

## A MAGICAL JOURNEY THROUGH THE LANDSCAPE. 1.

At the start of December I wanted to go to the sixtieth birthday of a friend who lived in Glastonbury, and I decided to travel down on the thursday before, which was new moon. I travelled down from my home in west Wales via Bristol, staying with a friend there, and set off early friday morning, down the A37, to Stanton Drew, one of the largest stone circle complexes in England.

I have been to this group of circles several times, and love the approach; over a narrow mediaeval stone bridge, up a windy lane to a little car park, through the kissing gates and round the farmyard, and there it is, proud and bold in its field. The stones are of red sandstone, pitted and holed by time and rain, with beautiful mosses and lichens growing in and around them. And they are BIG! There are only three stones left standing in the first of the 3 circles that you come to, but each is about 6-8 ft tall, and 3-5 ft square, and some of those lying in and on the ground are bigger. This first circle must be over 100 ft across, and it takes me a good twenty minutes to walk round it, touching and sensing each stone as I come to it. I always do this when I go to a circle, it seems to slow me down, and help me to really connect with the circle, so that when I go in I am more open to the energies of the place. I would love to help re-erect these stones, I have worked on several stone circles, both old and new, and can imagine how marvellous this place would look if restored to its former glory.

A recent geophysics survey shows that there are NINE concentric circles of wooden post holes going in from the outer ring of the stones to the centre. I do not know what these were for, perhaps

holding up some kind of roof, or providing foresights for an observatory, no one really knows what went on here, just that folk put a lot of effort into making the place!

The remains of an avenue of stones leads from the first, and largest, circle to the next, not far away, maybe 30 yards or so. This one, though smaller in circumference, being about 40 ft across, is still mainly intact, with its massive blocks creating a strong feeling of enclosure from the field outside. There are further remains of an avenue leading on from this circle to the bottom of the slight slope, 50 yards away, where the field boundary is and the megalithic landscape stops. This second circle feels much more intimate than the very spacious first one, and I wonder as I gaze around why they built the three circles, did they each have different functions, or get used by different tribes/sexes/power groups? The effort required to move these blocks even feet would have been enormous, and involved some very clever co-ordination and engineering. Not something to do on a whim on a boring day! Finding the stones and fashioning them would also have taken a lot of time, so this site is the product of great devotion and dedication.

I had with me a Rune spell that I wanted to charge up, and it felt more appropriate to do this in this second circle, so I started slowly rotating, showing the spell to the stones as I did so, and gradually going faster and faster, till the stones were dancing round me in a whirling throng! I gradually slowed down again, feeling the energy going into the charm as I did so, then stood for a while, getting my balance back and waiting for the world to stop spinning. A thought came into my head, "I should go to Stoney Littleton". This is a Cotswold-severn type cairn, a

few miles away, which I had heard of but never visited, and it felt as if the stones were encouraging me to go on to there after leaving Stanton Drew.

I walked around the circle one last time, thanking the stones for their presence, then went back across the field, and the first circle, to my car. The third circle is in another field, and almost completely buried, so, as it was now raining, I decided not to go there that day. The atmosphere of this lovely place, in its green and rural setting, always helps me feel more calm and centred, reconnected with the land and moving with its rhythms. I do hope that one day I will see it restored!

So on I went to Stoney Littleton, about 5 miles away, through torrential rain, and one rather deep and long puddle that nearly deterred me. I finally found my way down a steep hill to a place where I could pull in and park, and armed with my trusty flask and compass, I set off up the track way that two nice ladies on horses told me was the right way to go. Luckily the weather had eased up, and the sun even shone a bit as I walked along, for about a mile or so, past hedges and fields, up to the top of the hill, where I suddenly spied the humped back of the cairn, standing out on the skyline. The last stage was across a ploughed field, somehow the path ran out, but I followed some wheel tracks and finally I was there, going through a wooden gate into the green and grassy space around the tomb.

It is really well preserved and maintained, just a few discreet iron bars keeping the roof from falling in, and no nasty cementing to cover up the stones. The structure is made of dry stone walling, covered over with a grassy mound, maybe 50 foot long by 25 across. At the southerly end there is an opening into a long passage, going deep in to the

mound, almost to the far end, with six chambers coming off it, in three pairs that are opposite each other, and equally spaced out along the length of the corridor. The first section, to just past the first pair of side chambers, is dryish, but the next bit is full of drips, as the recent rain works its way through the layers of earth and stone above me. The ceiling is quite low, so I have to walk in a stooping way, going right down onto my knees to enter the second section, along the back of a stone set into the earth of the passage.

