



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

September 2024 | Issue 325

This Issue

- ✿ Musings on Lichen by
Andrea S H Hunt.
- ✿ A Walk on the Wild
(Card) Side by Jon Nash.
- ✿ The Future of Tarot by
Steve Hounsome
- ✿ Plus lots more!



COVER: "Mousemage Whiskers" by Beth Amos

Editorial

Welcome to September's *Touchstone* and what fruitfulness we have in store for you this month.

Firstly, there is the wonderful piece of cover art by Beth Amos. Not only has she gifted us the endearing mousemage, Beth is creating beautiful artwork around the eight seasonal festivals and she is going to share them with us as the year passes. You may have spotted her gorgeous Lughnasadh piece in the last edition, which we rushed into place just before printing. This month she shares her Mabon work with us. Thank you, Beth, for sending your art work with us. It's a real privilege to be able to share them with our readers.

The Mousemage on the cover, with his magical walking staff at the ready, hints at a mini-theme running through this edition - pilgrimage! We have wonderful pieces by Jon Nash and Jenna Robertson about special journeys they took this summer, a review of a book about pilgrimage and a wonderful poem by Michael Wall about walking the Camino. Isn't it amazing when you get a sprinkle of synchronicity and 4 pieces on the same idea come together? It feels like there is a little bit of magic at work!

There's also a thread of lichen spinning through this edition with an article, poem and piece of artwork by Andrea S H Hunt. We also have Steve Hounsomes concluding Tarot article, this time about the future of the cards and a wonderful "From the Archives" piece about labyrinths. There are also plenty of other little morsels hidden in the textual hedgerows for you to seek out, including some very delicious Elderberry Rob! Enjoy!

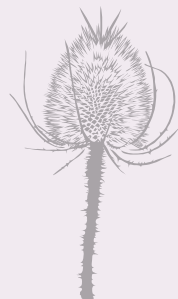


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Autumn Equinox Haiku by Janet Elvidge

Time of Reflection
As we walk between the worlds.
Darker days to come.



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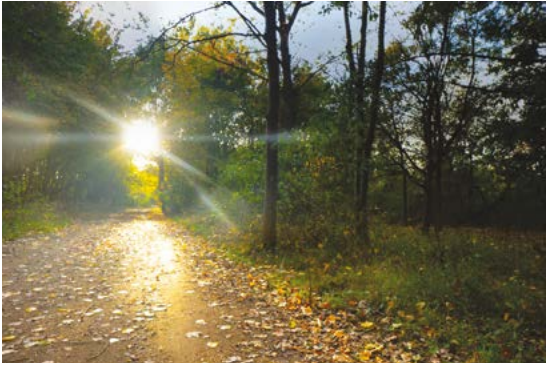
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They Say by Jacqueline Baxter Bellew



They say it's summer still
But the dry rasping trees leaves speak to a summer past.
They say it's summer still,
But squirrels hoarding their acorns, prepare for a hard winter.
They say it's summer still,
But the smell as the morning air betrays autumn,
creeping in a low mist across the fields and in the woods.
They say it's summer still,
But the steady beating wings of the Canada Geese,
practicing, practicing their cries echoing through the twilight, mark the turning year.
They say it's summer still
But every fibre of my being tells a different tale.

Triad by Katja Bouwens

Three necessities for any successful journey:

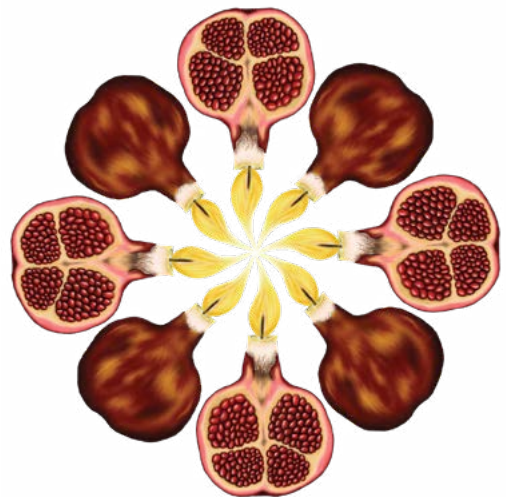
- The dot on the horizon that gives direction
 - Setting one foot in front of the other
- Following the winding path to your destination.

In both physical journeys and meta-physical journeys we need to have a destination in mind, be it a place to visit or a core value to honour. Then we have to put in the work, decide on a path to take and start to set one step after the other, to move in that general direction. And lastly we must accept that all paths do wind and twist sometimes, but that following the path will still bring us to our destination.

The Rabbit and the Owl by Mark Miller

A few nights ago I heard a rabbit meet an owl.
The rabbit's response to those silent wings was one of surprise and dismay.
The beating of the wings following the meeting was followed by the deeper silence of the night.
I was both saddened and honored to have been witness to the intersection of these two circles.
The death of the rabbit was reborn into the breath of the owl.
The Cosmos is filled with such circles.
Some are repeated in seconds.
Some last beyond our imagination of time.
Some intersect in obvious ways like those of rabbit and owl.
Some never seem to come near each other.
Throughout all of creation there is nothing that cannot be imagined in the circle of life, death, and rebirth.

Mabon by Beth Amos



Haiku by Steve King

Having never writ
Such thing as a haiku yet
I'm not sure I can.



A Druid's Camino by Michael Wall

The journey starts at home
With thoughts of new lands to roam
To places of sadness and sorrow
Meetings, sharing, a new tomorrow.

A place of spiritual power
And a trust that humanity may flower
To journey and walk through these lands
Where people and place join hands.

Transformation is ever evolving
Each day new memory resolving
Yet change and connection to mystery
Leads to adventure, lasting new history.

Return brings promise of pledges
Made with candles on dark church ledges
Watching the stars in the heavens above
The land becomes a circle of love.

