

SerpentStar

Newsletter for members of
The Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids
in the Southern Hemisphere.

Beltane 2008



Drought-defying wildflower at Wyeuro Grove

photograph taken by Carole Nielsen



G'day, Southern Hemisphere OBODies! Welcome to the Beltane 2008 issue of SerpentStar. Beltane finds us still drought-stricken in this part of the world, with the River Murray at a low ebb and strict water rationing in place to take us - we hope - through the coming hot, dry summer. And yet there are flowers - like the one photographed for us by Carole at Wyeuro a month ago. May your Beltane be filled with the beauty and fragrance of flowers.

SerpentStar's in-box has been sadly quiet this time, but there's still plenty of reading in this issue. In particular, you're invited to join Carole, Wayne, Nellie and me at Wyeuro Grove for our first serious attempt to work in harmony with the aborigine spirit people, the native animals and plants, and the spirit of the land to bring about reconciliation and healing between the indigenous peoples and species and the exotic invaders. Not being willing to 'appropriate' aboriginal heritage 'inappropriately', we've been slow to make the necessary connections with this land's first custodians, conscious that aboriginal cultures are still deeply traumatised, though rallying admirably under difficult conditions. Now the elders are asking us to read and understand their stories, and interact in vivid and vital ways with their music, art and dance. So continuing the aboriginal theme, there's a traditional dream-time story as well.

SerpentStar needs your thoughts, talents and inspirations. Articles, stories, links, poems, art works, photographs, snippets and anecdotes, quotes and quips - all are welcome. Email them to me at wyeuro@bigpond.com

or post to: vyvyan ogma wyverne,

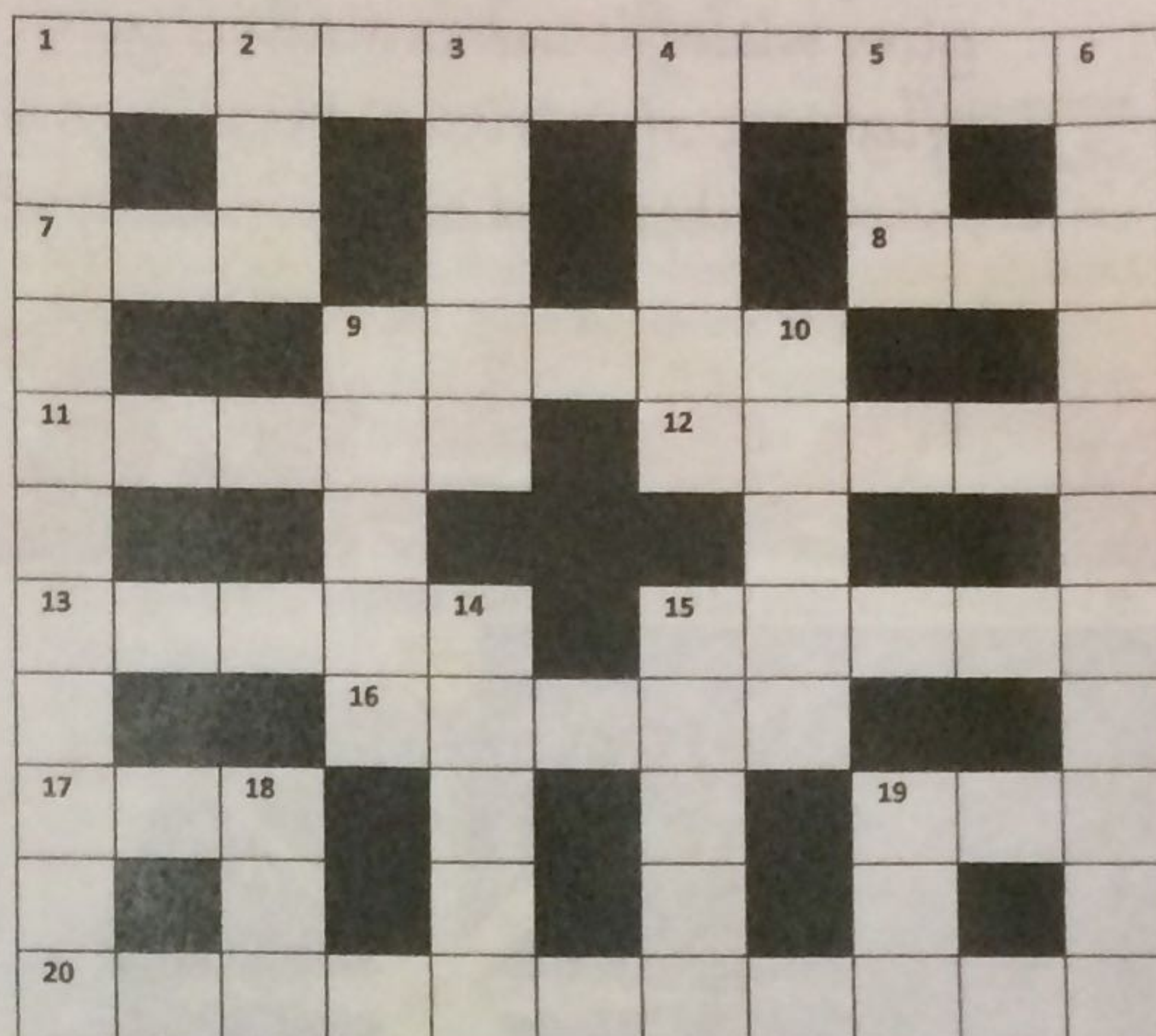
PMB2,

Angaston SA 5353.

Have a BLESSED BELTANE!!!!

SerpentStar comes out four times a year at each of the Fire Festivals, Imbolc, Beltane, Lughnasadh and Samhuinn. **Subscriptions:** By email, free - just email me at wyeuro@bigpond.com. By post, send \$Aus10 made out to V O Wyverne to PMB2 Angaston SA 5353 Australia. **Contributions** are eagerly sought by email or post. Please make sure your contributions do not violate copyright laws. **Opinions** expressed in **SerpentStar** by contributors are their own and not necessarily the opinions of the editor or of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids.

Crossword Puzzle



Clues Across

1a. Arthurian knight. (3,8)

7a. Herb of Grace. (3)

8a. Mild expletive. (3)

9a. Scottish farmlet. (5)

11a. Famed. (5)

12a. Great big books. (5)

13a. Epic Latin poem. (5)

15a. French 'thank you'. (5)

16a. Of Rome. (5)

17a. Herb of purity. (3)

19a. Psychic ability. (3)

20a. Youthful females. (5,6)

Clues Down

1d. Lucky accidents. (11)

2d. Fish eggs. (3)

3d. Prize. (5)

4d. Vessel. (5)

5d. Tree trunk. (3)

6d. Undines (4,7)

9d. Species of tree. (9)

10d. Sign.

