gazes at the strength and beauty of life through the flapping wings of a butterfly whose ripples touch all."

Alban Elfed by Jessica McGee

Poised before the Fall
The perfection of balance
Harmony is here.



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World Rivers Day - Sunday 28th September 2025 by Lorien Cadier

OBODies how will you celebrate, honour and protect your local waterways on World Rivers Day this year? Join the millions of people in 100 countries and across 6 continents who mark World Rivers Day to show their love and concern for our precious waterways.

A water-based ritual or blessing, sing, dance or walk to a source or spring, bathe (if safe to do so) speak your rivers' names, research their folk lore and recite water-based poems. Organise a clean-up or education session.

Take yourselves, your children and your family to the riverbanks. Be with those who go with the flow. Sit still and listen and ask the question – *where do you come from? What kind of person are you? May I speak for you?*

TOUCHSTONE is published by OBOD.

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Andrew's Bit At The Front

Welcome to September's issue of *Touchstone*! And what a jam-packed edition it is, with plenty of ripe fruit, perfect for the picking!

First of all, please don't worry: I haven't ousted Eimear and her opening remarks from the magazine. Eimear is on holiday this month but will be back where she belongs, on the front pages of *Touchstone*, in October.



In the meantime, there is so much to read in this issue.

The whole magazine is infused with an interesting mixture of late summer and early autumn. Take Charles Hill's article on Turtle Mound, or Ann Beer's wonderful poem *Summer Dusk*, both of which seem to invoke the warmth and adventure of a long summer holiday. Contrastingly, there is the story of Chang'E, beautifully written by Henry Hollerith, which is told in China on the night of the full moon closest to the equinox. Henry's story moves us into that liminal time as the seasons change, gently carrying us into autumn. And of course, Leyawen's beautiful bear on the cover of this issue, gazing thoughtfully at that little clump of ripe berries, is perfect for the cover of September's issue. Thank you for sharing him with us.

September also promises to be very busy, outside of *Touchstone*'s pages. Take Morgan Hollett's article on World Cleanup Day and how a simple litter pick can help deepen our druidic practice. This is such an important and interesting piece that I will be discussing it with Morgan in this month's *Touchstone Unbound*, our new show on the Hearth every first Friday of the month. Tune in on Friday 5th September at 7pm UK time to find out more about this month's issue and to discuss World Cleanup Day and other topics with Morgan and me.

Tucked away on the inside front cover is an important note from Lorien Cadier about World Rivers Day on 28th September. With the decline in condition of rivers around the world, our work to support rivers and the beings which depend upon them for life has never been more important. I have heard of lots of community groups across Britain who are working to give personhood to their local rivers (we are doing this in Warwickshire with our own Avon), which seems particularly resonant as we move into the quarter of the west with all of its associations with water. Why not share what you are doing for

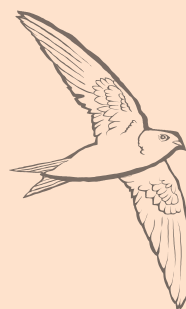
World Rivers Day on the Hearth.

It's been a long, hot summer this year. As I confessed last year, I am an autumn-lover, and yet, this year, I am noticing the transition from summer to autumn much more acutely. There is even a tinge of sadness that we are moving into the dark half of the year, with all the challenges that brings. The sense of a bittersweet farewell to summer is captured perfectly in Vanessa Fielding's gorgeous poem, *Ringling Swallows*, below. I can think of no better image to mark this point of transition

Until
next time, Andrew iii

Ringling Swallows by Vanessa Fielding

This year
the swallows may break my heart
four downy fledglings on the low slate roof
each soft forked tail curved like a fine eyelash
eight small wings a-flutter to test the sky
off they swoop, looping the air with untaught
grace
see how we fly
how tiny in their wild flights of joy
don't think
of deep and hostile oceans far below
the days and nights of rest less miles
believe me, I have ringed
each fragile leg and linked them
safely to my heart
and in the winter's darkest hours
a gentle tug reminding me
how bravely love flies high
and knows no barriers of near and far
of land or sea and sky



At Gawain's Green Chapel by Joshua Ramey-Renk

A guardian at Gawain's green mound
Did show me quarters four
Of each a sign demanded he
At each direction's door

The first of these a Northern call
To defend ancestral ways
Was a silver ring and a burning torch
My families' names ablaze

Then round to the East we trod the way
Divining there the next
A triple spiral my vision showed
To defend beliefs the best

Still moving, then to Southern door
For protecting Mother Earth
A redwood tree stood strong and green
Centuries of promise in a sapling's fragile birth

The last now before me stood
My spirit's journey sign to say
A golden dragon and Nwyvre's flame
Did mark this Western way

"But what else," the guard did ask
"To make these signs complete?"
Twin baldricks of that place's green
To signal Honor's seat.

The shepherd then cast down his crook
And bade me never yield
Four signs I'd found, my quest complete
These symbols now my shield.