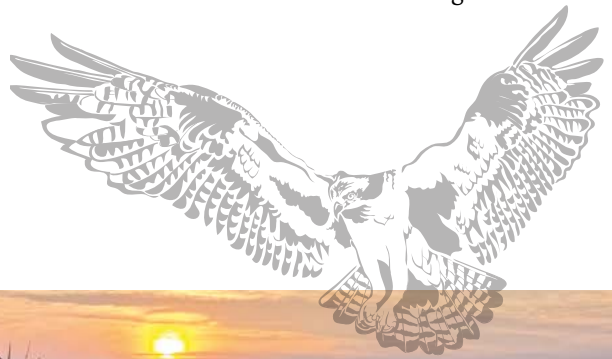
The journey, transformation, the place, the return
Brings to life new light to burn
The Druid journey, with wand in hand
A blessing on life, on work, and the land.

An Ancient Knowing by Elly Millet

Sea hawks appear, dream-like wraiths
Taking us back to the last time
An ending is appearing anew
Time an endless spiralling

The Ancients fly close, wings beating slow
We whisper a greeting, a welcoming (hello, old friends)
A healing prayer echoes above and below
Our shadows are transforming

Heron weaves to and fro,
We are warp and weft entwining
Crossing the ebbing river flow
We're in the midst of a radical returning



'Watery' Places by John Davis

John wrote "I find that 'watery' places hold a sense of liminality for me. I live along the coast of the north-east of England...in fact just a 30 second walk from the seafront. I try to walk along the seafront promenade, or go down onto the beach, every day if I can. As the tides ebb and flow, the events of the previous few hours are washed clean and the scene is reset. I try to allow this natural process to work within me too. At this time of year, sleeping with the windows open you can hear the mood of the sea before you open the curtains and look out. Here is a photo of the sea at the bottom of my street around the summer solstice just past. The sun, in setting in the north-west, interestingly, it also rises out from the sea to the north-east."

Plant a Pollinator Garden

by Mark Miller

I've watched you now for a full half hour;
Self poised upon that yellow flower
And, little butterfly! Indeed
I know not if you sleep or feed...
William Wordsworth, *To a Butterfly*.



Caroline loves butterflies, especially the Monarchs. Each spring she waits for their migration and offers her flower garden as a place of rest and recovery along their way. Sometimes her garden is the last stop for some as they lay their eggs and fulfill their life's purpose. Those eggs become caterpillars and then chrysalis before being reborn to continue the journey. Riding the air currents, fueled by nectar and instinct, it may take generations to complete the trip from south to north and back again.

As friends and admirers of these pollinators, a few of us banded together to not only plant flowers in our own gardens but also in other public spaces. With the permission of a local church we converted a five foot wide strip of their lawn into a garden for pollinator and other wild folk. We chose plants that were native and were suitable for our area. The milkweed provides nectar for the butterflies and food for the caterpillars. The Rudbeckia and Echinacea provide both nectar seeds to feed birds all winter long. The revived space not only feeds wildlife but also feeds our souls and brings us together as we tend and visit the garden.

Look beyond your own garden for those bits of turf waiting to host the winged members of the family of life.

Seasonal Recipe

Autumn Equinox by Sue Wilson

September is our most abundant month for British fruit and vegetables. English apples are being harvested now, although sadly so few of the old varieties remain. Plums of all varieties can make any number of delicious dishes, from plum sauce for tofu to a cake to take along to your ritual. Hawthorn, rosehips, blackberries and sloes are all ours for the taking. Just remember the forager's code - Never take more than you can use today or tomorrow - Pick with respect - And know for certain what you are picking.

My own personal favourite fruit to forage is the elderberry. I always leave the flowers on the tree in the hope there will be abundant fruit.

Elderberries are autumn and winter's best medicine. So I make several bottles of Elderberry Rob to prevent the dreaded winter colds and flu. I start taking a spoonful a day from the Autumn Equinox until the Winter Solstice to boost my immunity. It is great diluted with hot water to make a cordial too.

Elderberry Rob

Elderberries

Dark Brown Sugar

Cinnamon sticks & cloves

Lemon slices

1. Wash the elderberries, then place in a large saucepan. Just cover with water.
2. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 20 minutes.
3. Allow to cool. Then put the fruit in a jelly bag or muslin over a bowl, and squeeze out the juice.
4. Measure the juice. For every 500mls add 250g dark brown sugar, a cinnamon stick, some cloves and a slice or two of lemon.
5. Bring to the boil, then simmer for 20 minutes.
6. Strain whilst still hot into sterilised jars or bottles.



From the Archives

The Classical Seven-Circuit

Labyrinth by Ray Stirton (Corrie Raven)

Ray Stirton was a regular contributor to Touchstone who passed away in October 2024. It's an honour to share this wonderful article of his from August 2015.

There are many ways of using a labyrinth and possibly the purposes of what you use them for. Well this is a way I use mine and would like to share with you.

I use the Classical Seven-Circuit Labyrinth and usually on the beach after the tide's gone out. I find this a Magical Sacred little exercise as the Sea giv'ith and the Sea tak'ith back. Like a gift from the Otherworld. A magical time spent in your own Sacred space.

I was first taught the Labyrinth by my Mentor, Coifi the Druid (Chris Turner) and changed things to suit my own individual way.

Firstly go to your favourite sandy beach or any sandy beach that has a nice feeling for you. Now mark out your Labyrinth as shown above. When you feel grounded take 3 deep breaths. You could say...One for the Earth below me...One for the Sky above me... One for the Sea around me...Then slowly enter your Labyrinth, walking to the right first, anti- clockwise, this is where I start to build up my inner Female energy, breathing slowly and deeply as I walk.

Then as I walk round my Labyrinth turning clockwise, I now begin to build up my inner Male energy, breathing deeply and slowly as I go.

So creating a Female energy and Male energy around me and creating my own Vortex, my own Sacred space. My own Sacred place in my own magical Sacred world, away from reality and the Outer World.

So I am carrying on round my Labyrinth turning into a clockwise Male energy ring, breathing deeply and slowly. Feeling each time the energy building up inside me, now into an anti-clockwise Female energy ring, keeping on moving around slowly in my Labyrinth. Keeping between the lines very gently building up this energy field around me creating my own special magic Vortex.

Now as I reach the centre of my Vortex, I can sit quietly surrounded by my Male and Female energy rings, I feel Sacred and Safe to do my workings, or Meditate to the waves or read or write or do anything I would like to do. Out with the Outer World and busy places and people.

