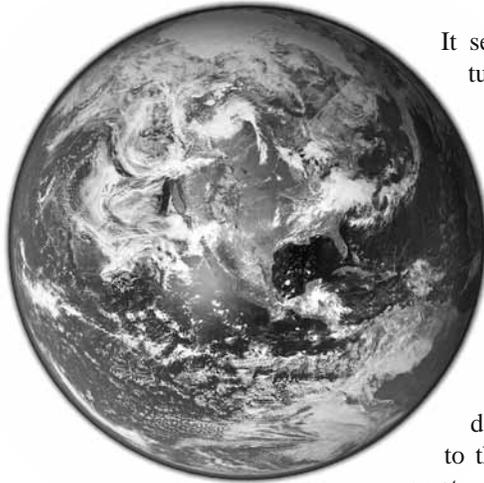


The Earth and Us



It seems like we are at a turning point in our relationship with the Earth. Extreme weather events are increasing in frequency, icecaps and glaciers are melting, ocean currents may be shifting. It's a wake up call, to reduce and reverse the damage we are doing to the Earth and the other creatures we share it with.

It's no longer a case just of preserving the Earth for our grandchildren: it's now a question of preserving it for ourselves as well.

Religion is a major determinant of people's attitudes to nature, and past religions have been part of the problem. Although many Asian faiths have generally given nature and animals a prominent status, the dominant Western faiths have given them a low priority. In the Christian Bible, Earth is not seen as an important end in itself, it is only a passageway to an eternal afterlife. God gives man dominion over all the earth and its creatures, and tells Adam and Eve to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it."

It seems that at this critical moment we need a new spirituality, one in which Nature is central and not just incidental, and one in which the planet is seen as an overarching whole. Some people are already trying to shift the traditional religions in this direction – a key harbinger is the Christian Evangelical Climate Initiative, which in March ran prominent ads in US media calling for stewardship of the earth and action on global warming. Given that Christianity and Islam account for half the human race, these efforts are intensely important and should be supported.

But new spiritual directions also have a part to play, and the environmental crisis is expanding nature-oriented religious viewpoints. Pantheism's nature-centered view can offer inspiration. We see ourselves as members of the natural community of all life on earth, with the same rights as other members, but with greater duties because of our greater power to do harm. We see Nature as our mother, our security, our peace, our past and our future. Nature made each one of us, and as long as we live we remain part of nature and at our death each one of us will be reabsorbed into nature.

The earth is our only home. It's here that we are born, live and die. It's not some temporary launch pad to heaven, or temporary stop-gap until God violently destroys it and replaces it with a new heaven and a new earth. Indescribably beautiful, endlessly diverse, a clouded blue sapphire hanging in the deep black of space, it is the only place where we can find or make our paradise. But it's a fragile paradise, and we are well advanced in the process of destroying its natural beauty and diversity, reducing it to drab uniformity.

In this issue we explore aspects of our relationship to nature as Pantheists. Do we think and act globally, or locally? What do we do to conserve and enhance Nature? Where does Nature rank in our priorities? How can we use Nature in our spirituality and our ways of coping with life?

Our responses are diverse and very personal. As the articles in this issue show, Nature is a prime resource for us, not only for material survival and shelter, not only for our aesthetic and intellectual pleasure, but also for our sanity and our mental peace.

Nature offers us ways of coping with stress and pain by transcending our selves. It gives us ways of coming to terms with grief, through the knowledge that we and our loved ones are and always will be part of Nature.

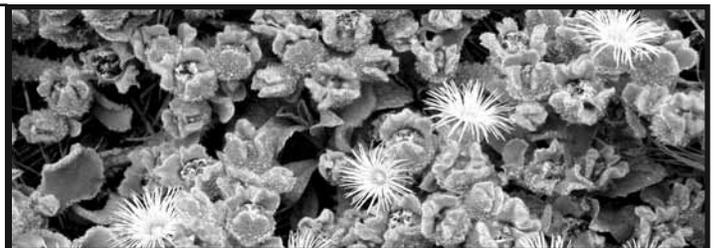
Our feeling of gratitude and reciprocal obligation makes Nature a uniquely strong focus of our ethics. We care about and care for humans, but also for the millions of other unique species with whom we share our planetary home.

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Seeing locally, feeling globally

by **Paul Harrison**



Photos © Paul Harrison

Since adolescence I have always had a strong desire to get to know the planet on which I live. Always fascinated by maps, especially by dark brown and purple and white colored mountains, I started traveling under my own steam when I had just turned seventeen, starting with most of Western Europe. After university I got a job in Nigeria teaching French and traveled around much of West and North Africa. Later I became a journalist and began to plan wider travels, visiting many countries in Asia, Latin America and Africa writing about development and environment in Third World countries.

For most of this time I lived in London on the edge of Hampstead Heath, a big, beautiful and in some places quite wild park about four miles north of the center. Hampstead is peaceful and insulated from nature's problems. There are no earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires; no dangerous animals or wilderness diseases. The only routine risk to my life was cycling on London's busy streets.

Then the unfolding of the Universe upended my life and flung me almost six thousand miles away to the Santa Monica Mountains north-west of Los Angeles, where I have lived since June 2002. If I believed in destiny I would think it had been planned for me to come here.

Shortly before I moved I saw a program about Los Angeles – it was in a TV series called *The World's Most Dangerous Places*. And it wasn't about the gang scene or the freeways.



In truth, this region has more natural hazards found together than I have ever seen or

Bee on a native soap

even heard of anywhere else on earth. We have earthquakes, landslides, flash floods, wildfires. We have rattlesnakes, black widow spiders, mountain lions, fire ants, killer bees, and of course termites. We have poison oak and Lyme disease and West Nile virus. I have become blasé about these hazards, but they are still there.

What makes it worth while running these risks and occasionally running into them is the natural beauty. I go hiking every day and the 45 degree slopes help to keep me fit. Frequently I stop to look at a scene and get a heady heartache, very much like being in love. The Santa Monica Mountains are the eroded remains of uplifted sandstone and mudstone beds, and of an explosive volcanic episode 15 million years ago. This has created a series of moderate but steep-sided hills of 2-3000 feet that to the human eye look just like a full scale mountain range – from some locations you can see nine or ten layers of hills, each one bluer than the last.

The varied slopes, distance from the sea, orientation and soils creates a huge diversity of microhabitats and microclimates, so there's a very diverse flora – often you will see a rare flower like the white globe lily in only one year, in one tiny location, and the following year there will be something else in that same spot.

