

Inspired by the journey...



An Anthology



*A collection of poems, stories and other writings inspired by travels
in the spirit of pilgrimage, to beautiful and often remote places in
Britain and Ireland .*

Cover Photograph by Huw Riden

Journeying started life in 1988 as Pilgrim Adventure and began to lead small groups of people on pilgrimage to the more remote parts of Britain and Ireland, often following in the footsteps of the early Celtic saints.

Along the way people have felt inspired to write, take pictures and draw...

While every attempt has been made to gain the permission of the author before publishing and indeed in some cases to establish authorship, this has not always been possible. All items have at one time or another, been sent to Journeying by the author.

CONTENT

Pilgrim Adventure	<i>Carol Hodgkins</i>
God in all places	<i>Paul Heppleston</i>
Candlelight	<i>Hilary</i>
Lundy Island	<i>Janet Wilkes</i>
The Isle of Skye	<i>Paddy Allen</i>
Night Prayer	<i>Cynthia Spey</i>
O Small Cross	<i>Ryan Smith</i>
On the Holy Mountain	<i>Cate Macfarlane</i>
Borders Mushroom	<i>Paddy Allen</i>
The Skellig Isles	<i>David Gleed</i>
Reflections on Ensay	<i>Carole Hodgkins</i>
Dolphins	<i>Cate Macfarlane</i>
Y Journey	<i>Jon Wilkinson</i>
Llandaff Cathedral	<i>David Arkell</i>
Creation in all its glory	<i>Adele Trapnell</i>
Hiraeth	<i>Alona Harris</i>
Pilgrims Diary	<i>Iain Tweedale</i>
The Burren, Co. Clare	<i>Paula J. Lee</i>
This is Journeying	<i>Yvonne Dixon</i>

Pilgrim Adventure

Carole Hodgkins

The hills of grey-blue erstwhile were green,
The pilgrims walked onwards through heather's mauve screen.
Some chatting, some silent – over rocks and bog plough
While their spirit soars heavenward knowing that –
Heaven is now!

Ragged robin and orchid bring joy to the eye,
Mosses, soft green and springy 'neath our feet lie.
The deer on the hillside, the stags on the brow,
Convince me more strongly
Heaven is now!

The mysterious water hides Neptune's dark world,
The whale and the otter glide 'neath ripples froth-furled.
The Lord shares our travail, this I avow,
And His glory in flowers and His people reveals –
Heaven is now!

Carole travelled for the first time with Pilgrim Adventure in 1996.

*The above was written on the island of Mull during 'Walking to An Island,'
a journey from Applecross in Wester Ross, to the island of Iona. ..*

God in all places

Paul Heppleston

I wonder how many of you can remember Pilgrim Adventure. That's how Journeying started (it was about 10 years ago that the name was changed). There's quite a bit of overlap between what is meant by 'journeying' and what is meant by 'pilgrimage'. And these days they can almost describe the same thing.

We can think about the journey of life as being a pilgrimage with the ultimate destination being God; the paradox is that God is also on the journey with us – and was there encouraging us when we set off at the start.....God being at our beginnings, accompanying us through life and waiting for us at the gate to new life. It's the journey *and* the destination.

As Christians we believe that our life and our very existence is in God - we are immersed in God's presence all the time.

This thought came to mind as I recalled recent travels and I am sure that an attitude of expectancy in terms of how God reveals himself can have a great impact on how we live our lives.

Seeking and finding....

What God is asking us to do is to be aware of his presence in whatever we are doing, wherever we are. It was Brother Lawrence who wrote the classic booklet many years ago - 'The practice of the presence of God'. These days the word *Mindfulness* has come into the public consciousness and in effect does the same thing - living in the present moment and being aware of God in all we do and in all we see, even (and maybe especially) in the unexpected places and people and circumstances.

That's why a phrase which could be used to describe Journeying's ministry, as it does the work of other groups, is *Finding God in Creation* - words that align very closely with Ignatian and Celtic spirituality.

There is another helpful phrase : *To the edges to find the Centre*, first linked to Journeying/PA publicity about 15 years ago. The edges are the remote places to which Journeying takes people and there, if one is sufficiently aware, is God - waiting patiently for us.

John Muir, the father of modern approaches to conservation in wild country wrote this: "*Into the forest I go, to lose my mind and find my soul*". For 'forest' we can of course use the word 'wilderness'.