When you have finished your workings, stand up and start to unwind your Vortex. I turn clockwise unwinding my Male energy then anti-clockwise unwinding my Female energy, always breathing deeply and slowly. Each time unwinding my Vortex energy field from around me.

You may feel a deep lovely feeling of protection and solitude when entering and getting deeper into the Labyrinth and a wonderful feeling of release and fulfilment when unwinding from it. It's a very Magical special little Ritual each of us can do by ourselves.

Unwinding my female and male energies with each turn as I walk slowly and breathing deeply until I reach the Gateway of the Outer World and reality. This could be a nice time to turn and thank your Spirits of your Labyrinth for keeping you safe.

Now if you have the time you can sit and relax, drink lots of water and breath gently as it can be a powerful little Ritual of deep feelings and you may feel a little light headed, so relax with some water.

As I said at the beginning, the Sea giv'ith and the Sea tak'ith...as she gives, she takes and as you sit watching the waves get closer and closer, the Otherworld returns and will take back your Magical Labyrinth full of your Magical workings and thoughts deep into the womb of our Mother Earth.

You can change lots of this to suit your own words and ways and I hope I have been able to share with you a wonderful experience that I am sure you will definitely enjoy.



Lichen Eyes: An Ovate Journey to See by Andrea S. H. Hunt

I am within the Ovate grade of the OBOD course and one of my unexpected guides has been Lichen, a small, slow-growing revolution of an organism. If you haven't met Lichen already, I am pleased to introduce you.

Meet....Lichen! Lichen defies adequate categorization in our current taxonomic system. It is more than one organism, a fungus, an algae, and sometimes a yeast; a symbiotic pairing to create something more than its constituent parts. The algae photosynthesizes providing food while the fungi and yeast provide structure and shape. Lichen is not so much an individual as it is a union. Lichen are widely spread, covering approximately 8% of the earth's land surfaces, living in some of the harsher environments on the planet. It withstands drought and cold, can become dormant when needed, and can exist on almost any surface; its collective nature builds strength and resilience. It is a voice of the environment, warning of increasing pollutants through the absence of some types or the flourishing of others. Resistant and fragile. Precarious and tenacious. It is a paradox that reflects perhaps some of our contradictions.

Lichen is a creature of sea, land, and sky. As an avatar of Water, Lichen holds the memory of the sea within. The algae is a legacy of the origins of life on this planet, living on land through the lichenization of fungus. As an embodiment of Earth, it creates soil by trapping dust from the air, breaking down rock, providing organic matter for decomposition, and converting nitrogen into nitrates in the soil. It is one of the first organisms to colonize desolate landscapes. As a representative of Air, Lichen absorbs water, minerals and pollutants from the air. It is sensitive to pollution and is used as an environmental watchdog, providing a tangible report card for air quality in its vicinity.

Lichen's voice is one of adaptation and the requirements of interdependence for survival. I live in North America, where the story of competition and independence is as pervasive as it is persuasive. Define yourself: Separately. Achieve: Alone. Narrate: Individually. Lichen quietly challenges this from the interstitial spaces it inhabits, breathing the long, slow rhythm of mutual interest, and shared living. The foundational paradigm –survival of the fittest– is reductionistic and outdated better replaced by the idea, espoused by Zonca (2018), that survival is “...the result of the most effective interactions”. Sharing resources is a strength. Community is survival.

Lichen's touch is a reminder of the power of anchoring, grounding ourselves as we nourish the spirit with breath. It affixes to surfaces without drawing nutrients, an intimacy of shared space. Lichen grows slowly, inviting a contemplation of time. Indeed, fossil evidence indicates that lichens have been part of our planet's ecology since pre-Cambrian times (Hawksworth, 2015). That's about 2.8 billion years. There is a sense of the eternal within its aged story and yet, its associations with the decay of buildings and spaces names Lichen as a marker of time.

Lichen's ancient wisdom is increasingly needed in a world of disconnection, individual focus, and frenetic consumerism. We exist in relation to belonging to each other, the landscapes we inhabit, and our planet. Lichen belonging is not one of categorization. It is an inclusion that arises from understanding and expanded perspective. Each part of Lichen is valued without having to be exactly like the other. In a time of increasing polarization of viewpoints, this message matters. We can belong without being the same. Our labels matter less than how we function.

Lichen has been a steadfast and patient teacher, inviting me to slow down and modulate to the long exhale of time. I have become more aware of the disparity between my desire to unfold slowly and the pressures exerted by a culture that is always in a hurry, operating on the assumption that growth and achievement are infinite. Lichen brings a type of caring that is dearly needed. A light touch. An unrushed opening. Gracefully held space. An eye for seeing what exists in the margin. Deliberate attention. Spanish poet, Olvido Garcia Valdés, said: “I believe that attention is the phenomenon of stopping, of letting things enter, arrive.” (Armada, 2014). How would the world change if we viewed it through this lens? If we stopped more, breathed, and let things arrive? If we slowed to Lichen time and paid attention to what exists within the cracks of the world? What could change if we opened our Lichen eyes?

Armada, A. (2014, August 14). *Están muy solos también los animales*. ABC Cultura. <https://www.abc.es/cultura/libros/20140811/abci-olvido-garca-valds-poesa-201408041118.html>

Hawksworth, D. (2015). *Lichenization: The Origins of a Fungal Life-Style*. In D.K. Upreti (Ed.) et al. (Eds.) *Recent Advances in Lichenology*. DOI 10.1007/978-81-322-2235-4_1

Vincent, Z. (2023). *Lichens. Towards a Minimal Resistance* (J. Gladding, Trans.). Polity Press. (Original work published 2021).



A Walk on the Wild (Card) Side

by Jon Nash

*We are walking the land, we are walking the land, let us
walk in beauty, let us talk of beauty,
we are walking the land*

- walking chant by the author



It's a Saturday morning in April and I'm stood in a car park applying suncream and thinking about knights. Specifically the ones who walked the same route I am about to follow nearly 800 years ago. Mostly I'm wondering how hot it would have been in chainmail and armour. My straw hat (a memory of festivals past) feels quite warm enough never mind a helmet. I slip the bottle back in my bag, pick up my ash walking stick and walk over to the river to cool a little before the walk begins.