This back part of the tomb feels very different, and I spent some time sitting there, looking up the tunnel to the entrance and appreciating the peace and stillness. I could imagine sitting here with the bones of my family, communing with the ancestors, feeling my own place in the eternal dance of life and death. The passage is orientated to the winter Solstice, facing toward where the sun will rise and shine down the passageway, reinvigorating whoever or whatever is waiting there to receive those beneficent rays. Once again I presented my rune spell for the approval of the spirits, rubbing it with the soil, letting the water drip on it, passing it through the flame of my candle, and blowing upon it hard.

I then went back up the passage and sat for a while in one of the front chambers. These chambers are all about 4-5 ft long, by 3 ft wide, by about 4 ft high, and comfortable to sit or lie in. The one I went in had a bunch of dried grass in it, making a rough cushion on the stone pebbles scattered everywhere on the floor. My local friends said later that they had come here for dawn at the last winter Solstice, and there were about 30 other people here, so it is obviously a popular place for visitors who appreciate its unique character. Apparently it was shut

with a metal gate for some years, so that makes it especially good to see it open and so nicely restored and made safe. One of the side stones in the passage wall is covered in shell fossils, and I see more in the rock above me too, so the energy of Water is strong here. A lovely place to give ones bones to when the time comes, reunited with the elements we are made of, returning to the soil we came from.

As I emerged into the sunlight, the sound of the swollen river running round the base of the hill reached my ears, and I looked down to it, imagining how in the past folk would have travelled here in their dugout canoes, coming ashore where the distinctive outline of the cairn is visible on the skyline again, just as it was on the approach from the other side. I followed the path back down along the river, and got back to my car just in time to avoid the next downpour!

After spending the next day in Glastonbury, I walked through the town towards the birthday party, and came to the footpath that leads up to the Tor. So I went up, feeling the need to sit and Be for a while, in the magical atmosphere of this place. I have found a special spot that I often go back to, round a way on one of the enigmatic terraces that encircle the Tor, and that are said to form a three dimensional labyrinth. Maybe it is in its role as a path on the labyrinth that this path and place attract me, it could well be the stopping point on the line that separates paths two and three, on a cretan style labyrinth. It certainly suits me as a place to stop and gather myself, when I make one of my regular visits to Glastonbury.

So I sat for a while, on the roots of a wiry hawthorn, one of a group of trees that clung to the edge of the hill, with twisty roots that writhe above the soil, clinging

tenaciously to the earth and somehow stronger for their exposure to wind and rain. When I got up to leave, I noticed a strange looking pair of trees a little way off, so went over to see them. It is the most amazing marriage of two trees, one a hawthorn, relatively straight and upright, with several branches going off in different directions, the other, intertwined with it, is a hazel, one of the biggest I have seen, as big as the hawthorn and completely wrapped around and through it, as though it had been deliberately done, many years ago when the trees were young and bendy. In places the two trees bark had actually fused together. It like a very powerful pairing, creating a dryad of rare and potent nature, and sure enough, there were ribbons tied to some of the branches, and red threads, offerings from others who had felt the power of this wondrous fused being. I cut a length of my hair, and tied and plaited it onto a small twig, to hang in the breeze and honour the tree spirit and the land. Once more I offered my rune charm, to be blessed by this being, and the great and powerful Tor, on whose slopes I sat. By now it was really starting to feel pretty pokey, with the energy of all these sacred spaces infused into it. Finally I took my leave, after making offerings of whisky and coffee cake, much to the delight of a passing dog, and made my way back round and down the Tor.

The third and final part of my journey I made after I had driven back to Wales, late on Saturday night. I set off on Sunday morning, with three friends, to the Gower, the peninsula to the south west of Swansea, which has escaped the developers and still has many ancient sites. It can be hard to choose which ones to visit, but I had planned that on this part of the journey we would go to some of the oldest and most spectacular

monuments, and so we met up at Park Mill, from where one can walk to Parc Le Breos, another Cotswold-Severn type cairn like Stoney Littleton.

We walked along by yet another rushy river, again the easiest way to access this place before the little road was there, and entered a beautiful valley, with wooded sides sloping down to a grassy flat area that wound off out of view. Beside the path is a big flat stone, pudding stone, red sandstone embedded with pebbles of quartz, like a pudding full of currants. Many of the monuments here are made with this stone, obviously full of added energy from the quartz. At one time this stone may well have stood upright, marking the approach to the cairn, which is another couple of hundred yards away, crouching greyly over by the woods. It sadly has lost its roof, so the passage is open topped, with the slab lined walls coming up to just above waist height. The horned forecourt, where the low dry stone walls come forward on either side of the entrance to make an elegant space for folk to gather, is still intact /restored, and so we stood in a circle there for a while, singing a chant to the ancestors. Then each one of us went into one of the chambers, and meditated and communed with the ancestors for a while, feeling the peace and tranquillity of the place. I took the opportunity to charge my Rune charm one more time, asking again for the blessings of the Old Ones. Some of the group did some dowsing here, and I demonstrated how the cairn is aligned down its passage on a north-south axis. This steep sided valley has no sun or moon rising or setting points at all, but the sun would have shone into the tomb at midday every day, when it is always exactly due south.

