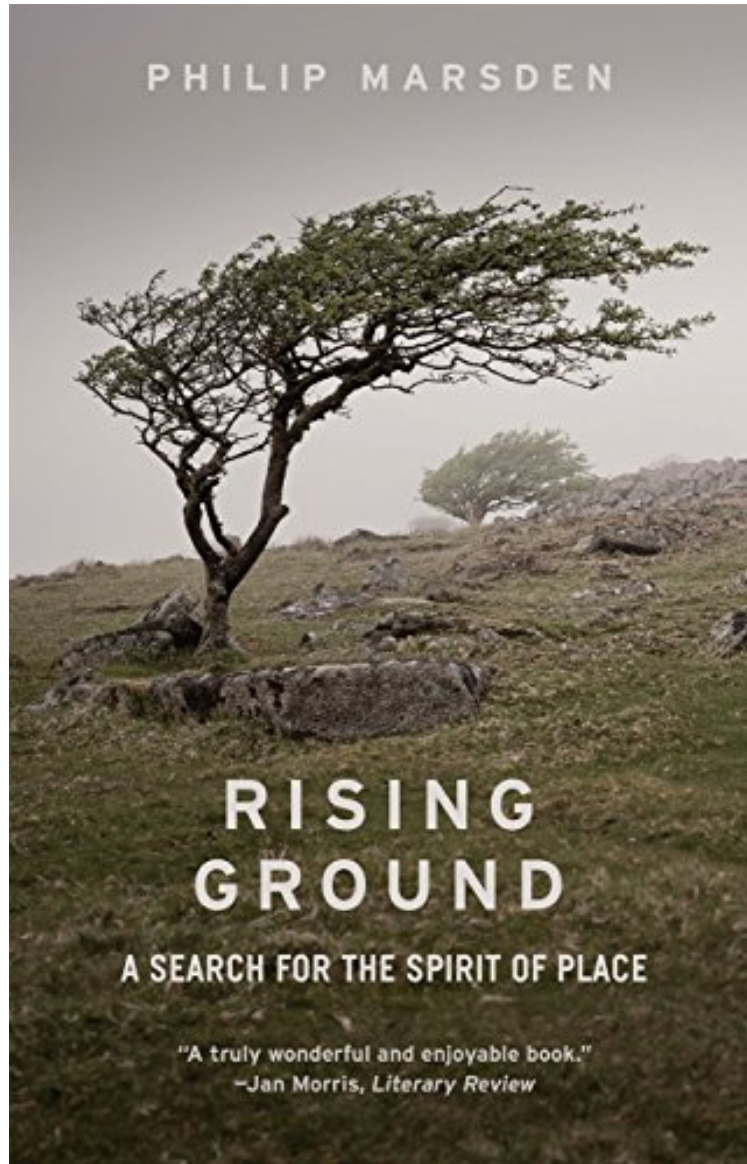


(Download) Rising Ground: A Search for the Spirit of Place

## Rising Ground: A Search for the Spirit of Place

*Philip Marsden*

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**Philip Marsden : Rising Ground: A Search for the Spirit of Place** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rising Ground: A Search for the Spirit of Place:

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Cornwall, its rock assemblages, and topophilia (i.e., love of place) By R. M. Peterson For 2,000 years, ritual assemblages of rocks were made all over northwestern Europe -- hill-top enclosures and cairns, barrows and chambered tombs, megaliths and miniliths, stone circles, lone standing stones and spectacular multi-stone sites such as Stonehenge. Most of them have imposing topographical settings. Cornwall, the