14d. Executing.

15d. Craze.

18d. Yourself.

19d. Greek letter

WANTED

Articles, poems, stories, items of interest, long or short, for SS.

If not your own work, make sure it's not under copyright.

REWARD

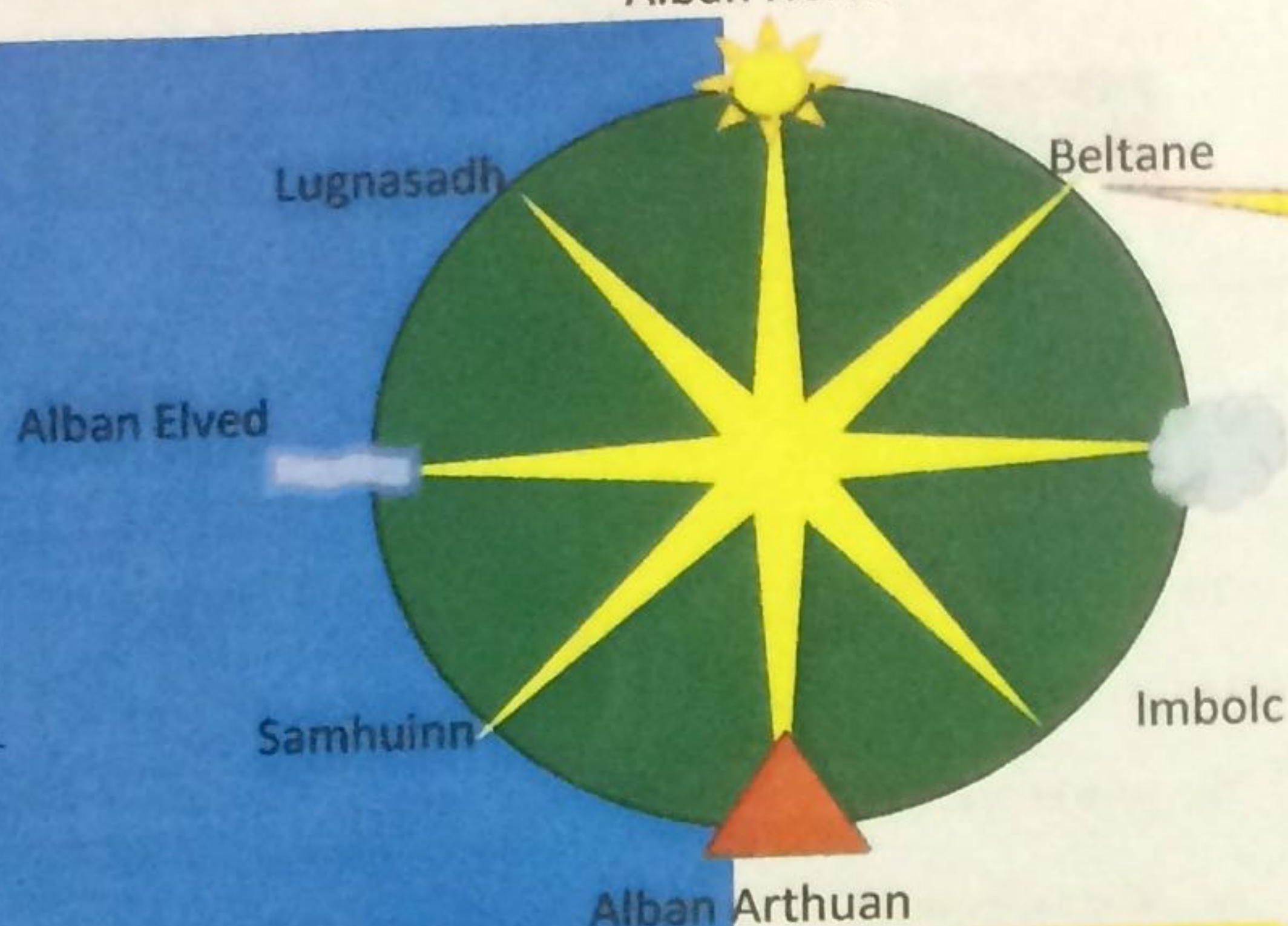
The inestimable satisfaction of seeing your work in print, and of knowing that you've done a good deed!

Children's work especially welcome.

Happy Southern Hemisphere Beltane to you all! May your Beltane Fires glow with divine radiance, your Beltane Baskets overflow with all the brightest of spiritual blessings and your Beltane meditation, rituals, rites and ceremonies sparkle with scintillating magic.

Beltane

Alban Hérvin



We are
here!!

Alban Eiler

Corinna's gone
a-November-ing!?

Write your problems, faults and unwanted burdens – anything you want to get rid of – on a piece of paper and throw it into the Beltane flames.

Now's the time for divination, and communing with the fairies and the blessed dead.

Gather flowers, give flowers, wear flowers, decorate your home and workplace with the abundance of beautiful Beltane flowers that bloom at this time of the year. Adorn altars and shrines with them too!

Wash your face in the Beltane dew – or roll naked in it (with or without your lover!!!).

Coming half-way between Alban Eiler, the Spring Equinox and Alban Hérvin, the Summer Solstice, Beltane falls at the end of October/beginning of November. Depending on where you live, the traditional seasonal activities of the Northern Hemisphere seldom match ours here in the Antipodes. Wheat, barley and oat crops are ripening at this time of the year, and hay-making is ongoing, so a work of blessing upon them and upon the products to be made from them and the processes they are to go through and the people, fairies and devas who help it all to happen, can be written into your Beltane Ceremony or Meditation. Our cattle are purged and purified at the farmers' convenience these days – seldom do they need to consult a calendar. We can input healing and vitality into the whole industry with our ritual work and prayer, and meanwhile, choose this time to smudge our own animals (and ourselves and each other) using herbs appropriate to the season (wormwood, sage, rue, lavender and ... does ashes of roses sound nice?).

It's not always practical to light two big bonfires at home and run your pets between them – and hey, why not, the kids, your friends and relatives – but if you can, what fun for everyone! Remember, the ashes of a Beltane fire have healing properties, so keep some for arthritis, rheumatism and other aches and pains.

