

The Goddess in Ireland Tour

summer 2010

by Melanie Battaglia Moir

What can I tell you about the Goddess in Ireland Tour? I can tell you about the places we went, which were vast and varied: from Dublin to Newgrange, Dundalk to Sligo, Roscommon to Liscannor, Killarney, Cork, Kildare, and back to Dublin again. We made a circle around the Emerald Isle. But why? Why did we go to the places we did? What were we looking for? What sort of circle were we really casting?

On the first day, we eight women gathered at the Hill of Tara, meeting with the first of many Goddesses we would encounter. We formed a circle and joined hands. Breathing in the beauty of the land, the sacredness of the ancient site, and the presence of this great Goddess force among us, we sang together and cast our sacred circle. Our adventure was just beginning! We called in divine wisdom, guidance, protection, and above all the love of the Goddess who called us all here, to be together on this pilgrimage.

Traveling through the Irish countryside by means of an eight seater Eurovan, there was just enough space for each of us to have her own seat, and our minimal luggage to be stored in the back of the van. One of only two Americans on the tour, I had intended to travel light, with one suitcase and a large camera bag to keep on my person. Yet I had already obtained an "extra" bag for gifts to bring home to my children and friends, during my one day alone in Dublin before meeting up with the tour. This bag was the last to be loaded into the van each morning, and because it was so light (but not by the end of the journey!), it fell out every time our luggage was unloaded at each new accomodation. In my mind I could only imagine what the six non-American women were thinking about that!

We were, respectively, "the two Americans" (myself and Leslene, from California), "the Aussies" (Sue and Marion), Mary from Yorkshire, Avril from Wales, and our beloved guides, Cheryl and Lana, from Cornwall. Thus be our motley crew! Now, being on a bus with seven strangers, spending roughly twelve hours a day together, for ten days, may seem a bit scary if you've never done this sort of thing before. Which I hadn't, yet I had no reservations about the company I'd be keeping from the moment I saw them standing together at the Dublin airport, awaiting me. This feeling of instant rapport surprised me, yet proved to be true as the hours and then days spread out before us. We were a united traveling clan, and the Goddess just wasn't going to have it any other way!

Now, you probably want to know, specifically, about the Goddesses. There were also the Sheela Na Gigs, who we sought out in earnest. On day one we found Boann, Goddess of the River Boyne. She resides in Newgrange, home of the megalithic burial mounds of the ancient people of Tara. You definitely want to see this place! On day two, we met up with two Goddesses who we would be following, and who would in turn follow us, throughout the tour. These were the Cailleach (She is most commonly known as "The Hag") and Brigid, Ireland's most famous Goddess presence. When I saw the Cailleach's name on our list of stops, my spirit didn't leap out in excitement. I am fond of The Crone, and meet with Her in various forms in my own life, but I was unprepared for just how much I would grow to love and revere Her on this journey. I expected Her to be a dark, harsh presence, more a shadow Goddess bearing death as her hallmark, rather than the life-giving, benevolent guide who I actually encountered, repeatedly. Her wisdom and grace moved me deeply. At each of her sites we were blessed to spend time with her, and there were many, I felt completely held in her loving embrace. She was beautiful! Sitting in her chair, laying on her bed, and communing with her rock overlooking Irish waters that she gazed at daily in her final resting place, I felt she was

my family.

Onto Brigid. What can i say about Brigid that isn't known to any Goddess worshipper who's interested in this part of the world? Her stories and legends are many throughout this green land. We visited Her birthplace in Faughert, Her wells in Brideswell and Liscannor, and more sacred Brigid waters in Kildare. Kildare is also home to Her great cathedral, circa 480! This "religious" site was, and still is, actually a very pagan representation of Brigid. Here we gathered in Her sacred fire pit, where a perpetual flame burned in Her honor, into the 16th century. The story goes that the bishop of the time snuffed out Brigid's flame, hoping to put an end to such pagan practices. What we discovered is that there is an order of nuns, called the Brigidine sisters, who re-lit the flame in the 1980's, and have tended it ever since! These beautiful women keep Brigid alive, her fire never to be extinguished again! We were able to go see the flame, kept safe in Sister Mary's home, not far from the cathedral. This opportunity was a sacred gift we felt so honored to receive. I fell in love with the Brigidine order that day, and just may join their ranks someday!

We spent quite a bit of time with Maeve, Warrior Queen. First in Carrowmore, and then in Rathcrogan. There's so much information about Her floating around in Ireland, it was difficult at times for me to separate Her folklore/tall tales, from her Goddess Herstory. Of course I preferred her Goddess tales! Much of the folktales were ridiculous, extraneous, meant to amuse and entertain. Not the sacred Goddess Warrior Queen Maeve, who I feel close to. This was but a minor issue for me, quickly remedied by communing with her megaliths. Ahh, there you are Maeve!

Allow me to pause with the Goddesses and check in on the tour bus. Three days into the tour it seemed like we had so far to go...five days in it seemed unreal that it was half over...after one week, it was speeding forward like a runaway train. It's all going by way too fast!

Can someone please press pause on this sacred journey? Coming to Ireland was like going to a different planet, but seeking and finding the Goddess in her many forms and faces is like being in another dimension entirely. Being in women only space for ten days was like breathing fresh air for the first time. This was truly living in a sacred circle with other pagans. With each new day we joined hands and sang our hymns of praise to our Goddesses, feeling Her love pour into us. This is the closest thing I have ever experienced to what a Matriarchal community must've felt like. I will treasure these days always.

As the days passed and our personalities emerged more, we grew familiar with one another in a comfortable way. These women truly became my sisterhood. I grew fond of each of them. Being in such close proximity to one another in the van, at the sites, and our shared mealtimes, we were a family for those ten days. We shared conversation, humor, music, stories, truths. Comments from the back of the van: "When's lunch?", "A loo stop, please!", "Are we there yet?", "Sheela sighting!". My favorite was when Marion said, "Look, a theater! Let's go to a film!". I replied, "Yeah, 'cuz we really want to sit MORE, let's do that!". Giddy from that day's time in the van, which was the longest of the entire journey thus far, we all burst out in laughter. As we laughed with, teased, and got to know each other, we also enjoyed one another. At least I did. I hope we stay in touch!

There is one last Goddess who bears mention. Aine, also known as Dinah, Danu, Diana, Demeter. Her sight in Killarney sits in the 'Paps of Anu' mountain peaks, i.e., Aine's breasts. The paps stand up tall, with two cairns placed right in the middle of them: Aine's erect nipples. This Goddess is made manifest in the rising of the earth, straight out of Her fertile soil, in the form of twin mounds. The sight was gorgeous! There was also a very unique statue of this versatile Goddess in town. We happened upon it quite unexpectedly; there she suddenly appeared, tall and regal, standing straight up into the sky, on a random sidewalk, eyes closed, breasts bared, hair coiled into two braid-

like spirals sticking straight out of her head, like antennae reaching out to the Universe. So much inner calm and peace to this proud Goddess. It seemed fitting to close our adventure with Her bidding us adieu.

In closing I'd like to thank Cheryl and Lana for making this tour possible for all of us. I would highly recommend it to any woman seeking a deeper connection with herself and the Goddess, who are all one. "The circle is open, but not unbroken. Merry meet, and merry part, and merry meet again!".