Similarly Gerard Hughes writes in his book about walking to Jerusalem "*I had walked to Jerusalem to find Christ's peace. I left Jerusalem knowing that his peace is offered to us in every place and at every time. For his dwelling place is in our hearts*". So the challenge for us is to make ourselves open to meeting God wherever we are. Being in wonderful surroundings on holiday with others who have the same approach to the 'spirituality of place' is what makes these times special and allows God to reveal himself to us in all sorts of ways and people.

A Journeying holiday, just like a Pilgrim Adventure holiday (I led ca.35 trips over 16 years) is one where we enjoy being together, worshipping together, enjoying walking together in areas of unique and often stunning surroundings. But there is that 'other' dimension...and I've had several experiences in life (and in Journeying holidays) where God has revealed him/herself very clearly and often in surprising circumstances.

Presence

The first Pilgrim Adventure (PA) holiday that I led was to **St Kilda**. On Hirta we were walking one summer's day up over the bealach towards the



Great Glen -
Gleann Mhor -
when suddenly
a thick fog de-
scended on the
isle. On our
return from
down the
Gleann we
guessed we
were quite
near a cliff

edge. I felt we needed to deal with it (St Kilda has the highest cliffs in Britain!), to stop, be calm and gather a peace around us and so I deliberately stopped and we prayed together, asking God to be in our thinking. By using our common sense and a compass and map we gingerly moved five metres at a time in what we believed to be the right direction. And so it was, for half an hour later the mist did lift and revealed that we were out of the danger zone. So my learning curve was strengthened by understanding that by trusting the Master, being still and without panic, we would be led to safety - whatever that might be in life. We had used our gift of reasoning and intelligence, the whole group sharing in what was in effect joint leadership at that moment.



Another example of God at work was in the **Derbyshire Dales**, when one of our group (in her words) “tripped over her own foot” and fell on the country lane down which we were walking. She hit her head on the tarmac of the lane and, though conscious all the time with no bleeding, lay perfectly still as was the advice I remembered to give her. She was 72. Well, a few minutes later, when we were wondering about a 999 call, God walked round the corner in the guise of a consultant orthopaedic doctor from Derby hospital. George Macleod, the founder of the Iona Community, said “if you believe in coincidences may you have a very dull life”. And of course many of us now use the word ‘God-incidence’ to describe that feeling; maybe we’re beginning to get the message.

On **Fair Isle** lives a remarkable community of about 60 people and I’ve taken two Journeying groups there. I’ve known the isle since my teens and every time I go there’s something tangible about ‘belonging’. Those five dozen folk form the island community and are some of the most welcoming people I have ever met; I believe that their wonderful hospitality (Celtic?) comes from understanding that they cannot live alone. They know, as we all need to learn, that we are all interdependent, one on another, community on community. I’ve known community by living on islands and also as an ecologist; I know too the essence of the web of life, the need that all segments of the biosphere have of the others. Sadly we humans are making rather a mess of things just now and we need to step back and stop and re-assess where we are, check our place in the world and our relationships with each other.



“The same feeling comes on ***Iona*** where I’ve spent much time. There is the official Iona Community, with HQ in Glasgow and it’s the abbey occupied by that Community that draws huge numbers of people to the isle each year. But it is so important to understand that there is another ‘Iona Community’ viz. the people living there, the crofters, the shopkeepers, hotel staff, boatmen, fishermen. So it’s all about relationship again, the interdependence in life that God calls us to understand for our very survival. On small islands, where Journeying often goes, one can feel God truly at work amongst the human population. Wild places with no-one near are wonderful. Communities with lots of people near - they’re wonderful too. God can be seen in all things and in all situations....but only if we search with the right glasses on.



Identity

In Orkney I was involved in a long-term study of Fulmar Petrels and I also spent an earlier three years studying Scottish Oystercatchers. In both studies there was a need to colour-ring the birds e.g. Blue/Black/Orange. That has a purpose ecologically, but spiritually it speaks to me of God’s relationship with us; for I knew each bird as an individual, marked out for ever as a having identity. Of course we can debate whether or not God had a real relationship with those birds (but he did talk of sparrows didn’t he?). What was significant was that I too am marked out, just as you who read this are marked out as an individual belonging to God, for it was he who made us (Ps 139) so wonderfully, with intention and with loving care.