Image by Catherine Lavender

And rest by David Hockley

And rest.

The Summer here is a whirlwind of activity.
Craft markets, filming for a TV series, Sanskrit
retreat with people from all over the world,
storytelling festival with dragons and giants,
princesses and goblins, drumming and Rumi.
But now.

Just rest.

I have taken a moment to come to my little
wildlife pond, built during lockdown.

Just gazing.

At the tiny insects, the bees and wasps. (No sign
of the grass snake this year). The frogs have
come and gone.

A moment to myself.

To remember mySelf.

To rest.

There was a speaker at the Storytelling festival
who said, 'All this world is an illusion. There
are no people, no minds. Things just happen.
No birth or death. No growing old. Just One
swirling mass of energy. No children, no time,
past or future'.

'Is that true? No Truth, no ideas, no getting
anywhere at all. Just eternal Isness. But surely,
we need to get to where you are'.

'No need. Nowhere to get to. Nowhere to come
from. All teachings are just a story'.

Yet in this moment I know there is

Just rest.

No need to worry about what will happen next.
What is true or false.

Leaves appear to rustle. Cars and bikes appear
to go past. People appear to chatter. I appear to
just rest.

Summer Dusk by Ann Beer

A pearl-soft sky without a cloud,
The walnut, oak, and maple still.
One robin starts to sing out loud,
A tawny rabbit eats its fill.
The clover carpets half the grass,
Though where the bees are, I don't know.
What future may now come to pass
If heat won't let the flowers grow?
But to and fro the rabbit runs,
And munches leaves and jumps and plays.
The heat was like a thousand suns,
All creatures sheltering from the rays.
But now a gentle coolness falls
Like blessing from the world above.
And as the night's soft music calls
The garden answers it with love.



Image by Catherine Lavender

Alban Elfed by Susan Knox

Bluid rid, the rowans hing heavy, the corbies
pu'in et th stalks.
Brambles glisten. Aipples tapsalteerie tumble
intae granny's baiket.
Tatties, smoor wi' butter piled in the ashet.
We hae muckle blessins an' we gie thanks tae
oor mither Earth.
May we be aye
gratefu' and mindfu'
an' tread wi' blessin
upon her.



An Elemental-Orchestra by Iain Marshall

I used to love hearing the rain
On the trailer roof
Snug, and safely cocooned
While the elements played a symphony over the
moor
Our dwelling
Merely a percussive instrument for the
rhythm-section
On which to perform intricate paradiddles
While the wind-section did its best to sabotage
the beat
Countering with something more powerful
And less rhythmically predictable
What it lacked in melody
It made up for in sheer elemental terror
Conducted expertly by some
Unseen maestro
As it conjured its way to a frenzied
And somewhat diabolical crescendo

Stonehenge, June 2025

by Frances Kelsey

An ancient spell, an awesome magic,
This place, or rather not-place,
Time out of time,
Not-place, not-time
But more – connection to the infinite.

Sun on stone,
Fire in earth,
The dead, the living, and the dead
In sacred circles spiralling.
Soft voices of the ancestors,
The song of skylark, night-dark corvid call,
Mingled intimations of divinity.
And also a felt presence – the intent
Of those who will come after;
Their silent breath a cool sonority
Which meets me here and now -
Which changes me.

And here, it seems
That opposites may perhaps be held,
In moments of transparency:
Where peace is found in motionless movement,
Where stone speaks to star.

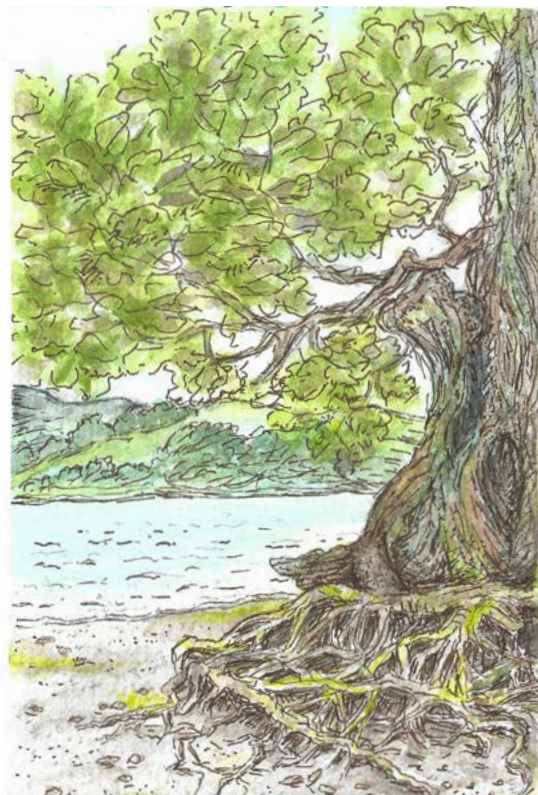


Image: The Walking Tree
by Rhyannon Brightwater

The Turtle Mound, Sacred Landscape and Labor on the Florida Coast by Charles Hill

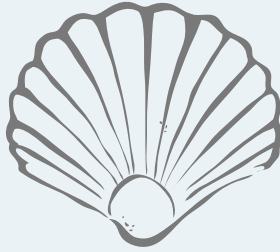
When we think of sacred sites, food is not what comes to mind, but on the Atlantic coast of Florida there are many such places.

