

So you want to find a coven, hearth or grove, or meet other Pagans socially, or celebrate rituals with other Pagans?

A guide on what to expect

There is a lot more information about a variety of Pagan paths (Wicca, Witchcraft, Druidry, Shamanism, Heathenry, Asatru, Hedgewitchcraft etc) around now than there used to be. People are more public, at least in print, than was the case even 10 or 15 years ago. You can learn a great deal second-hand, from books, magazines and the internet, but when you decide you want to meet real live Pagans, what should you do and what can you expect from them?

You may want to join a group in the hope of learning how to perform rituals, or divination or forms of magic. Many experienced Pagans are happy to help new seekers along the way and share some of their knowledge. However, no one 'owes' a new seeker anything. Remember, Pagan spirituality is personal and no one in the Pagan community has a 'duty' to share spirituality in the way that a priest or minister of a conventional religion might be seen to have that kind of duty. Most Pagans are seekers all their lives, at some points they feel they have insights to share, at others they may be more introspective, working at things privately and not wishing to discuss them.

Ways to meet other Pagans

- 1) Moots – advertised regular gatherings usually in Pubs or organisers' houses
- 2) Through the Internet: egroups on yahoo or other web-based forums.
- 3) Pagan conferences, camps and other semi-public events often include open rituals in which anyone attending can participate.
- 4) Local contact lists run by the PF or other reputable Pagan organisations.

Please note: Most Pagans celebrate their spirituality privately, and are so loosely organised that they don't have any 'neutral territory' that belongs to the group. Groups meet and celebrate in people's homes or on private land. You wouldn't expect your neighbour across the road to invite you to a family party or let you invite yourself, just because you were interested in their habits or traditions, and it isn't reasonable to expect any Pagan group to invite you to a celebration without coming to know you first. This is where **pub moots** come in.

Pub Moot Advice

Pubs are public places where you can meet strangers for the first time, and are able to decide exactly how much you wish to share about yourself and how much you don't. It is useful, both for the new seeker, and for the experienced Pagan, to be able to form an impression of each other, and then gradually talk about more detailed stuff **if** you are comfortable with each other.

Most pub moots advertised give a contact phone number. Ring them up and have a chat before you go along, so that the organisers will look out for you, and tell you how to recognise them if they haven't got a specific room booked.

Use as much common sense as you would at any other gathering of folk you don't know.

- Have your own transport home sorted before you go - know public transport times and details in advance if you aren't driving yourself or being picked up by a friend or family.
- Don't give anyone your address and phone number details or any other personal information unless you feel absolutely comfortable about doing so. (Pagans can be great folk, but they are still strangers to you.)
- If possible, go with a friend, or arrange to meet the organiser for a chat before you go to the moot for the first time. If it is possible, most moot organisers will do what they can to help you.
- Don't let yourself feel pressured to go to a private address at any point.
- Anybody who seems overly interested in sex or nudity, is probably a prat - just as they are at work, a club, a party or a disco.
- Overt sexism (in jokes or language) is also generally a bad sign, though there is a more relaxed attitude towards sexuality generally within the Pagan community.
- Don't give out personal information you may know about others at the pub moot to anyone without their express permission.

At most pub moots there are people following different Pagan paths, there are likely to be some folk who work in groups as well as folk who work alone. There can be Witches, Druids, Shamans, Heathens, ceremonial magicians, healers, diviners, astrologers, or people who are more interested in ecological aspects of being Pagan than in magical ones, and people who aren't sure exactly what they are looking for yet. You may not actually find someone whose Paganism matches yours, but most Pagans are interested in other spiritual outlooks and you can enjoy a good discussion even if you don't agree.

Egroup Advice

Much the same as pub moot advice, but also remember that you are only perceiving others through the words they choose, and they may have spent a long time deciding **how** they want to express something – you don't even have body language to go on. Not everyone on an email list or web forum may be telling the truth about themselves, even in terms of age, gender or locality.

