Sacred Geography:
Sitting With Stones and Trees

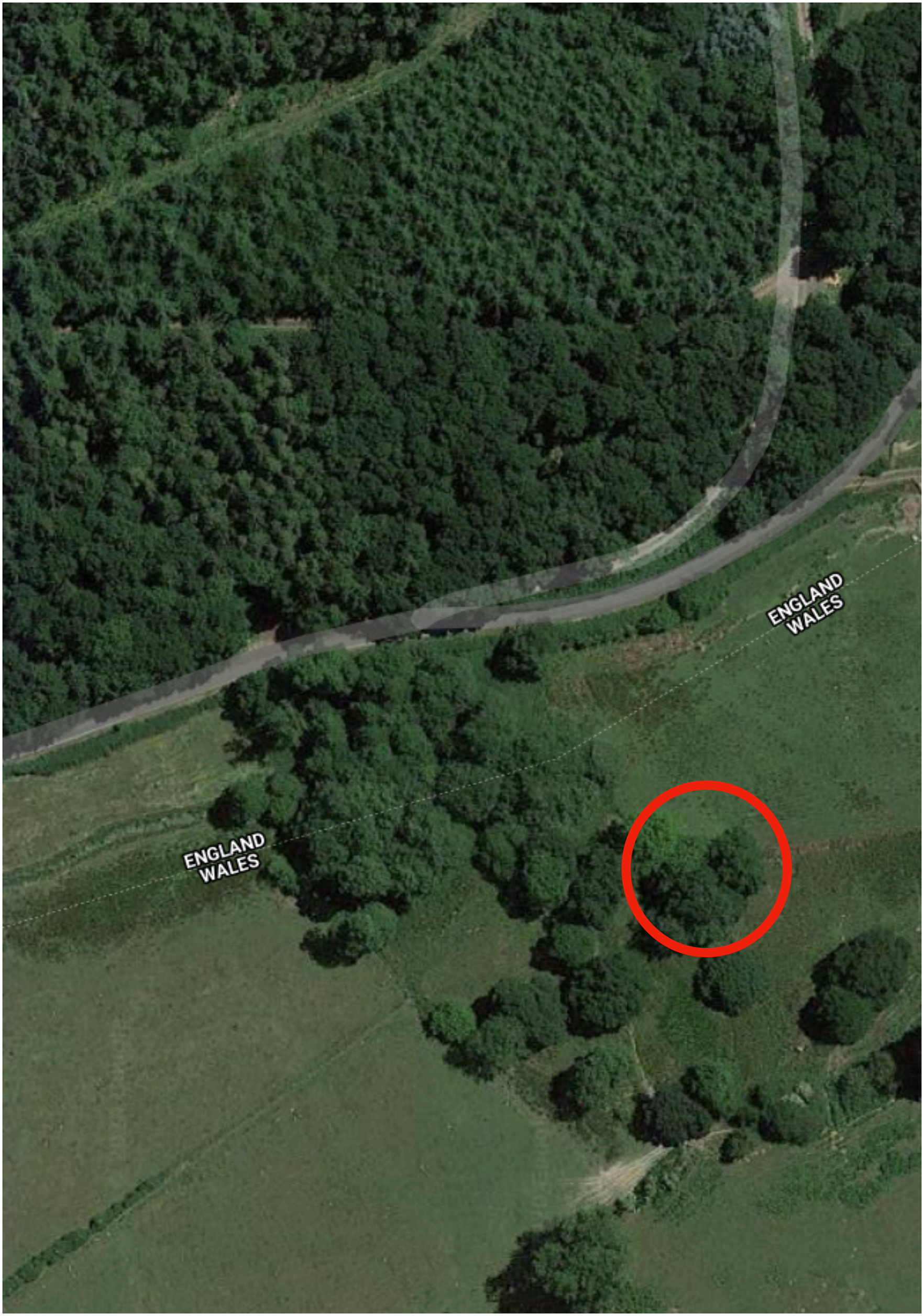




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Topos and Chora

- "…the Greeks had two terms for place, *topos* and *chora*. *Topos* signifies a simple location, the physical, observable features of a locale. *Chora*, however, refers to the more subtle aspects of place, those that can trigger memory, imagination, and mythic presence" (Devereux, Krippner, Tartz & Fish, 2016, p. 412).

- What are these subtle aspects of place? Forces? Spirits?









Biodiversity and Psychodiversity

- When you get into the bog you realise that it is a rich and diverse habitat.

- The complex interactions between different kinds of minds - plants, insects, birds, rodents, humans - constitute the ‘psychosphere’ of the place.

- The ‘character’ of the place is relational - a combination of factors - the weather, the flora and fauna, the rocks, the water, the bog…

- But it is not explicitly the bog that caught my attention.







Are all stones alive?

- “I once asked an old man: Are *all* the stones we see about us here alive? He reflected for a long while and then replied, ‘No! But *some* are.’…”

- “The Ojibwa do not perceive stones in general as animate any more than we do. The crucial test is experience…”

- This rock ‘spoke’ to me. Called me over. Invited me to investigate.





