

# West Virginia Petroglyph

by Mike McCormack | May 1, 2008 3:17 pm

On June 24th 1976 a strange craft, made of ox hides stretched over a wooden frame, was sighted off the coast of the Faroe Islands. Two square sails, painted with Celtic crosses, billowed above The Brendan, a replica of the craft in which Irish monks had first sailed this way. Historian and Explorer, Tim Severin, built her from the description of his craft in the writings of St. Brendan the Navigator, regarding his sixth century journey to America. From the Faroes, Severin set out for Reykjavík, Iceland and ultimately Newfoundland following the route of St. Brendan in an effort to prove that the journey, which some believed was only legend, was indeed possible. Check NYAOH.COM for that story. Meanwhile, another story was unwinding that would add further proof to the visit of Irish monks to America.

That story began in 1964 when two amateur archeologists found a petroglyph, or man-made rock carving, in Wyoming County, West Virginia. It was interesting, but hardly earth-shaking since many such carvings exist whose origins are shrouded in mystery and whose messages remain undeciphered. In accordance with standard practice, the find was recorded and verified by archeologists the following year and, in 1970, a study was conducted by a West Virginia Geological Survey Team. The similarity to other petroglyphs was duly noted and it was concluded that the inscription – whatever its meaning – was the work of early native Americans. Sometime later, archeologist Robert Pyle saw photos of the carvings and thought them similar to early runic writings. He carbon-dated lichen scraped from the recess of the marks, and estimated that they were carved between 500 and 600 AD

Beginning in March 1982, Pyle painstakingly recorded every detail of the carving in 18 separate visits. Convinced of its importance, he gave the story to a local newspaper. The editorial and photo that subsequently appeared was sent it to the West Virginia Chamber of Commerce magazine who, in turn, sent it to Ida Jane Gallagher – a native West Virginian working as a free-lance historian in Connecticut. Gallagher saw a similarity between the carving and one she had photographed in New England, and she contacted the editor. In November 1982, a small group led by Robert Pyle scrambled up a steep bank to a rock ledge, and Gallagher took her first look at the 10-foot long inscription carved on a recessed portion of the cliff face beneath a natural rock overhang. She was convinced that it was a major find, and contacted Professor Barry Fell, America's leading expert on ancient epigraphic inscriptions.

When Fell saw the carving he immediately recognized it as Ogham – the ancient Celtic alphabet. He knew the script as similar to dozens that he'd seen in Ireland, and began a translation of the Ogham into Old Irish, from Old Irish into modern Irish and then to English. The message thus deciphered read, At the time of sunrise, a ray grazes the notch on the left side on Christmas, the first season of the year, the season of the blessed advent of the savior Lord Christ, behold he is born of Mary, a woman. Knowing that the ancient Celts were excellent astronomers and held a special significance to the winter solstice which fell at Christmas time, a small group decided to verify Dr. Fell's translation, and they met at the petroglyph just before sunrise on December 22, 1982. Quietly they waited as the sun climbed in the east to a height where it spilled over the mountains and streamed its rays toward the cliff face before them. The group watched in amazement as the first shaft of sunlight funnelled through a previously unnoticed 3-sided notch in the cliff overhang, and, like a flashlight beam, struck the sun symbol on the left side of the inscription. As they watched in awe, the beam pushed the shadow from left to right, slowly bathing the entire message in bright sunlight like a prehistoric neon sign announcing yet another Christmas as it had done for centuries. Before their eyes, they had received

a message across the centuries.

We may never know the name of persons who carved that message, but the fact that it exists provides important proof of an old claim. It has long been claimed that from the sixth century, Irish monks sailed to distant lands to spread the gospel; and that a monk named Brendan wrote of his travels across the Atlantic to North America. Unfortunately, the lack of hard evidence relegated those accounts to the category of legend. We know that in 1977, author Timothy Severin duplicated the voyage of Brendan in a leather-covered boat built to Brendan's specifications, just to prove that it could have been done. Yet the sceptics still argued that possibility and probability did not offer proof. Now, the West Virginia petroglyph exists as is irrefutable evidence: here for all to see is a Christian message, left on these shores between 500 and 600 AD, by a Christian missionary in a language that was known to no other culture but the Irish. Since that time, at least 13 other petroglyphs have been found along either side of an ancient trail known as Indian Ridge – a trail that wound along the mountain tops all the way out to the Ohio River, another ancient highway. They all contain Christian messages in Ogham!

Can they doubt now?

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