The native peoples in East Florida, in what archaeologists call the St. Johns Culture, left behind huge shell mounds or middens. The mounds are made up primarily of oyster shells but also the bones of small mammals, fish and reptiles. Middens are refuse piles what we might now consider junk heaps. But they sometimes arose to great heights.

The Turtle mound near New Smyrna Beach, located in the Canaveral National Seashore is the largest shell midden in North America. If ten people consumed oysters each week for a year, the pile created would not be that great. But Turtle Mound, at it's height, was 75 feet tall and around 600 feet long. Today it remains 50 feet tall and can be seen out at sea for seven miles.

The Turtle Mound's formation began sometime between 800 and 1400 C.E.. Recent radiocarbon testing seems to indicate the year 1000 C.E. The amount of oyster shells estimated to be in the turtle mound are said to be around 35,000 cubic yards. The people who inhabited the area

surrounding the Turtle Mound are know as the Timucua. The Timucua were known to have winter camps they returned to regularly. Many of these mounds are said to be associated with these winter camps. The Timucua and the other East Coast people did little to alter their landscape. But these shell middens are a testament to the thousands of people who must have eaten oysters everyday for hundreds of years to create the Turtle Mound.



The area surrounding the Turtle mound must have been an important site for the people who lived here. There are at least two other shell middens within walking distance. Early Europeans recorded the Timucua launching their canoes from the shores of the Turtle Mound, which is said to give it the shape from which it's current name is derived.

The careful observer will also notice that from the Turtle Mound you can see the Sea Turtles who nest within its sight. Among the turtles that are known to return to the Canaveral national Seashore are the Loggerhead (*Caretta caretta*), Kemps Ridley (*Lepidochelys kempii*), Leatherback (*Dermochelys coriacea*), and the Green (*Chelonia mydas*).



Image: From the top of Turtle Mound by Charles Hill

The shells that make up the middens have the property of heat retention. The warmer spots would have been attractive in the days when heat was labor intensive. The Turtle Mound reaches up into the heavens and runs along the ocean and a lagoon. It is a breathtaking place of earth, sea, and sky. Even today the area boasts impressive diversity of mammals, fish, molluscs and birds, and the like. As diverse as the fauna is the flora. For many of the species, the area serves as its northern limit. Several different habitats all commingle in the area as well. You can find dunes, scrub, wetlands, pine uplands, and the like. Common plant species include species as different as Spanish needle (*Bidens alba*), wild coffee (*Psychotria nervosa*), sea grape (*Coccoloba uvifera*), and various mangroves.

The Turtle Mound has undergone great changes over the years. The arrival of the Spanish to Florida greatly changed the landscape and eventually caused the near total eradication of the Timucua people. It is thought that some Timucua people may have escaped and fled to other indigenous communities. The Spanish then gave way to the British who, again, gave way to the Spanish. The United States finally took control of Florida.

The place has been through several names after the Europeans arrived. The first recorded name was Surruque in the 1500's. This name was taken from an indigenous Chief that inhabited the region. A succession of names was to follow: Mount Belvedere (1769), The Rock (1769), Mount Tucker (1796), and Turtle Mount (1823), and finally the present name, Turtle Mound.

What the indigenous people called 'the mound' seems to be lost to history. It is believed that the native people used the mound as high ground during hurricanes and other high water events. Europeans later used the mound as a lookout point and as a landmark when navigating by sea.

The Turtle Mounds height was reduced from it's 75 feet during the 19th and 20th centuries when people were shellrock mining for roads and other uses. Today the park is a protected archaeological area in a nationally protected environmental preserve not far from Kennedy Space Center. It stands at a height of 50 feet and has never been excavated for research.

When you arrive at the warm and windy Turtle Mound you are greeted with flowers and a boardwalk. Florida was rightly called the land of flowers because, if you look, something is blooming year round.

The place is charged with the procession of human activity. My wife and I can feel the spirits of those early native people who spent hundreds years processing the shells that built the site. This byproduct of their lifestyle is one of the only physical signs of their presence. The Europeans too left their mark on this place and it has the feeling of an old city, having been constantly used by people over thousands of years. The area is still quite busy being visited by tourists, fishers, and naturalists. It is a high place were you can see the timeless ocean, the city of New Smyrna, the active lagoon, and even spaceships heading beyond Terra.

When we go to the Turtle Mound, we commune with the land, the ancestors, and the descendants. It is a sacred site built on the labor of food.