Features

- Threshold - stream.
- Wern Ddu - ‘Black Bog’ - Liminal.
- Oak and Ash - Faeries - ‘Ash, Oak and Thorn.’
- On the border between Wales and England.
- Distinctively positioned stone.







Named Places

- “A landscape is a series of named locales, a set of relational places linked by paths, movements and narratives. It is a ‘natural’ topography perspectivally linked to the existential Being of the body in societal space.”

  (Tilley, 1994, p. 34).

- Pwll y Meirch Bach?

- Association of horses in the Mabinogion - highest status animals, magical animals (Garlick, 2011).

- Celtic water horses, e.g. Kelpie?



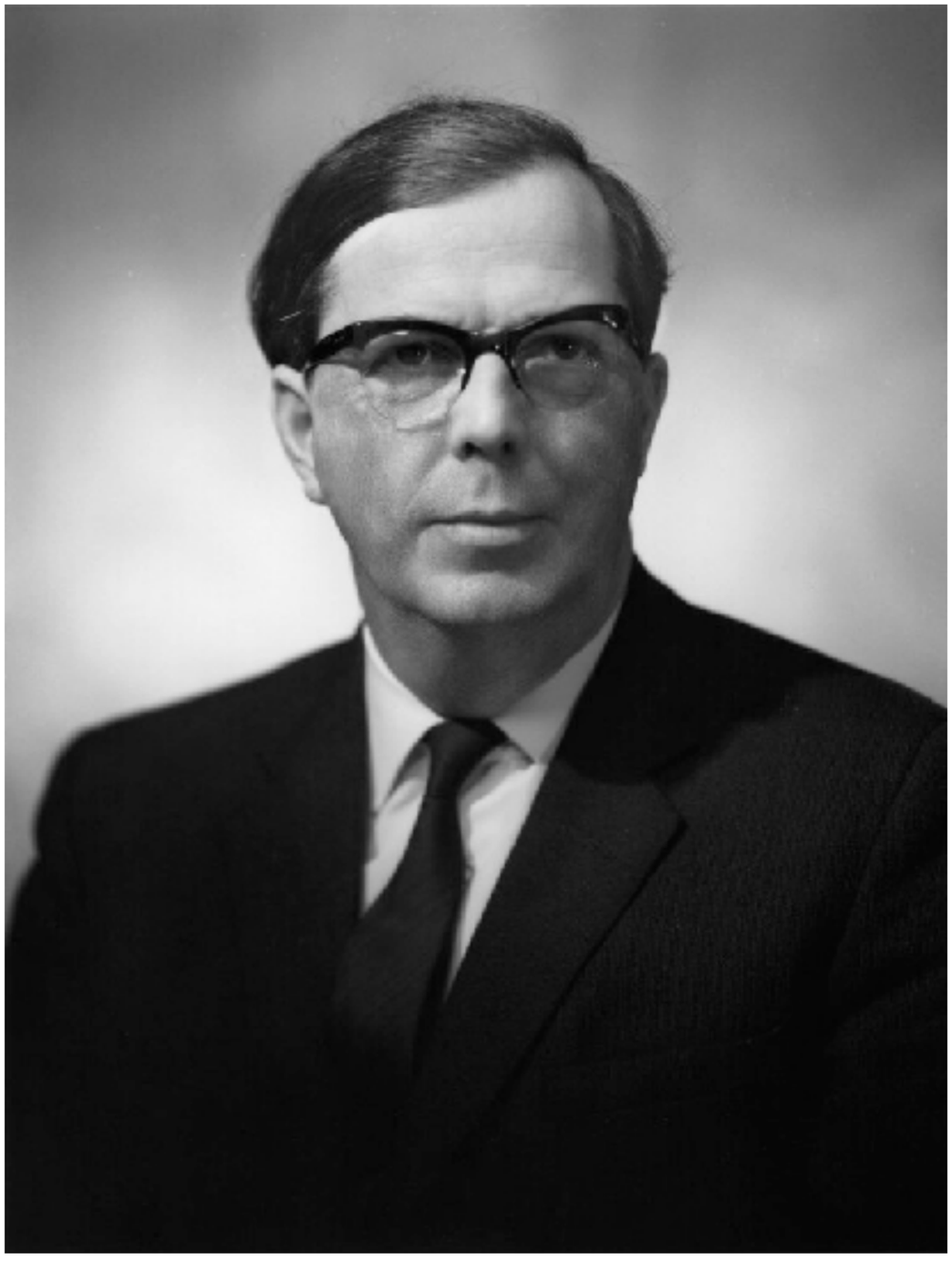


Fairies in the Tanat Valley?

- Cledwyn Hughes - *A Wanderer in North Wales* (1949).

- “For a long time the fairies have lived with the Welsh. And perhaps with a greater love for the north of the country. Where there are none of the great cities of the industrial south…”

- “…the mountains and lakes and bogs of the North are the places which the Little Folk haunt now. Coming sometimes to upland farms, or seen by some late traveller in the moonlight” (Hughes, 1949, pp. 12-13).



