

the sibley mazes



On Sunday, June 8, 2003, OBOD¹ Druids and Bards Michael R. Gorman, Rodney Karr, Susa M. Black, Michael Black, Jim Bianchi, and Rene Lopez² visited three of the mysterious complex of mazes located inside the remains of a ten million year old volcano in the 660 acre Robert Sibley Volcanic Regional Preserve in Oakland, California. The day we visited was chilly and windy, with the infamous San Francisco Bay fog rolling in and brushing the landscape with muted colors.

¹ Order of Bards, Ovates, and Druids

² Members of Sacramento Grove of the Oak, Manannan Mac Lir Grove, and Doire Bhrighid Seed Group

The Geology

The highest peak in the Oakland Hills, *Round Top* (elevation 1,763 feet), overlooks the remains of the lava and volcanic debris where the sedimentary rocks of the *Orinda Formation* have eroded away. The seismically active Hayward and Moraga faults uplifted the Berkeley and Oakland hills, folding and tilting the rock formations, whose striations are easily visible where the rock faces are cut. “The folding and erosion have exposed a cross section of a great volcano, right down to its roots, providing an unsurpassed outdoor laboratory for the study of volcanism in the Central Coast Ranges”.³

Botany

Sibley Park is host to a variety of species, including native grasses, ferns, Queen Anne’s Lace, Foxglove, and California Live Oak and Laurel trees.



Windswept California Live Oak



White Foxglove

The History of the Mazes

Who constructed the mazes? No one knows for sure, not even the rangers of the East Bay Regional Park District. No one is even sure when they first appeared, but they have been visited regularly since the 1980’s. There are at least five of them, although mysterious mazes have been known to appear and disappear in the hidden hollows and crevices of the hilly grass covered terrain. Reports of people dressed strangely chanting under the full moonlight have also been reported. Local residents claim apprehensively that they were built by “witches and warlocks.”⁴ One of the mazes was built in 1989 by Helena Mazzariello, a local Montclair psychic and sculptor. She does not know who built the others.

³ See <http://www.ebparks.org/parks/sibley.htm> for the complete article, including map and contact number

⁴ Kevin Fagan, Chronicle, 9/6/99, See <http://www.joyfulspirit.com/maze.htm> for the complete article.

Whoever built them, the mazes are a favorite gathering place for many groups of people - local walkers and hikers, tourists, dog-walkers, horse riders, bicyclers, curiosity seekers, miracle seekers, geologists, students, families, religious groups, New Age and spiritual groups, Pagans, Druids and Witches. To many people the mazes are a spiritual, mystical magnet that draws them back again and again. Travelers fall silent as they walk between the stones, and no one dares to cross over the stone lines of the path. Some have claimed that the labyrinthine walk rids them of chronic pain, depression, and migraines. Nobody knows for sure who tends the mazes, but the debris is cleared away and the rocky paths are maintained. Offerings by seekers are left in the central altar space of the mazes, and periodically removed.

The mazes are classic labyrinths of a single path, winding into the center and out again. The pathways are lined in local rocks and stones, the dirt path worn by many feet. I have only found three of the main mazes, although I have searched diligently for the others. (Once, a friend led me to a small maze of bramble hidden deep in one of the narrow glens, but I never found it again.)

The two largest mazes are about 50 and 100 feet across, and duplicate the classic Cretan maze, as shown on the ancient Cretan coin (1250 BC), a pattern found in many cultures across the world.⁵



The largest maze is set down in an abandoned quarry pit, with a long road curving down. Grazing cattle are often met on the way. The second maze is set in the hill above. The heart shaped maze is nestled in a steep canyon at the end of a rocky road. Perhaps you can discover the other mazes.

What are they used for?

I have visited the mazes alone and with friends for years. Those who are sensitive can feel the power, the force field, energy, or chi emanating from the dormant volcanic area, and focused within the mazes themselves. Wherever there is seismic activity, the earth forces are strong. These forces were sculpted into an ancient pattern by anonymous labyrinthine architects, who understood the local ley lines and placed these earthworks according to the earth's own internal energy pattern. The results are astonishing, disorienting and sometimes even disturbing.

Many people go to pray, on a walking pilgrimage, a spiritual journey of cleansing and purification. Labyrinths have been used as prayer walks since before the advent of Christianity. The Notre Dame Cathedral, in Chartres, France, has a square labyrinth built over an ancient Druid Grove. It was said that to walk that maze in penitence was the equivalent of a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. In San Francisco, across the bay from the Sibley mazes, the Chartres maze is duplicated in Grace Cathedral. I have walked that maze as well.

⁵ For full article on Cretan Mazes, see Joe Edkins website: <http://www.gwydir.demon.co.uk/jo/maze>

The Cretan maze is an older pattern than the one found at Chartres. It is round, Lunar, womb-like and feminine, the path of the Goddess.