In 1240 Henry III sent out orders that lands belonging to his brother Richard of Cornwall should be confirmed by means of the Sheriff of Devon and twelve 'lawful knights of the country' riding and walking the boundary of The Dartmoor Forest. They walked the 400 furlough boundary (about 80km) clockwise, marking certain fixed points along the way and at the end celebrated their walking efforts with cake and ale. The event (mostly designed to make it clear to peasants to know their place-quite literally) is known as the 'Dartmoor Perambulation' and was a show of power and land ownership that persists hundreds of years later. The boundary still exists, and the land still belongs to the crown.

The car park is filling up and I return to Clare, my walking companion for the day, who smiles and points out people gathering around a small girl (Ellen) who is holding aloft a hazel staff topped with a sun symbol made from grasses, mosses and leaves from the riverside, woodland and moorland created by The Lost Giant Makers. We join the group, around forty of us ready to begin a people's perambulation walking a small part of the boundary route. The event (by grassroots campaigning group Wild Card) is called 'Healing Our Commons: a pilgrimage' and will last most of the day as we walk from Dartmeet to Yar Tor reflecting on 'who Dartmoor actually belongs

to, our relationship with nature and what it means to be a commoner of our natural commons'.

Hazel staff leading the way we leave the carpark, a ragtag crowd of walkers, musicians, storytellers and present day peasants and start our journey alongside the river.

*As I remember, you remember, we remember, ever
echoing, ripples widening, looping back and flowing on.
Water long may you flow, water long may we hear the
stories that you hold, water long may you team with life,
water long may you thrive*

- Song lyrics by Holly Ebony sung by the river Dart

At our first stop beside the weaving bend of the river Dart we are led in song by singer songwriter Holly Ebony. Together we address the water way who will be our companion for most of the journey. I step close and plunge my hand into clear coolness. It's welcome in the heat and, for a moment, I watch the water rush over my skin and on along its ancient way. A storyteller, Lisa, pops up from the crowd and tells us a folk tale of the origin of the nearby river Tamar – an earth spirit Tamara turned into a river of tears, while Morris dancers in hi-vis warm up behind her.

Friends of the Dart reveal their latest news, the outcome of lots of dedicated community campaigning, that the river has been awarded bathing water status at four sites, the largest number on any river in the county. This means the Environment Agency will be obliged to test the water weekly for harmful bacteria and indeed a few weeks after our walk they warn swimmers not to enter the water due to pollution caused by run off from local farmland. I dry my hand on the back of my shorts as I watch the Morris dancers begin to move and wonder if any of those knights stopped to drink from the river in the hot weather. Before we walk further along our route, we each pause by the riverside for a blessing of water sprinkled from a bundle of local plants. The shift into ritual space brings a solemn hush and as I feel the drops hit my brow, I feel a strange kind of alchemy happening as we make offerings to the landscape in story and song and action and open to what might be returned. The combination is heady and rich.

Our pilgrimage takes us on into the woods, welcome shade from the sun where Adam from the Woodland Trust recites lines from the 1217 Charter of the Forest which returned rights of access and use to the royal forest which had been taken away since 1066. 800 years later the Woodland Trust created a new charter which begins with this beautiful call to relationship:

*Natural Treasures, in roots, wood and leaves, for beauty,
for use, the air that we breathe*

*Imagine: A Wood starts with one small seed. We are
stronger together, people and trees.*

- the Woodland Trust Charter for Trees, Woods and People

My fingers gently toy with moss hanging on the oak tree to my left as my walking stick presses gently into the soft earth under my feet. What would it be like to stand in this place season after season, king after king, age after age? People are singing together a praise song to the trees and I feel my eyes start to tear up. This declaration of love of place and tree beings is so strong, so unlike our lives off the trail I feel a kind of joy and grief shake through me. This is a moment you want to curl up in, where ritual, politics and art combine into magical connection. It's old this feeling. Ancient. I want to fill my pockets with it and leave pieces all over the route home. We take it in turns to bless water taken from the river earlier before it is poured onto the roots of the trees as an offering. Ash Brown who has offered us beautiful song talks passionately about Ecosystem Restoration Communities across the world where you can work and volunteer to restore nature. It's a reminder to me of how little time I really spend with the land around me in active relationship and a call to do more, large or small.

But first there is further to go. We set off again in procession, musicians playing and songs being sung as we continue to mark the old trackway. We stop to have lunch and people paddle in the cold water of the stream, we cross paths with walkers and farmers and school kids on expeditions, we walk the land and notice the way it shifts and changes, how the wild little dells are never far from a road or the buzz of a plane overhead.

Before stepping from the road out toward our final location, Yar Tor, we pause in sight of a fragile looking small cross, a memorial to a young World War One Soldier (Lt Cave Penney) who died in Palestine in 1918 and feel the connection from this land to the unfolding tragedy in another far away. The inscription at the base of the cross invites us to look up and lift up our heads, I watch clouds pass across the sky as we sing a low mournful note of solidarity.

Out at Yar Tor, with a view across the moorland, woods, river trails and farm land all around us we finally stop and rest our pilgrim feet, my walking stick sloped against granite as I squint in the sun. Lewis Winks from Right to Roam speaks: "Today we are here to reassert the nature of the commons and this treasury that we all have a right to and also the responsibility to take care of with our land and with our water and pushing back against this creeping baseline of loss". I wonder how as Druids we can build true solidarity with land we are so often excluded from, fences and no trespassing signs replacing the hoof prints of the King's Knights.

Local ale and cake are passed around, May Day Morris perform a host of

dances honouring the land and there are ripples of laughter and chatter as we mark the end of our journey. Musicians strike up again sending deep, raw notes of a Cello across the rippling grass. Did someone carry that all the way up here? I find a quieter spot a little way away and make a little offering to the Tor of cake, ale and vervain from my pocket. The stone speaks silently. And I know this is the start of a new relationship, that in time the silence will become a whisper, become a loud and pressing call. This pilgrimage has ended. A new one is just beginning.

