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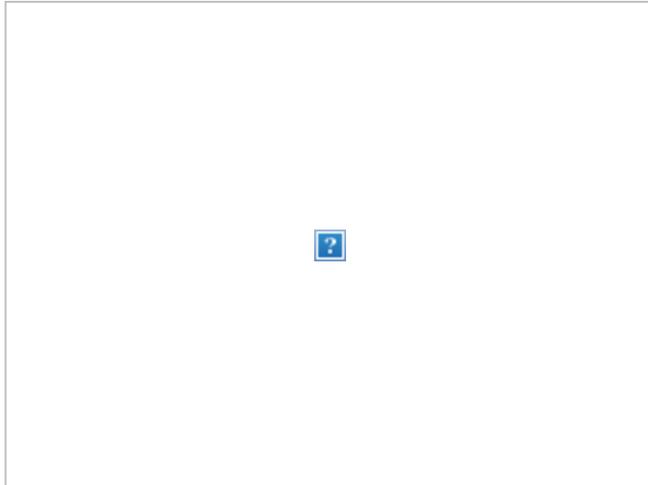


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'Earthing the Spirit'

A five-day festival of spirituality and creativity



Vibrant friends earthing their spirits

THE AIM of this festival was to model a community of the future and to furnish people with creative skills, which would enrich their respective communities. The setting was the Burnlaw Centre in Northumberland, a 45-acre organic small holding which sees its mission in terms of promoting learning, creativity and the soul. Accommodation was mainly camping, with a limited number of bed spaces for less hardy souls. The programme was zoned into morning, afternoon, early evening and late evening. The morning was dedicated to the promotion of wisdom and

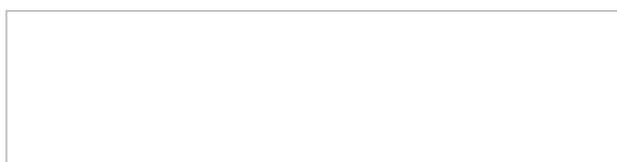
wisdom skills. Roger Prentice ran a Philosophy for Children course. Lorna Silverstein demonstrated how to develop a practical curriculum for children's classes. Rose Villiers-Stuart took people through a meditation course. Ken Finn ran sessions loosely based on Ruhi book 2. Derek Greenbury enabled people to discover the rich wisdom to be found in the holy writings.

The courses ran over the five days, and participants were encouraged to sign up for a whole course. The afternoon was given over to creativity and practicality. There were workshops in drama, dance, circus skills, fire sculpture, singing and drumming. As a balance there was also a group that spent afternoons involved with earthy farm work, stonewalling, ditch-digging and well-clearing. The early evening was given over to more casual drop-in sessions.

There were healing options, Long Obligatory Prayer options and other delights. Later the mood became celebratory. Each evening was themed, the first night witnessed the lighting of the fire and was full of impromptu, live and soul-inspiring music. The second evening was pure reggae, the third a ceilidh. There was a talent night, a story telling session and a fabulous crescendo on the last night. All were invited to participate in an extraordinary procession, and experience a series of performances that expressed the talents and skills developed through the week.

Now this was a heady mix in itself, a glorious cross-referencing scheme of development. But beyond this was all the subtle (and not so subtle) embellishment made by people and place. All contributed to a gathering that hit spiritual gold.

A beautiful decorated geodesic dome had been put up in the woods. This became the focal point of sacred space. Another (very organic) dome, clothed in a colourful parachute was a place where



chi, coffee, music, tuck, and very thick morning porridge could be enjoyed. (The location changed after the wind bounced the dome down the field one morning!) There was a big marquee with hay bales as seats. There were extraordinary fragrant morning devotions. There was the cow shed, renamed the “Big Barn of Happiness” where all sixty souls sat round one long table and ate the food which had been lovingly prepared by various volunteers from the local community.



The “Big Barn of Happiness”

Then there was the physical setting, a beautiful near-wild place verging on England’s last wildernesses. There was its atmosphere, clothed by the rich layers of its spiritual heritage: Catholic, Quaker and now Bahá’í with a dash of Buddhist have all made a shaping contribution. The multicoloured flags that dressed the trees welcomed participants. Big colourful cotton sheets and patterns transformed an average barn into an extraordinary barn. There was an empty mural that invited spontaneous creativity and became increasingly full of colour and reflection as the week progressed.

Behind it all was the vision and energy of the organising team. They produced a loving blend of the chaotic and the practical. They generated such a feel of loving acceptance and encouragement. The yang of their organisation was beautifully complemented by the yin of the participants. Ireland, Scotland, England, Wales, Belgium, Sri Lanka, Persia, Australia and who knows where from came, so too did people of many beliefs. They lived, shared, learnt, gelled and found the paradise of the good pleasure of the Ancient Beauty.

The last night, after the procession of creative happenings, all linked round the final fire, there was yet more song, dance and spiritual trance. We had found the sweetest atmosphere of all...a palpable feeling of that truly inclusive state of a blessed unity in diversity.

For those five days the spirit had been truly earthed. Plans are already afoot for more earthing next year.

Garry Villiers-Stuart

