



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

June 2024 | Issue 322

This Issue

- ✿ A Druid in Russia
by Denis Domrachev
- ✿ Selkies and Druids
by Penny Billington
- ✿ Muddy Feet Revisited
by John King
- ✿ And lots more!



COVER: "Fire Ritual" by Leyawenn

Editorial

Solstice Blessings!

Welcome to June's edition of *Touchstone* - and a very special edition at that. For many of you, *Touchstone* will now be found in the Druid Hearth, OBOD's new online community. I hope you are enjoying the space. Being able to store *Touchstone* in the Hearth rather than emailing it to you all individually helps us reduce the carbon footprint of the magazine even further.

So what's in store this month? Well we have two very different pieces about Selkies (calling us to our summer holiday at the seaside perhaps), an introduction from an OBOD member in Russia and something from the archive about being skyclad (rather timely, following an article in *The Guardian* about paganism called "**Everybody's welcome – as long as you keep your clothes on!**"). There's also poetry about the old OBOD Forums and a stunning photo of the recent solar eclipse in North America. Speaking of stunning artwork, how wonderful is the front cover by Leyawenn? I love it! It makes the cover look so summery!

There's also a call for submissions on page 12 for a folklore themed issue in October so get your thinking caps on!

If you are going to the Summer Gathering, I look forward to seeing you there. Do say hello - but not if you see me walking up the Tor because I won't have the breath to answer back!



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A Summer Solstice Haiku

by Janet Elvidge

Summer Solstice Sun.
Roses softly unfurling,
Air hung with perfume.



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Opinions/statements by contributors are not necessarily those of the editor, Order or publishers. Submissions from members are welcomed, but it is not always possible to use everything offered for publication. Contributions must focus on Druidry or contributor's experience of Druidry and may be edited without consultation unless a request is made to the contrary. Poetry no more than 40 lines. Deadline for events inclusion is 5th of the month before publication. Submissions may be printed on the OBOD website unless requested otherwise.

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Chosen Chief's Bit

Bandia daoibh a chairde! Beannachtaí
Meitheamh! Greetings to you all! June Blessings!

“Summer’s come, healthy free, that bows down
the dark wood;

The slim spry deer jumps and the seal’s path is
smooth.

The cuckoo sings sweet music, and there is
smooth, soft sleep.

Birds skim the quiet hill and the swift grey stags.

The deer’s lair is too hot, and active packs cry
pleasantly; the white stretch of strand smiles and
the swift sea grows rough.

There is a noise of wanton winds in the palace of
the oakwood of Drumdell; the fine clipped
horses who shelter in Cuan Wood are
rushing about.

Green bursts out from every plant; leafy is
the shoot of the green oakwood. Summer
has come, winter gone, twisted hollies hurt
the stag.

The hardy blackbird who owns the thorny wood
sings a bass;

The wild, weary sea reposes and the speckled
salmon leaps.

Over every land the sun smiles for me a parting
greeting to bad weather. Hounds bark, stags
gather, ravens flourish, summer’s come!”

*From Four Old Irish Songs of Summer and Winter, in
A Golden Treasury of Irish Poetry AD 600 to 1200, Ed.
& Trans. David Greene & Frank O’Connor.*

I was so excited this week when I twice heard the
Cuckoo sing. The first time was in Grange Stone
Circle near the enchanted Lough Gur in Co.
Limerick, and the second time was in Grove of the
Druid Clan of Dana at Huntington Castle. It’s now
official - summer has arrived.

In sync with the vitality, creativity and generativity
in the landscape around us the Druid Hearth has
been launched. It is an amazing creation. Visually
it looks wonderful. I’m in awe of Matthew and
his team’s work, dedication and commitment.
They have worked tirelessly to create this space
for us. I’m still learning how to navigate around
the Hearth and being patient with myself, the
platform and the hiccups along the way. I’m
looking forward to exploring the capabilities of
the Hearth where we can meet and sit in virtual
circles and so much more. I’m aware it will take

time to have everyone on board and to sort out the
teething problems which is to be expected. We
appreciate your patience with this.

Traditionally June has been a month of wild
celebration both in Ireland and Europe,
particularly around mid-summer and St. John’s
Eve. An important feature of these celebrations
was the Tine Cnámha (Bone Fire) or Bonfire
which was placed at a crossroads, a bridge or some
special place. People contributed by bringing turf
and wood according to their means and bones
were also placed in the fire. People danced around
the blaze and, as the flames began to die down,
people jumped the fire. The purpose of these
rituals was for the protection of couples, animals
and crops. At the end of the festivities, people
would take coals and place one in each
field to ensure a good harvest. In some
places, June 23rd was known as ‘The Night
of the Wisps’ where the old people would
light a sheaf of corn called a wisp and
shake them over the crops to bless them.

This June we are having a very special
celebration - the 60th anniversary of the Order
at our Summer Gathering in Strode Theatre in
Street and in Glastonbury for our Fringe events,
where we will create our own magic and fun. I
look forward to meeting you there.

“Summer is the fine season for long journeys.
Calm is the high choice wood that no breath of
wind stirs. Green is the plumage of the sheltering
wood, streams of wandering water are dried up,
there is a good omen in the fine turf.”

*From The Four Seasons, A Golden Treasury of Irish
Poetry AD 600 to 1200.*

Beannachtaí, síocháin, aoibhneas, agus fiántas
daoibh go léir! Blessings, peace, joy, and wildness
to you all!

Eimear 

Triad by Katja Bouwens

Three dangers to the mind in times
old and new:

Superstition based in fear
Misinformation spread in spite
Division sown in greed

Bard's Page

In April, the old OBOD forums were closed after they were targeted by spammers. Daerwin and Leyawenn sent in poems "to celebrate what a magical place it was", in Tony's words.