Image: From the top of Turtle Mound by Charles Hill

Bardic Tales

The Tale of Chang'E by Henry Hollerith

A very long time ago, in Ancient China, there lived a beautiful young woman named Chang'E with her husband, a legendary archer named Hou Yi.

Hou Yi had served his Emperor in many wars and had slain many great beasts, but at the time of this story he had settled down in a modest cabin at a beautiful lake to be with his wife.

There he'd find work as a hunter and take on an apprentice from time to time. At the time of this story, he trained a scruffy, but talented young bowman named Fengmeng.

At that time the heavens were still in much turmoil and hadn't settled into the formations we know today. So it happened that, one day, ten terrible suns rose on the sky, threatening to scorch the earth and burn down all the crops.

The Emperor swiftly sent for all great warriors under his command, but none of them were able to take the suns down.

And so it was that he sent for the greatest of them all, the recently retired Hou Yi, with the promise of any reward his treasury had to offer, if he would only serve him one more time.

Not far from where Hou Yi and Chang'E lived, there was a huge mountain, that reached far into the sky. On the very top stood a single ancient oak tree, called the Sacred Tree by the people of the surrounding villages.

The day after he had accepted the Emperor's request, Hou Yi kissed his wife goodbye, shouldered his magic bow and began his climb up the mountain.

When he finally reached the top, he meditated for five days and five nights under the Sacred Tree to prepare for his quest.

On the early morning of the sixth day, when it was still dark, Hou Yi prepared his bow and aimed at where the first sun would soon rise. He calmed his heartbeat and emptied his mind and, as soon as the first sun began to rise, he shot it down from the sky with a sizzling arrow.

Even before the arrow hit its mark, he reached into his quiver and got the next one to shoot down the second sun as soon as it began to rise as well.

So he went on until only one sun remained. Hou

Yi and his wife had a beautiful garden where they grew much of their own food and so he knew that they would need the last Sun's light for their crops, so he let it be.

Word of his deeds spread quickly and, when he came down the mountain, he was welcomed with ovations from many people who had come to see the great hero. Among them was an envoy of the Emperor himself, who escorted Hou Yi to the palace to receive his well earned reward.

To the Emperor's dismay, Hou Yi picked the most valuable treasure of them all: two unique potions of immortality, so he could live forever with his beautiful wife Chang'E.

Back home he asked Chang'E to store the potions safely away until he had his affairs in order, since as soon as they'd drunk them they would turn into gods and no longer be able to dwell on Earth.

Chang'E did as she was asked and Hou Yi continued the training of his apprentice Fengmeng, to whom he had committed and grown rather close to over the past months.

Chang'E spent the following weeks preparing everything for their departure, while her

husband finished the training of Fengmeng.

So it was that, on a hunting trip, Hou Yi told his apprentice about the potions and that they were planning to depart as soon as Fengmeng's training was finished.

Fengmeng was an ambitious man and, since he couldn't quite match the skills of his master and feared he could never live up to Hou Yi's reputation, he secretly had grown jealous of him. Because he was also very greedy, he decided that he wanted the immortality potion for himself. Surely nobody would dare to question his skill once he became a god.

A plan was made and quickly executed. The very next day, as Hou Yi was gathering firewood, Fengmeng shot him in the back, gravely wounding him.

When he couldn't find the potions anywhere in Hou Yi's belongings, he realised that his wife must have the potions hidden. He took off towards his master's cabin, leaving him for dead.



He found Chang'E outside the cabin, tending her beautiful garden. Fengmeng threatened to kill her if she didn't hand him the potions. Chang'E was shocked and terrified, but she wasn't about to just hand her husband's murderer the potions. She tried to run into the house, but Fengmeng attacked her with a knife.

She eventually managed to fight him off and get into the house, badly wounded by several deep cuts.

Believing her husband dead and feeling her own life force running out, Chang'E quickly drank one of the potions and smashed the other one on the floor, so the vile Fengmeng couldn't get his hands on them.

Immediately a radiant energy filled all her senses, bringing her great knowledge and power. All her wounds closed and she felt light-headed as her mortality faded away.

As she began her ascent towards the heavens she saw her beloved Hou Yi lying in the woods, badly wounded, but still alive.

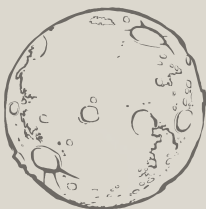
She was able to save him through her new found power, but a great sorrow filled her as she realised that she had to leave him. She now was a Goddess and could no longer dwell on mortal grounds.

The couple shared one last kiss and declared their ever lasting love. Then Chang'E made her way to her immortal residence, for which she chose the Moon, so she could be as close to her beloved as possible. From there she could watch over Hou Yi and shine her light upon him and all the people on earth.

Every year, when the moon is full around the time of the autumn equinox, people in China and all over Asia celebrate their Mid Autumn Festival. They have a feast and bring offerings of fruits and cake for Chang'E, just as her husband Hou Yi used to do in the years following her ascension.

