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Buried Alive in Cymru

In the land of crop circles, the logic of time spirals out, spinning like the globe itself. Everywhere is geometry. Here, in the quarries in the Preseli Mountains, dotted with ancient settlements of the long departed, Stonehenge's igneous rocks were sourced. And here, where the Welsh coastline meets the civil parish of Nevern, Pembrokeshire, stands Pentre Ifan, a portalled Dolmen, a megalithic mystery. Composed of seven Neolithic pillars, it stands erect, like the abandoned remains of a sister-Stonehenge—with a flat stone ceiling.

The view from its frame: a volcano sleeping in the westward distance, so deep in its slumber it is mistaken by visitors for dead. Its peak emerges majestic along the skyline like a grace note. Thought to be a burial chamber for centuries, there is curiously no sign of the perished. But make a wish under the shade of its 16-ton capstone, and you might wonder if you have died and gone to Pentre Ifan.

On a nearby hilltop sits an archaeological site spotted with Celtic huts currently under reconstruction, all shaped like volcanoes. Built in the Iron Age they are closer in time to us than they are to Pentre Ifan, the Neolithic Age being ancient history to the world of metallic savagery. The bare, circular bases of the huts stand like henges made of wood, with dung, clay, and oak fleshing out their walls and straw crowning their conical roofs.

These structures, dark as a chimney swift borne out of pillars of smoke, breathe like volcanoes brought back to life by a fire in their hearth-stoned bellies. And outside they are surrounded by the lush countryside. This island waxes amphibious, its waves of leaves floating in the breeze, reminding us that the plant-life here evolved underwater.

When we go back far enough to the time of long ago, there is only one place. It is all flour and rice mills, tepees and yurts, open fires, bent wood, antlers, coracles, oracles, and wool wool wool. There are gods, the same gods, borrowed from neighbors like a cup of sugar and renamed—Horus, Shiva, Dionysus. Everyone playing Adam in the world-Eden of our forgotten yesterday. These same taper-roofed huts can be found seven time-zones east on Jeju Island in Korea, a country with its own volcanic islands and oppressed indigenous peoples. Where they bury their ancestors in the mountains, haunting the land and seascape.

But at Pentre Ifan the volcano has itself been buried by the invention of time, now hidden under stones masked by lichens and a carpet of wild Welsh vegetation. It is almost as though this cratered mountain, in its geologic prescience and Victorian redolence, agreed to be buried alive, its body springing forth life as quickly as it entered the throes of death. And today from the plains surrounding Pentre Ifan, we sense that, soon, this slumberous volcano may wake.

**Cymru is the endonym for Wales*