An unexpected bonus is a sense of immediate connection to the dynamic processes of the planet, indeed that connection is the reason for some of the hazards. Each morning I visit the US Geological Survey quake website, just to see how the earth has been stirring in its sleep. We get earthquakes because we are – like the rest of the Western US coastline - on a fault line where the Pacific plate slides under the North American plate. Occasionally we feel a quake if it's over 3.0 on the Richter scale. We are surfing on the sliding lithosphere.

Then there is the hydrosphere - that real surf, which I photograph as it curls over itself like a green waterfall. Another website I visit frequently is wavewatch.com, where you can see a forecast of surf height and watch swells, forming off Alaska and Japan, surging in our direction. The Central Gyre rotates clockwise around the North Pacific, heading off-coast on our stretch and pulling up deep cold waters full of nutrients. This feeds the rich diversity of aquatic

life, so we see pelicans, dolphins, porpoise, harbor seals, sea-lions, sea otters, plus migrating grey, blue and humpback whales. In February our local pantheist group drove up to San Simeon, where elephant seals started colonizing a few beaches in 1990. Last year there were 14,000 animals. We watched the mothers feeding the roly-poly pups, and the huge bull males fighting each other for the privilege of mating with females in estrus.

We are also on the frontline of the atmosphere. We are just one degree north of the tropic of cancer, on a level with Casablanca and Baghdad and Kabul – this is a latitude of descending warm dry air where aridity is normal. Inland from here is desert, and only the moister offshore airs hitting the mountain ridges save us coastal dwellers from being surrounded by desert. This pattern creates a succession of diverse habitats: within fifty miles you pass from green wooded mountains, through chaparral and open grassland with oaks in creeks and on north-facing slopes, past dry hills covered with prickly pear, into the San Gabriel mountains with pine forests and snow in winter, and then down to the Mojave desert. Sometimes the winds blow inland from the sea, bringing huge billows of cloud rolling over the first crest of the mountains. Sometimes they blow from the desert towards the sea, and then we get hot dry days, headaches, and fire alerts.

And fires. A couple of years back, after the last set of wildfires, I foolhardily wrote that I wouldn't mind if one of the hazards here got me. That statement was put to the test last October, when 40 square miles of wild oak grassland to the north of my canyon townhouse burned. For the first few days we thought we had escaped – then the winds changed direction and headed our way. When I saw 20-foot flames on the hillside above our canyon, I knew it was time for us to leave. We packed artworks, African masks, papers, computers and cats and hoped for the best.

As we drove away we looked back and watched as armies of helicopters and small planes flew in and out. Whole neighborhoods were swathed in flames, and it seemed inevitable that many homes would be lost.

We spent a fretful night with friends. On our return all was well with our house. Only three dwellings were burned in the whole vast area. It was a wonderful feeling of relief and release and

Love in the sand: elephant seals mating at Piedras Negras beach

gratitude. But it had been a close call - all the slopes around the complex burned, and we saw from the ash that the flames had come within forty feet of our building.

The fires opened up many new walks for me that were previously blocked by dense chaparral and towering black mustard. Walking through the burned wildlands was heartbreaking at first, so for psychotherapy I determined to photograph the recovery process. It started within weeks as grasses germinated in early rains - in fact the hills were greener and more beautiful than ever. Most of the gophers seemed to have survived underground, because there were masses of newly dug mounds of soil. Some wildlife took refuge in the human areas – flocks of turkey vultures circled overhead, and deer munched down half the woody shrubs in my small front garden. The wildland shrubs took longer to recover, but within a month or so green shoots were sprouting from the base of burned skeletons. The oaks lost some leaves and bark, but they are adapted to survive here, and green shoots and leaves are now returning among the dried russet. Fire is part of the natural cycle here.

I feel rejuvenated by the fire, exhilarated by nature's power of recovery, and blessed to live here. I hope I can go on interacting with this dynamic landscape for a very long time.

I feel an obligation to avoid doing damage to nature, and on my walks I do my small part in preserving local flowers and animals by tearing up black mustard and star thistle – two European invasives that outcompete and muscle out the native flowers. I am helping Sheila Rosenthal to preserve and restore native vegetation on three acres of creekside and woodland.

From the backbone trail overlooking ocean and inland, I wheel around and witness all of these local and planetary phenomena at once. It is quite dizzying. But wherever you are, it's always possible to feel the pulse of the planet through rocks, plants, animals, clouds and winds around you.



Time and the Earth Heal

by Flora Cordis Johnson

In the 1970s, my parents bought 250 acres in Nova Scotia, Canada, and started spending their summers there. Later they retired to this windswept near-island jutting into the Atlantic Ocean, and lived happily here until they died. An only child, I knew that one day I would inherit this land. For 30 years, I never doubted that I would end my days here, or that my remains would come to rest in the small cemetery just across the river, where my parents lie.

The knowledge that I would one day own this land guided me to make a career change in the early 1990s, when I took up natural landscaping. I figured that, if I was going to own 250 acres one day, I probably should learn how to care for it responsibly.

The natural landscaping movement arose in the late 1970s from the realization that, as more and more land in North America is developed, nature is losing out. The landscapes humans usually install where they live and work are hostile to many types of plant and animal life, and are typically maintained only at great environmental cost.

Natural landscaping is an alternative to this destruction. Natural landscapers try to protect or restore, as much as possible, the landscape that would have been present on a site before development took place. We can't put back all that's been lost—nobody can—but we can at least hope to keep or replace many of the species that might have existed in an area before development began. Typically, we work with native plants—plants that might have been present on a site prior to European settlement—and also add or keep natural features such as mini-wetlands and standing dead trees with holes in them that provide nest sites for birds and other animals. With luck, the landscape that results will be able to support many more species of plants and animals than can live in a conventional landscape. It will require far less maintenance, particularly maintenance



Photo copyright Flora Cordis Johnson

of the environmentally destructive kind. A well-designed natural landscape will also perform community service—for example, natural landscapes can help to prevent disasters such as flooding and mudslides.

Before becoming a natural landscaper, I had worked for a medical publication. One of the lessons I learned after my career change was that healing land is not unlike healing the human body. Wise doctors often talk about prescribing “tincture of time”—just wait a while, and most things get better without a doctor’s help. Tincture of time is also a good prescription for land, as I found out. If you wait long enough, seeds of plants the site needs will probably blow in on the wind or be carried in by birds; all trees die eventually and, if allowed to stand there and rot, will be hollowed out by woodpeckers and other animals looking for nests; wetlands tend to form naturally wherever drainage is poor.

At best, humans can speed these processes up, and guide them. At worst, the wrong action, or even the right action made with too much haste, can have disastrous results. If you plant a shade-loving wildflower before trees have had a chance to grow, the plant will probably die in the sun. Plant an aggressive wildflower in just the right spot, and your entire project could be overrun by a single plant that is just a little bit too happy to be on your site.