The rhythm of the days

On the Royal Road (path, sheep-track, boat) God is longing to engage with us and that can happen to any of us, in ways that are just right for each of us. I'm reminded of Journeying walks I have led - and walks I have done alone - where I try to link with God through my senses, through the landscape and the immediate surroundings. I've found seven ways that help me to do this, some of which may be helpful to you too.

1. Dangling my hand in a stream - feeling the movement of the water caressing my skin, rather like what God longs to do to us.
2. Deliberately lying on the grass (hopefully dry!) and pressing my hands into the solidity of the ground, trying to really engage with this planet of ours, this gift from God that we, to be truthful, are not caring for as we should.
3. Facing the wind and feeling it brushing past my head, sensing it as the Holy Spirit coming very close.
4. Facing the sun (yes, I know!) and understanding that it brings me God's warmth and protection.
5. Even when it's raining, trying to interpret the rain on my face as Christ's forgiveness and healing power through the presence of water.
6. (Deliberately) changing my walk course ever so slightly to enable some tree leaves to touch my face. Of course this can happen naturally without 'planning', but I always treat it as God touching me, coming very close as if a butterfly landed on my arm.
7. Finally - when I am by a shore I stand and listen and watch. It might be gentle whispers of the tide lapping on sand; yes that can mean something special. Or it could be when thundering breakers crashing onto rocks that I feel the vibration of the Power of God going right through me.

Reaching home

We usually face forwards as we travel. But maybe there is something to be said for stopping now and then and looking backwards to see from where we have come. You get totally different views don't you? And it helps if we can review our life journeying too. Ignatian spirituality believes this to be helpful - a time at the end of the day when we can gently recall the day's events and see where we were moving towards God and where we moved away.

Like Gerard Hughes we can realise that we have discovered more about ourselves after the journeying, but maybe the last word goes to TS Eliot who wrote in the 'Four Quartets' a powerful sentence that speaks to us of our own life and purpose and journeying....

"we shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."



Candlelight

Hilary

Candlelight circles hallowed stones,
embraces the expectant.
Prayer emptied out
until silence listens for the Unseen.
Surprised by wordless Wisdom.
Simply enfolded.
God being present.

Written following a service in Iona Abbey ...

Hilary went on to say, 'The Sunday evening Abbey service was one of quiet reflection. In the stillness, I came to the end of my questions to God. I gave Him space.'

LUNDY ISLAND

Janet Wilkes

My first 'Journeying', 6 years ago, to Lundy Island, was memorable. Not just for the epic sea voyage getting there and the swathes of late blue-bells and black rabbits but for a unique relief inside St Helen's, Lundy's Parish Church.

Similar to other churches of its age there was, behind the altar, the Ten Commandments. But to its right, instead of the Creed, there was a relief of Aaron putting on the head of a goat the sins of the people before releasing it into the wilderness.

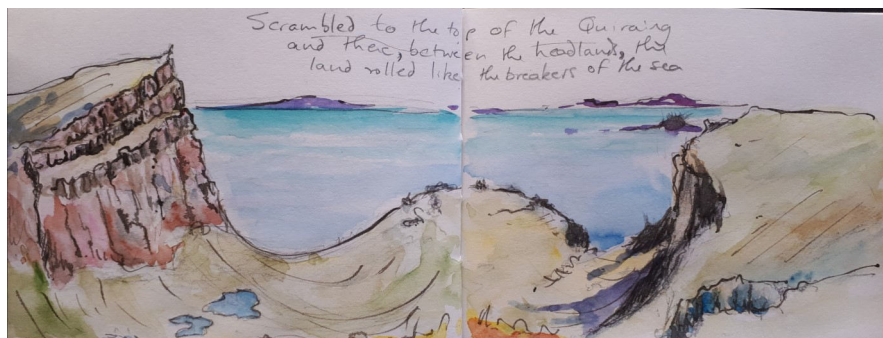
This concept of forgiveness I have never seen elsewhere. And, in an urban setting, it could well be lost. But on Lundy Island, with its vast sweeps of lonely land, the symbolism seemed perfect. And it was not lost on me. I had just retired and, like many others stepping off the treadmill, I realised I had much to be forgiven!

Crossing back to Ilfracombe was calmer. As the ferry pushed off from the shore schools of dolphins, sensing we were homeward bound, swam with us way out into the Atlantic, cavorting and somersaulting, until even they got tired of the show and turned round and swam back to their lovely island.