Upcoming new traditions and not yet fully at ease with our own, we Southern Hemisphere pagans have not yet found the North's May King and Queen, nor do we have any tradition of a sacred time for mass marriage, one-night stands, erotic escapades and what have you, rituals and more. These days, some one is forced to wait for that special night. But there's a special blessing on all romantic love and loving sexual embraces at Beltane, brewed through we know not how many generations of ancient and relatively modern tradition. It's a delicious brew, elixir, which we can reach through ritual and the awareness of ourselves as god/goddess, ordinary and imperfect as we seem to ourselves and others to be. From this holy Grail of ancient practice, we can refresh our marriages, relationships or fancy-free sex lives through this ritual self-identification with the godheads and identification of our relationships with theirs.

Bottle Brush in full bloom

big rose

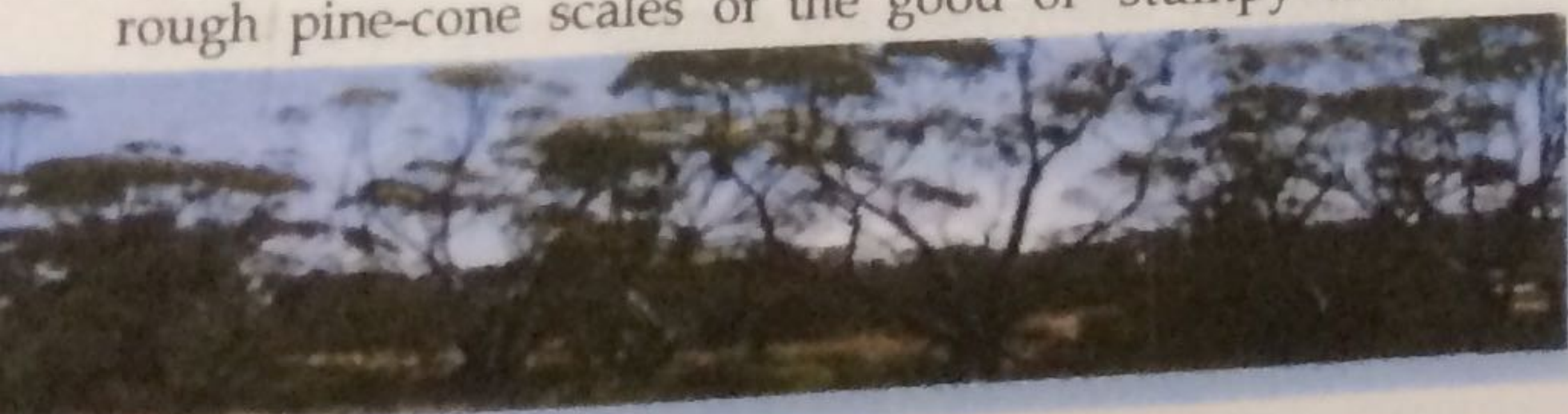
Corroboree

Wyeuro is situated deep in the mallee wilderness

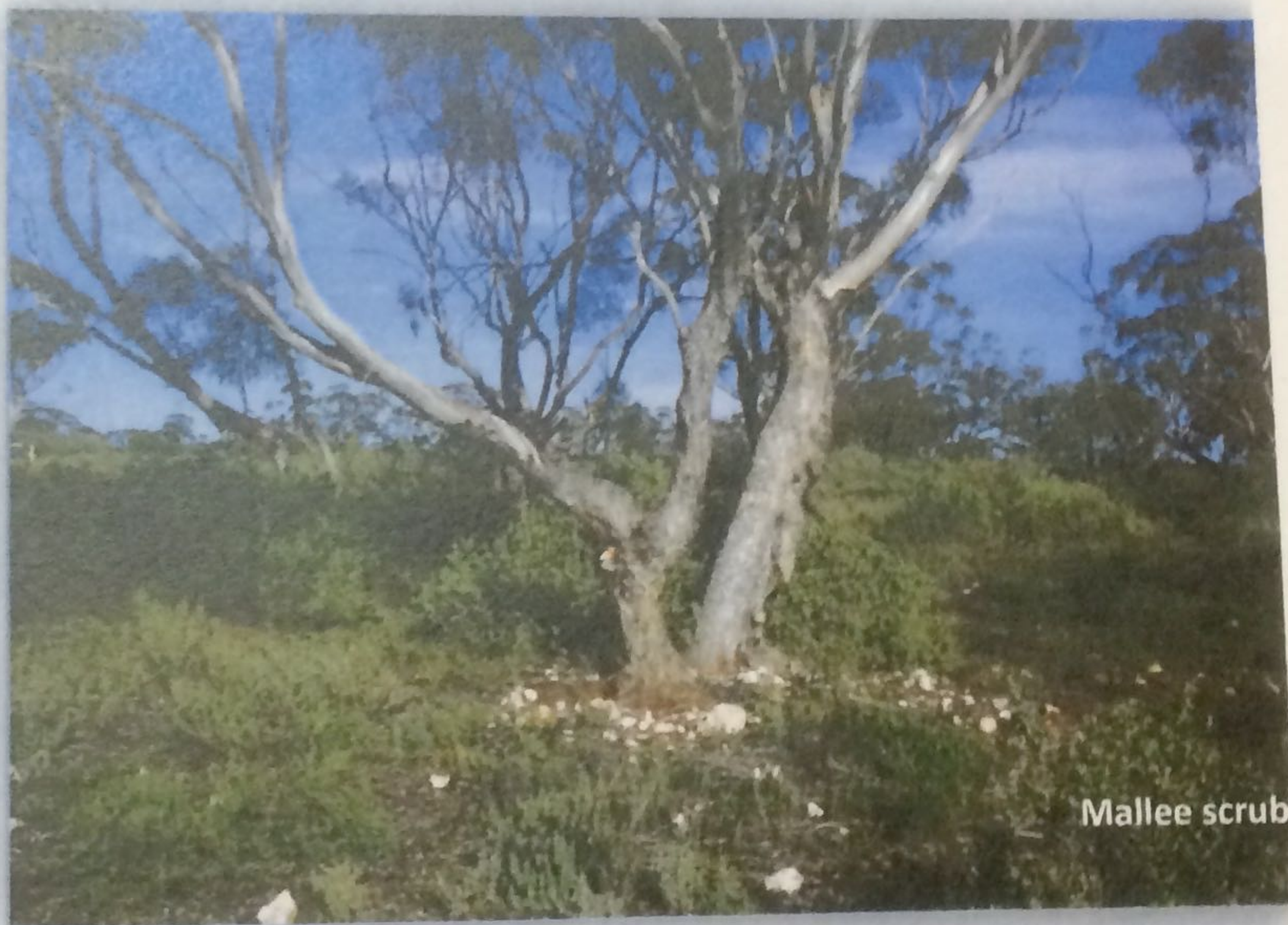
which covers vast tracts of semi-arid lands from east to west across southern Australia. It's a very extensive and diverse ecology, the mallee. Too dry for big gums, the smaller, multi-stemmed mallee eucalypts are the main species of trees, with sandalwood, wattles, myoporum, melaleucas and waterbush scattered through. Cypress pine and emu bush are returning now that the sheep have been taken off this fragile land, where for over a hundred years their heavy grazing threatened the survival of many native plants, pushing many species near to extinction. Introduced mammals such as rabbits and foxes almost ousted all but the largest of the native marsupials, with