Worse still, nature can be hard to predict: A plant that should do well in a given spot, doesn’t. One that shouldn’t, does. The art and science of natural landscaping is to know when to act, and when not to. Even more important, however, is to know that whatever action you do decide to take could be a mistake. So it’s best to proceed slowly—if you are making a mistake, better it should be a small one. The Hippocratic Oath - “Above all, do no harm”—is just as good advice for the natural landscaper as it is for doctors. Around the turn of the century, life as I knew it ended - in job loss, divorce, and deaths that all hit within the space of a few years. One of the deaths was my mother’s. I inherited the property in Nova Scotia and came here three years ago, driving 4,000 miles with my dog, cat and other cherished possessions in a rented minivan.

The property extends from a valley ridge above to a river and wetlands below. On the ridge is a small forest—mostly white spruce, white and grey birches, poplars, and balsam fir. These trees grow well in areas that have been clearcut. Almost none are more than 40 years old.

I wish I could say that my land inspires feelings of awe, but sorrow would be closer to the mark. This land once may have grown soaring, lichen-covered trees hundreds of years old. Most likely the property was clearcut at least once before my parents bought it. In the early ‘80s my parents followed recommendations made by the experts of the time, and allowed more cutting. Cutting has changed not only the age of the trees but also the species; the sugar maple, red spruce, yellow birch, and Eastern hemlock that probably grew here are now mostly gone.

Animals that would have lived here once have also vanished. Moose were replaced by white-tailed deer, wolves by coyotes. Of the big animals, only the bear hangs on. We still see snowshoe hares, weasels, all manner of rodents, and many birds including bald eagles. But the shy creatures of the deep forest—the pine marten, the flying squirrel, the lynx—are mostly or completely gone.

In good weather I climb the logging road my parents installed, at substantial cost. I am often sad. A drawback to knowing the ecology of a place is that you know what might have been, and this can make it hard to appreciate what is. I fret about where to find the resources to restore missing trees, or do the thinning some experts tell me I should do; I worry about whether I should maintain the expensive road, which is crumbling along the edges and being overgrown by brush and trees.

Yet as I walk I also see white pines growing among the white spruce and balsam fir trees. White pines can live to be 400 years old and grow to 115 feet. The tallest and straightest were logged from these forests over a century ago, because they were highly valued for making masts. It seems these majestic creatures like to grow on my humble logging road. They respond to good drainage and a patch of open sky by shooting up - mere babies at 25 years or less, some of them are already taller than me. In 300 years, these trees could tower over this land, their layered tops visible from my grave.

The white pines remind me of the most important lesson I learned as a natural landscaper—which was not what to do, or what not to do, but only how to wait. Given time, this land will heal. Perhaps, though given a briefer span, I will too.

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The Land Ethic of Aldo Leopold

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to cooperate. The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics. . . A land ethic, then, reflects the existence of an ecological conscience, and this in turn reflects a conviction of individual responsibility for the health of land. . . We can be ethical only in relation to something we can see, feel, understand, love, or otherwise have faith in.

She is the circling hawk, the butterfly

On September 19, 2005, Chesleigh Marie Pafford passed away aged 21. In her memory, long-standing WPM member Rusty Pafford and his wife Paula decided to dedicate a 60-acre plot of land as a Pantheist Wildlife Habitat Reserve.

Ours is one of several species that mourns the loss of a loved one. In spiritual efforts to endure the grief, one's religion is especially put to the test at such times. As Pantheists, my wife and I believe we are the planet, and the planet is us. Our daughter held the same beliefs, and the lyrics remain on her wall: "we are stardust, and we've got to get back to the garden."

In our daughter's obituary I expressed that her soul was "trapped somewhere between the setting sun and a rising harvest moon, so busy bringing joy and happiness to family and friends." Amidst the serenity and beauty of a Saturday evening, as we sat in our boat on a nearby lake and watched that rising harvest moon, little would we have thought that two days later we would be planning her funeral.

The funeral home directors had to be educated as to our desire for a green funeral. They were ready with their pamphlets and price guides. I doubt they had ever had anyone choose such a plain wooden casket usually reserved for cremation. And, since there was to be no embalming, I had only a short time for viewing and visiting my daughter for the last time. I even had to sign a waiver to hold them harmless less there be some unforeseen event or

display on my part. Fortunately Texas' long history of life and death on the plains allowed this natural approach along with the establishment of private cemeteries.

The graveside and memorial services would prove challenging for many friends and family. Our UU minister, a panentheist, handled the events with great reverence and sensitivity. In the middle of our sixty-acre east Texas woods, a dedicated bird sanctuary and nature reserve, we buried Chez, on a hillside, up from a pond where she and I had often fished and listened to coyotes, owls, and frogs. A hawk's nest sits above the upper end where a constant spring refreshes this home to fish, insects, frogs, and unseen swimmers.

Along with a few close friends and family, we held hands in a circle around Chez' grave as our minister read from Rumi, Anne Dillard, and others. The minister spoke about how she would rest awhile, and then become the blooming dogwood flowers of spring, the dew on the branches, and the caterpillar pausing to accept the life-renewing moisture. We filled in her grave, several of us with shovels assisting.

Then we strolled down the several paths of the surrounding woods. We visited Chez' favorite places – one where two small springs converge over a sand-covered bottom and water flows just six inches or so, perfect for hiking barefoot during hot Texas summers. There are often aquatic bugs and spiders here, some walking on water, others sliding beneath the surface. That day, we startled a doe and her twins. Farther up the stream we could hear feral hogs staking their claim to a rich mud pit. Uphill, a spring emerges, then soaks right back into the ground.

Because a hurricane was approaching just a



From Chesleigh's diary, October 2003

Last night I bought roses for myself. I guess I'd call the color "antique" but I don't know if that is right. They are not quite pink; not quite white or yellow. I don't know what to do around them. I wish they had never been cut but I never would've been able to see them. They should be in a palace, or given to a goddess. They take my breath away every time I see them. I've told each one of them that they are perfect and beautiful but I don't know what else I can do. They should be worshipped. I'm a firm believer that the answer to any problem or question we have can be found in nature. We come to this place only to live and grow towards the sun and hopefully be able to provide some inspiration and wisdom.



Verses from the memorial service

*Not for me steel coffins
Nor even a pinewood box.
Lay me out in the wilderness
And let me return to Earth.
Tear my flesh, coyote
And I will run with you over the plains.
Take my eyes, eagle
And I will soar with you
In the mountains,
Pick my bones clean, little beetles
And I will flow back
Into the lifestream
To think like a mountain
And sing like a river.
Mary de LaValette*

*Oh, there will come a day, a twilight,
When I shall sink to rest
In deep wet moss and cool blue shadows
Upon a mountain's breast,
And yield a body torn with passions,
And bruised with earthly scars,
To the cool oblivion of evening,
Of solitude and stars.
Lew Sarett*

couple hundred miles or so to the south, the wind was out of the north, yet the sun was shining. Someone pointed that the usually vocal birds in the area were quiet. The divinity of nature was at hand.

