

Caroline Dear

Stories of the land - One week in July

Monday

We walked along the track,
the track of Moluag and his monks,
from the ruin in the churchyard
to the remains of the monastery – stones and a well;
this place of prayer,
this place of peace,
this place of song.

We sang in this place,
amidst the cattle – so beautiful and peaceful,
the blessed beasts,
living treasure of the people;
cow of milk,
cow of cheese,
cow of butter.

Tuesday

We felt the rocks and the sun,
going up the Quiraing path,
the Prison and the Needle,
going round, beneath the rock face, heavy, dark;
this place of echo,
this place of raven,
this place of story.

We told the stories of this place,
Placag and Peighinn, shaping the land,
Na Fir Bhreugach and Grianan nam Maighdeann,
surrounding the peat bank;
peat of history,
peat of belonging,
peat of memory.

Wednesday

We remembered when we were young,
fifteen white cats and a well of special water,
Tobar a' Cheaparnaich, now no longer of respect,
tea and sweets in Rory Donald's house;
this place of lineage,
this place of change,
this place of connections.

We listened to Lachy of the hands,
hands of knowledge, hands of wisdom,

working with the seasons – the circle of life,
the place names slipping away along with the rock;
names of the land,
names of the customs,
names of the people.

Thursday

We watched the shearing of the sheep,
the folding of the wool,
with midges, Panecur and coffee,
folding the language around my tongue;
this place of the Vikings,
this place of the cave people,
this place of the crofters.

We cut the peat on this open land,
with Trotternish ridge the boundary of our vision,
the new peat, soft and firm,
the past beside the present;
time of past,
time of always,
time of to-day.

Friday

We collected dulse, fossils and images,
images of the salmon swimming up into the nets,
images of the workforce labouring
on the steep slope, in tweed caps;
this place of archaeology,
this place of the silver coin,
this place of electricity.

Electricity running around my head,
linking my brain and my tongue,
past times connecting with to-day,
the language, the land and the people.

