

Elaine talking to Wendy Mewes about her new book

WENDY

It's about moving across Brittany on all paths, so picking out routes that might have been used for pilgrimage or in Neolithic times or Celtic times or Roman times for travelling, for all purposes. Trade, religious ritual, travel to ports to go on further to Great Britain, old routes, and what they can still tell us about the past.

ELAINE

So how long has this been in the, let's say, gestation period.

WENDY

Rather too long! I started at the beginning of 2017 intending to write a very different book. I was going to walk the Tro Breizh Pilgrimage around Brittany. For various reasons that didn't work out. I started to transfer the work I'd done into a book about paths and routes, more generally. I then had a heart attack, which delayed things let's say and made it difficult to do some of the things I'd planned, and a year later I had very serious Shingles which affected how I thought and how I worked, and again everything had to be changed. So it's had a difficult gestation period, and a long one, it's been three years since my last book – but at last it's finished, it's out. It's about integration, a little bit about integration. It's about my relationship with the landscape here which is the main theme of my work these days, and a little bit about being a very solitary person. I think we're well placed in Brittany to find peace and inspiration in the landscape, and also comfort, reassurance in the continuity of the beauty of the landscape here. The people who have read it so far seem to have enjoyed it and got from it the sort of things I'd hoped, so I'm pleased, but I am relieved to have actually finished it because at many stages I thought I never would, that it was too much, but in fact I think it's worked out well in the end.

ELAINE

Is it sort of written chronologically, or is it sort of chapter by chapter?

WENDY

It's ten chapters, each one is a different route or a different theme. For example there's a chapter following in the footsteps of Saint Yves, the patron saint of Brittany, and that involves looking at several different places. He was a great walker himself and he walked all over the place, so it's not one continuous route.



It's three different sections looking at different walks. Another one is just one walk, a Celtic route from the forest of Huelgoat all the way up to the Monts d'Arrée and over the Monts d'Arrée and old Celtic, probably commercial route. And there's quite a, quite a lot of islands make their appearance as well because I'm very interested in the islands of Brittany. I'd quite like to do a book about those at some point, and also the Quiberon Peninsula, Dol de Bretagne and the Marées near Mont Saint Michel. There's a great variety of places.

ELAINE

So what would you say has been the best bit of this particular book.

WENDY

That is a difficult question to answer, because every time I set off on an expedition I am overwhelmed with my good fortune in discovering new things, even places I know well. There's always something new to discover.