Now, my wife and I attend grief sessions along with other parents who've lost children in the same tragic circumstance that we lost Chez. Too many continue to blame God, and not understand why, as hard as they may pray, their child will not come back.

We cannot "come out" as Pans just yet. Most are not ready to hear our story of how our daughter had lived a full life in only twenty-one years, how she was nature's gift along our thirty-eight years of marriage. Our thirty-four year old son grieves as we do. Fortunately most of our friends don't feel compelled to "comfort" us with their religion although many acquaintances insist on making that effort. What we want, and are getting, is an arm around a shoulder or a firm grasp on the arm. There is no comforting explanation.

I just hope that what we did in memory of Chez serves as an example to all who knew her that life and our planet are delicate. The chemicals, iron and manufactured things of conventional burials have no place here.

When we visit the gravesite now and sit on the lone limestone bench that marks her grave, we are comforted by those owls, coyotes, and frogs. We will come back in the spring. We know where Chez is. She is the spider web, the circling hawk, the butterfly, the sunset painted by west Texas grass fires.



What we do together

So how does World Pantheism, as an organization, relate to the planet? Nature is central to the WPM's spirituality and ethics, and we have tried to embody that centrality by making it possible for members to realize their goals in our community. We aim to provide resources and channels through which our members can express their concern in individual and joint action, and see tangible results.

We are signatories to the Earth Charter, which sets out the rights of Nature and our responsibilities towards the planet. Below we print an extract of the spiritual and ethical principles of the charter.

We also have three schemes to save habitat for wildlife.

One is the daily click group at EcologyFund, which is now the largest of the religious groups both in terms of numbers and of area of land saved. The WPM group now has 191 members, who have saved over 2 million square feet or 47 acres – equal to a plot 1425 feet on each side. We have saved almost exactly the same amount of land as the group called World Wildlife Foundation, and more than twice as much land as the Sierra Activists. With a little extra push we could be in the top ten of all groups. These land savings are made possible by ad-

vertizers who sponsor payments to the environmental charities that actually save the land.

The second leg of our habitat saving is that we have ourselves sponsored adverts at EcologyFund and at Care2.com, making payment direct to the Nature Conservancy and the World Parks Foundation. Via this channel we have saved 75 acres.

Finally there is our Wildlife Habitat Scheme, which allows members to make a public commitment to managing an area of their land as habitat for native plants and animals – no change in ownership or control is involved. The area involved can be a small patch or a sizeable reserve. Two members - Flora Cordis Johnson and Rusty Pafford with his wife Paula – have recently added larger areas, more than doubling our previous total. The size of all the reserves is now is now 184 acres.

All in all we have now saved the impressive total of 306 acres – equal to 13.3 million square feet or a square with sides of 3650 feet, almost half a square mile. That's equivalent to almost ¾ acres per current member. If only every religious group did the same, we could save the planet and all the species we share it with.

From The Earth Charter

“We must decide to live with a sense of universal responsibility, identifying ourselves with the whole Earth community as well as our local communities. We are at once citizens of different nations and of one world in which the local and global are linked. Everyone shares responsibility for the present and future well-being of the human family and the larger living world.

“It requires a new sense of global interdependence and universal responsibility. We must imaginatively develop and apply the vision of a sustainable way of life locally, nationally, regionally, and globally.

“The spirit of human solidarity and kinship with all life is strengthened when we live with reverence for the mystery of being, gratitude for the gift of life, and humility regarding the human place in nature.

“Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.”



What you can do

- Join our click group at Ecologyfund and save 65 square feet of habitat for wildlife every single day.
- Think about dedicating part of your yard or land to native wildlife to make up for the lost habitat that we occupy.
- Ask us about a donation to sponsor the purchase of wildlife habitat via the World Parks Foundation.

Check out our Greenup Your Life resource page to do any or all of these:

- Audit your lifestyle
- Check hazards in your area
- Offset the CO2 you produce
- Find energy-efficient appliances
- Find green energy suppliers
- Build sustainable housing
- Garden sustainably
- Find recycling centers
- Buy green products
- Audit your workplace
- Combat light pollution

You'll find all the links you need at:
<http://www.pantheism.net/nature.htm>
<http://www.pantheism.net/greenup.htm>

Getting closer together

New local groups organizer

Sharon Dobrovich has taken on the important role of facilitating and promoting local WPM groups. She writes:



For me, Pantheist spirituality is about finding a way to express what I feel and think and believe about the something larger than me in my everyday life in the real world. I think sometimes that takes courage and sometimes it's a bit lonely. It takes courage to stand up in face of communities or families that are not accepting or sometimes downright hostile.

What I have needed is a group of people who understand my beliefs, share them, and don't think I'm crazy or going to hell but will support me and talk with me face to face, give me a hug, people that I can do the same for some day, to become friends, to do activities or work on a project together in our community, to eat together, talk, and share. An important part of this spirituality is sharing it with others and having a mutual support system, so I'm dedicating myself to helping establish local pantheist groups, even if they're very small ones. I want to do what I can to make it a less lonely path, both here online and out in my community, and I very much appreciate what all of you do, too. I really believe that local groups are what will help pantheism grow. I believe and hope that if we nurture each other and have that network behind us, then we gain more confidence and strength to live out our message.

Nature Reverence at Upcoming.org

Local groups are one thing that many people want and ask us for. The truth is that we are still small and scattered. We already have active groups in a few locations such as San Diego, Los Angeles, London, Ohio, and Washington. But groups don't start up by our waving a magic wand. They start up and persist in places where individuals have taken and sustained the initiative.

We used to use Meetup.com and things were moving rapidly there, but then Meetup introduced steep organizer fees which made it very difficult for small groups to start. So we looked around for an alternative and we found one. World Pantheism is now using Upcoming.org to galvanize the creation of local groups. Upcoming allows individuals and groups to organize and publicize events and get-togethers. The service is completely free and commits itself to remaining so on its front page. You can join interest groups, search for events by place and topic, create and add events, and add venues of your own choosing.

To maximize potential attendance we called our Upcoming group Nature Reverence. It is open to all people who feel that reverence for nature and respect for naturalism are central to their spirituality, whether you call yourself world pantheist, eco-atheist, naturalistic pagan, religious naturalist, or religious humanist. It's up to users to create events for people in their area, what Upcoming does is act as a public notice board and organizing facilitator.