many species brought to local extinction in some areas. Nevertheless, when we came here about thirty years ago, there were still sheep grazing the land, and there were plenty of both grey and red kangaroos, emus went about in quite large groups, wombats were so plentiful they were regarded as a nuisance, and eagles wheeling in the sky were a common sight. Most locals could distinguish several different local species in flight: wedgetails, kestrels, hawks, kites, little eagles and more. And in this semi-desert land of terracotta earth strewn with the oolites of an ancient ocean floor, this land of embryonic soils tightly supporting a tough, wiry flora

as fragile and vulnerable as its fauna, the reptiles were always a powerful presence. There were goannas; not as large, and not spectacularly patterned as the parentie is, but handsome monitor lizards, and very good eating, they say. There were bearded dragons, basking on the bitumen, dozens of them on any hot day. There was a whole array of beautiful skinks, from glassy-glossy sand skinks to richly textured, plain or wonderfully patterned, all the way through to the rough pine-cone scales of the good ol' stumpy tail.



Wool-prices have fallen drastically. Competition has challenged our beef markets. Many marginal sheep and cattle stations have been sold off, it being more profitable to subdivide and sell small blocks of this 'worthless' land for week-enders. Many of these blocks are bought and sold by investors, or by people with a love and respect for the land, but many others were bought as playgrounds, where the kids could ride trail-bikes. On long weekends there is a continuous debilitating roaring grind of engines tearing around the scrub, guzzling fossil fuel energy, with plumes of dust churned up from the delicate topsoil blowing away in the wind, and if we locals find it debilitating, how are the wild-life taking it? Whether it's anything to do with the trail-bikes or not, instead of native wild-life species'



Mallee scrub

numbers increasing now that they no longer have to compete with sheep and cows for habitat, some diminished. Not all species did; and it's interesting which did and which didn't. Emus have almost vanished from our area. Bearded dragons and goannas have become scarce. Raptors are now few and far between, and the smaller species have got scarce. Snakes proliferate. So do kangaroos, especially the Western Greys. Wombats remain the same. Zebra finches have stopped coming. Is anyone aware? Is anyone doing anything about it?

Local Earth-Care groups do their part, and the Universities are funding valuable research into the mallee ecology. Environment organisations such as the Wilderness Society, Green-Peace, etc, were slow to come to the mallee. Dry, dusty, places, haunted and scary, with tough, gnarly, bizarrely stunted trees with scraggly undergrowth full of venomous snakes and scorpions haven't the same appeal as rain-forests have. But they've been in focus a lot more, lately, as a new, more mature generation of wilderness supporters emerges, and among them all they now seem set to reclaim vast tracts of land for conservation of native ecologies and their traditional custodians. Newly emerging in the 1970s, ecology as a profession has evolved rapidly to fill the need. Increasing numbers of much better-educated environmentalists now have almost three decades of more closely-focused, high-resolution research to guide them. Industry and agriculture are increasingly willing to cooperate with them to enhance the survival chances of threatened species. So why have so many species of reptiles, birds and mammals continued to retreat, while others have thrived?

Some suggestions have been that they simply were not strong enough to survive the series of shocks of the invasion of their habitats by introduced species, and so succumbed to epidemics that wiped them out. The idea that marsupial predators such as quokkas and quolls could not compete with domestic cats and foxes had currency for a while, but hard evidence doesn't support that. In most of the mallee where they have replaced the native carnivores they have not been more numerous than the native carnivores they replaced. Exotic predators aren't worse than native ones. Cats don't bother emus. Raptors are rarer because native marsupial numbers are low, but there's more carrion for them now, not less, with road-kill, and since so many of them favour reptiles for food, they're not in competition with cats and foxes. Aborigines no longer hunt them.

Competition from rats and mice is only a problem in some areas. You'd think conditions would be close to ideal for many species to reappear. But instead they've been disappearing. What can be done?

A couple of years ago, with questions such as these in my mind, I met an anthropology student who was researching her PhD thesis about Pagan involvement in Wilderness Society projects. A witch herself, Judith had been active in winning protection for large areas of South Australian desert and semi-desert areas, working closely with Aboriginal people of the Western Desert. She visited Wyeuro several times for ritual and friendship, and to gather material for her thesis. We talked about the links between Aborigine people and their lands, about their animism, magic and religion. The rituals and ceremonies that have always kept the land ecologically coherent, the wildlife abundant, and the climate responsive and benign have stopped. The species have thus lost a vital source of their power. The land is losing its power to nurture in the same way - its people have stopped singing it, singing the ritual songs, dancing its dances, telling its stories, enchanting the

different areas with their chants, dances and rhythm-making. Judith had spoken to elders, old women of the desert, who had said among many other things, and repeated often, that you have to 'talk up the land'. I asked Judith what she understood by this and she replied sadly that the language barrier was still too great for complete understanding - we have to make of it what we can. Understand the Alcheringa, the meaning of the dreamtime stories, and the way the different dreamings are interwoven into a harmonious whole by ritual and ceremony over the course of time. And we have to find ways of using this understanding to identify and repair the damage done to sensitive ecosystems during the invasion of this land.