The Isle of Skye

View from on top the Quiraing and a solitary thistle

Paddy Allen



Paddy lives in Scotland and has been leading holidays with Journeying since 2018.

Both drawings were painted during our Isle of Skye holiday, 2018.

Night Prayer

Cynthia Spey

(With introduction by the Editor)

1991 on the banks of loch Sunart.

The weather had been perfect with clear blue sky's by day and wonderful sunsets by night. On one particular night, but I'll let Cynthia tell the story...

"We stood in the customary circle on the shore, on the night of the full moon, reiterating our constant desire for a quiet night and a perfect end. A moon of huge and astonishing proportions suddenly appeared, filling the whole sky with its presence and painting a blinding path across the sunset-coloured loch from the mountains on the horizon to the waters gently lapping at our feet. It was an awesome sight and the total silence and stillness created a magical scene that was quite uncanny. As our prayers ended, we were constrained to creep noiselessly away so as not to break the spell"

Back home Cynthia closed her diary with these words, "I wrote these notes under difficulties. We were housed in tents, on long wet grass, and I had to write in the tent by torch light, in rocking buses, perched on windy walls whilst waiting for ferries..."

"It was an exhausting trip, covering a lot of territory, much of it on foot, and it took me a week to recover. But it was a great adventure, and I wouldn't have missed it for anything."

O SMALL CROSS

Ryan Smith

O Small Cross

O small cross between land and sky

Connecting earth and heaven, bye and bye.

How you change the landscape, as you portray Christ's choice
to the sons of men

Everything for me or all for you, nothing more or less

That is the choice you offer, O small cross of Lindisfarne

Written along 'St Cuthbert's Way'

On the Holy Mountain

Cate Macfarlane

Vast, immovable, haughty in her grandeur, the mountain drew us towards her. Soft and rough, grey and green, she revealed more of her great expanse as we climbed ever upwards. Reciting Brendan's Prayer, we remembered fellow pilgrims who had conquered different trails on the towering rock.

Mount Brandon, on the south-west coast, in Dingle, Co. Kerry, is the second highest mountain in Ireland, 953 metres high. In June 2004 I travelled as group leader with fellow pilgrims from Pilgrim Adventure.

The ruins of St Brendan's Oratory mark the summit of the mountain. The legend is that the navigator saint climbed the mountain with his seafaring monks to prepare them physically and spiritually for their journey to the promised land of the saints.

Mount Brandon connects the wild and the holy. At the summit we encountered a swirling, whispering breeze. Enthralled we gazed about us: neighbouring peaks softly rounded and covered in green; tracks in the distance; the sky near enough to touch. Rivulets of crystal clear water appeared and disappeared. Down in velvet green pastures, sheep stopped and stared. The shimmering sun visited us for a moment or two, then danced on her way. On the horizon was a vast, open sea and infinity, just as it had always been.

The rocks, jagged and smooth, purple and blue, held their secrets as we clambered among them. Our limbs ached, but we were refuelled from who knows where. We sang 'Do not be afraid' and we were not.

This was our third visit to Mt Brandon and the first led by Cate.

Borders Mushroom

Paddy Allen



The Skellig Isles

David Gleed

Ten pilgrims, a small boat and a distant island... Eight miles off the coast of County Kerry the stark pointed rock of Skellig Michael explodes out of a 280-foot-deep sea and soars up a further 720 feet. For years, Great Skellig, the larger of two adjacent islands, was home to perhaps the most isolated Christian community the world has ever known.

Pilgrims take risks – the Christian journey is an adventure! It was barely four years since our previous trip to these shores. On that occasion, we had become marooned on an island and becalmed on a boat without fuel! But on this particular June morning, with the sun shining and a well-equipped boat waiting to whisk us off to the Skellig's, there was no thought of such daring escapades.

Gathering on the quayside at Knightstown on Valentia Island, we looked around for our hire boat. A passer-by waved us in the direction of several craft moored beyond the Clock tower. Which one could be ours? The elegant twin-hull with wooden deck, covered cabin and rather nice seating – about forty feet long she looked just right. Another, slightly smaller and red, would certainly do. Perhaps it was boat number three, a newer vessel with chrome railings, upper deck and dazzling array of aerials – although we suspected this belonged to the survey team working in the channel. We settled on boat number two and started to search for the skipper. “Hi, are you the pilgrim group going to Skellig Michael?” We turned and looked across the quay to a man dressed in sea denims aged about forty-five. “The boat’s over here.”

