

# Manannan's Isle

By GLEN COWLEY  
Special to The Epoch Times

A chieftain? A god? A wizard? Just who was Manannan Mac y Leir, Son of the Sea? Part fact, part fantasy, he exists like the mists that can surround the isle he once ruled—Ellan Vannin, the Isle of Man.

I first glimpsed the mystic isle from the belly of an airplane as it swooped low on its approach to Ronaldsway airport. The isle emerged through wisps of gray cloud as an emerald jewel spotted with dabs of yellow gorse and set amid the coiled dragon that is the Irish Sea. Though only 33 miles long and 12 miles at its widest, its story is as long and broad as nations many times its size.

## An Island With an Independent Spirit

A tiny cousin to neighboring islands, this isle has charted its own unique course and continues to assert its independent spirit. A patchwork quilt still in the making, it folds out to reveal traces of the people who drew breath there, the forces of nature which formed it, the mysticism surrounding it and a uniqueness shaped by geography and circumstances. It is a very visible tartan which, if you take the time, you can still see being made.

Blocks of green, blue and gray dappled with yellow gorse, purple heather and white cottages, ringed about by gray stone fences or overgrown with wild fuchsia, capture the eye. Sheep dot a thousand shades of green which rise up windswept "barrules" (hills) or fall away steeply to a hungry sea. Roofless "tholtans" (cottages) whisper untold stories.

In a land where access is held dear, public trails riddle the terrain and take the hiker to silent places where the mind's imaginings can take wing. Some are lengthy, like Raad yn Follian (Road of the Gull) which circumnavigates the entire isle, or Millennium Way which crosses its hilly spine. Others, though less grand, are no less appealing. A hiker, armed with proper attire, an ordinance map and an eye to the weather, can spend days discovering vestiges of the past or heart-stopping scenery. Ancient burial sites like Cashtal yn Ard and Meayl Circle, which have frowned over the land for four thousand years; Celtic forts atop windswept barrules or along the jagged teeth of the coast; the stony remains (keills) of St. Patrick's disciples dotted as hermitages astride the coast or hidden in shady glens near white-fingered waterfalls; Viking standing stones thrust up like daggers from the earth; yawning chasms falling away to a moody sea; shady glens whose trails and ornamentation recall the tramping of Victorian-age tourists; and abandoned World War II bunkers scanning a now unthreatening horizon, are all within easy reach.

For those desiring less demanding access, there is the journey which begins at the award winning Manx Museum in Douglas, the isle's capital and home to over 25,000 of the 76,000 plus who call Ellan Vannin home. Sight, sound and touch transport you through time and prepare you for the numerous Manx Heritage sites. It is worthwhile to purchase a season's pass which gets you in to all the venues for one discounted price.

## Castle Rushen and More

One of the best preserved castles in the British Isles, Castle Rushen sits amid palm trees in Castletown carrying the memory of the last Viking King of Man, Magnus, who died there in 1265. The bones of Peel Castle, which contains the roofless St. German Cathedral, spread over St. Patrick's Isle and house legends of the Holy Grail, ghostly hounds and, if you play it right, Shakespearean plays amid the ruins. Craigneash Village, with its whitewashed thatched cottages, lets you walk through a living museum harkening back to a time when Manx crofters still held to the land and the language. The towering Lady Isabella waterwheel at Laxey, the largest waterwheel in the world that once pulled moisture from the deep lead and zinc mines,



**WATER FROM ANCIENT EARTH:** The Lady Isabella waterwheel at Laxey, the largest waterwheel in the world, dominates the glen of Craigneash Village.



**VESTIGES OF PAST AND PRESENT:** A tailless manx cat strolls along a fence before an ancient castle.

dominates its glen. Castletown's Nautical Museum, with its smugglers' "hidey holes," now reveals the ingenuity of its creator. All these, and more, are readily accessible by car, public transit or tour.

Even getting around is an historical adventure. Ride the Victorian steam train, dating from the 1870s, from Port Erin to Douglas, then take the horse-drawn tram along Douglas' stunning seaside promenade to catch the 1890s electric tram on to Laxey and Ramsey. Electric tram side trips can take you to Mount Snaefell (Snow Mountain) which, at 2036 feet, is the isle's highest point or to the coastal Groulle Glen Railway.

There is so much more depth to this tartan—the cats with no tails, the four-horned Loaghtan sheep, the oldest parliament in the world, the Calf of Man, the Arthurian legends, the Little Folk, the three legs of Man symbol, world famous motorcycle racing, the Victorian promenades, the Gaiety Theatre and so on and so on. How much can one small isle have?