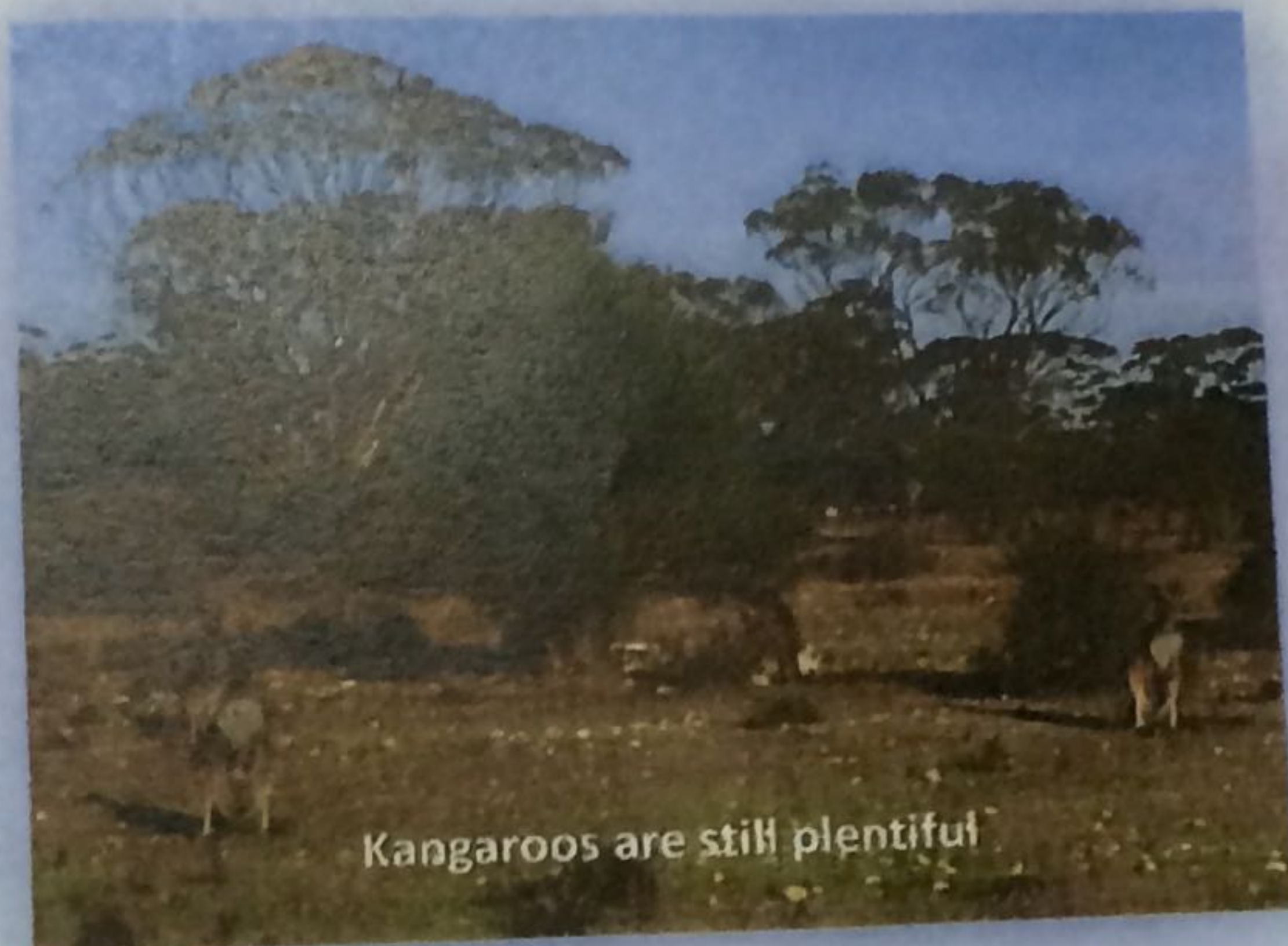
Peggy, our dog, investigates a spiny ant-eater.

Reading Aborigines' accounts of themselves and their current situation, e.g., their blogs and other sites on the web and in the Koorie Mail, we thought we discerned links between the destruction of the ecology and subsequent demise of species and the destruction of Aboriginal culture and short life expectancy and apathy among the people. They passionately assert that their land is their Dreaming, that their cultural health and the health of each individual is bound to the health of the ecology. If the ecological plight of the woylie, for example, is debilitating for the animal, this affects the whole dreaming, and impacts powerfully upon the predicament of every woylie-dreaming man, woylie-dreaming woman, and woylie-dreaming child, whether they know what dreaming they are or not, white or black, not just in Australia but in the whole world. The

impacts can have effects in the past, present and future. If the woylie were to die out completely, the woylie-dreaming people would not be able to connect to their major energy resource, with its access to the highly energising celestial dreaming places which are well-mapped in the night sky, and must be once again mapped on the landscape, or they might lose health and prosperity. The retrieval of the woylie from danger, and the restoration of the flow of power between the woylie as a dreaming and its marsupial and its human manifestations in the earth may be vital to the restoration of health for the now much altered Aboriginal people of the woylie dreaming. Aborigine artists, singers and dancers are eager to teach us and show us how, and it seems we should act too, towards reconciliation at a Dreamtime level.

Talking together round the summer campfire, Nellie, who is an OBOD Druid of Wyeuro Grove, Judith the Witch, and I, also a Druid of Wyeuro Grove, worked out a kind of ceremony that incorporates some of this Aboriginal understanding in a corroboree-like way. It's a while since I studied Aborigine corroboree songs at uni, but the idea and the magic are easy enough to grasp, at least in a simple way. You have to be able to visualise in a dynamic, immediate way, guided by the words of a song or chant, and to assert

in a powerful, passionate way the intense reality of the thing or being concerned. You have to collectively see it, right there! in its habitat, full of vital nourishment, there right now! vivid, active and alive! For tribal Aborigines this is easy - they live among, hunt, catch and feed upon them, so they have a natural connection which is difficult to obtain any other way. But for pagans of western traditions, who might be attempting to empower a species we've never seen except in pictures, we have to compromise. In preparation for our first corroborees we each chose an animal or bird, and researched it, so that we could read out a short description and history of it with an account of its current predicament. This way of connecting magically with an animal is usually successful for people brought up to western style literacy and 'white-fella' education.



We prayed for the Aborigine spirit people to assist us with the dances for our animal or bird, and perhaps nothing so convinced us of their willing, eager cooperation than the success of our dances. New to it as we were, it was exhilarating feeling our chosen deva take possession of us. I wrote chants which, to increase our own effectiveness by grounding us in our own

culture, we sang as rounds. There was also a song for each animal and an invocation and ceremonial address offering sorrow for their suffering and holding out loving hands of reconciliation, all in very simple language so that some Nungah spirit people who speak little English might understand it. After a week to study our parts, we had a brief rehearsal and then the ceremony opened in the usual Bardic way before we began the corroboree for calling back the departing animals.

