



La Hougue Bie



'Câtel', Guernsey

Note the flowers at the base still being left by the Faithful

IRELAND

The Celts travelled by boat and settled in England, and Wales and then pressed on to Ireland where they built a 'wonder of the world', *New Grange*, a jewel in the Celtic Crown. The exterior of this vast chambered tumulus has been restored to give an idea of how it looked in its prime. The walls of glittering quartzite shine in the sun. The average life span of the builders was only 30 years so the labour of many generations of Neolithic men and women went into the construction of this 300-foot wide and 40-foot high monumental burial temple that is reckoned to have taken 200,000 tons of material to build.



'New Grange', Ireland

New Grange is a wondrous sight and holds magic knowledge, some of which we still don't really understand. There are four engraved stones that face the solstices marking the sun's rise and setting at midwinter and midsummer.



The entrance of 'New Grange' showing the window over the portal



The carved stone in front of the doorway into the tumulus is covered with spirals and rhomboid diamonds. As the sun pops over the horizon at the *midwinter sunrise*, it sends a shaft of light through the small box-window above the doorway directly onto a stone bowl at the far end of the 100-foot long stone roofed passageway. Some of these stones are beautifully carved with mystic symbols amazingly similar to the painting on Bigge Island in Kimberley!



'New Grange', Ireland

Once inside the passage you are drawn on by the magic of the place. When you reach the end there are three small side chambers each containing a large stone bowl. The bowl in the middle chamber is lit by the shaft of sunlight on the midwinter solstice. Cremated human bone ash was found in this bowl when the tumulus was excavated. The fact that the *midwinter solstice marks the birth of the New Year* must surely indicate that the design of New Grange is directed towards *rebirth and fertility*. A carved stone placed at the midsummer sunrise illustrates the complete lunar cycle of 28 days. (P 1174)

Beside the bowl is the most important carving not only in New Grange but the whole Celtic world, a triple interlocking spiral, the *Goddess Stone*.



▲ ***The Goddess Stone inside New Grange***

The chamber is vast and looking back to the entrance you can see the window. On the left is the *Goddess Stone*, the 'Triple Spiral'. The spiral on the

left embraces the two spirals on the right. The spirals on the right are double, supposedly the out-flowing spiral signifying *Birth* and in-flowing one *Death*.



Goddess Stone

Above your head is the most beautifully-constructed six-sided corbelled roof that steps up to a square that is capped with a giant flat stone.



The corbelled roof of New Grange's central chamber



'Moon Stone' recording a 28-day cycle



Diamond Stone

The Diamond Rhombus is one of my favourite geometric forms and I have used it in one of my own Symbolic Sculptures in an attempt to show the same message as the Goddess Stone, *birth, life and death*, but more with the idea that immortality lies in the continuation of parents' DNA in our children, grandchildren, and *ad infinitum*. I found the same triangles on the Island of Campeche off the coast of southern Brazil! It is a universal symbol.



Genesis

In County Sligo in Ireland there is a man-made cairn of stones 35 foot tall and 200 foot in diameter. It has not yet been explored so may cover a chamber tomb, or it might be another Silbury Hill. The labour involved in building this incredible mound is beyond comprehension, and reminds me of the cairn I saw in the Air Mountains of the Sahara, which also is a complete mystery and unexplored, but quite obviously has a very important purpose.



'Knocknarea' cairn near Sligo, Ireland

If you visit New Grange you also have to see the Celtic gold in the Dublin Museum. Not only did these early farmers have a structured religion and society that could carry out amazing engineering feats decorated with elaborate symbolic carvings, they were also expert goldsmiths. The Moon Lunula and Sun Disc are dated at 1,800 BC. The arm torcs in the museum are some of the most exquisite jewellery ever created and are dated at 2,000 BC.



Celtic 'Moon' lunula and 'Sun' disc dated at 1,800 BC

Dún Aonghasa is one of the most astonishing Iron-Age forts that exist. It is on the Isle of Aran off the coast of Galway, in the west of Ireland. When we were camping in Ireland we spent alternate nights in B&Bs, the best one being run by Mrs McGillicuddy! We found a fisherman who was willing to take us over to Aran in the morning and promised to collect us again in the afternoon! We had heard that there was a tiny pub on the island that served the best seafood in the world, which turned out to be quite true.