I Miss the Poems on the Forums by Tony Stainsbury (Daerwin)

In the digital grove where wisdom did bloom,
Under the moon's soft silvery loom,
We gathered as Druids in virtual rooms,
Sharing our verses, our hopes, and our glooms.

The forums, a haven for thoughts to take flight,
Where words were our magic, our solace,
our light.

Each post was a stanza, each thread a long scroll,
A tapestry woven from each kindred soul.

"I miss the poems," I whisper to screens,
Now silent, where once we shared our dreams.
The gathering place that hosted our
mystical forms,
Now just echoes of verses in digital storms.

The board has shut down, the members dispersed,
But the spirit of poetry cannot be reversed.
For each line we shared, and each rhyme we spun,
Bind us forever, though the forums are done.

So here's to the Druids, both present and past,
Whose words through the ages will
steadfastly last.

In the grove of our memories, the
poems still dance,
In the forums of yore, they will always entrance.

Goodbye Beautiful Heart Place by Leyawenn

For all the moons
for all the hearts
for all the tears
for all the bards
for all the seers
and the makers
for all the hands
that have partaken
with blissful minds and blissful souls
we say for now goodbye to all
we close a library of souls
of lives and footprints left on shores
and as the beauty that's today
covers us gently in midday
a cloak of stars we each receive
for every post and soulprint give
the starry cloak to keep us well
to guard our lives as we foretell
the magic travels and adventures
the cauldron stirring of potential
of fun, of love, of hugs and cheers
of life with laughter and a few tears
as we take on the starry cloaks
we feel the peace, we feel the love
we're ready to let go with grace
and to rebirth in a new place.



Vixen at Sunrise by Vanessa Fielding

You were waiting on the rim of dawn
a wayfarer of starlight
and greenwood
scanning the pale shimmer in the east
with a wild knowing

Closer, softly closer
I drew without breath, brushing
the cobweb arch of cow parsley
and dew
damp petals on white shoulders
a ghost



amongst the lace of flowers
each in our own camouflage

You, haloed in fire
bright angel
stealing my heart, you neither flew nor
ran

A second's trysting of green eyes
fur and skin unmasked

White Cottage in the Weald

by Lee Daniels

In Weald of fields, woods and trees,
birch leaves shimmer in the breeze.
Songs of birds and buzz of bees.

Buzzards hang with ease on high
while, beneath the clear blue sky,
apple orchards pregnant lie.

Pink skies as sun is dawning,
Low Weald mists in the morning.
Dew drops, the grass adorning.

By the bluebell and foxglove,
white cottage with my truelove,
the moon bathes blue from above.

Dedicated to Amanda

The Book of Knowledge

by Tracy Rupp

An intimate place is a new lover's library
To know his hunger
Experience his seeking
Leaves turned tenderly for hours
Or dog-eared roughly
Words first supple and green
Climaxing into magenta
Orange yellow and red
To share in this knowledge
Now brown and spent on his forest floor



Eclipse Composite by Gwain Nighthawk.

This stunning photo of the recent eclipse seen in North America was sent in by Gwain who wrote "For the recent solar eclipse across North America I traveled to Le Cercle de Pierres de Stanstead in Quebec. One of the circle's co-creators was the late Ivan McBeth, OBOD Druid and Chief of the Green Mountain Druid Order. It was a wonderful experience to witness a sacred event in this sacred space."

A Druid in Russia by Denis Domrachev

Dear reader, let me introduce myself. My name is Denis Domrachev. I am an OBOD ovate grade druid from Russia. I am also the creator of a YouTube channel on Druidry, Nature and Magic that is called Druid Way.

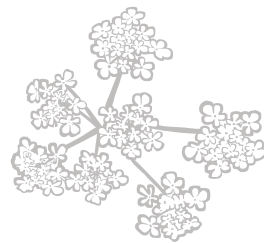
I joined the Order at Calan Gaeaf in 2018. In August 2019, I created Druid Way. In a few videos in Russian, I just wanted to share some information on modern Druidry which I thought might be useful to some people. I used to be one of those people myself searching for any YouTube videos on the subject in Russian, but I did not find what I was looking for. There is scarce information available on modern Druidry in Russian. Although my first videos were in Russian, from the very beginning I added English subtitles to all my videos to make them understandable to those who do not speak Russian. In August 2021, I started the second chapter of Druid Way, and since then I have been making videos in English. **My aim** is to inspire open dialog between Druids from all over the world. 'Inspire' is a key word here. I film my videos in picturesque locations in the region where I live. I try to show how profoundly beautiful nature is wherever you are, maybe just a few miles away from the place where you live. All you need is to take a road you may have never taken before.

The Russian landscape is beautiful, vast, diverse, and ancient. There are different folkloric elements and pagan traditions that can be defined by the multifaceted term "Russian". The land where I come from, Saint-Petersburg, North-West

Russia, used to be a part of a historical region called Ingria. Different languages, including Finnish and Swedish, were spoken here. Growing in such a multicultural place, I did not experience a big influence of traditional Russian culture. There are places I have been where authentic Russian energies are stronger, for example, in Veliky Novgorod or Pskov. So being based in St. Petersburg, a city where a lot of cultures and traditions cross, has not been leading me towards something one may identify as 'authentically 'Russian''. I live where my heart belongs.