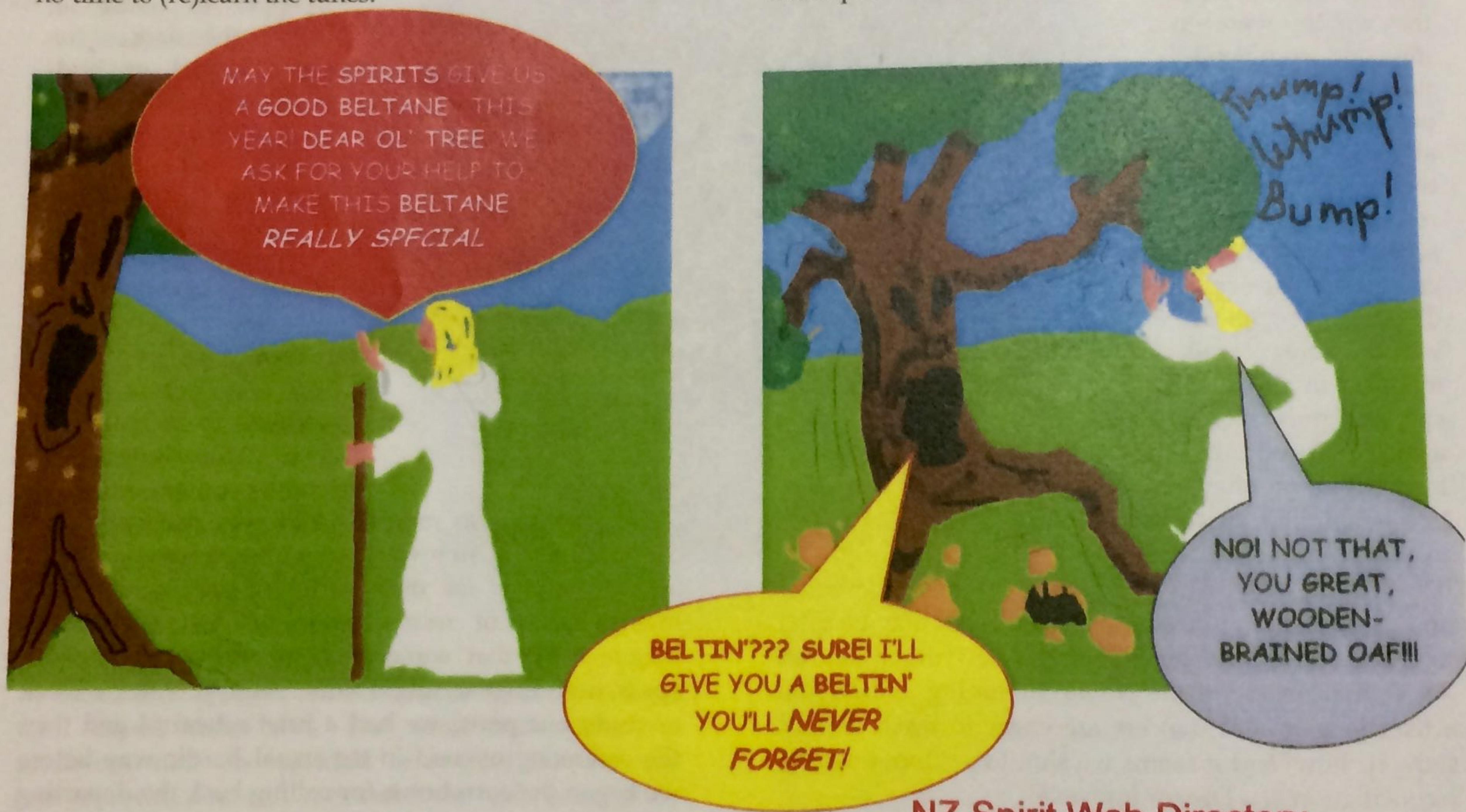
Nungah, Druid, Wicca - it was a vital, exciting mixture and the ceremony was a very emotional one. I'd heard others say that after practicing druidry for a few years, doing ritual with Witches can be quite thrilling, and that was certainly true that day. The energy sparkled and flowed, and the presence of the spirit people among us was beyond any doubt. We liked it so much we did it twice before Judith's research was finished and she took up her first

teaching post. The first corroboree had been for mammals: the woylie, the koala and the quoll. The second, a few months later, was for birds: the mallee fowl, the emu and the native hen. Both were so successful it was clear to me that we had to continue even without Judith. But powerful as it is with three, it doesn't work with just two.

I put the idea of incorporating corroboree into our ceremony to a few OBODies some time ago, and Carole and Wayne immediately expressed interest. It makes sense to handshake with the local spirit people by addressing them in our best attempt at their own idiom, meeting them half-way. Other things were happening to us all at that time though and it wasn't until this spring that Nellie, Wayne, Carole and I found ourselves all together in the little ring of limestone fragments which is the Circle of the grove of Wyeuro. We had only talked about it the evening before, and we had a quick run-through after breakfast, so we chanted the songs rather than sang them there being no time to (re)learn the tunes.

We used an old script from our earlier days modified to suit four. We used our usual opening and closing, slightly modified for the occasion. We invoked the crow as an authority figure to supervise our magic, and then we danced in the Sooty Owl, the Desert Frog, the Bearded Dragon and the Murray Cod one after another, to the accompaniment of our chanting, clapping of rhythm sticks and Carole's noble bodhran. The enchantment was deep, still and solemn, and by the time we closed, a strong feeling of achievement enveloped us all, a feeling of good magic well done.

The energy of that ceremony was still sending thrilling reverberations through Wyeuro a week later with fey glimpses and fleeting sounds of corroborees being danced by spirit people just beyond the veil, and very friendly responses from birds and lizards and of course, the ubiquitous kangaroos. So to let you get your share of it, and participate retrospectively in spirit if you feel like it - you'll find the ceremony on page 9. (You sometimes get to 'time-travel' a bit when reading about past events. ☺)



The Wilderness Society
Membership enquiries, donations:
<http://www.wilderness.org.au/join/>
Freecall 1800 030 641
Email: members@wilderness.org.au

GAIA

The **G**oddess **A**ssociation **I**n **A**ustralia
is a not for profit member-driven organisation which is
committed to bringing women together, united in the
timeless wisdom and lore of Goddess
www.goddessassociation.com.au

LINKS

NZ Spirit Web Directory
<http://magicalpath.net/dir/pagan>
PAGANZ

A place to meet and talk with people, to find Pagan
groups, Pagan shops, Pagan services, and other
Pagan websites.
www.paganz.co.nz

PAN Pagan **A**wareness **N**etwork

A not for profit educational association working to correct
misinformation, encourage religious tolerance, and foster the
growth of the Pagan community.
Contact: David Garland 0412427343
<http://www.paganawareness.net.au>

THE RITUAL AT WYEURO GROVE



Preparation: Meditation and research concerning an endangered species. Each participant is given a sprig of myoporum (pictured left), a local native herb which promotes harmony across wide and difficult cultural boundaries.

Opening: – There is our usual brief opening section giving peace to the quarters, welcoming guests and attuning to the Sacred Grove and the Spirits of the Land.

(Ritual Begins)

South: I proclaim this Ceremony of Reconciliation and Calling Back the Animals in the Grove of Wyeuro.

