

# BDO Grove Guidelines

(extracted from *Druidry: Rekindling the Sacred Fire*, BDO, 2002)

*These guidelines were originally composed by Emma Restall Orr, based on discussions between her and Greywolf over a number of years. The notes in brackets here and there have been added to explain how and why various clauses came to be included. Various alterations reflect changes in the structure of the BDO since this was written more than a decade ago.*

To honour individuality means that we must be tolerant of different ways within our tradition, so to lay down rules or dogma here would be anathema. However, bringing together the experience of running groves, of attending others, and what we have been trying to achieve through the BDO, we've put down here some ideas of what we'd like to see happening in a grove affiliated or joined to the BDO.

- The festivals of the modern Druid tradition should be acknowledged, the turning of the solar and lunar tides, even if not all these days are celebrated by the grove as an open group.

- The essentials of Druid ritual should be used, calling for peace, casting the circle, honouring the elements of creation, the spirits of the directions, the gods and the ancestors.

- It is not necessary for grove members to be members of the BDO, though the grove organizers should be members in order to keep in touch with BDO ideas and programmes; it is not seen to be necessary by us that those who attend grove rites even term themselves Druids, though the grove organizers should find no problem in doing this.

- If the grove meets at anyone's house, it is the hosts' right to express their house rules; if you don't like them, talk about it with the host and/or with the BDO, and if you still don't like it then vote with your feet, find or create another group.

- Those facilitating or organizing a group or grove, who hold it together, have no obligation to take into the group every person who gets in touch with them, while at the same time if they want a solely private group they should ask us not advertise its existence via the BDO; it is reasonable and often useful to meet a person before they come to a rite, talking about the grove, explaining the ground rules, establishing a relationship.

- If those facilitating the group or grove are finding one member difficult to deal with, it may be better that the issue is raised with the BDO than the organizer take full responsibility for asking the person to leave the group.

- No one grove or group holds territorial rights over an area, city or sacred site, each group celebrating and holding energy in very different ways; if you don't like what you find in a group, find or make another. *(This was included in response to an agenda promoted by the Council of British Druid Orders in the 1990s, initially designed to promote a single individual's territorial claims to three major sacred sites, Stonehenge, Avebury and Glastonbury, by which that individual sought to limit access to them to those on his personal 'approved' list. The BDO has always sought to broaden access to sacred sites rather than limit it).*

- In order for the BDO to be able to guide enquirers to groups or groves, we need to know the people who are facilitating or hosting the gathering; if you are interested in starting a group or affiliating your own to the Order, get in touch, get to know us, let us get to know you.

- While some political issues (such as eco-campaigns) are worth pursuing, the grove should not be a forum for political posturing, nor should any one person be able to use grove gatherings to promote their own political agenda; though some blend the two, the BDO vision recognizes Druidry as a spiritual path rather than a warrior tradition. *(This was included in response to people turning up at open rites and interrupting them to lecture those assembled about their personal political bugbears).*

- The BDO does not condone the use of drugs in ritual - which includes dishonouring sacred space with cigarettes, drinking alcohol before the rite, or being drunk/stoned at any time through the grove

gathering. Trust is an important key to good grove work, as is clarity of intention and of vision, and a rite is honoured by allowing the two to flow naturally. (*This was included in response to people turning up at open rites drunk and/or stoned and behaving disruptively as a consequence – hard to believe, but it happened*).

- There is no initiation rite into the BDO, nor should there be an initiation rite into any grove of or affiliated to the BDO; while a person may look to dedicate or initiate into the tradition, and might ask a respected member of the BDO to guide and/or witness this rite, the BDO doesn't condone any rite which ties a person to any group or organization. (*This was included to differentiate the freedom of thought and action we wanted to encourage from some other groups whose initiatory rites are full of bindings and dire warnings. Our courses do include initiatory experiences, though these are personal and individual, marking transitions between areas of work and study rather than admissions into them. Personally, I think there is a case to be made for having some sort of simple rite of dedication into a grove, perhaps along the lines of the short bardic initiation used in our gorsedd rites – see below*).

- The BDO encourages the open expression of Druidry and would not encourage any activity within a grove that implies it to be an occult tradition. We are utterly opposed to any undertones of racism, nationalism, sexism, etc. - none of which have any place in the spiritual philosophy of Druidry as we understand and practice it.

- The BDO encourages a non-hierarchical attitude towards administration; however, clear roles of responsibility and organization are an important part of any group's make up and should be honoured.

- The BDO won't condone any members or groves trespassing on private land in order to celebrate their rites; if you need support in order to gain permission, we'd be happy to see what we can do to help. (*This was included largely in response to groups using Druidry as a cover for aggressive trespass at Stonehenge and elsewhere. We have found that, with very few exceptions, if you approach landowners or conservation bodies politely and explain who you are and what you want to do, they're usually happy to let you hold rituals on their land*).

- At the BDO office we are aware that the groves coming into being have very different characters. Part of the defining energy is that of the facilitators, any other spiritual or religious traditions they have worked in, if and how they were trained in the Druid tradition and whether they have experience in creating and conducting. Another defining factor is the land on which the grove meets. Allow both elements to weave together when meeting a group or putting together your own.

- If you are very keen to meet with other BDO members but have no experience of running rituals or groups, nor any training in the tradition, we would be happy to help you. Such groves tend to be no looser in terms of relationships, yet more easily flowing, with the whole group creating and taking responsibility for the rituals, as everyone involved learns the ropes together.

- So what can you do?

