

Walking with Trees – First Stirrings

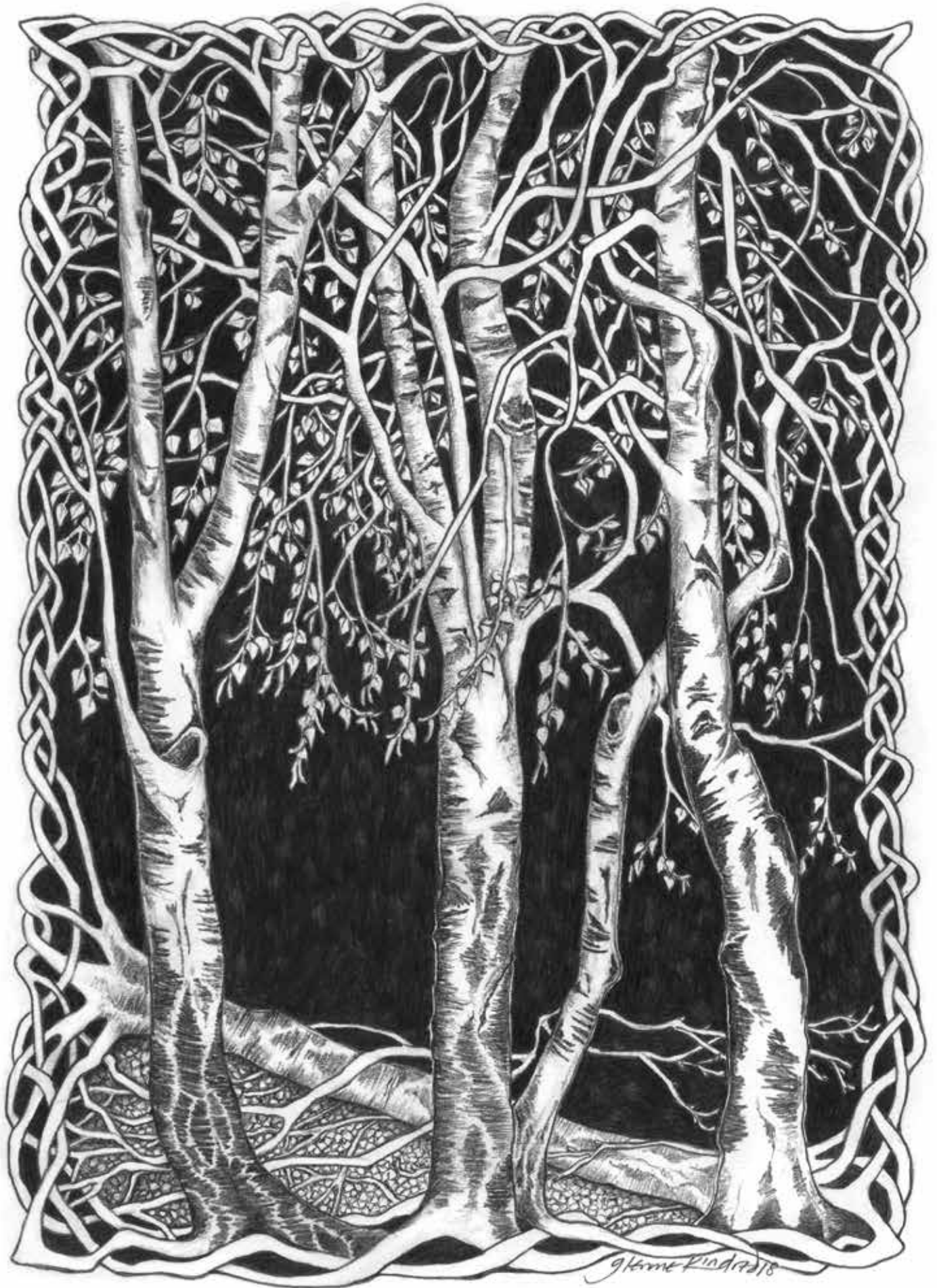
Glennie Kindred shares how trees can reconnect us to Nature, and help us to become healthier, more empowered and engaged with the world.

Walking with Trees is my delight, my meditation, and my anchor. A daily walk with the trees helps to deepen my relationship with the natural world around me, and opens my heart, my lungs and my mind ... If I give myself the time to stand still with them, their intrinsic tree-wisdom permeates my consciousness. I feel the presence of their deep roots, filling the very ground beneath me, and become more aware of the Earth beneath my feet. I breathe more deeply and become more rooted, and more fully present. They help me to find my sense of inner stillness and this guides me to listen more closely to my intuition and the wild edges of my instinctive self. When I am walking with the trees, I see a bigger picture, break free of my old conditioning that would have me believe that I am separate from Nature. I am reminded of my deep interconnectivity with all life here on our beautiful complex Earth, and I am made whole.

Trees are totally intrinsic to present life on Earth. They store and utilise vast amounts of carbon from our atmosphere, and are the co-creators of our weather systems and climate. These great water-lovers draw up water from below the ground, and fill our air with the circulating waters of life, bringing many beneficial nutrients and minerals to the surface from deep within the Earth. They generate the oxygen-rich air that all of us air-breathing creatures need. We breathe with them and because of them. Their out-breath is our in-breath. They literally give us life.

Trees are beautifully present, complex beings, deeply interconnected with the natural world around them, and the flow of the year's seasonal cycles. They are a highly successful species, and have been growing here for a very long time. Early fossil remains of Yews have been found from the Triassic era, two hundred and fifty million years ago, and from the Jurassic era, one hundred and forty million years ago! Hollies originated in Europe and Northern Africa in the mid Pliocene era, an incredible three thousand million years ago! Humans have been evolving for only six million years and the present strain of human, *Homo sapiens*, for a mere two hundred thousand years. I find this a very humbling notion, and why I walk with the trees with respect and gratitude for all they give and all they have to teach me.