We crossed the tarmac and looked down into the water – there was nothing visible above the quay. A small open boat, maybe twenty feet long bobbed about below... We looked at each other. No one said a word... thoughts of Captain Bligh cast adrift from the *Bounty* or Robin Knox-Johnson rowing the Atlantic came to mind. Still, the skipper, we’ll call him Diormit, was likeable enough and as we putt-putted our way

along the channel toward the open sea he managed to put us at ease with stories of life in the West, of cutting turf, and the sending of the first telegraph message to America. The wind was slight and the sky blue with occasional clouds drifting over the hills. Maybe our trip wouldn't be too bad after all.

"Pass the cover, put this over your legs, here comes another..." CRASH! A wave broke over the bows and sent several gallons of water across the wooden deck. "I'm told if you keep your eyes on the horizon you won't feel sick," a pilgrim voice called from one corner of the boat. We all clung to the horizon trying not to be the first to disprove his theory. And all the while, out there on the horizon, the distant peaks of Skellig Michael and its' sister island, Little Skellig, seemed to remain as far off as ever.

It must have taken hours – but Diormit assured us it was only two "and that wasn't bad" – before the boat eventually bumped its way alongside the jetty at the base of the rock. Wobbly, but relieved, we made our way from the boat up the relatively new concrete steps to the top of the landing stage. Diormit said we had no more than three hours as the weather was turning. Somehow, I didn't think it was for the better.

Skellig Michael is a remarkable place. An imposing 'rock' of some forty-two acres, it attracts up to 50,000 breeding birds each year – puffin, kittiwake, manx-sheerwater, storm petrels and razorbills. Human habitation on the rock goes back thousands of years. Legend has it that Ir, the son of Milesius, leader of the Milesians, first invaders of Ireland, died on the rock in 1300 BC. In 956 AD Olaf Trigussaon, the heir to the throne of Norway, was born and baptised here... and before that during the sixth century St Finan and his monks chose Skellig, 'the shining rock,' as the site for their monastery.

Climbing skyward the enormity of the task facing those early Christian settlers became apparent. This is a harsh environment – a small steep-sided island, with little vegetation, open to the full force of the Atlantic. Amazingly, the location chosen for the monastery lies just below the summit on a ledge facing east, 650 feet above sea level!

It is a truly salutary experience to stand among the well-preserved beehive huts and walk the narrow stone pathways of this tiny 'village in the sky'. Such faith, such presence of mind, such love to inspire man to live here...

Returning to the jetty, mindful of each step as we negotiated the precarious stone stairway – and occasionally drawing eye to eye with a Puffin making its nest along the lee side of the path – we began to straggle out.

The more agile among us made a detour to the highest peak – an alarming climb which took our intrepid pilgrims through a stone 'chimney' with hand holes and steps cut into the rock face.

Then it was up two narrow grassy gullies, finally reaching the summit – a great rock outcrop with a rusted weather vane set into it. Not a place for somebody with no head for heights. On a small platform, immediately underneath the peak, one monk had lived a solitary life of prayer. The remains of his cell and grave are still to be seen.

At the boat Diormit had the engine running and was waiting for us. "Put these on" he said, handing out oilskins, "you might need them." Clad in our new outer layer, and covered from the waist down by a ribbon-like blanket of canvas; we sat around the edge of the boat waiting for the worst. Diormit had his back to us at the front of the boat so we couldn't see his face, but I could tell by the way he gripped the wheel that he was as apprehensive about the crossing as we were. Friendly nervous banter tried to keep spirits afloat as we inched away from the shelter of the rock. But with the first lunge of the boat through the green heaving waves, the chatter ceased and the steely expression of people about to experience a disaster returned.



An hour out with the boat rising and falling, a strange calm descended. It was almost as though the boat and its passengers had become one with the elements. Together we were cutting a safe passage. There was a sense of time and timelessness, of early pilgrims with us, battling their way to and from that remote outpost on the edge of the world. We were caught up in the pilgrim experience. We felt close to God, the elements and fellow pilgrims stretching back across the years. We were on a journey but we were not alone – it was a great feeling.

