

It goes without saying that the ancestors are important to Asaturar. We mention them often, raise horns to them in sumbel, and erect family shrines to their memory. All these are good. But perhaps the ultimate ancestral connection comes from making a pilgrimage to where the ancestors lived, to walk where they walked and to see the sun shine on the land they knew.

I recently made such a pilgrimage, and the effects were so profound that I am still processing all that happened. I want to share a little bit of my story with you so that you can do something similar, if you choose.

First, you'll have to do your homework. You can hardly go visit the ancestors if you don't know who they are or where they came from, can you? Some genealogy is in order. Online resources make this much easier than it was even a few years ago. With luck, you can find more in an hour on the web than with days or weeks with older methods of research. A good place to start is <http://www.ancestry.com>, and you can buy software that will give you access to incredible amounts of information.

Once you know who your ancestors were and what city, town or village they called home, you can plan your trip. Try looking for a family web site first, in case there is someone out there already pulling your dispersed clan together. Sheila found ours almost immediately, and we were soon in contact with the Old Country via email. This enabled us to visit living members of the clan, renew ties across the Atlantic, and enhance our knowledge of the family history by listening to the stories of our overseas kin.

When you make the trip, don't try to do too much. Ireland, for example, is a small place. You'd think that you could see the whole island in just a few days - but that's not the way it is; Ireland is a country packed with significant places you won't want to miss. And getting around isn't always as easy as one might think. Remember your focus: the ancestors! Go to the places they lived. Find the earliest known location from which they came, if you can. Visit their graves. Tourist sights are fine to include as well, but don't forget why you're there. The ancestors will repay your attention...

Consider rituals - at graves, at holy spots near places of ancestral homesteads, at the old homesteads themselves. Pour libations to the ancestors. Give them the honor they may well have not been getting of late. If you dare, tell the ancestors you have come to claim your spiritual inheritance, and that you are there to accept what they have to give you. But beware; along with spiritual gifts come obligations. Nothing worthwhile is without price. Great are the mysteries of the kinfylgja.

I was fortunate in that there was a specific location with which the very first known use of our family name was connected. I went there late at night, mead horn in hand, and greeted the Old Ones. I buried my face in that sacred earth, gave what I had to

give, and took what They had to offer. I will not attempt to describe all that occurred, but nothing has been the same since.

An observation: As soon as I decided my trip was a pilgrimage rather than a holiday, difficulties began to strike. I had a quick health crisis, the journey itself was fatiguing, the weather was less than ideal, and we came close to injury or death in not one, but two car crashes! I accepted all this as the price which must be paid. Paying it was an honor and I begrudged nothing.

This time I went to Ireland. I am eager to visit ancestral turf in England and Germany in the years to come - but my spirit is full, and I have taken in all I can hold for now. One can only absorb so much!

An ancestral trek of this sort is an opportunity for great spiritual growth. Give it a try and see for yourself!

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