Checkout how to join and use Upcoming here:
<http://www.pantheism.net/upcoming.htm>

Other ways of forming a group

1. Join our local email lists. If they are quite active you will hear and hear about meetings, and you can let people know about you and where you are. But remember: if everyone waits for someone to speak up no-one ever will. To be active they depend upon you personally and individually.

All local yahoo groups are listed at:

<http://www.pantheism.net/localgroups.htm>

2. Look people up in the members' geodata and email them asking if they are interested. Not all are current, but it's a good start. Click on <http://members.pantheism.net/imdms/geodata.html> and fill in your ID and password. We have almost 3,000 names and emails on record, you can look up who's in your country, state, city or phone area code.

3. Print out our leaflets from <http://www.harrison.dircon.co.uk/credprin.htm>. Add your name and email for people to contact and leave them at UU congregations, humanist, atheist, environmental and science meetings.

4. Check out your local Unitarian Universalist congregation and talk to people, there are usually a good contingent of potentially pantheists. This can be one of the easiest routes to creating a local group. Check out our pages on UU groups:

<http://www.pantheism.net/uu/uupantheists.htm>

5. Be ready to consult new people about what meetings should be like, but go prepared with ideas of your own. Check out suggestions from existing groups at:

<http://www.pantheism.net/upcoming.htm>

Pantheists and the Planet

Members write about their personal relationships

My connection with this remarkable planet is first and foremost that it has made my life possible. I am amazed by the complexity and variety of life. Life's prime directive appears to be "make more living things." I feel more emotionally connected to the whole earth rather than a few specific favorite spots. In fact, I can't say I have

many longstanding favorite spots. Quiet places, away from manufactured noises, are the best because distractions are lessened and I can sense more easily the oneness of the "all."

Occasionally I can feel a powerful sense of the oneness of our own species. It comes upon me unexpectedly, usually in a setting where there are hundreds of people going about their individual business. I get a very strong feeling that we are all so very much more alike than different.

I prefer spending more time around that which pleases the senses rather than that which doesn't. All things considered, I favor squirrels over skunks if I have to be in the vicinity of one or the other. I try not to disturb any creatures, though I know I will do so unintentionally as I go about my life. Spiders get to wander along the ceiling at my house. Peaceful co-existence with most pests is my usual policy, but action is sometimes required. I remove the wasp nests from near the front door, as they pose a hazard to visitors.

My ethics regarding the earth are based upon my belief that we should preserve that which we can for as many generations as we can. There is only so much we can do, as nature will run its course without regard to what we desire. Still, it is in my nature to take a much longer view of things and to think about impacts far beyond my life span. It is the only kind of immortality I can hope to achieve.

My day to day efforts are very much local. I work from my home, so I avoid daily commuting. When I do need to take a car trip, I combine tasks and plan the shortest route. We use cloth bags at the supermarket. I let my yard grow as it does, without fertilizer or pesticide. I admit that I will use carefully-chosen pesticide in the event of necessity such as carpenter ant home invasions. We minimize our production of trash, in large part because we use almost no pre-packaged meals and we acquire "stuff" more based upon necessity than desire.

I feel somewhat powerless to control the automobile-crazed structure of society. Collectively, we have spent many decades putting together our housing and infrastructure assuming personal vehicular transportation will always be an option. It will take decades to reverse that and the reversal will only come by way of painful events that force change.

Preferring warmth and comfort, I find it necessary to rely upon what exists today in fuels and energy choices. Still, my own dream is to built a home designed to take advantage of geothermal and wind power. Perhaps, someday, I will get that chance.

In the meantime, I can't rescue the planet. I can only do my part to limit my impact upon it and to lead by example.

Bruce Merkle



Those who dwell among the beauties and mysteries of the earth are never alone or weary of life. . . To stand at the edge of the sea, to sense the ebb and flow of the tides, to feel the breath of a mist moving over a great salt marsh, to watch the flight of shore birds that have swept up and down the surf lines of the continents for untold thousands of year, to see the running of the old eels and the young shad to the sea, is to have knowledge of things that are as nearly eternal as any earthly life can be. *Rachel Carson*

I feel locally, in that my sphere-of-concern starts with me and my family & friends and radiates outward from there – to my community, my city, my county, my state, my country, and then the world.

I feel an emotional connection with the planet: this planet - our planet. Earth is my home. And it's where I keep all my stuff. It is hard to express in words. The phrase "the Earth is sacred; the universe is divine" comes closest.

My connection to Earth is more akin to a sense of homecoming and home-and-hearth, rather than love of Earth for its beauty. Not to belittle Earth's beauty – many vistas I find beautiful, both large and small.

I act locally, and nationally, and globally, all three. But a larger proportion of my time and effort is local, rather than national or global. Followed by national, rather than global.

I feel I should do my small part to nurture my little corner of the ecosystem. I do not feel that I, by myself, can rescue the planet. Also, I don't feel the planet needs rescuing, per se. Rather, it's in humanity's best interest to insure that the planet's ecosystem continues to remain hospitable to us humans.

I try to reduce my consumption, reuse, recycle, and send requests to my various state and federal representatives to encourage them to be mindful of environmental concerns.

Be conscientious of your actions and the repercussions of your actions.

John Love-Jensen

I think and live globally. I also think of our planet as Gaia, or Mother Earth. Simply put, I believe Gaia is severely injured, and we are past the point of healing her. As a consequence, Gaia will do what she needs to do to cleanse herself of that which has infected and injured her. Severe climate change the likes of which has never been seen on Earth should rid Gaia of what ails her and eventually get the planet back to its beautiful, life-sustaining self, capable of harboring those species which learn to live with her, not against her.

Our species is the one that infected her, and it should be the one which pays the price. All other species understand their place in the ecosystem. Perhaps our descendants will too.

Kim Johnson

I think the land will live beyond whatever we do, for good or ill. But to protect it as a preserve, think of that as part of the human memory of this land. You may bequeath it to the children around you, those who know it as I did, from hill to hill and stream to stream. In this case you would have to

know those whom you live with, and trust them to love the land the way that you do now.

If you leave it as a preserve, then assure yourself that we, the Pantheists, are a community of people who will hold this land as sacred. If it is such a trust, we have to know the land by seeing it and touching it. And for that, we have to be there, in body or in spirit. If some of us come to visit and walk those hills, then the land will serve as a preserve in that it will touch a human need and refresh the spirit of those who look upon it. Even if we do not come, knowing it is there will nourish us - we may not touch it in body, but our thoughts touch it just the same.

Tony van der Mude

I don't think a pantheist can be truly happy unless they are sacrificing a portion of their life to the environment. As a pantheist, my greatest love is help mankind solve environmental problems.