The pub hired out bicycles so with dog Lassie following we set off to ride around the tiny island, which was quite hard work, as although the rocky shore of the east coast runs into the sea, the west cliff is a sheer 300-foot drop into a pounding Atlantic swell. The dry-stonewall fort is built as a horseshoe with the open end backing onto the cliff. We sat on the edge looking down into the surf, holding on to Lassie in case she had the urge to fly! We wondered why anyone would want to defend such a desolate spot. Whoever occupied this lonely place would certainly not want to be prone to sleepwalking! The view was unsurpassable, but that surely wasn't the reason for choosing the site.



'Dún Aonghasa', Aran Island, Galway, Ireland

On the way back to the pub we stopped to talk to an old white horse that looked very lonely. Not having an apple to give him we offered him a nibble of a Mars Bar that the brute grabbed and wolfed down, wrapper included! Watching him chew the toffee caramel was as good as a play. The

fisherman returned and much to Lassie's dismay we embarked again. Until then I had never seen a dog hang on to wooden deck planking before!

From the Ring of Kerry you can look out to the Christian hermits' retreat of Skellig Michael. I have dotted the photograph to show where they landed on the right, climbed the path and lived in cells on the left. What a life!



Skellig Michael

When in Dublin you have to see the Book of Kells housed in the Trinity College library. Most Irish manuscripts were produced between the 7th and 9th centuries and the illumination of the Book of Kells is one of the finest examples of such work that still exists.

SCOTLAND



'Ring of Brodgar', Orkney, circa 3,000 BC

North of Scotland on the Orkney Isles is the remarkable *Ring of Brodgar* that still has 27 of the original 60 standing stones. The labour involved in transporting these giant slabs of rock from the beach to the centre of the island is staggering. How they did it is a mystery as the island had no trees to use as rollers and hide rope must have been very scarce. A 10-foot deep ditch surrounds the 1,215-yard diameter Ring that is cut into solid rock in some places, something that was done with stone tools! The smaller *Ring of Stenness* has four remaining stones, the tallest of which is 17 foot high!

However, it is the village of *Skara Brae* that is quite beyond belief. The state of preservation of this ruin is due to the fact that a great storm buried the village under a vast sand dune 5,000 years ago, forcing the people to flee their homes. The village disappeared and remained lost until the winter of 1850, when another wild storm stripped the sand from the dune known as 'Skara Brae', to reveal imbedded in a large midden the ruins of an entire village that had a central covered thoroughfare passing right through the middle of it.



'Skara Brae' village, Bay of Skail, Orkney

People lived here before either the Pyramids or Stonehenge were built. It is not the age alone that makes the village so remarkable, but the degree to which the stone furniture inside the houses has been preserved.

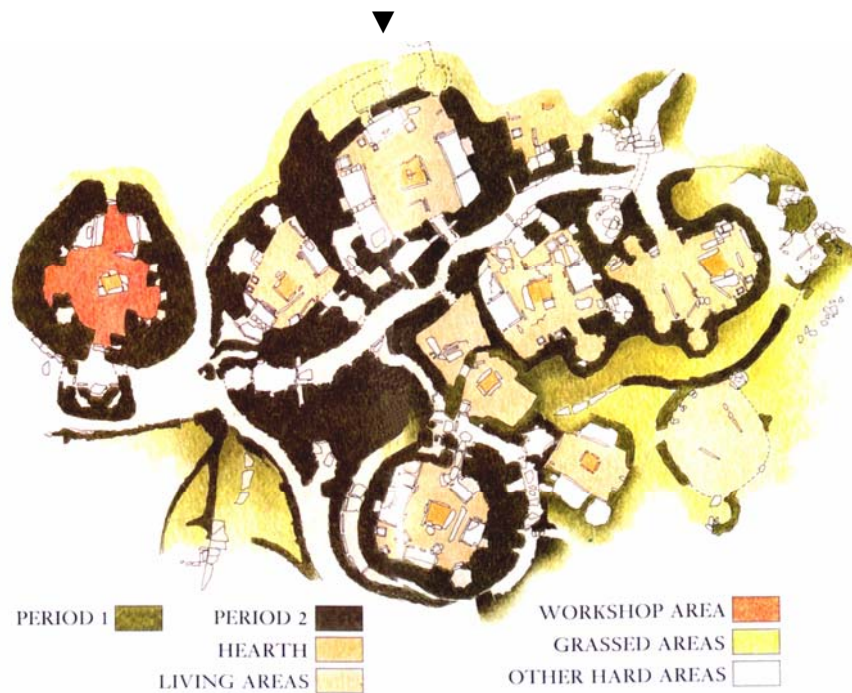
The occupants lived in a type of badger's burrow, their subterranean homes interconnected by covered passageways. Each house has a central hearth with a vent in the roof to help draw the smoke out. The only light would also have come from the hole in the roof, like the Pantheon in Rome!