East: We ask for the blessing of the Aborigine people and spirits whose land this once was, who are still here, our neighbours and friends in the Invisible Worlds.

North: For the love and respect and reverence we feel, we call upon the Black Crow, acknowledged to be a bird of power, wisdom and high authority, well-loved by us all, to bless and guide us in this ceremony of healing.

All (the Incantation): Black Crow, Black Crow, Black Crow, Black Crow,

We call to you, we call to you, we call to you, we call to you,

Call you to our sacred circle, call you to our sacred circle...

West (*dances a crow dance with wand while all others chant while playing on sticks and drum. West discharges wand's energy into altar stone.*)

All others: Black Crow, Black Crow, Black Crow, Black Crow, WELCOME!

(Brief meditation.)

South: We are now going to call the Bearded Dragon. (*Dances in the bearded dragon spirit while **All others** play on sticks and drum while chanting or singing above (crow) incantation modified for bearded dragon. Then **South** discharges wand into altar stone while **All others** chant the name of the animal and then cry "WELCOME!" **South** returns to place. Pause for a time of dynamic visualisation, in which you imagine the creature abundant in its habitat again, returning to its old homelands, finding them healthy and pleasant again. Try to smell it, see it, hear it, see its tracks, smell its scent, sense its traces, many of them, feeding, breeding, becoming plentiful again. Then **All** sing or chant the Sad song - appropriate changes are made for the Mallee Frog, Sooty Owl and Murray Cod when their turn comes. Begin slowly, speeding up, accompanied by digging sticks and bodhran.*)

Sad we are, sad we are Bearded Dragon
Hear us please from your place in the stars
Hear us calling you, hear us pleading
Please don't leave us, sad we are!

Please come back, we are sorry, we are sorry
Please come back to your native lands
Please come back Bearded Dragon woman
Please come back Bearded Dragon man.

See the bikes leaving, see the land recovering,
Food is plentiful once again!
Safety too in the returning undergrowth –
Come back Bearded Dragon, come back, DO!

(*chanting*) Come back, come back, come back, come back, come back, come back, DO!
(*Brief meditation, silently communicating peaceful, caring thoughts to the spirit beings.*)

South: Thank you for hearing us. We offer you our blessings and goodwill.
(*After all participants have danced in this way, the ceremony is closed in the normal way.*)

THE END

MURRUMBIDGEE DREAMING

How the selfish goannas lost their wives.

Long ago there was a great drought and all the water-holes dried up. Spiny ant-eater people and emu people were severely stressed. The goannas had a secret supply of fresh water, and they thrived. Their wives were not goannas, but teal teals, i.e., small magpie-like birds. Their husbands gave them enough water, but they pitied the spiny ant-eaters and emus who had none. They helped as much as they could, sharing their own rations, but they could not persuade their husbands to reveal the secret of their plentiful water supply. In fact, when they asked, the goannas became angry and reduced their wives' water rations out of spite. The teal teal women decided to conduct a secret hunt for the water supply. Pretending to be hunting for yams, they tracked their husbands to the foot of a nearby mountain, which overlooked the valley in which they were camped. There they lost the trail, which the goannas had carefully obliterated. So the bravest of them, the chief goanna's wife, volunteered to make a hidden camp halfway up the mountain, commanding a good view of the whole valley, to watch all possible pathways up the mountain to see where the men might go when they came to get water. All the other wives went home.

That night, when the goanna chief's wife was missed, the teal teals denied all knowledge of her whereabouts, and feigned fear and anxiety about her. The goannas soon began to suspect that either the spiny ant-eaters or the emus had carried her off to be a wife for one of them, and when day broke next day, they took up their weapons and went looking for her. The teal teal women went and told their sister, the chief's wife, what the men were doing. "They won't be visiting the secret water supply today," they said.

But she told them of a strange thing that had happened that morning. She had wakened suddenly to see a tiny tuckonie man, no taller than her hand was long, warming himself beside the embers of her camp-fire. She was startled, but he reassured her, explaining, "I am the friend of kind people in deep distress. You have camped here because I guided you here. I will guide you to the hidden water." Hearing this wonder, the teal teals went about their food-getting and left her there alone.

Soon the tuckonie reappeared and he gave a loud coo-ee which brought many more tuckonies out of the fernery. Decorated with white pipe-clay and red and

yellow ochre, with cockatoo feather bracelets at their wrists, the men carried long hunting spears, boomerangs tucked into possum string belts and small hunting clubs. The women carried their digging sticks, dilly bags and coolamons. The first tuckonie told them to help the teal teal woman to find the water and release it for all to share. They took her a short distance further up the mountain to a hidden rock-hole shaped like a deep basin and filled with clear, cool, sweet, still water. They told her to quench her thirst and she drank thirstily, but the level of water in the rock basin stayed the same.

The tuckonie chief then told her to go back to her sisters and tell them to stand on the north side of the valley near the border of the tribal lands of the spiny ant-eaters and wait. This done, she returned, and the tuckonies appeared again.

Now the chief tuckonie told her to take a grass-tree stick and, at a signal from him, ram it with all her force into the side of the mountain. She took the stick, pointed it at the mountain-side and waited. At last a voice cried, "Ram it in, NOW!" She rammed it in so hard the tip of it entered the rock, and then the tuckonie cried, "Now, RUN FOR IT!!!"

Run she did, for behind her was a mighty roar of rushing water. Safely out of its path, she watched it thundering down the mountain-side, up-rooting trees and tumbling boulders about like pebbles. Off she fled to her sisters waiting on the valley-side, where they watched the tumultuous torrent of water as it rushed through the valley, annihilating the evacuated camp. The flood continued, gouging out its own bed as it went, until at last it reached the Murray, and poured its waters into its parched dry bed, and it's still a tributary to this day.

The goanna men returned next day from the territory of the emu tribe to find this great river flowing serenely between them and their wives, and they knew their secret had been discovered.

They lamented for their wives, but the women scolded them, saying, "We have released for all long-suffering creatures the life-giving water you so selfishly kept hidden for your own use only, callously leaving others to suffer and die. We will not return to you. We no longer want to be married to such cruel men!"

So the teal teal to this day lives in the trees, and their mud nests are shaped like the mountain that held the secret water supply. The selfish goannas were duly punished, and they still bear the marks of it on their bodies; but a greater punishment still was the loss of their beautiful, kind-hearted, courageous wives, and the secret of their water supply.