*Oak, Oak, Oak of old, King of trees in your crown of gold,
You are the door to worlds unseen, In winter bare and in summer green.*

- by Anna Richardson, River Jones, Oran Ash (and danced to by May Day Morris)

As we walk down the tor back to the car park, the music is still playing behind us, drifting over the gorse, gentle and inviting. Then another sound picks up in the air. The unmistakable call of a cuckoo heralding the spring. The first time I think I've ever heard one in real life. In Ireland it is said to be lucky to hear them call whilst you are walking and at that moment caught between human song and wild song, I feel very lucky indeed.

Find out more about Wild Card at www.wildcard.land.

Additional links if helpful:

Right To Road: www.righttoroam.org.uk

Woodland Trust Tree Charter: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/support-us/act/tree-charter/>

Friends of the Dart: <https://www.friendsofthedart.org/>



Popping my Druid Cherry at the Bioróg Retreat by Jenna Robertson

In this lifetime, I am a brand-new Druid learning with a beginner's mind. Yet, my path of forty years in this Scottish-born body recognises the path as a reclaiming of an ancestral wisdom that my soul and bones have known before.

I started my Bardic Grade this year, working solo. So, when I saw the Bioróg Retreat in Ireland with Eimear Burke and Donegal Druid Sean Ó Gaoithín, I saw it as an exciting experiential opportunity with a group and I signed up.

I live in the Gold Coast Hinterland of Australia on the lands of the Wangerriburra people and the beech, gum and casuarina trees; her trees a mirror for my part Scottish, part Australian heart. It has been 16 years since I left my Scottish home lands and all of my spiritual development and decolonisation practice has happened in Australia. This migrant wanted – in fact, longed – to reconnect with Celtic lands and a pre-colonial Celtic spirituality and culture.

Most of the group were OBOD members. I loved that there was no explaining. It felt like “you’re here, join in” and I got the inclusion and the immersion I was looking for.

For three days, we visited parts of the striking, vast landscape of Dún na nGall (Donegal) associated with the Irish mythological story of the Druid Bioróg and her prophecy for King Balor about his daughter Eithne and his grandson Lugh. As I listened to the stories and how the landscape was

deeply woven with their culture, the Aboriginal dreaming stories I have had the privilege of hearing echoed in my mind, as I noticed that they seemed to do the very same thing.

We visited Bioróg’s rock in a deliciously mossy forest, Bioróg’s cave up a fern-covered steep climb, Balor’s Eye in the poisoned glen valley (pictured right) and we sailed and hiked to the cliffs of Toraigh Island.

Sean passionately shared about his lands and taught us Gaia Touch movements to introduce ourselves to the land and connect. Eimear taught us Irish chants and gave us one-on-one Oracle sessions. We chanted Imbas and we did short ceremonies in many locations.

At the end of the third day, with bellies full of beautiful food provided by our hosts, The Song House, we relaxed into the Irish tradition of the “night court”, where each of us told stories, sang, played music or recited poetry. This was so joyful for me. I am a singer in one branch of my work and since childhood I have enjoyed expressing myself through music. I was asked to sing the ‘Casta diva’ aria from the opera *Norma*, where Norma is the Druid Priestess singing to the moon. Singing this to a room of Druids, after fourteen years of singing opera arias in often-stifling professional contexts, was a very meaningful moment in the story of my own voice.



At Balor’s Eye in the Poisoned Glen. L-R: Ana, Eimear, Marcella, Paul, James, Sean, Kate, Cathy, Ali, Colin, Anne, Jenna (Me), Hari and John. Image by kind passer-by.

We had some special guests join us; renowned artists from Dún na nGall. We heard readings from Cathal Ó Searcaigh from his book *Errigal* and traditional Irish singing from Diane Ní Chanainn. Another artistic and emotional highlight was the combination of a devastating Stephen Murphy poem titled *Before You Push the Chair* courageously read by retreat participant John Boyle, followed by a melancholy song on the *cláirseach* (harp) played by Eimear.

On the fourth day, as a group, Eimear invited us to split into groups in four corners of the room, representing each of the archetypal characters of the mythological story and finding a group expression of that voice. As we did, we were invited to step closer to one another if we were able to relate or empathise with each voice. With some initial prickly and resistance, we soon found ourselves in a circle; able to find a way of seeing, empathising, accepting or even loving each of the others. There was no mistake here. We were being given an experience of moving from an inner place of hurt and separation to finding varying degrees of connectedness, group harmony and acceptance. My gods, how this one skill and experience on a grand scale could transform the health of this moment in humanity's life cycle. The deeper lesson within Bioróg's story and the landscape for the greater humanity began to emerge.

Indeed, Sean and Eimear played the role of the Druid Bioróg in our retreat; seeing a bigger picture and guiding us through it to create conditions for us to find the learnings within that we each sought.

On the fifth and final day, we had a special co-created ceremony at Beltany Stone Circle. Afterwards, we each shared a most memorable moment from the retreat. No two were the same and each had its own flavour. We sealed our connections with hugs that felt like portals of connection. Heart to heart, open giving and receivership and genuine words of appreciation were said kindly into one another's ears.

If I think of the retreat today, in the weeks after, I see a weaving of land and humans. The stunning, huge and tiny landscapes of Dún na nGall watching us, enjoying us, breathing her air into our bodies for the pure love and joy and growth of it. Bonds made, loosely and freely held and lovingly crafted into a patchwork of love for the Earth and for each other. I laughed, a lot. These Druids knew how to have fun, and it was

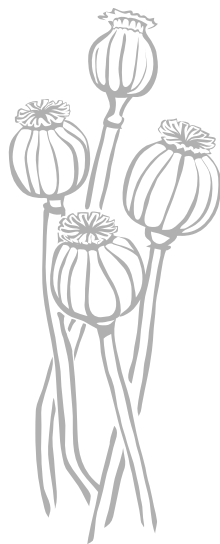
no surprise to learn that they were also "down to Earth". So, as I shared in the car towards the end of the retreat that I felt I'd now "popped my Druid cherry", Eimear laughed.

While we were a group from around the world (Ireland, Scotland, England, Portugal, Netherlands, Canada, Australia), the majority of the group were Irish and I was humbled and delighted at their generous sharing of their Irish language and culture with the rest of us.