Back in the 1970's when we had gas shortages that created long lines of cars waiting to fuel up I worked on a new turbine design to extract energy from sources like wind and tidal currents. In my home laboratory I came up with a novel way in which to increase the velocity that wind or water gives to the rotor blades of a turbine.

My concept worked so well that I quit my job, incorporated and sold stock in my new company. One of my largest shareholders was the singer John Denver. I was simultaneously awarded seventy-seven novel claims in fluid dynamics and turbine design. New York University encouraged me to build a giant prototype on a forty foot tower on a Manhattan roof top. We were able to match the turbine output to a brake used to stop aircraft on short runways, so that the turbine produced heat (hot water) at close to 100% efficiency. We made hot water to supplement the building's needs. The project made thirty five major publications including a color spread in Popular Science.

Exxon Enterprises was instrumental in ensuring my downfall as well as several small oil companies that promised me everything and delivered nothing until I simply ran out of money. I lost over a million dollars (1980 dollars) but I think that NYU's environmental program picked up as a lot of students did their thesis on the Lebest Wind Turbine. The prototype came down two years later after damage in a seventy mph wind.

My latest love is geothermal but any large projects like that one are grounds for divorce in my house.

Barry Lebest



Three Principles of Deep Ecology - Arne Naess

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on earth have value in themselves. These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realization of these values and are values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this diversity except to satisfy vital needs.

The Spirituality of Gaia

The Gaia theory states basically that the living organisms on Earth interact with the atmosphere, lithosphere and oceans, forming a dynamic evolving whole. As a result the Earth's temperature, atmospheric chemistry, alkalinity and other properties are maintained in states that would be impossible without the presence of life – states that also help to keep the system hospitable to at least some form of life. The theory has now graduated to mainstream status, and has stimulated a great deal of interdisciplinary scientific research.

The concept goes further, offering an inspiring focus for commitment, affection, and spirituality. James Lovelock, the originator of the theory and a WPM honorary advisor, was surprised when so much mail generated by his first Gaia book related to the religious implications. Since then he has done a lot of thinking about these aspects and here we present some of his own thoughts.



The Ages of Gaia, 1988

I am too deeply committed to science for undiluted faith; equally unacceptable to me spiritually is the materialist world of undiluted fact. Art and science seem interconnected with each other and with religion, and to be mutually enlarging.

When I wrote the first book on Gaia, I had no inkling that it would be taken as a religious book. . . Two thirds of the letters received, and still coming in, are about the meaning of Gaia in the context of religious faith. . .

That Gaia can be both spiritual and scientific is, for me, deeply satisfying. In no way do I see Gaia as a sentient being, a surrogate God. To me, Gaia is alive and part of the ineffable Universe and I am part of her.

Thinking of the Earth as alive makes it seem, on happy days, in the right places, as if the whole planet were celebrating a sacred ceremony. . . Any living organism a quarter as old as the Universe itself and still full of vigor is as near immortal as we ever need to know . . .

On Earth Gaia is the source of life everlasting and is alive now; she gave birth to humankind and we are a part of her. This is why, for me, Gaia is a religious as well as a scientific concept.

Individuals interact with Gaia in the cycling of the elements and in the control of the climate, just like a cell does in the body. You also interact individually in a spiritual manner through a sense of wonder about the natural world and from feeling a part of it.

Homage to Gaia, 2000

I am a scientist and an agnostic but I am too much an animal to want to live exclusively in the intellectual world of modern science. The pleasures of science are in the mind, but poetry and music move our hearts as well. . .

We are just glimpsing the possibility that the worship of humankind can also become a bleak philosophy, which excludes all other living things, our partners in life upon the Earth. The bee is not complete without its hive; all living things need the material Earth. Together with the Earth, we are one in Gaia.

Our planet is one of exquisite beauty: it is made of the breath, the blood and the bones of our ancestors. We need to recall our ancient sense of the Earth as an organism and revere it again. Gaia has been the guardian of life for all of its existence; and we reject her care at our peril. If we put our trust in Gaia, it can be a strong and joyful commitment, like that of a good marriage where the partners put their trust in each other. The fact that, like us, she is mortal, makes that trust even more precious.

Gaia should never become a religion, for then it would need a church and a hierarchy. Religions are all too human and fallible and in danger of sinking under the weight of their dogma; a Gaian religion would not be exempt.

Gaia is part of science and is therefore always provisional, but the Earth, which is its embodiment, is something real for us to respect and revere. It is something much larger than we are and, unlike imaginary goddesses, can truly reward or punish us.

What she does offer is an evolving world view for agnostics, and this would require an interactive trust in Gaia, not blind faith; a trust that accepts that, like us, Gaia has a finite life span and is provisional. . . Gaia's parables are for the Earth. Daisyworld illustrates the mortality of Gaia and that, for every change we make to our environment, there are consequences.

I regard the notion of personal life after death as wholly improbable. The scientific evidence is now strong enough for me to take a chance and put my trust in Gaia. It is comforting to think that I am a part of her, and to know that my destiny is to merge with the chemistry of our living planet.

Extracted with permission from *The Ages of Gaia*, Oxford University Press, 1988 and *Homage to Gaia*, OUP, 2000.

I am atheist; that is, I know no gods. I had wasted much time exploring religions, hoping for something "real". I found no real gods, yet some of the religionists seemed to believe. Thus, I went through "the motions", hoping to find ultimate truth, but ultimately in vain. I became "burned" and antagonistic to the concepts, and the very words, of "god" and "religion"; to ritual, and to groups.

Although I am atheist, I long have been impatient with militant atheism's relentless and consuming, yet necessary, sparring with religion. Something was missing. I asked myself: "Is there, or can there be, an atheistic spirituality?" I began to reflect on my self and my life experience. There is the truth that meaning is always found in relationship. Without relationship to gods, what remains is participation in, being "of", the physical universe. The universe consists of inter-related elements (animate and inanimate), each with its unique characteristics, but no "soul".

The physically observable universe is everything; it is complete in itself. In this, there is no human illusion of mind / body duality. Mankind has been said to be distinguished for the making and use of tools. I say that mankind has alienated itself from nature by crafting and promulgating illusion. A pantheist's crucial challenge is to penetrate that veil that isolates.