Drumming Down the Moon by Keith Schubert

Drumming down the moon
Drumming down the moon
To us she comes
As she hears our drums
Drumming down the moon



Bard of the Silent Stones by Damhnaic De Na Darach

At dawn I walked the dragon's spine,
Through mist that clung like ancient rhyme,
To Avebury, where silence speaks
In circles made of granite peaks.
Alone I stood, yet not alone—
Each stone a voice, each voice a tone.
Of Earth that dreams in root and flame,
And calls me softly by a new name.

The air was thick with whispered lore,
The myths that seep from sod and spore—
Blodeuwedd's cry, Taliesin's song,
The tales that twist the soul-life long.
I bowed my head, the rite began,
Not made by priest, nor led by man,
But stirred by winds and sparked by thread
Of Yeats's fire within my head.

That flame!—no hearth, no mortal blaze,
But sight that cuts through veiling haze,
The sudden bolt of second sight,
Where word and world ignite in flight.
I felt the Awen—bright light of silver, gold—
Three streams that through my spirit rolled.
It sang of sea, of stone, of sky,
Of deathless things that never die.

The Earth beneath, a pulsing womb,
Held echoes of the barrow's tomb.
It gave me root, it gave me weight,
And fire crowned me with its fate.
A spark to shape, a flame to send,
A song to birth, a wound to mend.
And in that place, my soul did weave
The truth I sought, the past I'd leave.

For bard is not just harp and voice,
But witness of the hidden choice:
To walk the path no feet can claim,
To keep the myths and tend the flame.
I rose renewed, my heart unshod,
A walker off to find the paths untrod.
They dwell in stone, wind, stream, and tree—
In every breath of mystery.

Three things shall
guide the
seeker's way:
A heart of fire, an
Oak that stands,
The myths that
linger through
ancient lands.





Image: The Awen Grove by Kenn Payne

Rayleigh Seed Group and the Labyrinths by Daniel Croucher

I am a member of a small seed group in Essex and as part of our Beltane ceremonies we wanted to all walk a Labyrinth together. I searched for our nearest Labyrinth, which was at Thameside Nature Discovery Park owned by Essex Wildlife Trust, so went to visit it to make sure it was suitable. Unfortunately the paths were somewhat worn out and overgrown so it would have been difficult to walk it.

Labyrinth 1 - Sand in the Garden.

After speaking to the other members of the group we decided to create one from sand in the garden of the house where we normally hold our ceremonies. One of our members Wendy is a fantastic artist and had previously worked with labyrinths so it seemed very achievable.

After giving Wendy the measurements she designed a Labyrinth and marked up a piece of string with the widths of the pathways to help us on the day. We all then came together on 3rd May and using, hands, crisp tubes, string and a few bags of soft sand that John had brought along we created a Labyrinth. It was such a lovely afternoon working, creating, helping, supporting each other and having an actual Labyrinth that we had made.

We all took it in turns to walk the Labyrinth individually at our own pace, with our own thoughts and ideas about what the Labyrinth meant to us.

'Sand so bright and orange, like the setting sun, sat so softly on warm green grass, positioned so true within circle of stones.'

I am here waiting, wanting, calling to be explored, step forth and walk my path.

In the coming days my path will fade, but take me with you on yours.

May your path be strong, knowledgeable, wise, full of life, love and healing.'



Labyrinth 2 - Rocks in the Park.

After my visit to the Discovery Park I contacted Essex Wildlife Trust to enquire as to whether there were plans to reinstate the Labyrinth and was told that they were waiting for a corporate company to volunteer their help. I explained that we were a small group of willing Druids and asked if we would do. After a bit of date juggling on Sunday 13th July we met up at the Discovery Park. There were 14 of us including friends and family members, our ages ranging from two and a half to fifty three.

We were faced with an overgrown and sometimes hard to distinguish Labyrinth and two huge 1 ton bags of reclaimed crumbled brick and concrete. On what seemed like the hottest day of the year we rolled up our sleeves, put gloves on and applied a thick layer of sun cream. We started by cutting back the overgrown pathways and then marking out the edges with the rubble.

With all those willing hands the labyrinth soon took shape and I think to everyone's surprise it felt like we finished it fairly quickly. Especially considering it measures 16 metres across and the path you follow in and out stretches nearly 600 metres.

Again it was wonderful to all come together on a project and see it take shape before our eyes. Wendy and her daughter also surprised us all with a hand painted postcard showing the Labyrinth.

We all walked the Labyrinth in our own time knowing that we could return again in the future and that other visitors to the park could now also enjoy it too.

'Bricks and concrete and tiles and stone, laid down upon this space.'

Each one gathered from many a place, touching numerous lives along the way.

Their journey here is unknown but now they come together as one, creating a future shared.'

Grab your bin bags: It's World Cleanup Day by Morgan Hollett

"It's not my garbage, but it is my planet."
— *Popular environmental slogan*

Alban Elfed is fast approaching, and so is World Cleanup Day! Falling on September 20 — two days before this year's autumn equinox — World Cleanup Day brings together millions of people in hundreds of countries for one purpose: tackling our global waste crisis.

