

A photograph of four women in white, flowing dresses standing in a circle in a forest. They are holding hands and looking upwards. The forest is filled with tall, thin trees and several large, upright standing stones. The lighting is soft and natural, suggesting dusk or dawn. The overall mood is ethereal and mystical.

FAERIES *and* STANDING STONES

by John Kruse

Photography by
DARJA BILYK PHOTOGRAPHY

Faeries and Standing Stones

John Kruse

The stone circle of Craigh na Dun is a vital feature of the *Outlander* series. It's the portal through which Claire Fraser and Geillis Duncan travel from modern times to the 1740s. It's also a symbol of the magic and power that always attach themselves to ancient sites.

There's a very longstanding link between the faeries and barrows and megaliths, not just in Britain but across Europe. For example, in Cornwall, spriggans are said to be found only near cairns, cromlechs, barrows, and stones. People have often explained these mysterious monuments by linking them to faeries. It may just have been a name—in Scotland there is a cairn called the Fairy Hill at Clunemore, Blair Atholl; a barrow in Caithness is called the Fairy Hillock; and on Orkney is the Fairy Knowe—but very often the faeries were seen as being more actively involved in the making of a site. In Brittany, the Champs les Roches stone rows were made by faeries dumping stones they had been carrying, and a passage grave at Coat Menez Guen bears the marks of the fairy builders' fingers on two of its stones.

In fact, faeries are linked in many ways to ancient stones:

- *Music and dancing:* At Athgreany stone circle in County Wicklow the faeries play their pipes at midnight. The faeries were known to dance on top of both Cauldon Low and Long Low in Staffordshire, the latter on Christmas Eve. Many ancient tumuli in Scotland and England too are noted as "music barrows" where, if you sit at midday, you will hear fairy music within.
- *Healing:* At the unusual holed stone at Men an Tol, Cornwall, the resident pisky cured sick children who were passed through the stone. At Farrangloagh, County Meath, two standing stones were consulted whenever a person was thought to have been enchanted by the faeries.
- *Dwellings under stones:* Most commonly, ancient stones are where the faes live. Passage graves are dwellings themselves. For example, a Cornish fogou near Constantine was called "the pixie house," and in Ireland several stone circles are classified as *lios*, or fairy forts. Equally, the stones might act as a portal to fairyland. The Irish legend is that after the fairy tribe of the Tuatha De Danaan was defeated by invaders, they retreated into an enchanted kingdom beneath raths and stones, with such places as Newgrange, Dowth, and Knowth in the Boyne Valley now being their abodes. Ancient stones marking the access to fairyland are common throughout the British Isles: A hole or stairs beneath a menhir lead to the fairy realm. Faeries could be contacted at these spots. At a large stone lying at Borough-hill near Frensham, Surrey, locals could knock and ask for whatever they wished to borrow; a fairy voice would then tell them when to return and the item would be there.

- *Dwellings under burial mounds:* In Scotland, particularly, the "people of peace" live beneath "fairy knowes," which are either natural green hillocks or ancient tumuli. These are often seen open at night, with light pouring out and faeries feasting within.

It follows that these sites have magical powers. They can cure, but conversely, in Ireland and Scotland, interfering with or damaging the stones is avoided for fear of fairy revenge. In Ireland, disturbance led to either the crops or the home burning; in the Highlands, people were warned against taking turf or wood from a fairy hill. Similarly, tethering an animal by pinning it down on the knoll was very unpopular with the fairy inhabitants within. It made sense, therefore, to appease the faeries at these ancient sites. At the remains of a tomb called Arthur's Stone on Gower in South Wales, offerings of honey cakes used to be made; offerings of oil and milk were made to *gruagachs* and *glaistigs* at standing stones in the Scottish Highlands.

One last thought: Perhaps the time travel effect of the henge in *Outlander* is related to another aspect of fairyland: the fact that time runs differently there. Entering a fairy hill or stone circle is always perilous because if you are able to return (and you may not), you may find that years or centuries have passed in your absence.

Not only are sites like Craigh na Dun worth visiting for their historical fascination and often stunning landscape settings, then; they are some of the best places for making contact with the faes.

John Kruse is a writer and researcher on fairy lore. He's a member of the Fairy Investigation Society and writes the British faeries blog on WordPress: britishfaeries.wordpress.com.



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