The Tanat Valley

- “In the valley of the Tanat is Llanrhaiadr yn Mochnant, with its rush of waterfall….In this valley, too, is Llangynog, in shadow of the Berwyn mountains…”

- “The bleak Berwyn mountains with the Pennant Glen, famous as the haunt of the fairies. And the Hounds of Hell haunt and hunt these mountains…” (Hughes, 1949, p. 23).

- CPAT: “It is little surprise that the dramatic landscape of the Tanat Valley has inspired numerous legends involving dragons, giant's, serpents, fairies brigands, princes and saints…”

- “Mischievous fairies were said to haunt Craig Rhiwarth, a spot which it was said should be 'avoided at all costs’” (https://www.cpat.org.uk/projects/longer/histland/tanat/tnfunera.htm).

- The folklore of the region suggests that there could be ‘fairy places’ in the landscape.





Perspectivism

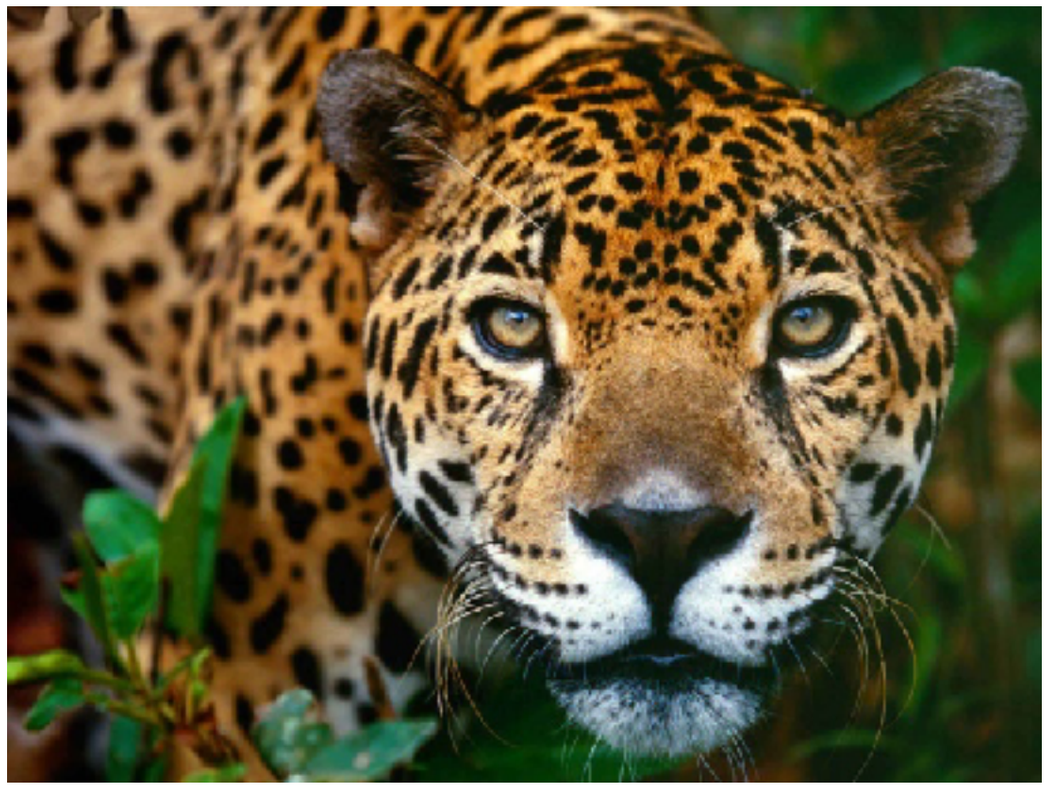
- Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998).

- “…the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view…”

- “Typically…humans see humans as humans, animals as animals and spirits (if they see them) as spirits; however animals (predators) and spirits see humans as animals (as prey) to the same extent that animals (as prey) see humans as spirits or as animals (predators)…

- “By the same token animals and spirits see themselves as humans: they perceive themselves as (or become) anthropomorphic beings when they are in their own houses or villages and they experience their own habits and characteristics as a form of culture…” (Viveiros de Castro, 1998, in Lambek, 2006, pp. 307-308).











Participating in Landscape

- But, we are invited to participate in the non-human landscape.

- “Greek places - gardens and grottoes or meadows in the landscape - that allowed the presence of gods and invited encounters with them, permitted mortals to cross over the limits to the netherworld, something forbidden to most mortals…” (Conan, 2007, p. 7).

- An opportunity to sit and think in this place, to be a part of it for a while.

- “…the twenty-first century calls for a newer and more flexible definition of pilgrimage, namely ‘undertaking a journey that is redolent with meaning’” (Digance, 2006, p. 36).







Conclusions

- How much do we bring to the places we visit and interact with - culture, stories, pre-conceived ideas…?

- There is a complex relationship between folklore, ecology and landscape (Hunter, 2020).

- I had no revelation or hierophany, and yet the place continues to speak to me.

- Who is the site sacred to? From whose perspective? Most of the time it is thoroughly ‘non-human.’

- Dialogue with rocks can take a long time.

- The mystery remains.

- Invites further conversations.



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