Two box-shaped beds made from large flat stones are situated either side of the hearth. We know they used dry bracken for bedding from the remains found in them. It must have smelt wonderful, which was probably a good thing, as I can't imagine anything else did, mainly because between the bed and the dresser, set in the floor, is a pit in which they stored rotting limpets that apparently make excellent fish bait! The inhabitants dumped all their rubbish above the village, which must have added to the smell, although each house had indoor plumbing for human waste!

The most impressive piece of furniture in this 5,000-year-old home is the dresser in front of which is set a large quern for grinding seed into flour.



The arrows point at the dresser in the room above and on the plan below



There are five separate houses off the main access passageway. The floor area of each house averages 35 square yards, half the size of an average two-bedroom house today. The supporting beams of the roofs were ribs from stranded whale, and then turfed over and held in place with ropes woven from heather and bracken. Trees do not grow in the Orkneys because of the cold, but fortunately a few pieces of driftwood from North American forests end up on the islands' beaches. The stone strata exposed along the shoreline breaks up into thick slabs, ideal for building homes, furniture and standing-stone circles.



Four-year-old 'Lucy' could walk upright through the passageway

The fuel burnt in the hearth was dried seaweed, heather, bracken, animal dung or bog peat. Wood would have been too precious to use as fuel. It seems that the refuse that covered the village also acted as weatherproofing against the bitterly cold gales that howl around the Orkney Isles in the winter.



Skara Brae double bed

The village was continuously occupied for 600 years between 3,100 BC and 2,500 BC. About halfway through this period it seems to have been rebuilt in a general upgrading of living conditions with larger accommodation. When the village was first built 5,000 years ago it was much further from the shoreline as a freshwater lock and a dune separated it from the sea beach, making it a very attractive place to live. The houses were designed to provide privacy for each family as the stone doors had slots on either side indicating that they could be barred from inside to stop intruders during the night!

Stone tools were made in a separate workshop which I imagine also acted as the *Men's Club* where political decisions could be taken, a sanctuary well away from the women and children! There is no communal room, but that might be because the workshop served that purpose. The thick walls of the workshop are freestanding, and the floor covered with chips of worked rock. I can imagine the storytelling that went on during the 600 years of long dark winters experienced so far north, not very far south of the Arctic Circle.

The only art found at the Skara Brae settlement were some 5,000 year old rhombuses incised on stone. The amazing thing is that they are incredibly similar to the 77,000 years old art discovered at Blombos in South Africa.

One at the top of the world, the other at the bottom.



Carving from 'Skara Brae', 5,000 years old



'Blombos', 77,000 years old carving on red ochre

The mean temperature was at least two degrees higher 5,000 years ago so the Orkney farmers were able to grow wheat and barley to harvest and grind for flour. They kept cows, pigs, sheep and goats for meat, as well as catching cod, lobster and crab, collecting mussels and oysters and harpooning seal and deer. They had eggs from seabirds and snared duck and obtained salt by evaporating seawater. They had plenty of fresh drinking water and milk and in all probability they brewed beer, but they didn't live very long. The average lifespan was only about 25 years, but when they weren't farming they built some astonishing stone circles using gigantic slabs mined from the exposed coastline. How they moved these slabs several miles inland is still a mystery.



Mammoth hunters in Siberia

We know the German hunter-gatherer Heidelbergensis people walked across a dry English Channel, probably following the mammoths, and then settled in East Anglia some 700,000 years ago. The Neanderthal people arrived in England 200,000 years ago, but both mammal and *Homo* were driven south by the advancing ice 20,000 years ago. England was joined to France until around 7,000 years ago. The Celtic farmers, *Beaker People*, arrived back on our shores in boats some 6,000 years ago and marched north over the centuries, eventually occupying Scotland and then crossing the sea to Orkney 5,000 years ago.

A ten-inch thick band of sediment deposit left in the cliffs of north Scotland is proof of a giant 33-foot high Tsunami wave, the same height as the wave off Sumatra in 2004. It was caused by a massive underwater landslide off the coast of Norway and swept over eastern Scotland 7,800 years ago. Both the Orkneys and Shetland Islands would have been devastated by this marine onslaught, so it was fortunate that the islands were unoccupied at that time!