## I Think Manannan Knows

It is said Manannan fled the isle but tarried not far away on an underwater island which, on occasion, rises from the sea to let him look upon his former domain. He knows the tartan is still being woven as the isle takes all that man and nature gives and shapes it to its own design. As conquered Greece conquered Rome so does the patient Isle of Man shape its national identity out of the fabrics meant to cover it.

The Isle of Man is easily reached by air from London or Manchester (though Manx Airlines no longer exists) and by ferry from Belfast, Dublin, Heysham or Liverpool.

For information on the island and links to other sites visit: [www.isle-of-man.com](http://www.isle-of-man.com)

# Belarus: My Country, My Hope

By ALESIA FLORO  
Special to The Epoch Times

Belarus translated, means "White Russia." This quaint and poetic name, I believe, is quite well suited to my country. "White" here means clean. The country's quiet charm can penetrate a traveler's soul, subtly, gradually, through a soft play of the morning sky over a vague horizon, through its vast velvet expansive fields and an overpowering balmy air scented by century-old pine forests.

## A Constant in a Sea of Change

Belarus is one of the few remaining places on the planet where you can see the amazing miracle of nature relatively undisturbed by human intrusion.

Surprisingly, right here in the very center of Europe, time seems to have slowed its pace to a crawl. While the 21st century rages all around, while civilization thunders forward in amazing spurts, nature in Belarus remains real, its people remain human, and eternal values reign. Belarus is an island of calmness in the swirl of chaotic times, a place where wisdom and harmony of the body and soul are cherished.

In light of its geographical location, Belarus was always been the arena for numerous wars. It has survived skirmishes of feudal lords, the forced introduction of Christianity, shifting alliances in the composition of the great principality of Lithuania, and the rise and fall of the Russian Empire. There have been thousands of bloody battles, great struggles, and wars on the Belorussian earth. But now, only monuments, ancient locks, palaces, and memorial complexes remind us of the stormy history of Belarus.

Since ancient times, Belarus has also been called "Lakeland." Lakes are the eyes of Belarus and the reason the country is sometimes referred to as "blue-eyed" Belarus. The lakes bathe churches, the bright fires of the evening city, tree-shaded parks and the river of Nemiga. The Nemiga flows into the depths of the history of my country, into the capital of Belarus, the city of Minsk.

During its almost millennial history the city, Minsk, has gone from provincial center to capitol of the 10-millionth state. It has undergone fiery conflicts—many times burned—but it has always triumphed. And the city has grown even lovelier over those many years.

## Items of Interest

Nesvizh, one of the oldest and most mysterious cities of Belarus,



**EXOTIC FLORA:** This calenche vestita is just a small sample of the beautiful natural scenery of Belarus.

once housed the residence of the royal family Radzivillov, one of the wealthiest and most influential families of all Europe. The palace fortress (lock) of Radzivillov, a major tourist site in Nesvizh, was designed by Italian architect Bernardoni in the 16th century. Over the centuries, the lock has been known for its legend of lovers, represented by two pine trees, interlaced together forever. Anyone who touches the trees comes away with strong feelings of innocence and tender love. At least, legend tells us it is so.

The Belorussian earth has brought peace to many over the centuries. It is the native land of the founder of Polish romantic poetry, Adam Mitskevich, national hero of the United States and Poland. It was the first home of Tadeusz Kosciuszko and the prime minister of Israel Szymon Perez. Not long ago in New York City, 17-year-old Katya Domankova, won the title of "super model of peace" while representing Belarus in the worldwide competition. There are some household names

in U.S. entertainment that began their careers in that competition, including Sharon Stone, Brooke Shields, Kim Basinger and Naomi Campbell.

## And This is My Country!

But there are countries in the world, where the people cannot speak freely, write freely and live freely! This is the greatest misfortune of Belarus now. Free souls are subjected to psychological violence, disappear without leaving a trace, or they die. I feel deep pain when I realize how many talented musicians and scientists have been forced to leave my country.

If I am granted one wish, it is to tell the story of my country's plight to people everywhere who believe as strongly in freedom as I.

For more information about Belarus, visit the following Web sites:  
[http://www.belarus.net/;](http://www.belarus.net/)  
<http://www.3dway.org/about/english>

The author invites you to contact her at: [alexa123@tut.by](mailto:alexa123@tut.by)

## The Epoch Times Geography Guru

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**SAND AND ROCKS:** The Ar Rub al Khali ("Empty Quarter") desert area includes territory in three of the countries on the Arabian Peninsula named below. Which country below does this desert NOT stretch into?

- Kazakhstan
- Oman
- Saudi Arabia
- Yemen

Read The Epoch Times next week for the answer!

Answer for the quiz of July 24:

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