To me the landscape where I live has enough similarities with the landscape of those regions that we may call Celtic. Working with the Ogham, for example, is something I can relate to since most of the trees and plants that are associated with the tree alphabet can be found in the place where I live. Some of them, however, do not, for example, the yew tree, so I work with them in my visualizations. Some trees or plants that are important to me may not be represented in the Gwersi, for instance, rosebay willowherb which is known in Russia as Ivan-Tea because one can make a wonderful tea out of this plant.

The Druidic wheel of the year also sits well in my landscape. Living in the Northern hemisphere, I share the same seasons and their energy changes as in the Celtic lands. Imbolc, however, is quite special. February tends to be cold and snowy, and regarded as a winter month here in St. Petersburg. The weather is often harsh in March too with its biting frosts and snow. So, it does take imagination to see coming spring in such unspringish conditions. But I cope. Sometimes it is not about changes in a visible landscape, rather it is about a very subtle energy or light change which one can feel and attune to. There is a Slavic religious and folk holiday known as Maslenitsa (also known as Butter Lady, Butter Week, etc.) which is similar to Imbolc. It is celebrated during the last week before Great Lent (usually in late February or in March). During its festivities, we bake bliny (pancakes) and burn the Maslenitsa effigy on the last day of the holidays, which symbolizes letting go of everything that does not serve us well anymore and seeing off winter. To me it is a very



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good example of how I use elements of traditional Russian practice in my work. Having two festivals of welcoming spring suits me just fine.

So, indeed I can say that I use some Russian elements in my work, but it is, as I have mentioned above, a rather multifaceted matter. It is not necessarily my intention to mix up these elements in my practice. They are, however subtle, just part of who I am: a Russian druid. Being one may feel a bit funny at times. On one hand, I am who are I am surrounded by rich and beautiful landscape with its own stories to learn and tell, but on the other hand my soul finds inspiration, healing and wisdom in Celtic myths and legends, especially the Welsh ones. Was I born in the wrong place? Why do I have a feeling of longing for and even belonging to the country where I have never been? Is this what one calls hiraeth? I do not know. I do not have answers to these questions, but I try to find them. This is my druidic path: it is a quest for meaning and understanding.

By learning the lore and myths that speak in different tongues, I am exploring and uncovering my own language and culture. To me it is unthinkable to claim that one can know their own language or culture if that language and culture is the only thing they know. When I am learning English, Norwegian, Welsh, I am also learning my own language to a level which was impossible before.

When I rediscovered Druidry back in 2018, I was amazed how well it aligned with what I had already known and what I had wanted to believe in. It felt as if I suddenly found something that had been missing for a long time. One of the great lessons that I have learnt thanks to Druidry is that this path is about establishing connection to the land where we live. It is a way of curiosity and exploration; it is a path of wonder and the Awen. And if you have ever experienced the Awen, be it like three drops of an elixir that suddenly changed everything, or like a song that touched the deepest strings of your soul, or three rays of light that reminded you of who you are, you begin knowing things. You start seeing yourself and the world around you differently. You can see that paradoxically there both is and is not such a thing as a Russian druid. We are all different voices in a divine song and the true meaning of Druidry lies far beyond the terms of Celtic, Russian, English, etc.

Seasonal Recipe

Summer Solstice by Sue Wilson

Allotments and back gardens are bursting with provenance at this time of year, and if you have a couple of courgette plants you can probably feed your whole street all summer! If you are looking for a delicious Solstice supper, or food to take along to your ritual, why not try:

Courgette and Tofu Fritters

These are a real staple in our house, delicious hot, but are wonderful cold, as finger food to take along to share at a ritual.

1 carton silken tofu (the long life stuff)
2 cloves garlic, peeled
3 tablespoons nutritional yeast flakes
1 tablespoon rapeseed oil

1 teaspoon ground turmeric
150g gram flour

1 tablespoon cornflour
2 large courgettes

Oil for frying

1. Put the tofu into a mixing bowl.
2. Add the garlic, nutritional yeast, oil, turmeric, gram flour, cornflour, and a good grinding of salt and pepper.
3. Add 2 tablespoons water.
4. Blitz until smooth with a stick blender.
5. Grate the courgettes and add to the batter.
6. Heat the oil in a heavy bottomed frying pan. When the oil is hot, drop in spoonfuls of batter. Cook the fritters for 2 to 3 minutes on each side.
7. Lift out with a slotted spoon and serve hot or cold, with salad and chilli jelly.



From the Archives

Muddy Feet: A Personal Journey

by John King

Being skyclad is something frequently discussed within OBOD so now feels like a good time to revisit this article important from Touchstone No 266, August 2019, with a 2024 update from John.

As the sole of my bare foot touches the ground, it is as though I am planting a kiss on the face of Gaia herself. When we walk barefoot, even if we are hardened to it, the tendency is to place each foot with care as if we are gently kissing the lips of our beloved. We are sensitive beings. From the hair on our head to our finger tips and the soles of our feet our bodies respond to sensation. If one shaft of hair is touched or a zephyr of breeze passes over bare skin we know it instantly. Yet when we strive to contact the natural world we are generally insulated from the very phenomenon we are trying to engage with. Our climate, social structures and conditioning cause us to wrap up, boot up, and muffle up and yet if we strip off, at least a bit, we feel the wind, the sun, the rain, and the cold with an immediacy and intensity we cannot otherwise know.

So what is this about? There is a growing interest in, to use the current buzz word, re-wilding, but the wild is often cold and wet, has biting insects, stony muddy ground. It can be rough. This IS nature. Depending on our intention, if we are sincere in our wish to connect, we need to meet nature on nature's terms. If we genuinely want to 'connect' it has to be on nature's terms rather than our own. It may involve mud, wet, brambles, midges, but also sunshine, warmth and soft breezes.