(In compiling this chapter, I am indebted to Frank Lewis for his detailed article 'Skellig Michael')

Reflections On Ensay

Carole Hodgkins

I'm an oystercatcher wild and free
Soaring in flight over the Ensay sea.
I am boldly patterned in black and white,
My orange-red legs are a brilliant sight.

I have a stout red bill and shrill piping cry.
There are people on Ensay and I'm wondering why.
Is it the stillness, the peace, or the sheep,
The house or the chapel, or the charms of the deep?

High I fly over sand and dune,
Freedom and song my good fortune.
Who is the figure I see below?
Where has she come from – where will she go?

I'm an oystercatcher without discontent.
To follow the Master is my intent.
The figure I see is an Adventure Pilgrim,
Who strives like me to follow Him!

To share the earth, the sky and sea,
Companions together in life are we,
To laugh, to learn, to live and love,
And walk with him, our Lord above.

Written on the Hebridean Island of Ensay.

Dolphins

Cate Macfarlane

Listening to the music of the blue-green sea, suddenly the rhythm changed. Out of the depths they rose... Dolphins...

Side by side forming a perfect arc as a prelude to their extraordinary sea dance. They glanced before gracefully dipping and rising again.

Mesmerised we watched and listened to the gentle harmony of their breathing. Effortlessly gliding and weaving through the waves, they escorted us across their homeland, the sea.

As we marvelled at their performance, they vanished to the depths, where there is no beginning and no end. They had asked for nothing...

Cate added; "My thoughts, following the display as we crossed the sea between Tiree and Iona"

Y Journey... the youth wing of Journeying

Jon Wilkinson

Y Journey was conceived in 2010 when two Church leaders sat down at a party and began to imagine what a Journeying holiday might look like for teenagers. The fundamental question was this; Can today's teenagers, in our loud, media saturated, information intense culture, meaningfully experience God in creation, the journey, in one another?



Well, we decided to give it a go, and with the enthusiastic backing of the Journeying leadership we launched Y Journey in 2011 in the Yorkshire Dales. Naturally, a Y Journey holiday differs in some respects from a conventional Journeying holiday as we are working with high octane, energy filled young people. However, the core values of Journeying were built into the structure and programme from the start. Still, the question remained; can this work with young people? The answer came on that first holiday. One afternoon we found ourselves on the banks of the rushing, wild, and powerful falls at Aysgarth. Following a lot of paddling, splashing, and general horseplay we invited everyone to find a quiet spot and to be still, to discover God in the beauty of the place and time, and to enjoy his presence. A rather sceptical part of me thought that after two minutes extreme boredom would set in followed by restlessness. In fact, as the leaders quietly wandered round the group all we saw was young people absorbed in the moment and totally oblivious to our presence.

Now, after eight holidays I can affirm that time after time our young people have journeyed *to the edge and found the centre*. This has happened in the Pennines, The Lake District, Northumbria, the Derbyshire Dales and the Yorkshire Dales. The destination varies but the journey remains the same.



Llandaff Cathedral

David Arkell

Stately towers of grandeur fine
Framing noble, weighty doors;
Offering pilgrims restful pause
Down the centuries' coursing time.

Enter now this hallowed place,
Let the outside world subside;
Worries and fears allayed; abide.
Feel the moment, present space.

Vast dimensions, spacious scope,
Tombs encasing history's bones;
Massive columns, ancient stones
Built by labourers' concrete hope.

Air with incense sweet imbued,
Portly arches stretching high;
Windows stained in motley dye,
Dimness strange of light subdued.

Choir's wafty tones ascend,
Sonorous notes of pipes ornate;
Haunting chants and psalms elate,
Harmony's striking colours blend;

Range of pitch from depth to height,
Resonant echo, glorious sound;
Vibrant expansion, fullness round,
Glimpsing angels' chorus white.

Rousing hymns, spirits raised,
Minds infused with inspiration;
Joined in chords of exultation,
Christ our Lord, His name be praised!

*Inspired by a visit to Llandaff Cathedral on my first holiday with
Journeying in August 2015.*

Creation in all its glory...