Just a short way down the track from this 5-6,000 year old tomb is



another place of the ancestors, but this is far older still. It is now known as Cat hole Rock, and consists of a sheer cliff, maybe 100 ft high, with three caves opening out of its westerly face, and thus opening onto the valley. By climbing a muddy path up, one can reach these caves, the first of which is very low, and only accessible by crawling in, but the next one, just a few yards on, is much bigger, and we could walk in. There is a large area inside, with another opening up above the higher part, and a large chamber coming off the back, bending round and with a narrow entrance, giving a really safe place to sleep. Certainly the first inhabitants needed that, for they shared this area with sabre tooth tigers and woolly rhinoceros, for they lived here 40,000 years ago, if not



earlier. The Gower was never covered with ice in the last ice age, so it was continually inhabited, and one of the oldest burials found in this country was discovered in Paviland cave, a few miles down the coast. The Red Lady of Paviland, {now shown in fact to have been a man} was laid in the cave, covered in red ochre, with bracelets and necklaces and other treasures, 29,000 years ago.



We stayed in the cave for a while, drinking in the atmosphere of this amazing place, which is obviously still used by people, judging by the remains of a fire, and a couple of cans. Apparently bats also live here, though we didn't see any. Finally we joined hands and did three Oms, which sounded wonderful in that enclosed and acoustic space. As we left and went past the first little cave opening, I looked inside with my torch, and saw that a little way inside is a smoothed "bowl" on the side of the passage wall, which is full of some ore that sparkles redly, with a strange white circle of rock embedded into the wall just above it. It looked like a natural altar, worn smooth by the rubbing of generations of hands.

We walked slowly back down the valley, noticing how the atmosphere changed as we came around the bend and

reconnected with modern sights and sounds. There is a craft village complex where the track leaves the main road, which is based around the old water wheel and mill that give the place its name. There is a nice little cafe here, so we got some good warming lunch, readying ourselves for the final part of the journey, out of this sheltered valley and up to one of the highest points on the Gower, and Arthur's Stone.

Many places have been linked with Arthur, but this one must rank as one of the most dramatic. High on the gorse and bracken moor that covers the saddleback of the Gower, and with views stretching 37 miles and more, it could not be more different to Parc Le Breos. Our first stop was the lookout point, where there is a waist high, circular brick structure with a circular direction map of all the mountains and places that could be seen from here.



Lundy Island, hazy in the mist of the Bristol Channel, is visible at 35 miles away, and in the opposite direction are the Brecon beacons, looming massively on the horizon 37 miles away, so a round view of nearly 80 miles of landscape! It was also rather windy, so we didn't loiter, but carried on towards the pathway

leading to Arthur's Stone itself.

This path is obviously an ancient avenue, as it has stones on each side along its length, and it takes one on a grand sweeping view around the entire estuary of the Loughor, as it flows down past the salt marshes to the sea. The monument comes into sight, the enormous capstone, maybe 50 tons or more, balanced on little stubby stones, in the middle of a sunken crater lined with the scattered stone rubble of a cairn. A pool of water fills the bottom of the crater, maybe a foot or so deep, surrounding the little support stones, and adding mystery to the site. There are many legends associated with this spot, and local customs about how to access its powers, which seem to include the gift of prophecy. It is possible to step up on to one block of tumbled stone and place ones hands on the flat side of the capstone, supposedly sheared off of by Saint David, because he disapproved of the pagan stone worship by the local folk. This flat face is on the north -south axis, as was Parc Le Breos.



One of our group used his dowsing rods to ask some questions about the site, and was told that this was a place where the Elders of many tribes would

have come together for their meetings, and the rest of the tribes folk would have waited outside of the space, perhaps in the stone circle that another person dowsed as lying about 50 ft out from the cairn. There is another huge cairn, a mound of rocks with no monoliths visible, which we only spotted as we were leaving, some distance away. It would certainly make an amazing place to gather, being visible for miles around, and accessible by sea from Devon as well as west and south Wales. The people of Stoney Littleton could have come here, down their rushy river to the Bristol Channel and on along the coast of Wales to the Gower.

We stayed here some time, each seeing or feeling different aspects of this awesome place. There is one stone which now lies on an east -west axis, nice and flat and surely the place to lie for the gift of prophecy. This was dowsed to have originally been standing upright, and used by leaning against it. After trying this, it was time to go, as the sun set over the headland of Rhossili Down, where there are more monuments, and other ancient settlements.

As we went back in the car we received a final blessing; the vision of the wafer thin crescent new moon, low in the sky as she followed the sun down into the west, and just above her the bright light of Venus, shining in the palest of blue skies. A beautiful end to a magical journey!