The idea of a large-scale community cleanup began in 2008, when 50,000 Estonians turned out en masse to clean up their country, gathering a whopping 10,000 tonnes of rubbish in just five hours. World Cleanup Day was officially launched ten years later in 2018 on the back of further successful events. Since 2018, the number of countries participating has grown from 157 to 198, attracting between 15 and 20 million participants annually (the COVID years being an exception, of course). And last year, in 2024, World Cleanup Day was celebrated as an International Day in the UN calendar for the very first time.

So what's the link between World Cleanup Day and druidry? Well, for me, community cleanups are one of my favourite forms of 'druidry in action', and with World Cleanup Day falling so close to the autumn equinox, I think it's the perfect hands-on way to honour the festival.

Having attended my very first cleanup last September, three months prior to joining OBOD, it took me a while to connect the two in my head. I saw cleanups as something I did independently of my Bardic studies. At a particularly wild-weathered cleanup on June 5, World Environment Day, something clicked into place and I realised that these events are one of the main ways I live out my druidry, especially as someone living in an urban setting. Now, I love a good ritual out in nature as much as the next person — but there's something unexpectedly beautiful in the act of grabbing a few buckets and filling them with other people's trash, "unexpectedly" being the operative word here.

Getting out and about in your local park, armed with buckets, gloves and grabbers, fulfils two cornerstones of druidry, with one being more obvious than the other: reverence of the earth and a good dose of mindfulness. Cleaning up the local landscape is a very easy way to show your love and appreciation for the planet we all call home, as well as her inhabitants of all shapes and sizes. The cleanups I attend, organised by wirBERLIN and Cleanup Trepnick, tend to use a three-bucket system. Events elsewhere might follow different formats, but I've included the one I'm familiar with here as inspiration for those who might not have an

event local to them and/or who might be inspired to organise one of their own!

The first bucket is for cigarette butts. These might seem innocuous enough — after all, they're just a bit of paper and cotton, and therefore biodegradable, right? — and are often tossed aside without a second thought. But cigarette butts are more than they seem and are incredibly bad for the environment. Not only are the filters full of micro plastics, a dreaded pollutant that means the butts take years and years to break down, they also contain over 7,000 toxic chemicals, including almost 70 known carcinogens. These toxic chemicals don't stay put: every time it rains, they leak out into the soil and eventually make their way into the water cycle, affecting far more than the spot they were carelessly chucked away at. With each butt able to contaminate up to 1,000 litres of groundwater, it's essential to get these out of the landscape and into the rubbish bin to protect the soil and water that nourishes us.

The second bucket is for metal beer bottle caps, properly known as crown corks. I can only speak for Berlin here, where beer is most commonly found in glass bottles with metal caps, but these caps can be found in abundance at local cleanups. This time it's a slightly different story: crown corks are usually made from valuable metals such as steel or aluminium, which are highly recyclable, but only when they're popped into the recycling bin and not into the landscape! Sadly, there's no cap-loving dragons living in Berlin to hoard these resources, meaning us volunteers need to step in and make sure they end up where they actually belong.

The third and biggest bucket is for everything else that doesn't belong in the landscape: plastic wrappers that won't break down anytime soon, broken glass that can injure our animal companions, single use coffee cups that were enjoyed for minutes but will pollute for years, and much more.

At the end of each cleanup, the cigarette butts and crown corks are counted up and the remaining rubbish weighed. At the time of writing, the cleanups I've attended since last September have removed 65,000 cigarette butts, 56,000 crown corks and almost 1,500 kilos of other rubbish from the local environment — a fantastic team effort for sure, and there's more to come!

Let's take a look at the other druidic aspect of these events: cleaning as a way to get some mindfulness in. There's a few different ways in which roaming a small area of park with buckets and a grabber constitutes mindfulness for me.



Firstly, I ditch the headphones as soon as I arrive at a cleanup. At first, this was primarily for safety; when your attention is highly focused on a small patch of ground in front of you, you need to keep an ear out for joggers, cyclists, dogs and e-scooters! But it also gives me an opportunity to really listen. Whether it's the gentle splashes at a riverside cleanup or birdsong in the woods, there's a lot to hear when I'm forced to slow down and stay in one spot.

Secondly and in a similar vein, slow and mindful steps are a given when cleaning. At the last event I attended, I walked a whole 120 metres in two and a half hours. I'm sure all but the most dedicated mindful walkers would have given up long before then without the extra task at hand! I covered such a small area, but in doing so could give it my undivided attention and appreciation, something I might not have been able to give had I simply walked through at a normal pace. As each event takes place at a different location — the ones I've been to took place at a 19th century park turned Soviet war memorial, an open-air art gallery constructed from sections of the Berlin Wall, and an old airport that's now a popular recreation area — it's also an opportunity to tune into the different energies and histories each place has to offer.

