A WALKING PILGRIMAGE THROUGH SACRED AVALON

The Glastonbury Pilgrims' Trail

Written by **Sig Lonegren**

with Palden Jenkins, Liz Pearson & the Friends of Bride's Mound

Geomancer Sig Lonegren, who wrote this trail, at Stony Littleton long barrow

The trail at a glance

The key waypoints of the trail — the numbers match the stops below.

The trail

1. Glastonbury & the Isle of Avalon
2. Wearyall Hill
3. Glastonbury Abbey
4. The Chalice Well
5. Bride's Mound
6. St Margaret's Chapel
7. Journey's end

Pilgrimage and Glastonbury are synonymous. People have been drawn to this little town in the Somerset Levels for thousands of years — Druids, saints, kings and seekers — and they still come, in ever greater numbers, to feel the Spirit of Glastonbury for themselves.

Joseph of Arimathæa — some say he was Jesus's uncle — was an early pilgrim here. A trader in tin and lead, legend says he discovered this Isle of Glass (*Ynys Witrin*), and that he may even have brought the young Jesus with him, as William Blake imagined in his hymn *Jerusalem*. In the early 20th century the mystic Alice Buckton, then owner of the Chalice Well, laid out a pilgrimage route to guide seekers between Glastonbury's sacred sites. This trail follows in those footsteps.

Your guide: geomancer **Sig Lonegren**, who wrote this trail, at Stony Littleton long barrow.

> This is a self-guided walk you can follow on your phone as you go. Take your time — the journey *is* the pilgrimage. Allow a half to a full day, wear good shoes, and let the place speak to you.

1

Glastonbury & the Isle of Avalon

Glastonbury has been a place of sanctity and pilgrimage for several thousand years. The Tor, crowned by its single roofless tower, dominates the landscape, rising high above the flat Somerset Levels — the 'Moors' that lie at, or just below, sea level. In ancient times these were marsh and water, and Glastonbury was an island: *Ynys Witrin*, the Isle of Glass.

Ancient beginnings

Nearby runs the Sweet Track, dated exactly to 3806 BCE — the oldest marsh walkway known in the world. The Tor is so prominent that the first people in the area, at least 12,000 years ago, will surely have come to it. It is said that Glastonbury was the site of one of three Druidic *perpetual choirs* — the others on Anglesey and Iona — making music around the clock, 365 days a year, enchanting the land.

Joseph & the first Christians

Tradition tells that in 37 AD Joseph of Arimathæa came here as a refugee after the Crucifixion. He stepped ashore on Wearyall Hill, planted his staff, and rested. The staff took root and blossomed — the famous Glastonbury Thorn — and a descendant of that tree grows here still.

2

Wearyall Hill

For an overview of the island, its surrounding Moors and all of Glastonbury's holy hills, begin on Wearyall Hill — where the town's guided walks often start. It isn't the highest hill, but it gives fine views over Avalon.

Where Joseph landed

Legend has it that Joseph of Arimathæa came ashore here and his staff sprouted leaves — an old shamanic sign meaning 'this is the place'. A wealthy metals trader, he dealt in Cornish tin and Mendip lead, and may well have known Glastonbury already, among people who would understand the early Christians' plight.

Panorama over Avalon

From the ridge you look out over the town and the Abbey to the other holy hills — from the right, the Tor, Chalice Hill and St Edmund's (Windmill) Hill — and across the once-marshy Levels that made this an island. Until late medieval times, pilgrims could sail right in: the old River Brue swung close beneath Wearyall's southern side and round past Bride's Mound.

↗ More about Wearyall Hill: unitythroughdiversity.org/wearyall-hill.html

3

Glastonbury Abbey

St Mary's Chapel marks the site of Joseph of Arimathæa's original church — said to be the first above-ground church in all Christendom. The Abbey is also the only place to claim King Arthur's grave, found in the cemetery during rebuilding after the great fire of 1184.

England's holiest earth

This was a cradle of Celtic Christianity — the Culdees, or 'wanderers' — and grew into one of the foremost places of pilgrimage in Christendom, with a great library and a stream of spiritual visitors. It became so powerful that when Henry VIII dissolved the monasteries, the Abbey was among the last to fall.