Adele Trapnell

“Praise to the holiest in the heights and in the depths be praise”. This line from the well-known hymn is the essence of what Journeying means to me and brings to mind my first ‘Pilgrim Adventure’ in June 2002, as well as my most recent in April 2014. My first adventure took me to the tiny island of Skellig Michael, off the south-west coast of Ireland, where 6th century monks lived and worshipped their creator. Wishing to live a life of sacrifice and faith, much



in the spirit of St Anthony going out into the desert, they built tiny ‘beehive’ huts on the top of this remote rocky island which are still standing today... As we climbed up the dizzying steps I had one of the most wonderful experiences of my life – a puffin landed on my foot!

A high point of our journey on Anglesey Island in April 2014 was the descent to the deepest part of the earth that I am ever likely to visit – the amazing Parys Copper Mine. We had to dress up in heavy protective clothing and boots, like the miners would have worn, and after a lot of safety instructions, Ollie, a former miner, led us down, down, down, clinging to rickety ladders, until we reached a huge cave. Our headlamps illuminated the most glorious colours of the rock; the sound of dripping water and the half-foot of water we were standing in all brought us something of the atmosphere of what it must have been like for the workers in the mine, which Ollie told us dates back to the Bronze Age.

St Davids, The Scilly Isles, Isle of Man, Skellig Isles, Anglesey; what links these great Journeying experiences for me is the excellence of the leaders, the camaraderie of the other participants, the beautiful walks in nature, the worship outdoors at so many special places, the prayerful atmosphere of evening worship and the fun we shared as we prepared meals, washed dishes, or did other small tasks together. For me the spiritual path is the most important path in life, and as I get older it fascinates me more and more. Thanks and congratulations to the Journeying team for these wonderful adventures. I am so looking forward to my next one, to the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, this coming summer, 2019!

Hiraeth

Alona Harris

Hiraeth – a longing of the soul to come home. When I first came across this word, I felt that is it! That describes how I feel when I come to Wales. But then as I read further, it seems that most feel the definition of hireath cannot be translated easily, or at all, into English. Over many years of traveling to Wales with the Pilgrims, then the Journey folk and on my own; I feel a strong affinity for the country and its' people.

It actually starts with the landing in Ireland during the long slow descent through the most luscious green valley; cares, worries and any mental distractions are left behind. Then the short trip to Wales and I am home; in my heart, my soul and my spirit. Physically being in Wales is a spiritual experience for me. I love the land, the people and their culture.

Wandering the coast seems to best suit me. And the specific area between Porthclais and Solva pulls me the most. I'll be back in May to walk this favored section. The sea is restorative as is walking with cows and ponies and birds.



When I am not with my Journeying friends, I stay at small B&B's tucked away in interesting places. And I use public transportation; it is such a lesson in culture. The bus stops at many drive ways to collect senior ladies and gents to take them to town. They find their friends and pick up the visit from the last trip. On the return they have purchases from the day and continue the visit.

The people of Wales are very welcoming and friendly. How did they know I just came home?

Pilgrims Diary

Iain Tweedale

Day 1:

Today a group from Journeying set out for the Brecon Beacons...



John Muir, the founder of the National Parks movement in the US, once said: "Keep close to Nature's heart...and break clear away, once in a while, and climb a mountain or spend a week in the woods. Wash your spirit clean." This is what we'll do on this short holiday in the Brecon Beacons, Wales, camping in the heart of this beautiful national park.

The holiday comprises spectacular mountain scenery, waterfalls and secluded wooded valleys. The Holy Spirit is the central theme and we'll be following the spiritual significance of water from the springs and lakes in the mountains down the fast flowing streams to the famous waterfall country which has the largest concentration of waterfalls anywhere in the UK.

Day 2:

We got out into the wild on our first day in the Brecon Beacons, stopping to reflect beside a waterfall.



Huw arrived on his motorbike ready to cook paella and soon had a glass of red wine in hand!

Day 3:



Today it rained and rained, so where better to go than to a waterfall you can walk behind where it doesn't matter if you get wet!

A strange almost mystical wind blew behind the waterfall. It reminded us of what John of the Cross said in which the soul can become united to God and transformed in him by drawing from within God a divine breath.

When the rain finally subsided we climbed up to Llyn y Fan Fawr, where we took this panoramic of the wonderful view.