In Australia, I learned to move at the speed of trust in relationships. And in this world, sometimes trust can take a long time to build and feel. I live and walk through the Earth with a dangerously open heart; loving all who cross my path and trusting openly. Sometimes my love and trust are not reflected back and I've had a lifetime of accepting that. But in this group, trust and openheartedness were abundant. My body remembers this.

As a migrant for 16 years, I sought a cultural remembering and reconnection and I felt this in my biology and soul. And yet, I spiralled through this truth to another beneath it, which is that I have the capacity to feel a sense of this wholeness and connectedness with Mother Earth wherever I am standing on her core. This doesn't mean quickly travelling through places, "doing" sites and engaging in a transactional way. No. It does mean that I have a worldview and a practice to connect slowly with the Earth and develop that connection over time, wherever I am. This was made a hell of a lot easier in a group of Druids.

And a co-existing third truth emerged. On Celtic soil, my soul flows through me more freely and an abundance of resonant energy is released within my body. It feels really, really good. These learnings have been Bioróg and Dún na nGall's gift to me. *Sin é.*



Triad by Brice Maiurro

Three councils to seek before making a big decision:

- yourself,
- your community,
- and the trees.



The Future of Tarot by Steve Hounsborne

I have written in a previous article of how the Tarot has and is evolving, as if alive of itself, and how it can be viewed and worked with a spirit imbuing it that expresses itself through the medium of the imagery of the cards. The structure of the Tarot is such that it is able to act as a container or repository of the sum total of human knowledge, experience and wisdom.

This somewhat grandiose claim may seem fanciful for seventy-eight pieces of coloured card, but it is about what is on them that matters, and how we relate to and can choose to respond to it. Seen and acted upon this way, the Tarot can be an empowering tool of self-development and therapy for others.

This move towards the developmental and therapeutic approach to the Tarot seems in my view, to be the latest aspect of its evolution. It began simply as a game, featuring ‘trumps’ (what is now the Major Arcana) which spread through Europe, then was placed in an esoteric light by occult scholars, taking the approach of the Tarot as an initiatory, magical thing that required instruction to unlock its secrets. In turn this became divination (implying interaction with a divinity) and fortune-telling, using the cards to predict futures and outcomes. Due in large part to media and cultural profferings, this is how the Tarot came to be seen in the last part of the 20th Century, and what I grew up with.

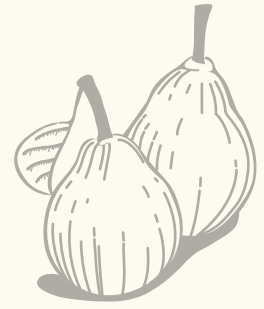
Since then the Tarot has emerged far more into the light, featuring in everything from Hollywood blockbuster films to Paris fashion shows. As with all things this can be something of a ‘double-edged sword’ (Tarot based pun entirely intentional!), as is the ‘spread’ of the plethora of decks and books increasingly available.

As I outlined in ‘The Spirit of the Tarot’ article, what is required amidst this morass of popularity is the retention of the sacred nature, if not of the cards themselves, then of what it is we are dealing with when we pick them up. It is necessary, if not vital, that we avoid a cheapening and therefore lessening of our regard for the Tarot as something akin to sacred and most importantly, the knowledge it contains and the capability it has to do good for all those that choose to use it.

I have felt for a time, and written elsewhere, that whilst we have a huge amount to feel thankful for with the Rider Waite Smith Tarot, it was the deck for the 20th Century. It is fair to say that it revolutionized Tarot and acted as a template for so many decks but it is also true to say that it was ‘of its time’.

In recent years we have seen new Tarot decks

showing a new side to the Tarot and one that is more in keeping with inclusion and diversity quite correctly reflected amongst its characters. There are also decks appearing that are reframing the use of traditional Tarot symbolism, some of which dispense with most, if not all, of the representative use of much that has been central to Tarot imagery for a long time. Whilst I am personally at present unsure about this aspect, it does go to show that at the least, Tarot will adapt to new understandings and ways as it evolves.



The Court cards of the Minor Arcana suits have for a long time been based around the mediaeval conception of Pages, Knights, Queens and Kings, or their equivalent. This is of course not immediately relevant to our modern way of societal structure, with some decks now offering them as a family of Daughter, Son, Mother and Father respectively. These stereotypical and gender specific ‘archetypes’ are now being challenged as we learn to move beyond the restriction they can offer.

This 21st Century shifting of the Tarot is presently culminating in the scholarly and excellent hand of John Matthews’ soon to be released (at the time of writing in February 2024) ‘The Fool’s New Journey Tarot’, which will apparently offer us a deck “stripped of much of the ancient symbology and re-setting the style and purpose of the deck back to zero - then taking it to places it has never been before”. As The Fool takes these first steps on their new journey I am ready to accompany them, with perhaps a little trepidation but ultimately eager enthusiasm.

Of course how we use these cards will be key to its future evolution. There seems at present to be a popularity in taking ‘a card a day’ and journaling what the card tells us. For me, this is too much, as the cards represent our energy and life-force, so in my experience does this mean that things move gradually, rather than change abruptly every day. Rather I prefer to take a card when I sense, feel or think that there is a shift or change in that energy, either within or without me. I will then choose a card, ‘journal’ my response to it and do any other work that seems appropriate – journeying, questioning and so on (see Mary Greer’s excellent ‘Twenty-One Ways to Read a Tarot Card’).

One of the tendencies implicit in the use of Tarot for self-developmental and therapeutic work is that of taking the card within, using it to undertake work on this inner level. The same can be true of when we work with the cards in a reading

for others. Recently however, we are seeing moves and suggestions that we can, and perhaps need, to read the cards not only for ourselves, but also for our community (see Caitlin Matthews' 'The Time Changers Tarot'). For me this recalls the links we truly have between us, being 'members one of another' (St. Paul in the Bible) and the way in which the Tarot can act as a reflection of the 'as within, so without' principle of Hermeticism – when we see this as the 'worldly' equivalent of 'as above, so below'. Put simply, the better we can be as individuals, the better our society as a whole can and will become.