- If you run a group and would like to affiliate that group to the Order, get in touch with us, tell us about your group, how you work and through what beliefs, get to know us and let us get to know you; if it seems appropriate for us both, we'll then list your group on the BDO website and elsewhere, recommending you to inquirers in your locality.

- If you want to start a group or grove within the auspices and beliefs of the BDO and the Druid tradition, get in touch, get to know us and let us get to know you; if it seems viable then we'll support you, offering help to get the group started, whether your aim is simply to meet local BDO members and those interested in the tradition, or to create a fully running grove that celebrates with ritual.

- If you want to meet others in your area but don't feel able, confident or willing to organize a group, you can ask us to put you in touch with a local organizer; if there isn't one, you could ask us to publish your name in a list of contacts as someone eager to find kindred spirits.

- The landscape of Druidry is changing. What was twenty years ago a scattering of people is now becoming a population, with different requirements. Not only is Druidry becoming better known, the

number of practitioners growing every week, but the variations in its practice are becoming better known, as represented by the growing number of Orders and working groves. If you have come across a grove that works rituals from scripts and you want spontaneity, if you have found a grove that celebrates indoors and you want forest, if you've been to a grove that is meditative and you want drums, if you have found a grove that is wild and you want clarity, it is possible that what you want exists - and if it doesn't and we can help you, you can make it yourself. It's an exciting time, a creative time. Let us each take a hand in the developing architecture of our tradition. In doing so, we can make it what we want it to be.

### Suggestion for a grove rite of individual dedication:

(from BDO bardic booklet 18, *Ritual: Part 3*) *As with most of the BDO rites of its era, this one is written to be conducted by a priest and priestess, obviously because Emma and Greywolf were working so many rites together at that time. It's been tweaked a bit to make it less specifically bardic and more Grovey. Feel free to accept, reject or change any or all of it!*

## a rite of dedication

*This simple form of initiation offers an opportunity to make a commitment to the druid path and to the spirit of the place. The circle is opened in the usual way.*

**Priestess:** “As we are born into the life of the body, so we may be born into the life of the spirit. Initiation into the Groves seeded by the British Druid Order offers an opportunity to dedicate to the spirit of place, the Druid community and kindred of the spirit. It is free and open to all who wish to receive it, welcoming followers of all spiritual traditions within one circle. In offering this initiation, we ask that you make a personal commitment to walk the path of the Druid in beauty and in peace, using what inspiration you may gain to find your own spirit’s true path of creative expression, and using your creativity for the benefit of your community and of the Earth.”

**Priest:** “I call on those who wish to be initiated into the Grove of [...name of grove...] and to receive the sacred spirit of inspiration and creativity that we call Awen, to step forward now to the centre of our circle.”

*The candidates for initiation gather at the centre of the circle, linking hands to form an outward facing circle of their own. All then repeat the following after the priest and priestess:*

**All:** “We assemble here at [...name of festival...] of the year [ . . . . ].

We assemble in the face of the sun; the Eye of Enlightenment.

We assemble on the Gorsedd mound of Mother Earth.

We assemble here to constitute ourselves a Grove of Bards, Ovates and Druids of the Isles of Britain.”

**Priest:** “In the name of the community of Druids, and by the authority of those here present, I hereby proclaim this Grove of [...name of grove...]; may it be a meeting place of Love, and Truth, and Light. So let it be!”

**All:** “So let it be!”

**Priestess:** “Let us now invoke the Awen, the holy flowing spirit of the Druid tradition, and direct its shining stream of creativity and inspiration towards those gathered in the midst of the circle, that they may receive its glowing gifts of clear sight, wisdom, wonder and strength of spirit. And let those in the centre join the chant, visualising the stream of inspiration flowing into you, and through you, to energise and inspire not only yourselves, but the land of [...name of place...] and all the worlds beyond.”

*Those in the outer circle link hands. Those who have already received the Awen visualise its stream of inspiration flowing into the circle, directed through them to those gathered in the centre.*

**All** (chanting long and low: aaaa-oooo-eeee-nnnn): “Awen, Awen, Awen.”

*Those in the outer circle then speak the following blessing:*

“Wisdom of serpent be thine,  
Wisdom of raven be thine,  
Wisdom of valiant eagle.

Voice of swan be thine,  
Voice of honey be thine,  
Voice of the son of stars.

Bounty of sea be thine,  
Bounty of land be thine,  
Bounty of the boundless heavens.”

(Based on prayers found in Alexander Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica*)

**Priest:** “Step forward now, member(s) of the Grove of [...*name of grove*...], and take your place within the circle.”

*All now return to their places in the circle.*

**Priest:** “Let us now proclaim the Druid Prayer.”

**All:** “Grant, O Gods, thy protection,  
And in protection, strength,  
And in strength, understanding,  
And in understanding, knowledge,  
And in knowledge, the knowledge of justice,  
And in the knowledge of justice, the love of it,  
And in that love, the love of all existences,  
And in the love of all existences, the love of the  
Gods and all goodness.”

**Priestess:** “Black Elk, a holy man of the Oglala people said:

'Everything the Power of the World does is done in a circle. The sky is round, and I have heard that the Earth is round like a ball, and so are all the stars. The wind in its greatest power whirls, and birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours. The junction of heaven and earth, the horizon, is its circle of enclosing stones, for it is beyond the air that heaven and earth meet, and that junction is the circle of enclosing stones.'

Let us now complete our circle by joining hands to swear the oath of Peace.”

*(Black Elk lived from 1863 to 1950.)*

*All join hands and repeat the following three times:*

**All:** “We swear by peace and love to stand,  
Heart to heart and hand to hand,  
Mark, O Spirit(s), and hear us now,  
Confirming this our sacred vow.”