



On White Horse Hill in Uffington, the South of England

By Linda Baker

As I arrive, ravens curl upward in a spiraling black swirl. The valley falls away beneath me, an endless sea of green and yellow fields. Out of towering clouds, sunlight anoints the countryside, selecting pasture and meadow in turn, to reveal their richness. I lean into the rush of the breeze and look out over the Vale of the White Horse in southern England. As with many of Great Britain's landscapes, this ancient place asks the visitor to quell the manic beat of life, and especially here on White Horse Hill it asks that I bask in the meadow grass, and see if I can't become part of its waving ocean.

Carved into the white chalky earth beneath the green sod, the Uffington White Horse was the totem symbol of the prehistoric people who made their home in this cherished place. Their tribal name has been lost to the ages, but this magnificent 360' long effigy has been ritually maintained through out the years enabling the modern day visitor to envision part of their world.

This is a little visited place. No crowds or busses, only kite flyers and the occasional seeker or two.

The Hill itself is surprisingly steep. Faraway in the distance a train slides through the valley. Nearer by, Dragon Hill with its flat stage-like top looms below. The wheat fields in the valley sway in mesmerizing rhythm. Here I immerse myself in England's vast mystery. Standing on the White Horse Hill next to the 3000 year-old, stylized carving of the mystical horse, I'm not so very far removed from the ancients who honored the power and spirit of this animal.

This White Horse is the only chalk carving to still exist from prehistoric times. Other chalk carvings of antiquity have been lost to time, or have been reconfigured over the years. Six other chalk horses in neighboring Wiltshire represent the horse as a figure of strength and power. These carvings date from the late 1700s into the early 1800s. An ancient carving of a horse with a crescent moon on the end of its tail was lost in one of these reconfiguring episodes. The Uffington hill figure retains its prehistoric form.

Linda Baker, of [Sacred Sites Tours](#), is insanely fond of maps and greatly enjoys working with Donna Niles to organize and organize and lead tours to sacred sites in [England](#) and [Scotland](#).

Linda is widely read in archaeology, history, and has a loving reverence for spirituality. As an ardent proponent of Pilgrimage, Linda takes great pleasure in connecting kindred spirits with the spirits of place.



Nearby there are other important and impressive sites that are as equally enticing. This bit of what is now called England was imbued with sanctity since the retreat of the last ice age some 10,000 or so years ago. Before any prehistoric wooden temple was built, before stone structures were raised, and long before the chalk effigy carvings were made, the land itself was held sacred. The ancient people recognized the spirits of place. They saw life in all things, spiritual purpose in all events. These people began the verbal traditions that have filtered down to us as age-old legends and tales.

A spiritual, earth-honoring people continued to thrive here for the thousands of years preceding our written history. These sacred hills and the surrounding area abound with evidence of their ritual sites. And I explore as I walk along an ancient sun-dappled track known as the Ridgeway.

In prehistoric times the lower landscapes were densely covered in brush and were difficult to penetrate, while the tops of hills, less overgrown, allowed animals to make their way across the countryside. Following these migratory paths came the hunter/gatherer folk who, in turn, established seasonal encampments along the path. The Ridgeway path has been in use for about 10,000 years.

Over the span of the years, the various sites along the path would be remembered for the events that took place in the lives of the tribe. Perhaps the place of the prophetic dream, or the place of a prolific hazelnut harvest, or the night of a thousand shooting stars, and so on with other important events. Meaning and purpose of place grew, and were subsequently passed down in tribal lore. Multiplied by generations of experiences and memories, a site's significance could develop great importance. In the lives of the ancients, ritual reverence and elaborated customs evolved in this way.

Through current scientific study, it has been demonstrated that some prehistoric standing stones emit extremely low frequency sound waves. This is sound out of the range of human hearing. Other sites have been shown to emit ultrasound, and higher levels of radiation at varying times. While we do not know the exact significance of these recent findings, they may lead us towards rediscovering certain aspects of ancient knowledge that have been lost. It is readily apparent to many making pilgrimage to these sacred places, that there is an interaction between the seeker and the sought. Subtle energies are at work. In our day, slowing down enough to allow ourselves an opportunity to recognize these forces is sometimes difficult to do, however, when we can do so treasure awaits us.



American culture, regardless of religious affinity, tends to incorporate the concept of the over-all sacrality. That is to say, the larger aspect of the sacred -- The Cosmos, the Universe, That Which is Greater, God, call It what we will. American culture has adopted an acceptance of one big, interlocking concept of sacredness. For other cultures whose ties to the sacred precede the advents of Islam, Christianity and Judaism, there are different concepts in the recognition of that which is held sacred.

In cultures that have their roots in the Goddess or Earth based religions of bygone eras, there is another equally important aspect of the sacred still honored today, that of the Spirit of Place. These genius loci or deus loci are acknowledged as the guardian spirits of a specific place. And they act in that capacity. The spirit of place is the spirit of whom one asks permission to enter a site, and to whom one expresses thanks to when leaving. Moreover, the spirit may extend its welcome and acceptance of the visitor and allow that seeker's particular requests certain consideration. This aspect of the sacred correlates directly to our ancestors' knowledge that all manner of things possess the energy of life and are to be honored accordingly.

One such site with a powerful and gentle spirit of place watching over it is Wayland's Smithy. Located about a half a mile away from White Horse Hill along the Ridgeway it is most appropriate to ask the spirit for permission to enter. Certainly an intriguing name, the Smithy is a 5500 year old chambered temple tomb, used by the ancients to venerate their ancestors and celebrate the mysteries of life. The name Wayland is a corruption of Voland, Norse god of the smith and comes to us from around 800 AD in Viking times.

Often erroneously referred to solely as tombs, these particular types of temples are called long barrows and were astronomically aligned to celestial events like the solstice sunsets or positions of the moon's circuit. As the spiritual focal points of the people who built them, these structures contain a central passageway with side chambers in which the bones of the ancestors were placed. The bones of successive generations would be continually added and mixed, and in this way one became literally and symbolically a part of one's ancestors.

Long barrows have a ceremonial forecourt, or stage area, where much of the ritual aspects of life were carried out. Dug from chalky earth and piled into an elongated mound, the length of barrow would gleam white on the horizon reflecting the light from both sun and moon, and may have proclaimed the identity of the tribal group among other things.

As I walk along it becomes apparent that we too, are part of the continuum of reverence, appreciation and awe of that which calls to us, of that which is divine. In a tawny-gold field



of wheat, red poppies grow wildly. Then, with a sudden burst of force, a dun deer crashes out of the thicket ahead and vanishes silently into the adjoining woods. The ravens announce the fact loudly from their widening gyre. A few kind words are exchanged between fellow strangers. The calm returns. And the red poppies nod their heads. It's all timeless. And it would like me to know it.

Among the English fields and the groves, there are other sites, as yet undiscovered. As I walk this ground and pay my visit to great ceremonial places of the ancients, I try always to allow myself to become cognizant of the subtlety of the unseen, and of the spirits of place who patiently wait for all of us, just outside of our established clamor.