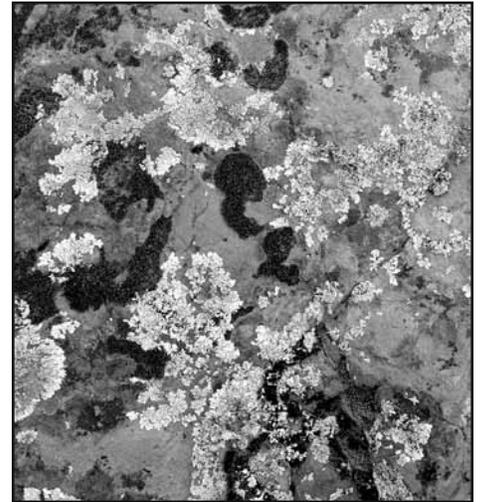
The natural world, neither good nor bad, is simply that-which-is. Yet, because I belong to the natural world, I can view my relationship with it as being good, but only to the extent that I am in harmony with the world. This belonging, itself, is a "good".

I belong to the light of day, and also to the dark of night, which latter I experience as the womb of nature. I feel the enveloping velvet scented crush of a warm, moonless night, with its quiet sounds of small life. One summer night, very near the dark of Lake Tahoe, I chanced to look up, gasping in astonishment at the sight of so very many, very bright, stars, now an ever-vivid memory of the night that never fails to entrance. Eventually, without fail, I shall relax in the embrace of the night.

I gasp at the phenomena of space, the macrocosm; and I quiver at the intricacies of the microcosm; but, I adore the more accessible in-between.

My Self, My Yards, My Universe

by Clare Pawling



I have yards about my house, in which a compost pile lives and dies. Compost piles are sacred, for they play a crucial role in the natural cycle of life and death. They have no beginning and no end, for they embody the meeting of past and future in the Here and the Now. In this place, I foresee the inevitable conclusion of my own face.

I practice what I think of as natural gardening - I allow the living things to determine where it is in the yard that they will live, each according to its nature. I discourage those plants that are greedy for more than their share of the available space, but I use no herbicides and insecticides. The yard as a whole, with my interaction, exhibits a dynamic flowing quality, albeit in slow motion; thus, in a sense, I and the yard comprise a living entity.

Our house's small yards, founded in the top layer of sandy loam, are enriched by squirrel and bird droppings, the dog pen, compost, and nature's winter cover of leaves. In this semi-arid climate, the vegetation and small life are benefited by the presence of paving stones, and flag stones, and lichen rocks (marking our dogs' graves), which hold moisture beneath themselves. The venerable compost pile, the sacred interface of death and life, needs an occasional

watering to help it decay.

We favor indigenous small trees, shrubs, and grasses, including the low-growing buffalo grass. Wildflowers as a special treat. We do not mow, instead string-trimming, but only to ward off our neighbors' ire. When there is a warm spring rain, the indigenous grasses grow from seed, mature, and set their seed, all quite quickly, then die. Some of the yards' denizens are obnoxious survivalists, greedy for space, and thus subject to manual control; others are left to fend for themselves, wherever they are comfortable. Our thorny, invasive Prunus shrub is the doyenne of the north yard.

My lichen-colonized "quest rock," quietly instructing me in the ways of nature, is nestled in the shade at the base of the north wall of my house, where its lichen are at peace and content. Since many years ago, I have nurtured that fine-grained shard of gray rock, a heavy and sleek sliver of stone. I first met this stone -- there is no animism in this -- up on the eastern slope of Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, near a special promontory to which I had gone to burn incense while contemplating the direction of my life, my "quest". This stone has accompanied me across two-thirds of this country. This animate-inanimate form has served as a silent shelter for my spirit, in harmony with my spirituality, which knows no spirits.

In the spring, I put flower bulbs to bed in the soil that I have stirred cautiously with my hands, carefully removing a century of broken glass, fragment by fragment, enabling the soil to heal. I cover the bulbs as with a blanket, gently pressing the soil down around them. Now, I pass my hand above and across the sleeping bulbs, because all things are related, and for no other reason. Life akin to life, each life sheltering its unique secret.

The alley of my city block is unique, in this neighborhood, in that it is private (not owned by the city) and paved only with natural earth and stones. Something like a Tom Sawyer alley, with squirrels and cats and the occasional wandering dog, it dwells behind the back yard,

adjacent to the compost pile, having casually ascended from the street, with a slight swerve to avoid a neighbor's guest cottage. This alley, open on only one end, is lined with vegetation (trees and "weeds", if you must) and garbage cans, cozy to the neighbors' fences and sheds; but I have no fences, for I think of them as unnatural and unfriendly. One of the reasons that I choose to live in this block is the presence of this alley, which sings its private song.

From time to time, I form a necklace pendant, each of one piece of jade, the most companionable of the minerals. I perform as much as possible of the work manually, each stroke of the file or sandpaper a caress. I design with the uniqueness of each stone in mind, to discern, respect, and reveal its innate character. My hands are instructed by the stone. I think of this as "natural design". My ideal pieces feature an integrated hole for suspension from a cord.

These same hands have wielded handsaw, drill, and screwdriver on the planed boards of softwood trees, in construction of many unpainted book and media cases for the house. Those few that are lovingly oiled, in the course of years, turn warm nut-brown colors, their grain glowing; this gradual change is well worth pondering with a pantheist's eye.

"I" will cease to be, at death, because there will be cessation of my self-perception, and thus disillusion of my self-identity as discrete in the universe. My ideal is the direct in-ground burial of my naked body, with a new tree planted above the jade that would be placed over my heart, but human laws intervene. Rather than incur the artificiality of the embalming of this body for a confining coffin ride to nowhere, I have chosen cremation, the lawful alternative. My ashes are to be placed (with a jade stone), or dispersed, by my true love, in some wild natural setting. Perhaps a bit of my ash could be stirred into this compost pile, or placed beneath my quest rock. My remains will be, no more and no less, "of" the Universe than I am now.

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"I gave my word to this tree and to all the people that my feet would not touch the ground until I had done everything in my power to make the world aware of this problem and to stop the destruction."

Julia Butterfly Hill



"People say to me so often, 'Jane how can you be so peaceful when everywhere around you people are asking these questions and yet you seem peaceful,' and I always answer that it is the peace of the forest that I carry inside."

Jane Goodall

The Year the Earth Sighed

2005 probably marks a turning point in humanity's awareness of the speed and extent of global change, especially relating to the atmosphere, polar regions and oceans. We don't know if these changes are permanent, or cyclical. But hopefully they will serve as the wake-up call that politicians seem to need in order to take decisive action.

Storms and hurricanes

Hurricanes form in tropical seas with temperatures above 26.5 C (80 F) and climate experts expect global warming to increase the incidence of storms and hurricanes. The 2005 storm season seemed to confirm that prediction by shattering records that have stood for decades.