Thirdly, it's a chance to connect to what's going on in the natural world at a slowed down pace. As someone living in a bustling capital, the task of

tuning into the rhythms of the year is often easier said than done. World Cleanup Day is the big event of the year, but it's not the only one. Events are often spread throughout the year and scheduled around the environmentalism calendar, such as Zero Waste Day in March, Earth Day in April and World Environment Day in June. In March, I was treated to a half-day amongst the early blossoms; April showers made their presence felt at this year's Earth Day event; and World Environment Day was accompanied by the sudden downpours of summer storms followed by brilliant sunshine that lifted the soul, something I certainly would have missed by staying indoors had I not committed myself to the event.

While these three benefits can also be achieved by simply going for a mindful walk, or by finding a spot to meditate and observe the natural world in for an extended period of time, there's something I find particularly special about combining them with an act of service for our planet. It's not just reaping the benefits: it's also giving something back (strictly metaphorically, of course) and leaving that one little spot in a better state than I found it.

I hope this article inspires you to swap your cauldrons for buckets, your staffs for litter grabbers, and your robes for a waterproof jacket and pair of gloves this autumn equinox. Happy cleaning this World Cleanup Day!

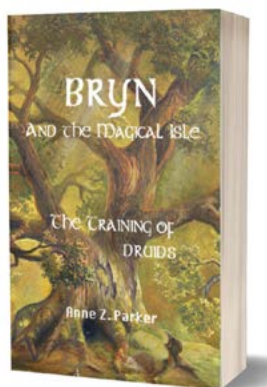


Image: Apple Tree by Kaz Leroux

Reviews

Bryn and the Magical Isle by Anne Z Parker

This wonderful book is termed 'An historical fantasy fiction novel' which doesn't do it justice. Set in ancient Celtic Britain during 10 CE, it follows the lives and training of Bryn and other Druids from youth to adulthood during their 15 years of study in the Druid school on the Island of Anglesey amidst the ever-present threat of the Romans.



Young people are called at the age of 10 to join the school, to leave their families and answer the calling of their special gifts. Each grade takes 5 years to complete with an oral exam at the end of it. We are taken through each grade with Bryn and his friends accompanying them on their journeys, living in harmony with the Natural World and learning much in the way of Magick. As another reviewer puts it – 'a story of a sane civilization grounded in respect for the Natural world.'

The book is a trilogy within one novel – Bard, Ovate, Druid - with an Epilogue that takes us many years on to Bryn as a wise elder.

Some students do not complete the full journey to the Druid Grade but go to serve their local community as either Bard or Ovate. Others complete the Druid grade and are called to serve in their communities or other communities or even to stay at the school and teach the next students coming through.

We watch the students grow up, find partners and raise families, if that is their calling, and watch as they make their ways in life and the world. There is a section at the end to help us with names and places as Anne has obviously done a tremendous amount of research, using authentic ancient names for places throughout. Also, a section to help us keep track of all the characters in the story – be they of this world or the other.

This novel is totally absorbing, leaving this reader wanting more and becoming attached to the characters.

Review by Jacki Woolmington.

A Sussex Guide: The Long Man & Friends by Philip Carr-Gomm and David Bramwell

If you thought Sussex was just tourist friendly seaside resorts and London-centric commuter towns, this cracking small guide to the county will utterly change your mind. According to the introduction, "It's the most goblin-haunted part of Britain ... is where the Devil's wife is buried ... and where the last of the fairies to survive in southern England live." It's quite the revelation.

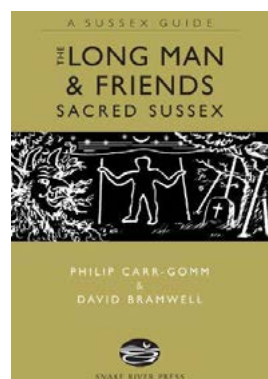
In terms of size, this book is quite small and would fit perfectly into the pocket of a rambler who came across a tump or ancient settlement and wanted to find out more. However, I would recommend giving the whole thing a good read through before you set out on your walk and then sticking it in your rucksack for when you go out to explore the landscape.

The book has two sections: a gazetteer of sacred sites followed by nine magical walks. All the well-known Sussex sites are all here, but it is some of the county's lesser-known treasures which particularly excite. For example, it is a joy to find out about the Gurdy Stone and the English Martyr's Church in Goring-by-Sea with its reproduction of the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. I particularly loved the sections on Blake's Cottage (and fully intend on finding the plaque on the site where he had a fight with a soldier) and Doreen Valiente, who is the only witch to have a blue plaque of her own! There is also a wonderful short section on Elm trees, which were once such a crucial tree in the British landscape but are now fading from our collective consciousness.

Written with a real affinity for the landscape, Carr-Gomm and Bramwell's connection to the county feels deep and authentic. I also must mention the gorgeous illustrations by Ivan Hissey, which add another layer of magic to the text. This book is a real treasure and I certainly intend on strapping up my walking boots and setting off along some of the suggested paths through this magical landscape one day.