Camp Advice

A great deal of Pagan activity and socialising takes place during the summer months, in outdoor camps. This is because the vast majority of Pagans care very deeply about the earth and nature, and some experience their religion entirely through that relationship. One of the best ways to get to know Pagans is to spend a weekend in a camp with others. Path-specific organisations may arrange their own camps, and you can obtain some links from the PF website to these organisations and look for announcements. Most organisations try to keep the price low and that sometimes means that the amenities on Pagan camps are fairly basic, with those attending being expected to take part in camp tasks, such as erecting a marquee, digging a latrine or a firepit, or helping strike camp. You will be expected to bring your own tent, cooking etc equipment and supplies. You will also find that some camps tolerate singing or drumming or other noisy activities until the early hours of the morning, while others observe a curfew. If these things matter to you, it is best to find out in advance what sort of behaviour is tolerated at any camp you wish to attend!

Warning:

There are a few extremists in the Pagan scene, and there are a few folk who think that the 'sensational' aspects of following a Pagan path are worth pursuing as ends in themselves. There have also been folk who have joined Pagan groups or gone to pub moots simply to gather information for the purposes of 'outing' in the press, the folk they meet. These are the sad realities of life. So if the folk you meet are a bit cagey about telling you about themselves at first, be patient, they need to assure themselves you are a genuine seeker. Likewise, be sceptical yourself. Listen to your intuition. Ask a lot of questions, but the best advice is be patient - finding Pagan friends (like finding any other kind of friend) takes time, but is really worth it!

Looking for Groups following Specific Paths

Learn as much as you can about various paths if you want to work in a group, not specifics of ritual or spellcraft - but **why** a person chooses that Pagan path before you try to join a group. By knowing these basics, even if it is just in theory, you show any prospective group that you are serious, have thought this through and are willing to learn.

Magical/Ritual groups (Groves, Hearths or Covens) are closely knit working groups who celebrate their spirituality, and sometimes practice magic, together. To enter one involves a commitment to the spiritual path, but also a commitment to the people involved. Every person in a group brings a different energy and dynamic to that group, so most groups are very, very careful about changing an existing dynamic by including anyone new. Most often, people will not even say whether or not they are in a magical working group. This is part of the ethos of privacy and protection for one's self and others.

So if you want to work in a magical group, first you have to meet the folk. They need to come to know you well enough to see if you would fit into their group, and you need to come to know them well enough to be certain you are comfortable with them and trust them. This takes a lot of time. Ethical folk will take this process slowly and in social contexts a long time before suggesting sharing anything magical. Be very, very wary of anyone who invites you to a ritual on first meeting, unless they make it clear that it is an open ritual, usually a seasonal celebration, and you can ask others at the moot about the ritual and the folk.

It will help if you decide beforehand what you want from a magical group. What are you interested in doing? What are you not interested in doing? Feel free to ask questions, while bearing in mind that there will be some matters members will not discuss with an outsider. You might ask: What will be expected of me as a member - and ask yourself if these are commitments you can willingly fulfill? Is the group hierarchical, fully democratic, or somewhere in between? Does it follow a particular pantheon and mythos (Egyptian, Celtic, Greek, Norse, Saxon etc.) and do these call to your heart? Does the group ever work skyclad (naked)? Is entry to the group by formal initiation, and if so, can you take the oaths involved with honour and sincerity? No genuine group will consider formally inviting you to join their group - through initiation or any other process - until they're certain that you are right for them and they are right for you. Don't try to rush things. It is far better, and more honourable, to spend years making certain of what is right for you, than to plunge headlong into things you don't understand and haven't thought through.

Joining the PF will give you contacts which may lead to entry to a magical group. There are training courses in many paths available, and there are networks of groups who are prepared to make contact with seekers (see the contact advertisements in PF District Newsletters or Pagan Dawn). None of this can guarantee anything. It only means that the folk involved are prepared to either write to you or talk to you about your spirituality, what you are looking for, what you already know, to see if they think their style of practice would suit you. If for any reason they don't think you are right for each other that may be an end to the contact. This isn't a reflection on you, it is simply an acknowledgement of the dynamic between you and them, there is no "fault" on either side.

All the various Pagan paths are still minority spiritual paths and always will be, so with the best of intentions there simply may not be any folk near you who can guide your learning or share ritual or celebration with you.