One of, and perhaps the chief influence upon the future of the Tarot will surely be technology. In the 1990's new phone and computer technologies gave rise to the capability of the premium rate psychic lines (some of which were and are genuine, amongst too many that are not), then psychic messages given by mobile phone and now a variety of Tarot and related 'apps'. Like all such things they tend to get used because they can be, regardless of whether they have a positive purpose and worth or not, beyond that of making profit of course.

In some ways I am surprised that the medium of video has not been utilised more in the area of Tarot. The well-known Tarot artist Ciro Marchetti is demonstrating a number of short offerings on 'Facebook' that begin to bring cards alive in this way. I look forward to a lengthier depiction of the Tarot, perhaps moving through four elemental areas populated by the pip cards and peopled with their respective Court cards, progressing to the landscape of the Major Arcana, populated by each card in turn which speak to us, question us and invite us to spend time with them.

One of the areas I am unfamiliar with, but that apparently has used Tarot, is that of gaming. I do not play games, preferring to employ my time and energy grappling with the 'game of life', I am therefore unqualified to say much here but I am sure that again, in hopefully the right hands, use of the Tarot can be done in a visionary and creative way that adds positively to its canon.

When I was given the opportunity to have a go at a 'virtual reality' headset I was eager to examine anything that used the Tarot. I was disappointed in what I did find, the main thing being a 'visualization' of a hackneyed portrayal of an 'old Gypsy woman' in her caravan, asking me to select three cards. Her main attribute seemed to lie in calling me 'dearie' every time she spoke! I do however, look forward to a more imaginative and purposeful use of this technology, which will only improve as we go forwards.

I have recorded guided journeys taking students through the 'Journey of the Fool' where as the character of that card we journey from one card

to the next, experiencing what we may each time we do so. Such an interior landscape could surely be created in the inner realm of virtual reality, bringing the Tarot to life in this way, re-imagining the largely now neglected practice of 'pathworking'. Each card can be experienced of itself as we follow the paths through the landscape of the Major Arcana. With a little skill and technological and Tarot know-how an environment could be created that will allow the participant to not only learn the Tarot but experience it personally for themselves, and in so doing gain in so many ways. Should you be someone, or know someone who can work with this technology, get in touch with me!

An area that is currently causing considerable and worthy consternation amongst the community of Tarot artists is that of AI – Artificial Intelligence. With the use of the correct app (which when questioned to tell me about Steve Hounscome told me 'he is an author and teacher in the field of Tarot and psychic development' – well, it's a start!) it is now possible to have a 'work of art' created in seconds that could pass for a Tarot card. Again, just because it is possible to do something does not mean we should, but humanity's history does nothing to suggest that the wisdom of questioning the ethics of this will prevent us from doing so.

In the right hands, however, I am sure that the field of AI can be employed to not only ethical but purposeful, positive and developmental use to portray and enhance what the Tarot can offer and what its energy can do. It seems that we are only in the infancy of AI and its capability so I am sure that with the right attitude and application, good things will emerge for the Tarot world from it.

Doubtless further technologies will be emerging that will offer tantalizing and even wondrous openings into the world of Tarot in areas and fields you or I cannot yet visualize or fathom. It has, is and certainly will be true to say that the Tarot is far more than just a deck of cards. If we are able to retain the sacredness of the Tarot and disabuse ourselves of it being limited to telling us what might happen, then I think we can predict a wonderful future for the Tarot as it evolves into a time when we might learn how to use technology in alignment and accord with our own sacred nature.

The motivation to write this article came as I read the thought-provoking book by PAUL GREER – Liberating Tarot; Engaging with Self and Society with a Deck of Cards. Although it can make for sometimes uncomfortable reading for Tarot traditionalists, I recommend this book to all working with it.

For more information on my work please see my website – www.tarottherapy.co.uk

Open Forum

World Rivers' Day Sunday 23rd September 2024

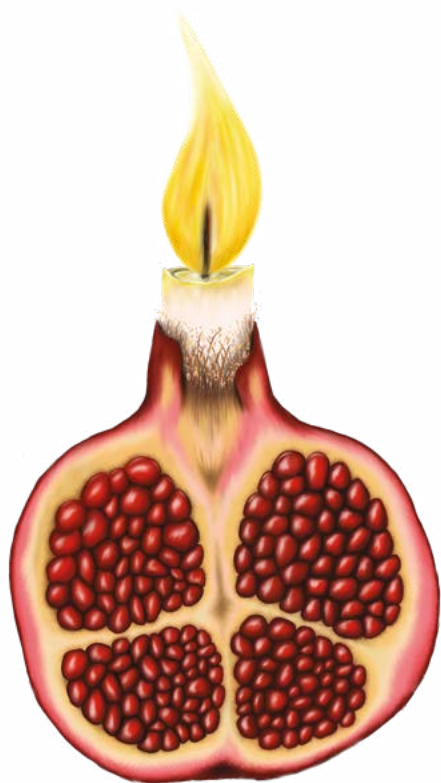
by Lorien Cadier

'Rivers are the arteries of our planet; they are lifelines in the truest sense.' Mark Angelo

Our ancestors may have viewed rivers, springs and waterways as sacred but they have never been in more need of our help. It is in all our interests to cherish and nurture our waterways for clean water and to conserve their valuable ecosystems.

Let's use World Rivers Day to honour and connect with our local rivers and waterways at their sources and along their banks. We can engage in ritual ceremonies, name, honour, sing, dance, walk, make music and poetry, clean, bathe (if safe to do so!) and teach our children about them.

Look out for information about opportunities to contribute via the Hearth. And if you find yourself doused in Awen while by the river, don't forget to send the results to *Touchstone!*



Mabon by Beth Amos

Reviews

The Shrine Way by Jim Hindle

In *The Shrine Way*, Jim Hindle has created a thoroughly recommended book about a very modern pilgrimage along the Pilgrim's Way between Winchester and Canterbury. Hindle had something of a Christian background but at the point of undertaking his pilgrimage "felt more immediately at home with a belief system that first and foremost honoured the earth." However, he "became convinced that [the pilgrimage] would go a long way to sorting out my life, even to somehow make the world a better place."