Find 'The Long Man & Friends - Sacred Sussex' on the OBOD online store here:

<https://store.druidry.org/products/the-long-man-and-friends>



Portals into Deep Imagination

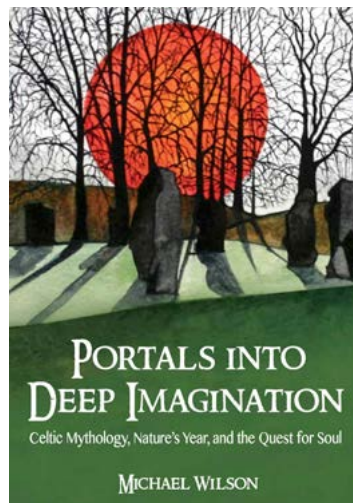
by Michael Wilson

I was lucky enough to read Michael Wilson's book a few years ago while he was developing it for publication and was immediately struck by just how useful this book could be. It is wonderful to be able to review this book now it is in print and to urge, as strongly as I can, other people to go and buy it!

While this is a book and practice rooted in Druidry, Wilson does not restrict his work to those who identify themselves as Druids. In fact, he begins with as broad an audience as possible, writing for those who “long for a tangible calling to guide us further on our life journey” or find meaning during “reflective walks in nature, when witnessing the solstice sun or the moon and those millions of stars...” It is at that point where Wilson introduces his readers to the Celts and tells us that his book will be “a spiritual journey thought the Celtic year.” This openness will be sure to bring Wilson more readers than those purely on the Druid path and, similarly, will provide an interesting first step for those who may feel drawn to Druidry but do not yet want to join an established order.

The book then outlines a series of weekly practices, beginning at Samhain and working through the year, although, it is clear that you could begin this journey wherever you are on the wheel of the year. The Celtic foundation of the season is outlined for the reader, using festivals and mythology, while more modern and personal areas for reflection are also woven in. Wilson is a psychotherapist, so this book is not simply about exploring the Celtic path but the effect that it has on us personally. Wilson's aim is for us to internalise the elements he brings to us and examine the way that they relate to our own psyche.

As I was reading this book just after Lughnasadh, I leapt forward to week 40 to see how Wilson explored the season. His starting point is the festival of Lughnasadh itself and the story of Lugh. He writes about the confinement of Eithne, Lugh's mother, in a tower and how Birog saves the infant Lugh from drowning, before he given to Tailtiu for fostering. Lugh establishes the Fair of Tailtiu in honour of his foster mother. From these tales. Wilson draw two interesting psychological points – firstly that acts of generosity tend to come at a cost to those who enact them and secondly that nature is generous throughout the year. To explore the latter point, he mentions “Lammas growth,” an extra set of leaves which oaks sprout in August to “compensate for insects foraging on its leaves.” The practical work that follows encourages the reader to reflect on “the role generosity has in your life,” before outlining several ways one could deepen the exploration.



I flicked forward to week 47 to see how Wilson tackles the Autumn Equinox and found an equally thought provoking section. Here he reflects upon the Salmon of Wisdom, with some beautiful and engaging prose. Beginning with the hazel tree he takes us on a magical journey from the fruit of the tree to the deep pools beneath:

“If there are any hazelnuts left on the tree, now is the time when they drop from their papery jackets, even into rivers with their deep eddying pools of mythological fame... With riparian woodland on their banks, of alder, willow, and birch, and oak, rowan and hazel not far away, the whole of life relies on rivers and their plunge pools, including the salmon who know these waters well.”

The practical element encourages readers to visit the river and make an offering, but also to deepen their understanding of how the river works by tracking its route, thinking about the landscape it flows through and considering any ancient sites or mythology which form part of its story.

As I think you can tell, I am a huge fan of what Wilson has done here. This is no simple self-help book to help you connect to the seasons but a thorough and engaging series of steps that will help even the most seasoned Druid to create meaningful seasonal practice. It has the potential to be utterly transformational and is highly recommended both for those who want to refresh their practice or take their first step on the path. It is an invaluable book and highly recommended.

Use the discount code:
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~ Valid for Sept only ~



To find Events from OBOD members and friends throughout the year, check the events page on the
Druid Hearth: <https://hearth.druidry.org/events>

Upcoming Events

Druid Gorsedd: 10-12 October 2025, Devizes, Wiltshire. For more information,
email druidgorsedds@obod.org

Winter Gathering: 6 December 2025, Strode Theatre, Street.

*I float as the Autumn leaf
Floats on the surface of
A deep pool-
Cast adrift from the Great Tree that held me
Close to her beating heart.
The Wheel turns-
Cast adrift- slowly
Slowly sinking to mud
Silt gathering- catching
All thoughts of who and
What I am.
De-Composition
Made new by dismemberment
Never lost
Never broken
Ever changing
Being Now*



Poem by Candy
Matthews