The fall of the Abbey

Henry's men found a chalice in Abbot Richard Whiting's office and accused him of theft from the Crown. In 1539 the elderly abbot was dragged up the Tor on a hurdle and executed there with two of his monks. The Abbey was stripped and left to ruin — yet its 36 acres of peaceful grounds remain one of the most atmospheric places to pause on this trail.

↗ Visit Glastonbury Abbey's official site: glastonburyabbey.com

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The Chalice Well

Here is a place of beauty, peace and healing. Pilgrims have come to this holy well since time immemorial. Its waters are famed for their healing power and for the deep red of the iron-rich spring — long associated with the Earth Mother, the blood of the Goddess.

The Vesica Pisces

Enter at the foot of the garden and you meet the Vesica Pisces pool, fed by water tumbling through a series of flow-forms. The vesica — two circles overlapping through each other's centre — is a sacred geometric figure, the root of the Golden Mean and of the Gothic arch, and the origin of the Christian fish symbol. Just uphill, by a door in the wall, an ancient yew has split and rejoined, a vulvic form sacred to the Goddess.

To the wellhead

Climb on through King Arthur's Courtyard to the wellhead at the top of the garden, with its famous wrought-iron lid. Drink the waters, sit a while, and let the gardens work their quiet magic.

↗ Visit the Chalice Well's official site: chalicewell.org.uk

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Bride's Mound

Bride's Mound is a small rise to the west of the town at Beckery, near the foot of Wearyall Hill. Tiny it may be, but its history is great: legend makes it a gateway to Avalon, where pilgrims arriving by boat from Ireland and Wales kept vigil through the night before processing on into the sacred isle.

St Brigid & the Goddess

Arthur is said to have had a vision of the great Goddess here, and of Mary with her son; St Brigid of Ireland is said to have stayed — hence the dedication to Bride (Brighde, Brigid). Archaeology suggests a wattle-and-daub shrine stood here before the medieval stone chapel.

Friends of Bride's Mound

For years a group of local people — the Friends of Bride's Mound — have worked to care for this long-neglected sacred place and to see a sanctuary, herb garden and orchard recreated here on permaculture principles, in the tradition of a monastic garden.

↗ The Friends of Bride's Mound: friendsofbridesmound.com

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St Margaret's Chapel & the Magdalene Almshouses

Tucked off Magdalene Street is a very special little chapel and its almshouses — part of a former medieval complex that served as a hospital and shelter for the poor. The chapel and its small garden hold a peaceful air of sanctity, revered today by unconventional Christians and by followers of the Magdalene as an aspect of the Goddess.

Hospital & almshouses

The Hospital of St Mary Magdalene may have been founded as early as 1264, "of the gift and foundation of the Abbots of Glastonbury", to house ten poor men. After the dissolution it became the Royal Hospital, its open hall re-roofed as two rows of almshouses. It is thought St Margaret of Scotland — renowned for funding chapels across the land — paid for the chapel itself.

↗ More about St Margaret's Chapel: stmargaretschapel.org.uk

Journey's end

This is the end of our pilgrimage trail — but there are many more magical places in this special town. It's a matter of coming here and moseying round, tasting it for yourself. And Glastonbury is not only a historic, spiritually-stimulating place: it's a living, breathing town, with a wonderful mixture of people.

You may wonder why the Tor itself isn't a stop on this trail. Simple reason — it deserves a pilgrimage all of its own. Stand at its foot, look up, and climb when you're ready.

↗ Glastonbury Tor — plan your climb: www.nationaltrust.org.uk/visit/somerset/glastonbury-tor

May the Spirit of Avalon be with you.

About the author — Sig Lonegren

This trail was written by **Sig Lonegren**, the American-born geomancer, dowser and author who made Glastonbury his home. A leading voice on labyrinths, dowsing, earth energies and sacred geometry, Sig founded Mid-Atlantic Geomancy and wrote widely on the spirit of the Earth and the sacred landscape — including the much-loved *Spiritual Dowsing* and *Labyrinths: Ancient Myths & Modern Uses*.

He first wrote this Pilgrims' Trail in 1998. Explore much more of his work at geomancy.org.

First written by Sig Lonegren in 1998; set up and adapted by Barry Hoon and Palden Jenkins, revised 2006, with Liz Pearson and the Friends of Bride's Mound. Photographers include Sarah Boait, Will Glenn, Lesley Delamont, Liz Pearson, Kevin Redpath and Palden Jenkins. Adapted for Glastonbury Online from the original on isleofavalon.co.uk.