Orkney surrounds Scapa Flow, one of the largest natural harbours in the world. On the south-west corner of Scapa is the tiny island of Hoy, and as there is a ferry we took the opportunity of going to see the *Dwarfie Stone*. This gigantic rock, into which the Celts mined a tomb chamber, is a 28-foot long sandstone glacial erratic! As you can see in the photograph it is a hands-and-knees job to enter, but once inside, the chamber can take three adults and three

grandchildren with ease as we proved. It was a bit cramped but worth doing!
The stone outside the doorway is the sealing plug.



'Dwarfie Stone', Hoy in Orkney

Maes Howe is buried under a vast round tumulus of earth covered with grass. It is spectacular in its size as you walk towards it, but the full impact of this wonder is not revealed until you crouch-crawl down the 36-foot long passage of flat rectangular slabs, stand up in the chamber and shine your torch on the dry-stone horizontal lines of the walls and up to the corbelled ceiling. We were stunned by the breathtaking simplicity and beauty of the construction.



Maes Howe

The interior of Maes Howe is the finest dry-stone building in Europe with a corbelled roof, dating from around 1,800 BC. The room is 15 foot square and 18 foot high with walls starting to curve in at about ten feet. The three small side chambers each have a massive stone plug to seal them and the entrance passage *a stone door that can be barred from inside!*



Tomb of the Eagle

One of the most intriguing tombs in Orkney is the *Tomb of the Eagle* on South Ronaldsay island, dating back to 3,150 BC. The tomb is a small chamber set into an earth bank running along the cliff edge that falls away some 200 foot to the sea. This photograph was taken during excavation and gives a good view of the interior. Now the tomb has been roofed over to protect it, so you have to lie on a trolley and pull yourself in under the three-foot high doorway. Originally the tomb was covered by a ten-foot high mound that was held in place by a thick retaining stone wall. Once it must have looked very important.



One end of the chamber in the Tomb of the Eagle when excavated

The skulls and bones were stacked in the end chambers and included a collection of beaks and claws of *sea eagles*. They also found 46 different pieces

of pottery, all burnt *after* having been broken. On the floor they found barley seed and thousands of fish bones. Sometime around 2,800 BC the tomb was completely altered, the roof lifted off and stone slabs laid over the previous burials. The tomb was then used for a further 600 years making a total of 1,500 years of burials. It is thought that the dead were exposed in front of the tomb and when the flesh had been stripped by the sea eagles, the bones were collected and placed in the tomb with remains of *sea eagle!*

White-tailed sea eagles are magnificent birds with a wingspan that can exceed six feet, and they must have nested on the cliffs of Orkney in great numbers. It has been suggested that because the human bones were buried with the beaks and claws of sea eagles they could have been the totem of that tribe. Three other tombs have been found with animal remains, one with dogs, another with songbirds and one with cormorants. It seems extremely likely that the eagles played the same role in Orkney as the vultures still do in Nepal.

The discovery of totem animal remains in Orkney tombs causes me to wonder if the various animals depicted in the Chauvet Cave, especially the Horse Panel with auroch, rhino, horses, etc, perhaps were the totem animals of the different clans that used the sanctuary when they met for Coroborees.



Sea Eagle

Before leaving the tomb we crawled to the edge and looked over to see if there were any seals swimming below. Sure enough there were several adults diving for food in the gentle swell running along the edge of the cliff. We whistled to them and watched as three giant heads stared up as they lay back and scanned the cliff top trying to make out where the noise had come from. However, they soon got bored and went back to the business in hand, fishing for crabs!

When a home near the tomb was excavated it revealed another mystery. In the centre of the one-room round house was a carefully constructed rectangular stone sided box that was not a hearth, as there was no sign of fire or residue of charcoal in the bottom. No one had any idea what it was or what purpose it served.

