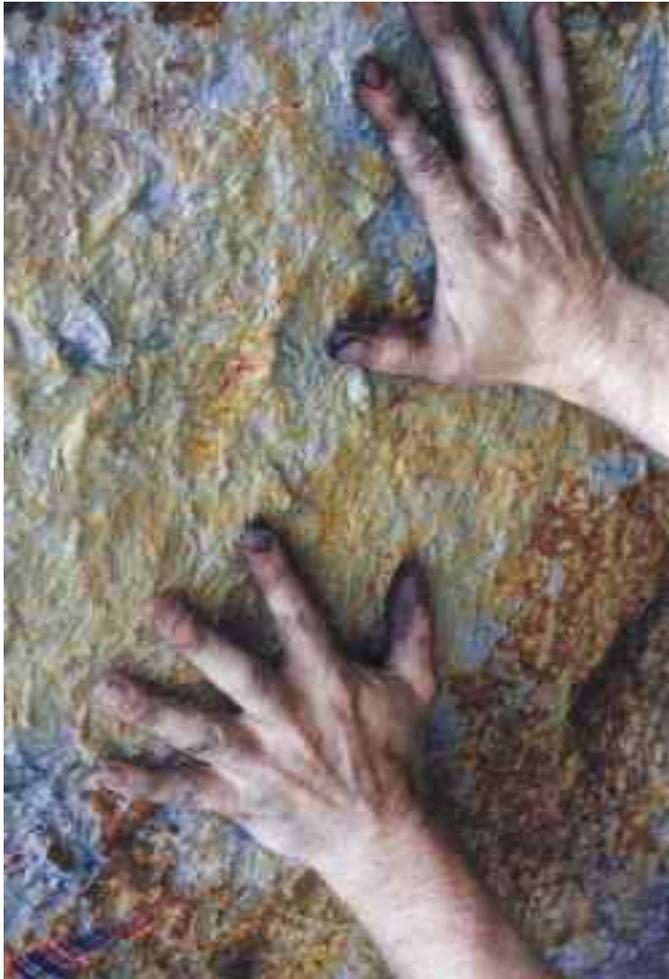


Why We Raise The Standing Stones

Written by test

Saturday, 15 June 2002 00:00

We are often asked by folks who have not yet visited Four Quarters “Just what do the Standing Stones mean?” And we are almost never asked that question once they have stood inside the Circle. The Standing Stones have to be experienced before they can speak. In a language that is universal, the soft words of your own inner voice.



As a human impulse, the desire to raise large natural stones is shared by peoples across the planet; in Polynesia, the Americas, Africa and Asia. But it was in Europe that this cultural phenomenon reached its greatest expression with monuments that are still a part of our cultural memory. The Menhirs of Carnac, The Great Circle of Avesbury, New Grange, The Temples of Malta and Stonehenge.

Beginning about 7,000bce the mastery of neolithic agricultural techniques began to expand out of the fertile crescent. And that technical expansion carried with it a new spiritual sensibility of the Great Gravid Goddess; whose body, quickened by the seed of mankind, gave forth her wet, rich, fruitfulness. For those early peoples it was an easy and obvious connection to make. As the technology of crop production developed and moved west through the Mediterranean basin, the religions of these peoples developed too. By 5,500bce they began to raise the first large megalithic structures, huge fieldstone mounds containing the bones of their tribal dead in common burial, designed to mimic the body of the Great Mother. Over the next 3,000 years this

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cultural ethic continued to grow and develop, following the western reaches of the Mediterranean and then northward along the Atlantic coast. Spreading inland from the sea and eventually covering almost all of sea-girt Europe. And it should be understood that this was not one pre-bronze culture, but many neolithic cultures. Separated by vast amounts of time, but sharing in common their work with the Standing Stones.

As this cultural diffusion progressed Dolmens first emerged, smaller triples of upright stone capped by a massive slab, usually sited to be viewed from a great distance. Followed by Passage Graves, long voluminous stone passageways covered by earth and forming a great tribal burial sanctuary. These Passage Graves continued their evolution for over 3,000 years until in their final form they incorporated a much smaller stone-lined chamber in the base of the mound, flanked with a formal entrance dais. The mound itself stretching for hundreds of feet beyond the chamber and buried deep within... a stone spine running for the mound's full length. A landscape sculpture of the Body of the Goddess in repose. Alignments of Standing Stones developed as small collections of as little as a dozen stones; most likely as local meeting places for ritual and governance. Later evolving as much larger, sometimes perfect geometric patterns in concordance with the stars; or with imposing outlier stones pointing to significant seasonal alignments.



And late in the megalithic period, all of these elements were brought together in grand complexes of Circles, Long Barrows and Alignments of Standing Stones. Avesbury (3,000bce) is perhaps the greatest example of such a regional ceremonial center; its main circle stretching for over a quarter mile, surrounded by a complex of processional, barrows and smaller features. It is sobering to consider our own "leisure time" when we realize that the Avesbury complex was created with a single unity of purposeful design and required perhaps 400 years

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to complete.

With this background we can begin to contemplate what the Stone Circles meant for the ancients by understanding what the Standing Stones of Four Quarters mean to us in our times. The Circle at Four Quarters began as one Stone, raised in 1995 because it needed to be, without much thought of consequence or the future. It was raised as a statement of purpose, but more importantly as a statement of hope in what was sure to be a difficult journey.

It was a hard thing to do, not so much the raising of it, but everything else that had gone into making it possible. Securing the Land, organizing people and motivating them to the task. During the long dark winter that following a number of things became clear. That the single Stone should not stand alone and that to raise a Circle was a work that would require many people working over many years, with a common purpose. And it became clear that the fundamental purpose of that single Stone was to bind a group of people, as yet unknown to each other, in a common spiritual experience.

In the years that followed, the simple act of surviving each winter in order to raise yet more Stones began to form strong common bonds among a small group of people. And that small circle of people grew to include others, expanding outward from the center. In order to raise those Stones we had to provide a larger conceptual frame work, a structure for our experience together; in a word, a church. Policies and procedures for the camp, and a camp to build. To ease our way and to join our hands, we made ceremony. To feed each others' bodies we cook, and share that food. To share our joy we drum, dance and sing.



And as the work grew greater, more people joined in to help, thus making room for even more to come. In this way, from the beginning of one lonely Stone on a hill top, a human organism was sparked; which began to grow and assume its own shape, purpose and meaning. And to

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coalesce qualities that were seen only dimly that first winter, creating a tangible rhythm of ebb, and flow and human abundance.

In a very real way the Stone Circle has become a psychic and emotional trigger point. A tool as effective as meditation or mantra for beginning an inward journey; every time it is entered and experienced again. It has become a common ground and shared frame of reference for many, many people; source and return as they ride the Great Wheel of their lives. And if you choose to believe in energies, deities, vibrations or cellular memory; yes, they all live there too.

It is rare that anyone can be unmoved when in the presence of the ancient megalithic monuments, because we intuitively sense the social and technical context of the people who created them. And in our own time it would be a simple matter to hire the equipment and erect a stone circle; a simple matter of money. But to do so would be to miss the point and erect a dead shell mocking the memory of those who went before. For it was through their Sacrifice, Ceremony and Celebration that the ancient Circles rose. And through our own work of years, stone by stone, that this Circle shall rise again.