A Druid's Perspective

The extraordinary thing about the mazes is that they exist on many levels and are aligned with the spirit of all religions, so that every seeker finds a resonance with her or his own spiritual tradition in this holy place. The mazes whisper to us in our own language and frame of reference so that they validate the sacred path of everyone who comes here. People of all faiths share this hallowed site in love, understanding, and respect.

After “graduating” my Druid level, I spent the day in Sibley walking meditatively through the mazes as I reviewed my three years of study with OBOD. To me, they resonate with the magic of Druidism. I experienced the three labyrinths as reflecting the three levels of my Order - Bard, Ovate, and Druid, and their sacred names occurred to me in the old language - Gaelic. I spent the day in a walking visualization, and imagined them as the sacred earthworks of an ancient Druid village. Or perhaps I was walking in the Otherworld . . .

The Bardic Maze

The Bardic Maze is the largest, about 100 feet across, set deep within an abandoned quarry. During the rainy winter, the maze often turns into a swamp and lies fallow until the water drains. There are often cattle grazing, and I've spotted rabbits as well. Bird calls resonate throughout the park, and the wind whistles through the trees and bends the grasses.



The Bardic Maze

I call this maze *Cuartan Mor*⁶, the Great Maze, and visualize it as a community gathering place, with a line of people snaking down the curving path with their flaring torches held high. The folk gather round the periphery of the maze as the Chief Bard slowly walks the winding path toward the center, chanting ancient lyrics to the bell like tones of the wire harpers playing around the edges. In the center of the maze, the Chief Bard pours a libation from the sacred well onto the altar stone. He asks the blessing of the Gods on the community, and there is total silence before he slowly and majestically winds his way out again. Then the harpers play as each villager in turn takes the contemplative walk to the center of the maze and out again. The Chief Bard has retreated to an oaken grove to regale the revelers with ancient tribal stories.

The Ovate's Maze

The Ovate's Maze is hard to find. It is hidden in a narrow gorge deep in the hills. On this auspicious day, the fog swirled in and curled against the rocks, creating eddies so visceral that we saw images – a whitened skull, a long somber face with white beard and hair. Odd and ghostly things have been known to appear and disappear in this eerie spade-shaped maze. As an Ovate, I saw it as a phallic symbol, with a stream of light, or life, winding its way from the head back up the gorge toward the sun.



The Ovate's Maze



Rodney, Michael G, and Renee

This maze, I call *Cuartan na Fàidh*, the Maze of the Seer. It is here in this crevice between two hills, with the fog rolling in, that we are truly between the worlds. It is eternal *Samhain* in this eldritch place, and the Older Gods walk here. As an Ovate, I have often come to this spot to talk to my ancestors, divine with ogham and rune, petition for a healing, or wisdom. I

⁶ "Great Maze" (Scots Gaelic) Note: These are my own personal names for these mazes and are not their official or popular names.

commence my journey here if I want to travel the Other World where time knows no set boundaries. Often time is uneven in this maze, and what seems a short time, extends for hours, or hours pass in moments. It is place some people avoid, and others would not care to visit alone.

Druid's Maze

This is a smaller, more intimate Cretan style maze than the great Bardic Maze. It is situated high in the hills overlooking the quarry. There is a serenity and simplicity to this fifty foot labyrinth that lends itself to quiet contemplation.



Renee and Susa walk the maze

This maze, which I call *Cuartan na Drùidh*⁷ is a place of council where the Fellowship of Druids can meet. The long rocky journey clears their minds and prepares them for the deep and important work that they must do. The labyrinth purifies them from their mundane concerns and opens the way for *Awen* or spirit and inspiration. This is the sunniest of the mazes, and on a clear night the stars are close. There is wisdom here, if you listen to the wind.

⁷ Maze of the Druid (Scots Gaelic)

Bibliography

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Web Resources:

Sibley Park Maze:

Regional Parks Online: <http://www.ebparks.org/parks/sibley.htm>

Joyful Spirit Resources: <http://www.joyfulspirit.com/maze.htm>

Grace Cathedral (San Francisco) Labyrinth:

Veriditas (Grace Cathedral Labyrinth Project): <http://www.gracecathedral.org/labyrinth/index.shtml>

Glastonbury Tor, Somerset, England:

<http://www.glastonburytor.org.uk>

<http://www.crystalinks.com/glastonburytor.html>

http://www.glastonbury.co.uk/visitors/tor_main.html

Druid Sites:

Order of Bards Ovates and Druids: <http://druidry.org>

Northern California OBOD Druid Groves and Seed Groups:

Sacramento Grove of the Oak: <http://www.groveoftheoak.org>

Manannan Mac Lir Grove: <http://www.druidry-sf.org>

Doire Bhrighid: <http://doirebhrighid.net>

Mazes:

Joe Edkin's Maze Page: <http://www.gwydir.demon.co.uk/jo/maze>

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Druids Susa, Michael and Rodney



Bards Michael, Renee and Jim