After stumbling into OBOD, having spent a huge amount of time out in nature, I soon came to see that whilst I could confidently operate in remote and sometimes dangerous environments in temperatures from -20 C to +38C and everything in between, I was essentially insulating myself from the experience. Whilst precautions were obviously necessary in the more extreme situations, often, in more temperate environments,

I continued this way from force of habit rather than need.

Ten years ago I moved to a small Scottish island and things began to gradually change. Our house was a mile by boat and two miles by quad bike from any other. It was remote but, initially, when I went swimming, I walked to the shoreline clothed and wearing wellingtons, swam naked and then dried and dressed before walking back. I had a summer evening routine where I walked about ten minutes and then swam off the rocks down the path of the setting sun with views to the islands of Eigg and Rum. Idyllic. Occasionally I walked back naked but always wearing at least my wellingtons. Writing this in retrospect it seems a little bizarre that I should have bothered.

Eventually we left the island and moved into our current house. It's in a wood and the east boundary is defined by a swift flowing burn with pools. I began plunging into one pool each morning throughout the year making friends with the coldness of the earth as I left the warmth of the house, the air, as well as the water. Over the months it was as though the river and the lands around called to me and invited me into an ever closer relationship.

I swam in a large pool about 20 minutes walk above the house and I started walking back without my shirt on. Gradually it seemed as though I was being invited to engage even closer. Not bothering to take a towel, I allowed my naked body to dry with the motion of walking. The seed change was when I began to walk up wearing a simple loin cloth. Yes, it is remote here and only once in eighteen months have I met anyone else, a neighbour who completely ignored the fact that I was nearly nude but possibly thought I was bonkers. But still I was wearing something on my feet. I had trimmed my footwear down to *Vibram* five fingers, those glove-like shoes.

Then one day I went out in the rain and stayed barefoot. It was a revelation. The temperature of the earth varies as you walk over it. Raindrops feel different to drips off the trees. The senses are assaulted with a myriad of stimulations. Nature wraps itself around you with an intensity that is at times almost overwhelming. Yes, at times it



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can be chilly but once the skin has cooled it's not unpleasant. I find that, providing there is no wind, I can wander in the woods for up to about an hour in temperatures of 10 C without chilling to the point of shivering. Obviously I feel very privileged to live in a remote area where I can be this free but I would encourage you to take off your shoes, wear a little less, let the cold and the wet seep into you a little sometimes. Allow yourself to experience a little discomfort, see if you can put aside your aversion and allow yourself to connect a little more with the wild nature that we are part of and which surrounds us no matter where we live.

2024 UPDATE: Throughout the Gwersi of the various grades there are occasional references to being sky clad or naked in nature but there rarely seems to be any follow up. There is a wonderful article in the OBOD archives entitled "**Getting Naked With Nuin**" and well worth a read. I have

written a second article in Touchstone 298, June, 2022, called "Falling in Love with Myself" on the subject.

However, there is no forum or follow up for members to explore this subject further so what I am suggesting is that I host an online Zoom conversation each month with the first meeting on the second Tuesday of June at 7pm UK time to discuss all matters relating to being Naked in Nature. This will be an undirected conversation and can range wherever the participants wish, it can cover subjects such as concerns, pleasures, insights, problems and experiences. It will be up to you.

If, as a member of OBOD, you feel this would be of interest then please contact me by email at nakedobodies@gmail.com and I will put you on a mailing list and send you a Zoom link for the first meeting.

Yorkshire Druid Gorsedd by Jacky Rawlins and Lynne Harling

A big thank you to everyone who made the pilgrimage through the labyrinthine lanes of the beautiful North Yorkshire Dales to attend the 2024 Druid Gorsedd at Parcevall Hall and gardens.

The weekend focussed upon legacy as the fruit of service and was primarily contemplative with gentle ceremonies and meditations to enable participants to connect with the legacies of the past, present, and future.

The Ash Ogham stave symbolised the theme of cause and effect and the ways in which personal legacies positively benefit the greater whole. We considered the societal roles of Druids throughout the years and discussed the future potential of OBOD at this time of global change

A special thankyou to Lorraine and Tom for their expert support with the ritual aspects of the Gorsedd and everyone's participation to make the weekend a great experience.



Selkies and Druids by Penny Billington

Holidays will soon beckon, and we will be singing to the seals from a cliff we know; and if you haven't yet tried this, please do – they do respond! That idle thought led me to a programme, 'Mythical creatures' with Rihanna (yes, Terry's daughter) Pratchett. There were black dogs, dragons, red caps, mermaids, hobs et al, but it was the Selkie that lodged in my mind. This magical seal-woman is referenced in The Druid Animal Oracle and I've noticed its rise in popularity amongst OBOD members. Its particular nature, of shapeshifting between sea and land, feels very much of the zeitgeist, and a gender-neutral member said particularly how comfortable they felt with this mythic creature.

Aside from the ill-fated Great Selkie of Sule Skerrie, Selkies are usually female, and their stories are not happy. Briefly, a lonely fisherman spies a group of seals shedding their skins as they emerge from the sea to dance on the shore as women. As they transform back he captures the last by stealing her skin, and so ties her to the Earth realm. She becomes his wife and bears children, but always yearns for home; and when inevitably her hidden skin is found, she immediately leaves her family to return to the sea.

My friend, happily celibate and non-binary, said they strongly identify and that got my brain buzzing: for how appealing is a hero/ine who carries the implication of a wild freedom of expression that cannot be pigeonholed by society. The story affirms the reality of being in a permanently liminal state that's useful to us all. It's a fellow-feeling acknowledging that we are none of us, whilst incarnated, actually in our chosen element.

