

IONA JOURNEY...

By Siobán Áine Lanigan

I was surprised that the night sky could hold so many stars! Despite the cold, one could not resist standing and gazing upward immersed in awe. We walked beneath that unique beauty on our way to evening Rùn on Iona.



After Rùn¹ the clouds had returned to hide the night sky's beauty but the morning Rùn walk was again blessed with a star filled sky; two shooting stars streaked across the heavens, as if declaring that there is so much more beauty in this wild world than we could ever imagine. These shooting stars were a trifle, gifted to bless my morning way.

It is impossible to speak of Iona without reference to her weather. Weather does not happen on Iona, it is part of who she is. The wind rattles the roof tiles and is so constant that if it ceases everyone stops in astonishment. Her wild Atlantic sea would not be what it is, without her weather, and even when it looks calm that sea can rise and threaten the small boat you journey in, while you hope you can still your insides; for nothing else is still. But that sea tossed journey yields yet another beauty of the wild world; caves which inspire symphonies and creatures as old as your soul.

Iona is not a place you visit, it is a journey your soul makes and you attend; if you are wise and lucky enough to notice the invitation.

*The wind was behind our back on the way to Rùn and then I understood, really understood, the Irish blessing of *May the Wind be always at your back!* But sometimes it blew with such strength, that I could only trot along giggling with the futility of resistance. When returning it literally blocked my path and blew my friend and I off to the side, as if we were no more than light leaves in a spring wind. I began to fancy that people of the island developed a unique muscular structure so that they could walk in the wild winds of Iona. I was sure they had adapted to being constantly wet and I vowed to do the same.*

If you listen and watch Iona, you learn you can move more freely if you let her speak to you of her weather, her wishes and her wisdom. Her rocks and caves will shelter you from the storms' lashing rain and hail; her beaches scatter gifts before you, her hills show you the wild and beautiful world before you and her wells give you blessing waters.

¹ The regular meditative practice in the Céile Dé Tradition. Rùn means at once; Love, Secret / Mystery and meditation.

Marion and I set out early for Port Ban because I had to travel slowly with the boot cast. We had shared lunch in silence and the walk was the same, save for when we debated whether to turn around as Iona's wind and rain whipped in our face, and through the supposedly water-proof pants I wore. The western side of the island is less travelled and I could more easily feel the energies in the land and the sea. In searching for Port Ban, we looked at a few coves but Marion, sure it was further ahead, led us on. When we arrived, there was no doubt for the land spoke her own name.

Fionn, Mairi and Joanie led the others and we met at Port Ban. All of us climbed inside a cave made when some very large rocks fell long ago and locked into place, crafting a tall cave; one side is one rock leaning into another. The Rock has been cataloged to be amongst the oldest rock in the world; it was as if we sat inside the Womb of the World. We sang Fuinn, of course, and did a "Rùnnette", as Fionn is fond of calling it. The next day, the group set out for Columba's beach and I could not go with my injured foot; the way was too treacherous. No matter, for I returned to the Womb of the World and did Rùn there at the same time the group did Rùn in the Termon of Sligneach.

When I traveled back to Port Ban, I understood Iona's afternoon moods a bit more. This time, I waited until after she had her early afternoon bluster. I was ready at 1:30 but I waited and she howled and her winds whipped the rain; and I knew it cut as if it were hail. I waited; for I had remembered.

We sang Fuinn in St Oran's chapel; and, late at night, under a full moon I did a private Rùn there. Moon lit walks on Iona were like silent sojourns of the soul.

The week before the retreat, I met Iona and lived with her while I still worked my job through the wonders of the technical world. We had more sun that week, but I also honored her weather patterns more easily because I had no exact times I needed to keep. On a day, the weather portended best, I climbed Dùn I (pronounced doon ee); the sun blessed most of the trip. When I reached the top, there was a rain cloud moving in from the northeast but I sat and did the paidirean I had planned. The rain did not come and in fact, the cloud seemed to wisp apart and travel a reverse of its original path. I waited on the top while other visitors attended the Well of Eternal Youth. Then I traveled to the well which was filled with tiny green plants, perhaps of the Trefoil family. They had multiple layers of green leaves and floated like little green roses in the waters of the well. I respectfully and gratefully collected some water for myself and friends.

A-top Dùn I, there is a ancient Cairn and you can see a panorama of all the islands around Iona.





When I wandered to the monks white strand, I had not yet learned of Iona's weather. I sheltered in some rock and sang a Fonn and when the rain had abated, I collected wonderful gifts along the strand. But the way back was through hail and the wind and weather soaked me to the bone. I traveled the shortest path that I could find, and met a beautiful and very large horse in a field; I was glad she ignored me; she seemed determined to face off the wind I bowed my head to.

What brought me and the others to Iona is sacred and what we shared and experienced there cannot be spoken. So the main journey remains the mystery it is meant to be. But my heart is filled with the gifts Fionn laid before us. And I find within me something new and precious and my practice is enriched.

May we all soon journey to Iona once again.

May her blessings live and grow within our soul. And

May we bless the earth and all who walk her precious body,

with Iona's Love.

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