Hindle doesn't take the journey alone. He is accompanied by literature – comparing his journey to the observations in Hilaire Belloc's *The Old Road* and, to a lesser extent, William Cobbett's *Rural Rides* – and history. Not only are there brief historical vignettes about the places he is passing but the story of Henry II and Thomas Becket is compellingly woven through his own journey. However, far from presenting these figures as simply people in history, Hindle brings them to life. Standing in front of the Anthony Gormley statue of Becket in the crypt of Canterbury Cathedral, Hindle reflects that it is "stark and ethereal, the nails jutting out almost like barbs, but also forming a human figure that is graceful and speaks strangely of peace."

However, there are more pressing issues which stalk Hindle on his journey; his own mental health issues are explored, as is the seemingly hopeless and deteriorating international situation. Hindle reflects that "In a world that suddenly seemed crazier than ever, walking felt like one of the few givens left."

From his ongoing concerns about where to replenish is water bottle to walking with infected toes, from an underpass "like something from Battlestar Galactica" to the "outright enchantment" of Coldrum Long Barrow, Hindle weaves a thoroughly compelling narrative which carries you with him every step of the way. But don't expect any sudden revelations or happy endings. This book is far more human than that. What you will find, however, is hope, dotted through the landscape in the most unexpected places. On the station at Redhill, Hindle finds a poem on a wall: "It was called 'Dragons' and by an eleven-year-old girl. There was something about a Bat King. The train pulled away as I was halfway through it. It said we would just about make it." Hopefully, we will.

Andrew's Bit At The Back

I'm one of those people who loves the autumn. It is by far my favourite time of year. I love the whole season – from the first harvest at Lughnasadh, when the landscape begins to turn as golden as the late summer sun, through the fruitfulness and plenty of Alban Elfed, to the leafless trees and stormy skies of Samhain. I love those crisp mornings where the spiderwebs drip with dewy crystals. I love those evenings when you realise, for the first time, that you are heading home in the dark. I love the deep golden browns of the exhausted landscape, draped in a gentle mist.

Back in my pre-Druidry days, I used to put my love of the season down to two things. The first was that I have an autumn birthday. Nothing engages you with a season as much as cake and presents. My birthday is on Bonfire Night, perhaps the most autumnal day in the calendar. The nights are dark, the bonfires are raging and there are toffee apples and jacket potatoes galore. The whole of autumn used to feel like a prelude to the big day, which always ended with fireworks.

Secondly, I used to think I loved autumn because that is when the new television season used to start. I remember poring over the preview issues of *Radio Times* back in the day to see what treats lay in store as the nights drew in. I used to gasp and coo over the schedules – a new series by Victoria Wood, a fresh set of tasks for *Challenge Anneka*. Of course, that's not how TV works these days, although I wish it did!

The autumns of my youth are obviously steeped in nostalgia. I remember rolling down the window of the car and taking a big lungful of beautifully smoky air on the day they burned the fields. The skies of my childhood autumns are cast in the deep purples and oranges of 1970s fashions, with glorious sunsets as wide as a kipper tie.

Walking the Druid path has got me to me sift through those experiences and seek out the kernels of wonder at the heart of the season. Why do so many people love autumn? I mean, not everyone has a birthday on Bonfire Night or is as excited by the prospect of a new series of *Challenge Anneka* as I used to be.

I do think there is something about new starts which is important in the autumn. Ok, so TV stations may not begin their new season any more, but a new academic year always starts in September. All of us, at some point or another in our lives, have procured our new uniform, got new books, new stationery, new teachers, new subjects and started our academic journey once more. For some of us who didn't like education, or who education didn't like, it may be a

factor in our relationship to the season. For others, autumn always feels like a new start, more so than January.

The other factor is that autumn engenders a sense of community. As the nights draw in, we gather around our metaphorical fires and begin to reconnect with our clan. For some, that may come in the form of *Strictly Come Dancing*, where we get behind individual contestants and discuss the merits of various quicksteps with our friends. For others, its about welcoming the family back around the table for a roast dinner, rather than a barbecue. For those of us on a magical path, Autumn sees the most overt acknowledgement of our community in the calendar year, although it is largely stereotyped. From August onwards you cannot go into shops without finding pumpkins and pointy hats, cauldrons and black cats. They may be symbolic of a dark past and a 'Disneyfication' of our practice, but many of us love them. We get to come together and share that love, while burning a pumpkin spiced candle on our altar.

However, communities can also become somewhat divided by the season. It often seems that, as soon as I post something about the approach of autumn on *Facebook* (ahh, that cool, calm seat of rationality), someone will post a snarky comment about it being dark, cold and horrible. There are as many people who hate autumn as there are those who love it, but over the last few years, I've noticed this division becoming increasingly toxic. Online there seem to be simply those who love the light months and those who love the dark months and never the twain shall meet. Which is sad, because there are enough issues on this planet without us sniping at each other about the inevitability of the seasons changing. It doesn't matter how potent our arguments are, autumn will arrive.

In fact, this year, with the UK experiencing a record wet spring and summer, even I have come to realise that having autumnal weather for twelve months of the year is no fun. We need the height of summer to fully appreciate the cool of an autumn evening. We must have the full cycle of the year to make our favourite season special to us. So, for those of you who are dreading the darker nights and colder days I say hold fast, my friends, your time is coming soon and it will be glorious. In the meantime, pull on your cagoule and let's go and kick up some leaves together.

Until
next time,

Andrew iii



Events



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

OBOD Wheel Of The Year Online Rituals

Check the Tune In page on the Druid Hearth: <https://hearth.druidry.org/tune-in>

DATES FOR 2024:

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

On Becoming Lichen

*Air. Breathe. Space
Seer of hidden truths
Words anchored in knowing
Beyond artificial limits
Opening conversation
Steadfast held
My Lichen Voice*

*Water. Tides. Dynasty
Explorer of margins
Ancestral voyage,
remembrance carried
In each verdant pearl
Eternity opening and
shriveling
To the cadence of time
My Lichen Song*

*Earth. Anchor. Endurance
Pioneer of cracks
Weaving interstitial identity
Belonging, an interlacing
Touching the embraced
contradictions
Of porous connection
My Lichen Love*



Poem & artwork
by Andrea S H Hunt