That feeling is surely part of the deeper nature of all humankind. It is the origin of the first Bible story in Genesis; of Adam and Eve's fall from grace. Maybe life is about coming to an accommodation with feeling like fish (or



Selkies) out of water? Religious philosophers cite this universal feeling as evidence that our true nature is to swim in eternity; we will never feel quite comfortable in the world of time and space ('Time's run away with me! Where's the time gone?'), or truly 'at home' in the world of here and now. Instead we will – and most of us do – yearn, like the Selkie wife, for another state. That's why many of our most potent stories hark back to a mythic 'Golden Age'. Eden, Camelot, Atlantis: whether ejected from the garden of Eden or considering the rise and fall of Arthur's kingdom or the drowned island of magicians, the message is the same. We are 'Other'; our place is not here. 'We are stardust, we are golden; and we've got to get ourselves back to the garden.' Or maybe to the sea...

So, back to the Selkie. This story's dark nature is worthy of the Grimm brothers. The fisherman's love may be genuine, but his actions are reprehensible and the wife is his prisoner. Its origins come from a patriarchal, tribal time in the Highlands and Islands when a man had to work for many years before he could afford to marry. The result? Many young brides taken by much older men to strange and isolated lives far from their families. No wonder this tale was widespread.

We recognise more easily today control disguised as love and its consequences: that's the surface story. But what might the underlying wisdom be? From a spiritual point of view we might consider how we all have to give up half of our nature to fulfil an imposed role, as the wife did. We are all 'the wife', complying with – or perhaps feeling tricked into – the contracts that rob us whilst promising 'what we want'. Unless we are very aware.

Most of us think we are. We've come a long way, but we are still living in a world with crazy rules coming from headology, and certainly not from the heart or body: so can we trust our own judgement? What will help us gain the wider perspective, to decide what is right for us? Being in nature will. Simple.

A half-hour walk by the shore, in the woods, on the downs, gives us mental and emotional space and we feel more sane, balanced, able to act with clarity. It gives us the space to acknowledge that other part of our nature, our wild souls. It is a duty of respect to that inner spirit to gaze beyond

cultural expectations; to consider how much of ourselves we might still be giving away.

The good news is that Druidry is a practical, er, practice. As well as stimulating our love of nature it encourages a fascination with traditional wisdom tales which help explain relationships in a sentient world. It suggests how we may bring all parts of our being into harmony, to fulfil our potential. Example: young Jack goes out into the world and is friendly and kind to human and non-human persons - a creaking gate, a horse, a river... Result? The whole sentient world responds when he needs help, whilst his selfish brothers get their comeuppance.

Some fairy stories are simple. Innocence and goodness are supported and protected – as in *The Babes in the Wood*. Curses and ill luck are transformed by the magic of love, as in *Beauty and the Beast*. And there is a bright tale that mirrors that of the Selkie. It is the story of Aengus Og, the Irish God of love, who might have died of love, but came to an accommodation with his Swan Maiden and voluntarily shapeshifted so they could live together alternately as Human and Swan at different seasons – for what more expansive and fluid instinct can there be than love?

The Selkie wife is a dark, adult tale, grown from a real time, real experience, that makes finding its message a little harder. Does it have a happy ending? The husband is left lonely: whether the child/ren are is not so certain. What the Selkie's regrets might be we can only speculate. But these uncertainties aside, one message is clear: that no matter how many years we spend in compromise, the potential of our true life is always there. Like the Selkie's skin, it is in a hidden place, but safe; we just have to find it. What a fantastic thought! And lovingly and wonderfully, in many

versions of the story the child finds the skin for her mother. It is the seal-mother who returns at intervals to reconnect with her child. No coercion, just a pure flowing instinct of love.

Today, unlike the story's original audience, we have the amazing privilege of choice. We can not only absorb its moral lessons, but can craft it and modify it as it might appear in our lives. We can resolve to cut short the time of separation and longing in our own lives – a real feeling of separation anxiety for many members. We can stop focussing on those feelings of lack and turn our attention deeper within, to our hidden places. We can put our energy into joining ourselves to that wilder part of our nature that makes us truly alive. And we can do it whilst teaching, delivering pizzas, cleaning offices or running a company – whatever might be our circumstance and contract with the world.

We start by realising that we have the freedom to discover and unlock our potential. By focussing on that, we are already changing ourselves from a deep place. We are connecting up new synapses between the magical and the mundane, to create moments that will fill us with life in abundance. We are, like the Selkie to whom some of us might soon be singing on our holidays, creatures of Earth and Salt Water: of Bones and of Blood.

We do after all originate from the sea: and somewhere within us all there is a dim resonance of that time 375 million years ago, when our lobe-finned ancestor, Tiktaalik, first crawled from it. For what other reason does the baby, fully formed, spend the last three months in utero, unless to plump up ready to float buoyantly into the world? And why else are water births so popular? The salt water of the womb is our first home.

As adult humans we carry this legacy, and as

Druids we are aware of it. From moment to moment we can honour it by being fluid and fresh to new experiences, by being open to change, to swimming with the currents and by being magical. We should never stop exploring our mysterious world and our place in it.

The fresh energy and potential of summer has arrived! Let's get out there and let our fascination with the fluid world change us.

Artwork: Selkie
by Maca Smith



The Magic of the Seal by Melanie Godfrey

Melanie Godfrey has given us a sneak peek into her new book 'The Magic of the Seal: Ocean Messengers', which is published by Moon Books on 26th July 2024. The book takes the reader on a journey into the magical world of seals, their history with the Gaelic ancestors of the British Isles, seal folklore, seal magic, and seals' and humans' ongoing interdependent relationship with the natural world.