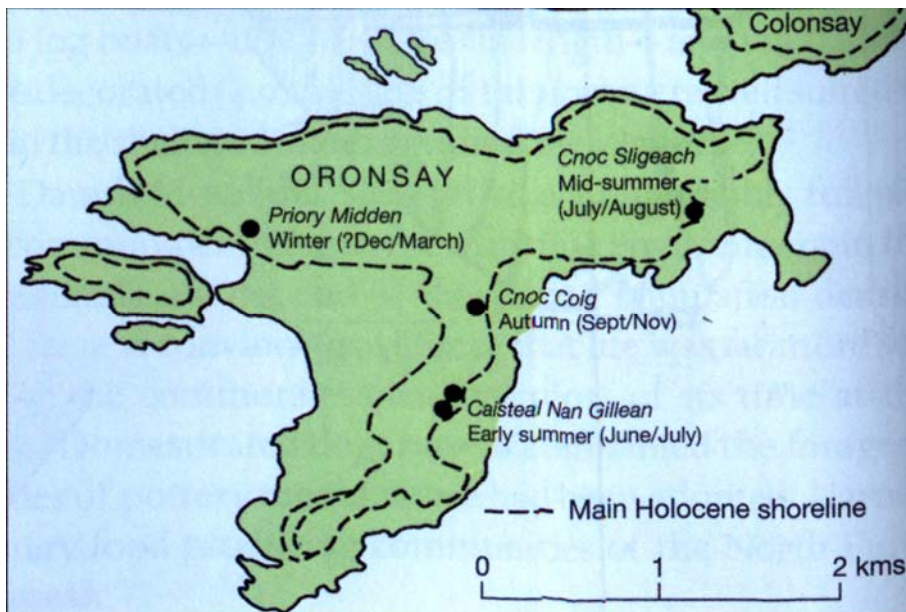


Celtic home near 'Eagle Tomb'

Another mystery turned up outside the house in the form of a large mound of stones that seemed to have been heated in a fire to a very high temperature. Inside the home was a pile of similar-sized stones as the burnt ones found outside, which definitely had not been burnt! This pile was beside a hearth that was on a side wall, rather than in the centre of the room like the hearths in the Skara Brae homes. The *penny dropped* when someone remembered that in the Hebrides the people still cooked their meat in water using red-hot stones to bring it to the boil in iron vessels.

Could this method have been used on Orkney 4,000 years ago? Perhaps large stones would be heated in the side hearth using peat or heather until they were red hot and then lowered into the water in the stone trough. Both peat and heather produce a lot of smoke, so this method of cooking would also stop the home filling with eye-burning fumes. Trials were carried out and it worked! The meat was wrapped in straw and placed in the water that had been brought to the boil using red-hot stones. Occasionally another stone was added to keep the water simmering until the meat was cooked. It took 20 minutes per pound to produce a perfectly-cooked leg of lamb! It is fun to think that if they had their main meal in the evening the hot water would warm the whole home for the coming bitter winter night, in which case these people had the *first hot water central-heating system in Europe!*

On one of our journeys to Scotland we took the *Rubber Duck*, the inflatable sailing dinghy we had used on Lake Geneva. We had been invited to visit some friends who lived on the island of Oronsay, a tiny dot of land between the islands of Mull and Islay on the West Coast. Oronsay can only be reached by crossing a sand causeway at low tide from the Island of Colonsay. I knew that just near the house was an inlet that was believed to have been a Viking harbour (four white dots) and thought it would be fun to sail there. We also wanted to visit an island that seals used as a breeding ground (three white dots). There is a vast tumulus in front of the house (three black dots by four white ones) which has turned out to be a gigantic hunter-gatherer shell midden.



'Oronsay', West Scotland

At the end of the last Ice Age when the ice melted, Scotland rose and the shoreline receded. The map shows five camp sites on the old shoreline (black dashes) that were used by the hunters in turn as the seasons changed.

The middens were found to be composed of huge quantities of mollusc shells including limpet, periwinkle, whelk, oyster, cockle, scallop and razorshell. Fish bones, particularly *gadoid saithe*, were abundant, so must have formed a major part of the diet, because land mammals and birds were scarce.

The ear bones of *gadoid saithe* can be measured and from a study the scientists could tell which months the hunters camped at which site, raising the possibility that the island might have been occupied by a single population moving round the coast as the year progressed. Some of these coastal middens are massive. One in Ireland is 100 yards long and 10 foot high. The shell middens along the Coorong at the mouth of the Murray River in South Australia are the same, unbelievably vast. Our ancestors were very successful beachcombers and loved eating shellfish just as we do today!

CORNWALL

During school holidays I dragged the family to various dolmens (community graveyards) to inspect these incredibly fascinating reminders of our Celtic ancestors that are dotted around the countryside of Britain. Margie was very obliging over this as long as I didn't her to camp in one overnight!



House-hunting during school holidays!

Cornwall is particularly rich and has some of the most evocative stones like those at Mên-an-tol that suggest a strange megalithic ritual. Even today crawling through the stone is meant to cure one of all sorts of ailments.