Kids Page

Junior Bards:

You can do lots of good things with pictures. Ask for old newspapers and magazines. Cut out the best pictures and keep them in a box. Keep adding new pictures whenever you find them. Here's how to make a folder for your best art-work. You'll need a cardboard box, scissors, paper paste and some strong glue, strips of brown paper or cloth, and lots of colourful pictures. Cut out two pieces of strong cardboard a bit bigger than your artwork. Paste big,



bright pictures on both sides of each board. Let one side dry before you go on to the other. Give each board a border of brown paper. Then put them together with their best sides out, and glue them together along one of the edges using a wide strip of strong cloth or paper. Turn it inside out, with the boards back to back, and then glue another strip over the join. You might like to punch holes in the outer edge to thread string or ribbon through, so that you can tie it shut when you're not using it.

Young Ovates:

Ovates are healers. They understand herbs, for example, which ones are poisonous, which ones are harmless, which ones are good for food and which ones have good, healing medicine in them for people and animals.

Some herbs must be wild-crafted – that is, you have to seek them in the wild, because they won't be tamed. Others are happy in gardens, or even in flower pots. And some of our best, safest medicines are common food plants.

Did you know that chewing a small piece of a cabbage leaf can often relieve pain, even tooth-ache, better than aspirin, and it's better for you. Feverfew can prevent headaches and chewing a gum leaf every day can speed recovery from all sorts of illness and injury. Gum-leaves also help sore throats, stuffy noses, coughs, colds and flu.

If you start now, and gather as much knowledge as you can about the herbs and other plants around you, as you grow up you'll have a great store of healing wisdom. Ask the plant-spirits, nature spirits, fauns and fairies to guide you. Perhaps for some of you, it will become a life-long study.

Eating Sage makes you brainy!

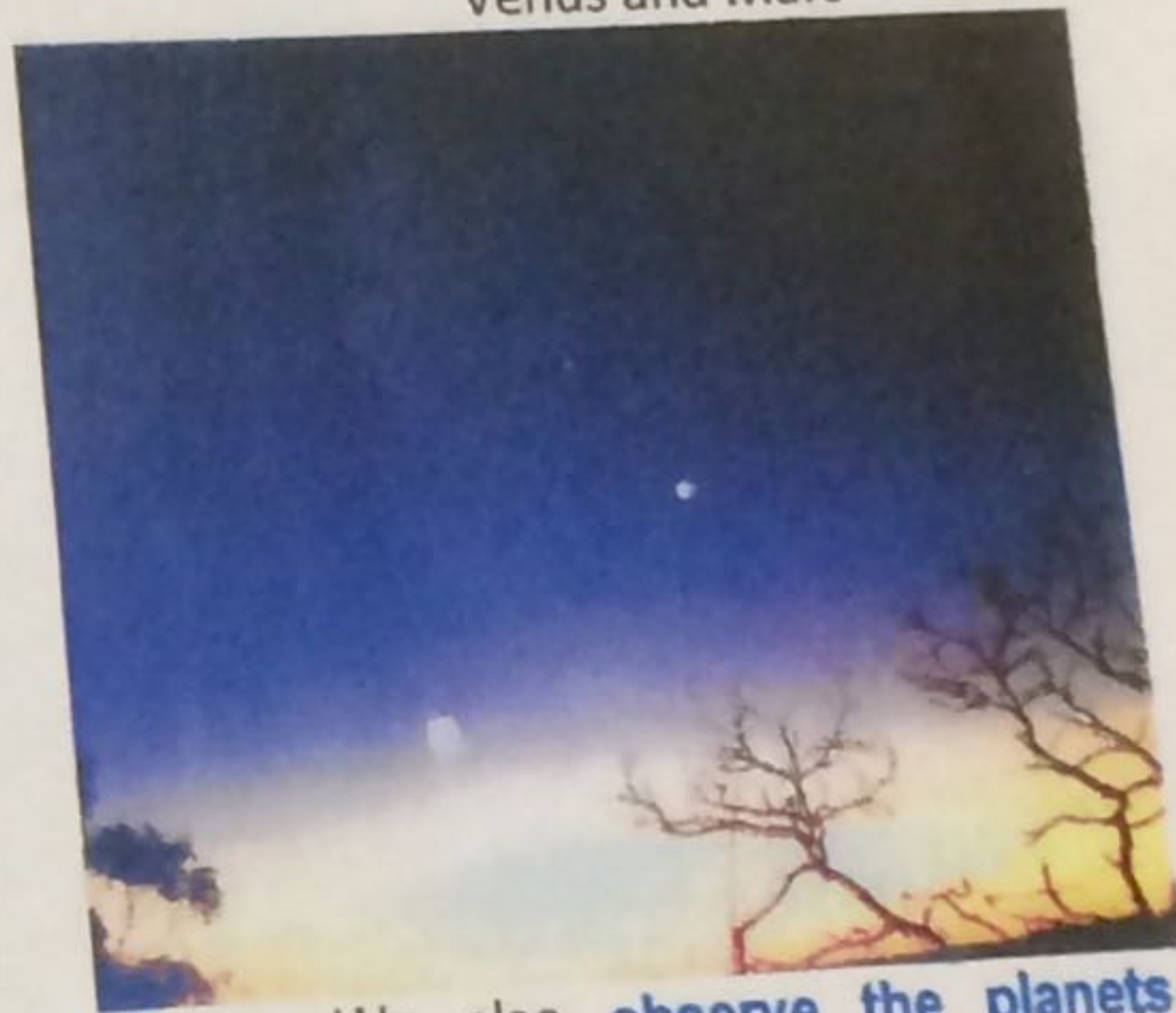


Budding Druids:

Druids try understand the stars. We try to discover everything they can about them – what they are, how they move and how their movements affect our lives.

The sun is the earth's very own star. Druids pay close attention to the regular changes in the direction of its rising and setting as the circle of the year progresses, and they sometimes build henges accordingly. Druids watch the moon, too, with its irregular cycle of change, of about 28-30 days.

Venus and Mars



We also observe the planets. Venus is Earth's little sister, and is the easiest planet to find. Venus is big and bright, and is the first star to come out at night. You can see here clearly shining in the western sky close to the horizon just after sunset. Perhaps you can find Mars too, which sometimes glows a fiery red. If you're lucky enough to have access to a telescope you'll be able to see much more, but even with your naked eyes alone, you can learn a lot about the stars in the sky above you. Anyone can know things about the stars, but if you are respectful and reverent, you can open your being to the mystery and magic of each star you see. Stars are living beings, vast and amazing, with minds and spirits and souls beyond our imagining. Many druids believe that the sun nurtures us not just with radiance and power, but with love and awareness as well. The moon communicates with each of us in myriad magical and mysterious ways. Just as the animals and plants in a forest are all aware of each other and react to one another in harmonious ways, so the stars and planets in the depths of space are aware and communicating. If we learn to listen, we can hear what the stars have to say to us.