"Seals understand the secret language of the ocean. They know when the gods of the sea are whipping up a storm and how to steer clear of the tempest's wrath. They know when it's safe to venture out to fish-filled depths, foraging through seaweed-laced salty waters, seeking crustaceans and nuzzling the seabed in search of sand eels and benthic, soft-finned fish, unveiling their presence, and thereafter devouring great fish suppers. Seals travel long distances in short periods of time and return to the exact place where they started their journey, as if there were in-built maps under the ocean. They are powerful swimmers, ocean's messengers, and wisdom keepers of the sea's mysteries.

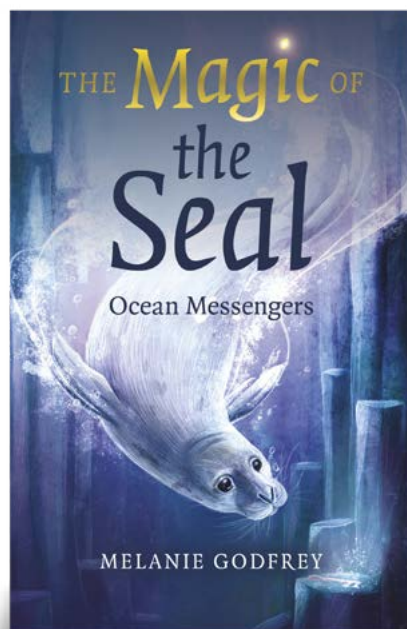
The ocean is a doorway to the Otherworld where alchemy is woven and where the legends of the selkie took form. Certain seals have paranormal talents where they shed their silky skins, enabling them to become human on land. They are not so much shapeshifters, but skin shedders, known as therianthropy. The selchie who are the larger of the grey seals are one of the most mysterious sea fayeries in the whole of the fayerie kingdom. Seal lore was seen as a type of religion among the crofters of the Outer Hebrides of Scotland, who spent their lives working beside the sea. The seal people tales ran deeper than an imagined fayerie world of enchantment and fantasy. The stories told were genuine and are profoundly significant in the present day world. Humans cannot endure life alone; there needs to be an alliance with all creatures, a common affection for nature, not solely for us to survive but to thrive and come home to ourselves – heart and soul. Our ancestors knew this. They knew about animistic wisdom and had an enlightened connection to nature.

Seal lore was kept secret, only to be shared within a family or village. Eventually seal legends began to journey to wider communities, and then shared with the world, only to be held gently as sacred knowledge in the palms of people's hands. The storytellers, travellers, fishermen and crofters

spoke with such purity it could crack open the hardest of hearts to the truth of life and the living Godhead that lives within all of nature, seeping into the souls of open-minded folk who listen not only with their ears but with the great mystery in mind.

On the shoreline where aquamarine waters gently ebb and flow, you will find seals basking on emerald and vermillion seaweed-covered rocks, relaxing amidst the liminality of land and sea. They stay in one place for only a short period of time as they belong to neither. They rest between solitary foraging pursuits, seeming incredibly lazy, as if they spend all their lives relaxing whilst their silky silver fur glistens in sunlight. But seals are misleading and they are far from idle. Sleeping a minimal six-and-a-half hours a day, these sensitive beings who are elegant in the water and clumsy on land, need rest. They need to lay down their weary heads by sleeping undisturbed as they are conscientious hunters by day, with some seals hunting at night. They sleep to aid in recovering oxygen levels, on top of restoring body temperature.

Seals are Albion's natural treasures and ocean's messengers, bringing valuable evidence of environmental changes to our shorelines. Evidence of oceanic warming and pollution is seen in the seals' stomachs, with increased



parasitic growths and entanglement with plastic waste. Seals are messengers of the afterlife and bring hope in times of grief. A belief is held among fishermen and crofters in Ireland and the islands of Scotland that folk who have drowned at sea go to live with the seal people, or become one. They are, therefore, our ancestors. Seals and humans are kindred, with their human cries, the tears they shed from compassionate eyes, and their intelligent and curious characters. Is there any wonder our ancestors connected so profoundly to these Otherworldly creatures?"

In traditional Scottish belief, it's unlucky to have a dead seal in your home and, as a personal preference, I would not wish to have any part of the seal in my home. "The dead totem," says James Frazer, "is mourned for and buried like a dead clansman." (From the book *Totemism*, by James George Frazer.) There is no evidence about how Gaelic seal clans honoured the seal; we can only speculate and use our imaginations to journey back into the past. The totem of the clan would have represented its moral consciousness and was the underlying power in a society. Durkheim says, "...he could not escape the feelings that outside him there are powerful causes which are the source of his characteristic nature, benevolent powers that aid him, and assure him a privileged fate." (Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, 1912, p220.)

Our ancestors had a far more complex, and enlightened bond with nature, and with the seals. We must not forget totem was a word introduced by nineteenth century scholars. Yet the relationship between human and pinniped stems back millennia, and our ancestors' relationship with the seal was far richer than the fairly modern hypothesis of totemism. The seal being both of land and sea is a powerful symbol and, throughout time, they have gained a paranormal position. They were a symbol of the islanders' relationship with the landscape. Our ancestors saw themselves not in opposition to nature but standing in unity with it and they understood the dangers of ignoring how to create a harmonious relationship with nature. The importance of the seal was an intrinsic part of the people's lives and, in my opinion, for that reason seals should be regarded not only as totems but as sophisticated who were sacred and special."

