

Aphrodite in the Hebrides

Sally Cunis (March 2000)

I had this mad idea last year (another one!) of travelling in my camper van – known as Aphrodite – the length and breadth of Britain in order to visit Callanish Stone Circle on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. I sometimes get these notions, but the feeling to go to Callanish was so strong, I was unable to resist it.

Having taken every precaution to ensure the smooth running of the vehicle, and packed everything into the van I could possibly think of – from wellies and dowsing rods to organic brown rice and a swimsuit – I set off on the weekend following the eclipse, 15th. August 1999, and made my way gradually up the backbone of England to bonnie Scotland.

Stopovers included Hereford, the Lake District, and Ullapool, from where I was to catch the ferry to Stornaway, but having surprised myself by making very good time, I had a day to spare, and drove almost as far as John O` Groats. I was aiming for a site named “The Hill O` Many Stanes” on the East coast of the Scottish mainland. This is an extraordinary fan shaped formation of approximately twenty-two rows of stones, and covers an area of about one acre. On dowsing the stones, the energy appeared to flow up and down the rows in a continuous, sinuous movement, and to travel in an unbroken wave, a bit like an electrical circuit. I wonder what the purpose of this was? It was very different to anything else I had seen.

I arrived on Lewis the following day, and made my way to the west coast, where my trusty Campsite book told me there was a small site at Siabost. Here I was give a warm welcome by the friendly owners, facilities were extremely good, and even included getting my washing done, dried and folded, and all for £3!

The next day found me at Callanish, only a few minutes drive from the campsite, and although it became quite busy, I did manage to get some dowsing in. This is a most beautiful circle, shaped like a Celtic cross, the circle being formed of thirteen inner stones, with a kist, which, on dowsing, appeared to hold a very strong and positive energy. I had to wait at least an hour for an obsessed Japanese tourist to get himself up out of the kist where he`d been lying so that I could check it out! The site linked in to two other, less visited stone circles, in the near vicinity, with some powerful lines which flowed between them. As the site became busier, I decided to go further exploring, and to revisit the Callanish Circle at another and hopefully quieter time. This I did, and one of the highlights of my trip was being there as the sun went down, and the moon came up – magical. My brother and his family (of whom more later), were at Callanish for the actual Eclipse, and found the whole experience to be very profound.

The surprise meeting up with my brother and his family, and spending a few days with them, was a welcome break from doing things on my own; we had fun surfing, walking, cooking up huge meals to share, watching for the northern lights on the advice of a local farmer (I think I saw them at four o`clock one morning, but they were very hazy and indefinite). Cows woke us up first thing in the morning whilst we were camped above Europaidh Beach at the Butt of Lewis, by rocking the van, rubbing themselves against it to cure their itchy skins - I thought this was all rather cute until I got up to

find cow pats of enormous dimensions all around the van, and the van covered from one end to the other in a not very attractive shade of cow pat brown!