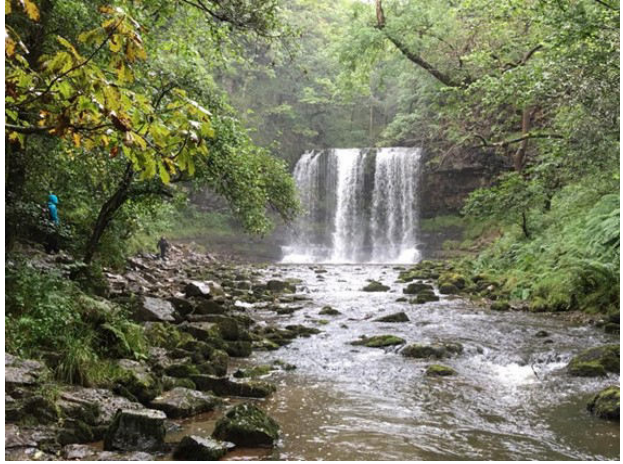
Day 4:

The final day took us to Henrhyd waterfall. All the rain made the flow incredibly powerful and loud. An apt end to a holiday all about water and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Let anyone who is thirsty come and drink the water of life, a free gift for those who desire it.



We were on a Journey toward contemplation. Contemplation is not self-centered navel gazing. Rather, as Thomas Merton puts it: contemplation is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is a vivid realisation of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible transcendent and infinitely abundant source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that source. It goes beyond reason and beyond simple faith. (Thomas Merton, New Seeds of Contemplation).



Following water from its source in the mountains was a fitting metaphor, and the trainee contemplatives went home wet but closer to God.

The Burren, Co. Clare

Paula J. Lee

I knew I wanted to go to Ireland, and I knew I wanted to travel with a small group with a pilgrimage bent. I sat in front of my computer in Denver, Colorado in the winter of 2011 and started researching my options. I discovered Journeying, and was intrigued by the description of their trips and approach. I ended up choosing the trip to the Burren Area of County Clare, and it was a very good choice.

I met Cate and Steve at Shannon airport, piled into the van, and we were off. Everyone was welcoming; there were two other Americans, and the rest of the folks were British. The long, guided walks each day were just challenging enough, and learning about the geology, geography, wildflowers, and wild creatures of the area was so interesting. At the end of our travels each day, we'd end up in a pub or café to rehash the day's adventures and plan for the next day.



There were so many memorable experiences; visiting John O'Donohue's grave near the sea in Craggagh, a 'letting go' spiritual practice at the Cliffs of Moher, exploring beautiful ruins, and walking the farmer's paths as we learned about their history.

One of the highlights was our day trip to the Island of Inishmaan. The water was choppy, and the boat ride intense. I was very glad to reach the shore, where we were left off, and together walked into the small café in town. Our charge for the day was to walk the island by ourselves, and reflect on the difference between loneliness and being alone. What a perfect place for this reflection. The sunny, warm day highlighted the green hills, the blue water off the cliffs, small homes, ruins, cattle, sheep, the occasional person, and what was for me the highlight—the miles and miles of stone walls. As I walked, running my hands along the stones, I could feel their energy. I had a sense of the generations of people who had built and rebuilt these walls, and depended on them to protect their livestock and property. They were beautiful to me, and alive, and I felt accompanied by them and the lives they represented.

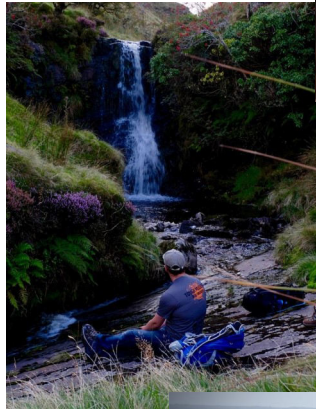
A sense of spirituality enveloped the whole experience; it arose naturally from our walks, sharing, living in community, and the gentle prompts we had been given. Our leaders were unfailingly kind, supportive, and calmly in control in the face of the inevitable (minor) challenges that arose, and I was grateful for their presence.

I joined Journeying again on the Isle of Skye in 2016, and am registered for the Scotland Island Idyll this summer. I'm looking forward to once again joining a welcoming community as we come from many places to share a time with kindred spirits in beautiful places.

This is Journeying...

Yvonne Dixon

'Not quite a retreat, not quite a walking holiday, but with pleasing elements of both: Journeying is a place of encounter and dialogue, conversation and simple fellowship with Christians across a wide spectrum of belief and experience, which I find rare in other settings, and all against the backdrop of some of Britain's most remote and beautiful landscapes.'



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