Call for Submissions The Touchstone Folklore Issue

October's *Touchstone* is going to be a Folklore themed edition, perfect for reading as the nights draw in. Why not share some of your local folklore with our readers, or retell a well known tale with a twist. Let me have your articles and stories (1,400 words or less), your poetry (no more than 40 lines), your artwork and photography. Send submissions to touchstone@druidry.org by 31st August 2024.

Reviews

Nature Meditations: Forest Bathing, Wildflowers, and Celtic Traditions by Bobbie Pell

Self Published. ISBN: 9798879312270

Nature Meditations is a tender feel-good book that wouldn't look out of place in the Chalice Well shop in Glastonbury. Filled with gentle poems, snippets of wisdom and colour photos, the book will undoubtedly delight the reader who wishes to relax with a nice cuppa or those who need meditative inspiration. There are ideas for forest bathing and reflective practices, as well as insights into the Celtic Wheel of the Year. The whole premise is to bring comfort while encouraging a deeper relationship with the natural world. Readers can find out more about the author on her YouTube Channel "Imaginary Lands" at <https://youtu.be/aGajtmh8gul>

All in all, A sweet little book, a perfect gift and meditation aid.

by Thea Prothero



Reviews

Land Healing by Dana O'Driscoll

On the outside and the inside, this is a simply beautiful book. Even just by holding it and opening it, this is one of those books that you really feel you want to engage with; there feels like there is magic between the pages. Setting down to read it is even more rewarding. I was swept up in O'Driscoll's clear but emotive prose, trying to hold myself back from racing through the deep learning that is here.

But just because this is a beautiful book doesn't mean that O'Driscoll only deals with beautiful things. From the start it is clear this book was written in response to a world in crisis, a world that is hurting and heating. "The challenges we face ... are cultural, historical and interconnected" we are told, with the warning that "Even if we aren't actively exploiting the land we are still benefitting from that exploitation."

O'Driscoll begins by outlining exactly what she means by the land, and it isn't only what is beneath our feet: "I mean healing any aspects of nature that are under duress from direct and indirect human actions: landscapes, forests, waterways, species and individuals under threat". Her approach is animistic, energetic but also profoundly practical. Alongside visualisation, O'Driscoll encourages us to get out and physically heal land around us by engaging in conservation work and creating seedballs of plants native to our locality.

As such, alongside magical theory, such as an exploration of the various energetic planes, there is information about ecology and ecosystems. A range of approaches are given so that the reader can choose the approach they are most comfortable with. Ritual, chanting, ogham, sigils, mandalas, standing stones, crane bags – all are given due consideration.

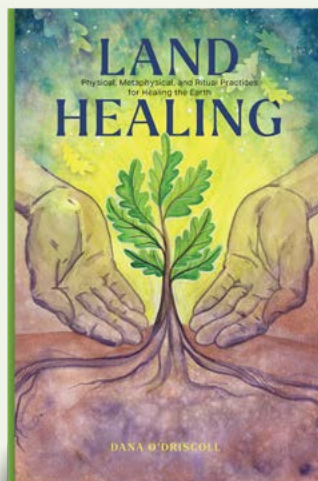
There are several key ideas which really stood out to me. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly is the emphasis that we need to start our land work through listening and observation. Reading the opening of chapter three I was reminded of Gordon MacLellan's wonderful comments at the Winter Gathering about the Druid marching into the landscape and

expecting to be spoken to! Just like MacLellan, O'Driscoll repeatedly reminds us to listen, to approach with humility rather than just giving the land what we have decided it 'needs'. There are some beautiful rituals which come from this approach. I tried the witnessing ritual in the garden of my home (which was built under two years ago) to re-start my relationship with the land here. It is something I will definitely be doing again.

The other aspect I found intriguing was energetic palliative care for land which "was destroyed or is going to be destroyed." This work is gentle and profoundly moving. It ranges from witnessing to preserving the genetic legacy of the space. The chapter dealing with this, as well as the one dealing with plants and animal spirits who pass, is tough but essential work. A consideration of how to create a refugia from the destruction that is sweeping through the natural world helps crystallise O'Driscoll's message that there is something we can all do in the jaws of the Anthropocene.

This book reenergises and reinvigorates the urgent work we need to do with our land. It is highly recommended. Even for those who have been on the path for a while you will find something new, something thought provoking within this magical book which will make you tread more lightly upon the land. It's a book every Druid should read.

Find Dana's book in the OBOD store here:
<https://store.druidry.org/products/land-healing>



The Wildsong Grove's QUEST TO SAVE VERDORA

Immersive Druidy: Exploring Druidry through the art of role playing by Tamara Buckland

Creating and running a role-playing game in Aotearoa, New Zealand, for my grove was a remarkable experience and a highlight of my journey with the Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids.

My interest in druidry was sparked a few years ago, largely due to playing Dungeons and Dragons. I was intrigued by the concept of druids and wondered what it would be like to embody one in real life. This curiosity led me to search for "druidry" online, where I discovered OBOD and promptly joined.

Joining OBOD and journeying along this path has been motivated by various reasons, but the connection to role-playing has always held a special place for me. Druids in role playing games are guardians of nature, are sought after for their wisdom and get to perform some pretty cool magic. These are qualities that I admire in the other druids I'm connected with and are an absolute inspiration for my own journey.

When the chance to lead a workshop at our Grove of the Summer Stars' summer camp arose, I eagerly took it to introduce my fellow druids to the world of role-playing.

I created the world of Verdora, crafting an adventure to rescue it from a menacing, wild corruption that threatened its existence. The *Quest for Verdora* immerses players into the role of special druids from the Wildsong Grove, tasked with Verdora's salvation.