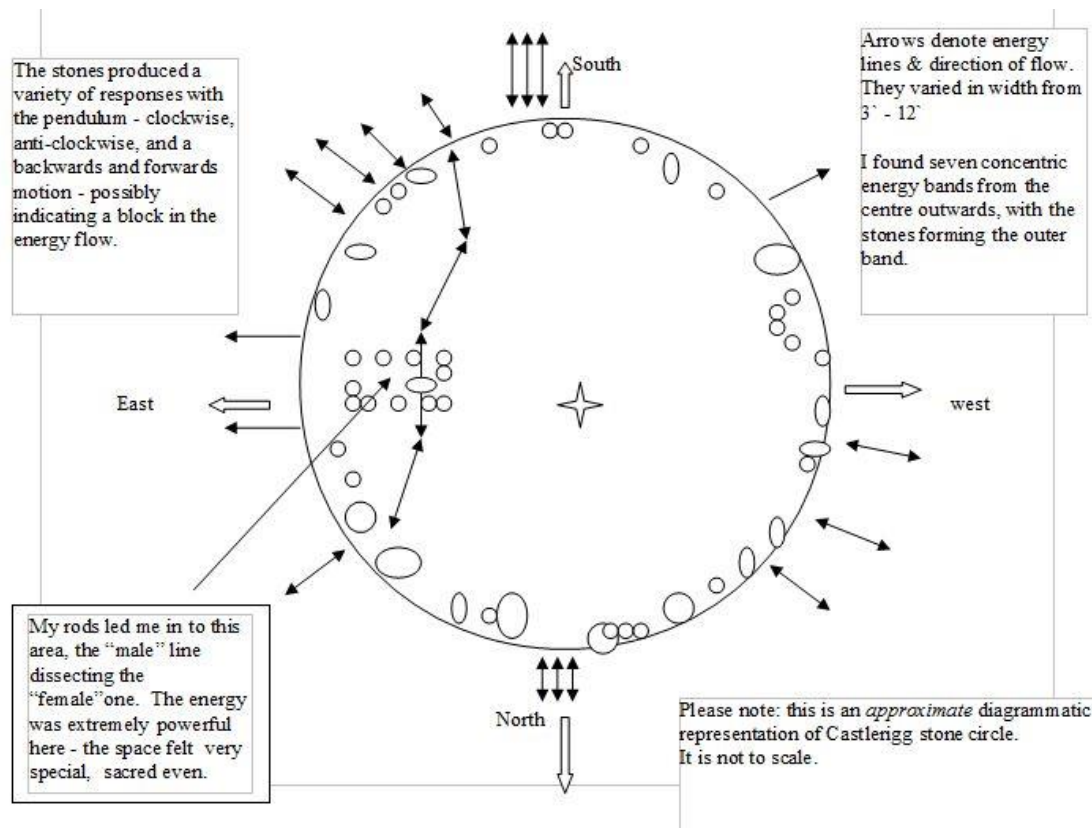
The children helped me prepare huge pots of warm and nourishing soup for their surfing obsessed parents, Tom aged two busying himself by carrying scrubbed vegetables from his sister to me. Francesca prepared all the vegetables, then painted her toenails with my best nail polish, I`m not sure how much nail polish found its way into the soup.

The Hebrides have a magical quality all their own - wild expanses of moorland, few trees, birds and sheep galore, stacks of peat drying by the roadside, wild flowers, silver seas and misty clouds. Wonderful colours reflected in the skilled work of the Harris Tweed weavers. I couldn`t resist buying a length or so, and, talking to a local weaver, was saddened to hear that the industry had suffered, with only 400 out of a former 2000 people still practising this ancient craft.

Over the sea to Skye, then. More wonderful awe-inspiring scenery. I walked in the mountains above the clouds, I saw flocks of birds all diving into the sea together, I took a boat from Dunvegan Castle, and communed with the seals. Their wide eyed gaze as we motored gently past them is a sight I shall never forget. I found standing stones to dowses, ancient churches, ruined villages, and museums depicting a way of life forever gone.

My homeward journey took me through Loch Lomond and Glencoe, where I stopped again for an overnight camp. Imagine my amazement when I heard my name being called, to find my brother behind me! My timing was immaculate - their kettle was already on, and I had arrived in time for Francesca`s birthday tea - Gina had even made an exotic chocolate cake which was ablaze with candles. (Their van is more up-market than mine, it has an oven and a shower!)

I travelled on the next day. I had a deadline to meet, as Devon Dowsers were to be meeting at Avebury on the following Saturday, and I very much wanted to spend some time at Castlerigg stone circle in the Lake District. It`s a popular place, but I did manage to get the occasional moment to myself. The setting is marvellous, with a stunning backdrop of hills and mountains, and the "feel" of the place was good. I spent almost an entire day dowsing there; inevitably there was some interest shown in what I was doing by various visitors to the site, one of whom had never dowsed before, but on being handed my rods, proved to be an amazing dowser, and went away a bit puzzled, but fired up by this new discovery of himself!



I made it in time to Avebury, meeting up with friends after the long travelling was wonderful, but I will leave it to someone else to tell you about that particular day, and about the crop circles.....

Space will not allow for more details of my epic trip to the Hebrides, so to finish, I will just say that although it is a long way to travel, it was worth every mile. I was quite proud that I'd done it, I was touched and humbled by the lovely Hebridean people, and more than grateful for the opportunity to visit such magical isles. Callanish, and the other sites I visited, more than lived up to my expectations. The whole thing was such an adventure, and perhaps there was as much an inner journey as the outer one!

Now where shall I go next? I think it will have to be the Orkneys ... and ...