Trees work in partnership with each other and with the rest of the natural world around them. They are not in competition with each other as we have previously been led to believe, but work together, help each other survive, and protect their environment. Trees are at the centre of many overlapping complex ecosystems, all working in harmony with each other. Over time, mycelia (the fine thread-like hyphae of fungi) attach themselves to the roots of trees and form a beneficial symbiotic relationship with them. The mycelia help the trees by providing nutrients from the soil, and in exchange the trees provide the fungi with carbohydrates and sugars they make from sunlight. The mycorrhizae (which literally means 'fungus root') networks can spread for miles and ultimately provides the trees with a vast network that enables trees to communicate over large distances. Through their partnership with the mycorrhizae, trees move carbon, water, nitrogen, phosphorous and other valuable nutrients around the forest so that the trees, and ultimately their environment, stays healthy.



birch

Suzanne Simard's ground-breaking research with Beech trees (and very accessible TED talk 'How trees talk to each other'), shows without a doubt that trees are conscious of each other and their environment, aware of their interconnectivity and are able to work co-operatively together for the good of their forest home. This brings a fundamental shift in our thinking and helps us to become more aware of the sentience and deep intelligence of Nature. Our world expands. We move into a deeper reverence for life when we remember that the water in our bodies is part of the Earth's water cycles, and our breath is an exchange with the trees and plants. Our shared interconnectivity becomes part of who we are and changes how we interact with the other life forms we share this planet with. Seeing ourselves as part of an Earth community restores our sense of belonging, and we come to recognise that our own healing and the health of the Earth are one and the same.

First Stirrings

Walking the land at this time of year I become aware of new life stirring and the beginning of life returning. Many say that February is such a dark month, but for me, as I walk with the trees, I see signs of new life and new beginnings everywhere. The trees are responding to the small increase in daylight since the shortest day at Winter Solstice. Elders begin to unfurl their dark leaves in January, and the bright catkins of Hazels in early February; along with pussy willows; the glowing red catkins of the Alders along the canals and rivers; early bright yellow Willow leaves and Birch leaves, and Blackthorn blossom. These all provide food for insects and bees who are beginning to venture out on bright days. Life is on the move! From afar a purple or golden haze begins to form around some trees, as their buds begin to open a little. The trees are waking up! I am filled with excitement and anticipation, ready to stir from my winter rest.

The Earth festival Imbolc is celebrated around the beginning of February and this is a good time to have a daily walk with the trees, and experience these first stirrings. Imbolc is a celebration of the first stirrings of life after the winter, and we too feel that sense of new beginnings emerging within us at this time of year. Now is a good time to gather a clear sense of direction for the year ahead, to ask the questions 'What have I learnt during this time of winter rest? What do I wish to take forward as I emerge back into the world? This is a good time to plot and to plan, to awaken ourselves to what we want and need to do as we move forward into a more Earth-aware, Earth-conscious future. What must we protect? What can we do to help the Earth restore damaged ecosystems? There are many solutions ... and we are many. If we all pledge our lives to help the Earth then change will happen fast.





hazel

Birch

Birch trees are just one of our many tree allies at this time of year. Their white trunks stand out in the grey winter woods, and call us to take notice of them. Birches are pioneer trees and catalysts for environmental change. They are the first trees to move into new ground, preparing the way for other trees to follow by improving the soil and changing initial conditions. They were the first trees to grow in the wake of the retreating ice after the last Ice Age, ten thousand years ago, and the forerunners of the great forests that followed. Birch grows quickly and have a short life span of seventy to a hundred years, much the same as ours, and in that time, if humans don't interfere, they have the ability to transform an environment, and within their lifetime turn a piece of open ground into a piece of woodland. Birches teach us that environmental change can begin with a single movement, and that a shift in initial conditions is all that is needed to set in motion new directions, and to change the flow of the interconnected complex systems of life. They inspire us to recognise that great changes begin with small actions and their pioneering signature inspires us to take a chance, to initiate a change of heart, a change of direction or a change in our thinking patterns.

Birch trees shed their bark, teaching us to release old patterns of thinking and behaviour that no longer serve us, or our Earth home. Shedding the old is the first step to embracing the new, and will make space for new understandings to grow. Collectively it is time that we shed the old belief that we are separate and wiser than Nature, and widen our vision. When we see the Earth as an ancient interconnected complex system that is eternally wise and self-regulating, we joyfully expand into her vast network of interconnection and see wonder and perfection wherever we look. We live our lives with a sense of belonging to the Earth and a consciousness of the integrated unity of life. This shift in perception informs all our actions and choices from this point onwards, and we are fuelled with the desire to give something back and to be part of beneficial change.

Trees are our wise teachers and our steadfast allies in these changing times, as we learn to walk this new path of co-operation and co-creation with all of life. By walking with trees, I invite you to dive in and deepen your roots, to arrive in the world of trees with a benevolence that creates more benevolence, a willingness for enchantment, and an openness to rediscover a sense of wonder for this precious gift of life.

Glennie Kindred is a highly respected teacher and much loved expert on natural lore and Earth traditions. She enjoys sharing her insights and teachings through a wide selection of popular workshops and talks, encouraging and inspiring us to create relationship with the natural world around us, especially with our native trees and plants. Glennie is the author of twelve books including her new book, *Walking With Trees*, out in February, available from *PM's* online shop site: <https://shop.permaculture.co.uk>

Use discount code: WALKING at the checkout to get the book for £10.00 (RRP £15.00)