This game delves into elemental magic, the corruption of nature and the symbiotic relationship between druids and their environment. Designed to be open and flexible, it encourages players to explore and shape the game in their unique ways.

Intended for brief playtimes (around 90 minutes), it's an invitation to you and your groves to embark on this journey. A facilitator's guide and all necessary files are available via the link below (facilitators should refer to the guide, while players should avoid it to maintain the game's surprise element).

<https://www.tamarabuckland.co.nz/rpg>

Check out the feedback from a couple of our grove members:

"Tamara has created a wonderful interactive and imaginative game with a lot of detailed options for character development and events to overcome as a team. This was my first experience of this kind of game and I found it a lot of fun and got to know myself and others in a different way. I'd highly recommend it!" - Sara

"I have never played a role playing game before, though I am very aware of Dungeons and Dragons. I was therefore curious to experience this game that was designed specifically to appeal to followers of Druidry. As a newbie, I did not realise I'd have such help in creating my character. Rolling the dice to select my magical item, my description, my magical gifts and my personality quirk gave me a great structure to apply my imagination to. Fun was there from the very start, from the creation of the roles to creating the world around our group to addressing the problem. I can also see scope in the game to get personal insights into one's own druidic path, and to identify new areas that could be explored safely in this game." - Germana

I'm eager to hear your experiences with the game, if you do end up playing it and am open to suggestions for future adventures in Verdora or other universes. If you'd like to get a hold of me, you can email me at tamara.buckland@gmail.com



If you are looking for the Seed Groups and Groves, these can now be found in <https://hearth.druidry.org/seed-groups-groves>



Events



OBOD members and friends are welcome to submit events they have organised for inclusion here.

This section may also be posted on our website at <https://druidry.org>

Please tell us if you don't want your event posted on the www.

OBOD Wheel Of The Year Online Rituals

On FB and YouTube. Hosted by CC Eimear Burke. Check: <https://www.facebook.com/druidry>

DATES FOR 2024:

Alban Hefin: June 22nd | Lúghnasadh: August 3rd |

Alban Elfed: September 21st | Samhain: November 2nd | Alban Arthan: December 21st

Regular OBOD Meetings

Fireside chat with Eimear: Join CC every Thursday, 8pm. Google YouTube + [Fireside chat](#)

Tea with a Druid: With Philip Carr Gomm/guests every Monday 8pm

Monthly OBOD Peace meditation: with your Grove or by yourself every full moon: 7pm local time

Building Resilience in Difficult Times: A monthly OBOD Listening Circle. Online zoom gathering, 1st Wednesday of the month 7pm UTC. Contact oboddeeplisteningcircle@gmail.com

Naked OBODies, meet online on the 2nd. Tuesday of each month to discuss all matters related to ritual nakedness, experiences, anxiety or legality etc. To join the conversation then email me (John) at nakedobodies@gmail.com

OBOD Death Cafe meets online on the 3rd Wednesday of each month to discuss all matters relating to death and dying, loss and grief. If you wish to join the conversation then email me (John) at oboddeathcafe@gmail.com

Upcoming Events

14-16 June, OBOD Druid Gathering di Mezza Estate: "Intrecci e connessioni" a Cerro al Volturno, Molise (Italy). Contact: info@druidry.it 0039 3286621163

14 to 16 June Wild Women 'Summer Village' Retreat - Bride Valley, near Dorchester, West Dorset. Ceremony, yoga, meditation, joyful coming together. Accommodation/camping nearby. contact@wildwomenretreats.co.uk
www.wildwomenretreats.co.uk

15 - 16 June, Inner Journeying and ritual level 1 with Penny Billington, Matt McCabe & Gary Llewellyn in Glastonbury, non-residential. Cost £75.00. Email druidevents@yahoo.com for a flyer

28 June-2 July, Bioróg Retreat - Discovering Mythic Landscape in Donegal, Ireland. Venue: Song House, Falcarragh. <https://thesonghouseireland.com/> Facilitators: Eimear Burke and Seán O'Gaoithin. FFI/bookings email seanogaoithin7@gmail.com

23 - 25 August, OBOD Bardic Gorsedd, "The Heart of Ritual" with guest speaker Matthew McCabe. Noddfa, Penmaenmawr, Wales, LL34 6YF. Single room accommodation, Vegetarian or vegan catering. A deposit of £90 is required,. Please email bardicgorsedd@obod.org

15 - 18 August, Druid Camp in South-West Germany, in Waldhambach. The website is www.druidencamp.de

30, 31 August, 1 September, Mercian Gatherings Pagan camp. Held near Nuneaton, Warks. Talks, workshops and ritual, music and entertainment.. Stalls, showers, café, free-trading Sunday market. ALL profits donated to charity To date, we have raised over £120,000. Ticket enquiries Sue on merciangatheringtickets@hotmail.com

9 to 13 September Wild Women 'Coming Home' Retreat - Selgars Mill near Tiverton, Mid Devon. Ceremony, meditation, yoga. contact@wildwomenretreats.co.uk | www.wildwomenretreats.co.uk

28th September, Meeting for OBOD members in Houthulst, Belgium. A get together ending with an Autumn Equinox Ceremony. For information: contact Danny Dewulf/Jol Props via FriendsofArduina@gmail.com

9/10 November Wild Women Winter Gathering with special guest Lisa Schneidau, Assembly Rooms, Glastonbury & Sun morning on the land. contact@wildwomenretreats.co.uk | www.wildwomenretreats.co.uk

14 December, OBOD Winter Gathering at Strode College, Church Road, Street, BA16 0AB nr Glastonbury