- It was the first year with 27 named tropical storms, breaking the previous record of 21 in 1933.
- It was the first with 15 hurricanes, breaking the previous record of 12 set in 1969.
- It was the first with three Category 5 hurricanes. The previous record of two was set in 1961.
- It produced Wilma – the strongest hurricane ever measured – and Katrina, the costliest hurricane in US history – with damages of at least \$80 billion.

Melting icecaps and glaciers

Average temperatures are rising faster in polar and subpolar areas than anywhere else, melting ice and permafrost, threatening faster sea-level rise and increased methane emissions from peat bogs.

In the Arctic, the extent of summer sea ice has shrunk by 27 per cent in the past 50 years. In the past two decades, the thickness of sea ice has also decreased at seven to nine per cent per decade.

The 2004-2005 winter-season showed a smaller recovery of sea ice extent than any previous winter in the satellite record, and the earliest onset of melt throughout the Arctic. If current warming trends continue, by the end of this century summers

could see the Arctic Ocean ice-free.

Because Arctic ice is already afloat, and is less dense than water, sea levels will not rise if it melts.

The real threat comes from the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets which are on land. New satellite images reveal that Greenland's glaciers have begun moving faster. Within the last five years they have almost doubled the rate at which they dump ice into the Atlantic Ocean.

The Antarctic has been more stable but that may now be changing. In March 2006 NASA reported that the ice sheet's mass decreased by 152 cubic kilometers of ice annually between April 2002 and August 2005.

Ocean currents

Many climate experts have suggested

that global warming would change ocean currents – in particular that it might slow or shut down the Gulf Stream. This warm current carries water from the Caribbean towards Northern Europe and the North East of North America, making those regions warmer than they would otherwise be.

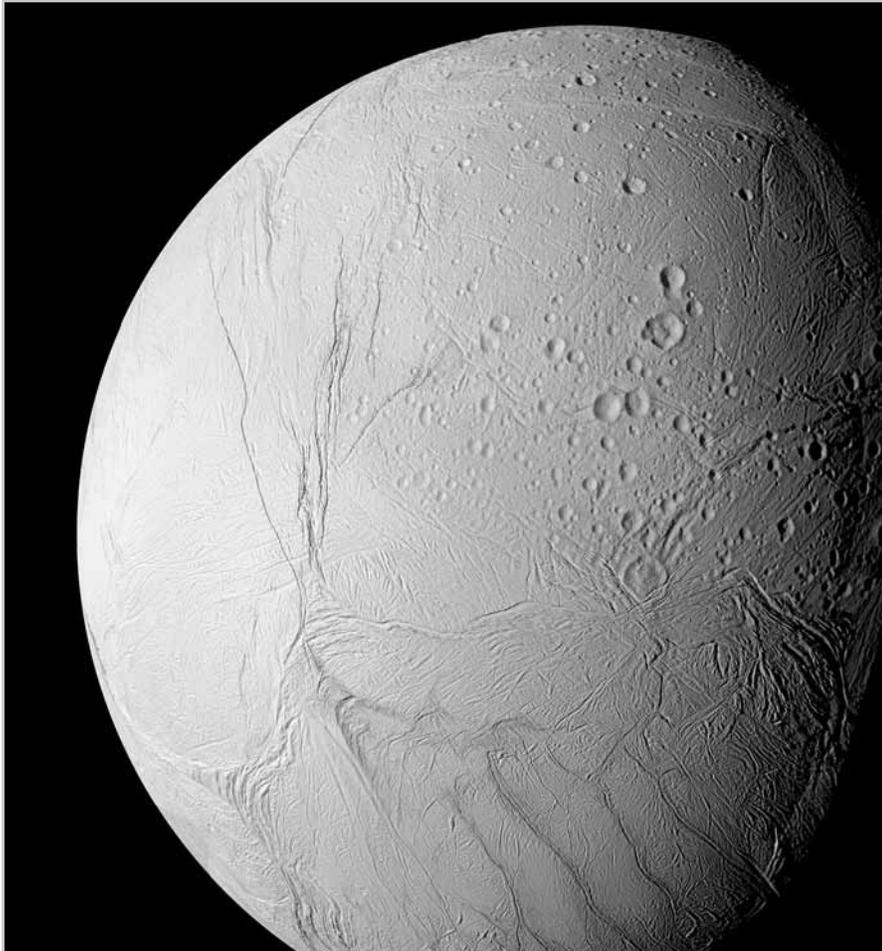
The Gulf Stream is pulled to the North East to replace cold saline waters which sink in the NE Atlantic. Increased melting of ice in the Arctic is reducing the salinity and density of these cold waters, so they no longer sink so readily.

The slowdown was until now a theoretical prediction, but in 2005 sensors strung across the Atlantic from the Canary Islands to the Bahamas found that the strength of the warm currents had declined by 30 per cent since 1957.



When I orbited the Earth in a spaceship, I saw for the first time how beautiful our planet is. Mankind, let us preserve and increase this beauty, and not destroy it! *Yuri Gagarin*

The Earth was small, light blue, and so touchingly alone, our home that must be defended like a holy relic. The Earth was absolutely round. I believe I never knew what the word round meant until I saw Earth from space. *Aleksei Leonov*



**Enceladus -
A New Geologically Active World**

Until last year only three bodies in the solar system were known to be geologically active: Earth, Jupiter and (perhaps) Neptune's moon Triton. Now Saturn's moon Enceladus has become the smallest yet.

Enceladus is so small that its diameter would fit inside France or New Mexico. Its brilliant surface is covered with ice, crater-pocked in places, in others wrinkled with folds and stripes. High-resolution images from the Cassini-Huygens mission show icy jets above the moon's south pole. With gravity only 1/86th as strong as Earth's, the plumes spew from this geothermally heated region for thousands of kilometers into space.

The jets may be erupting from pockets of pressurized liquid water above freezing point. Other moons have liquid water oceans, but much deeper below their icy crusts. NASA scientists wonder whether Enceladus may have been active long enough for life to emerge.

Words & image: ©NASA

Calendar & Almanac

Special events

April

- 1 April Fool's Day
- 7 World Health Day
- 21 Birth of John Muir
- 22 Earth Day
- International Climate Day
- Arbor Day USA [varies by state]

May

- 1 Beltaine / May Day
- 3 International Sun Day
- 7 "Be Kind to Animals" Week
- 15 International Day of Families
- 18 Festival of Pan
- 22 International Day of Biological Diversity
- 31 World No-Tobacco Day

June

- 5 World Environment Day
- 20 World Refugee Day
- 26 International Day in Support of Victims of Torture

Equinoxes & Solstices

Spring Equinox

March 20 18:26

Summer solstice

June 21 12:26

Full Moons

April 13 16:40

May 13 6:51

June 11 18:03

July 11 3:02

All times Universal time =
Greenwich Mean Time