county on England's rugged southwestern tip, is especially rich in rock shrines and monuments and sacred places. In *RISING GROUND*, Philip Marsden explores the concept of sacred places and conducts a Cornish tour of them, both historical and geographical. It is a relaxed, unusual, and thoroughly lovely and delightful book. In 2010, Marsden and his family moved into an old farmhouse at Ardevora, near an estuary of the River Fal in southern Cornwall. From there, Marsden went out on a series of hikes across Cornwall, hikes that form the structure of *RISING GROUND*. The book proceeds roughly from east to west -- from Bodmin Moor and Tintangel, to the Clay Country and the River Fal, and then on to Land's End and even, at the book's conclusion, the Isles of Scilly. Marsden's foremost concern is the ancient, remote rock assemblages, such as Aveline's Hole, Stowe's Pound, Devil's Cheesewring, Leskernick Hill, Glastonbury, Madron Well, and Arthur, an uninhabited isle in the easternmost Scillies. He also writes about his forerunners -- others who have explored, catalogued and described, and theorized about the rock monuments of Cornwall. Forming a third aspect of the book are profiles of distinctive Cornishmen and Cornishwomen, both dead and living, some of whom Marsden meets in the course of his travels. I approached *RISING GROUND* in a somewhat skeptical frame of mind. I am uneasy with New Age trappings like crystals and wind chimes and, perhaps unfairly, that uneasiness extends to ley lines and the like. That leads me, for example, to regard as mumbo-jumbo some of things that Robert Macfarlane writes. (Macfarlane, by the way, is the source of the leading blurb for *RISING GROUND* -- to wit, "superb".) But I wanted to read a book about Cornwall and its topography, so I took a chance on Marsden's book. I can now report that Marsden seems to have both feet firmly planted on the ground. He is sensitive to how topography created sacred places for humans of the past, but he doesn't try to sell you on how they are or should be sacred (or supernatural) for you. And he writes splendidly. One example: "At midday I left the riverside and followed a steep valley up to Tolverne Barton and into one of those forgotten, time-rinsed corners with which Cornwall rewards path-strayers and the persistently nosy." Another example from the end of his sojourns, as he sits among the burial cairns on the remote isle of Arthur: "They brought [the bodies] here in part because of those who had come before and left the dead and marked the place with stones. But each in their way came here too because of where it was -- out on the far edge of the main Scilly isle, out from Cornwall and Britain and the landmass of Europe, out here where the sun sets, the western-most place where land was no more than a whisper in the silence of the ocean, a flat-topped hill already half-way to eternity." As icing on the cake, the hardcover edition from the University of Chicago Press is a model of book publishing: handsome, sturdy, and very well designed. The physical artifact itself gives pleasure, in addition to its contents. Almost surely *RISING GROUND* will end up as one of the ten best books I read in 2016. 10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. "Outstanding.....far above ordinary history" as a Sunday Times reviewer said. By Peter W Marks As an ex-pat Cornishman who has lived in the USA for many years but who was born and raised in Cornwall I read a Brit Sunday newspaper review of this book and was hooked. As I still have family back there we vacation in the area every year or two but usually just do family, touristy things. Now, after reading this deeply thought-provoking book, our time back there this year will take on a wholly more satisfying aspect. Marsden superbly writes in a manner that will lead me to revisit so many places on Bodmin Moor, the Clay Country, West Penwith and the Fal area and more, that I used to consider I knew well. The title and sub-title of his book, 'Rising Ground- A search for the Spirit of the Place', an intriguingly enigmatic title if ever there was one, already has me impatient to explore what was once simply 'home'. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Power of Place, and its Spirit... By John P. Jones III... as opposed to "space." And this is a distinction that Philip Marsden makes several times in this marvelous book on Cornwall. It is a feeling that resonates with me since I have also developed a strong attachment to a range of topographies where I have lived. I must thank a fellow reviewer (thanks, Mike) for introducing me to Marsden's work, of which he has read and reviewed at least a couple. There are three principle aspects to this work. There is the "this old home" aspect. He and his family decided to sell their seaside cottage and move inland and renovate a mid-19th century farmhouse, Ardevora. In ways, it reminded me of Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence* without the transcultural humor. The second aspect is the natural landscape of Cornwall. Marsden loves to walk the land, and knows the names of the flora and fauna, something I greatly envy, and aspire to do myself, though the time is running out. Marsden will walk to Land's End, and even a bit beyond, though he did not walk on water. And the third aspect is the imprint of humans on Cornwall, with a particular focus on some of the remarkable individuals who have lived there. He commences at the beginning, as it were, when there was an announcement that at Aveline's Hole, a cave he was familiar with from his youth, human bones had been discovered that indicated it was used as a place of burial. To date, it is the oldest European cemetery discovered, dating from 8460 to 8140 BC, rather astonishing antiquity, as he says. Do the stones lay upon the land naturally, or have they been moved? And if the latter, by whom, when, and for what reason. Give a few millennia of pre-history (written), there appears to be a lot of moving of stones, as our ancestors were attuned to the topography, and expressed that relationship with stones. Certainly, one reason was to lay ownership claims to the land, that ever so difficult task. Marsden's impressive erudition covers the historical written period also, with well-wrought portraits of individuals connected with Cornwall. "The Lord Richard" was the younger brother of King Henry III. Richard had made his fortune in tin mining, and was one of the richest men in Europe. He built Tintangel castle, which Marsden calls a "Potemkin façade." Geoffrey of Monmouth, who wrote the "creation myth" of Britain, *The History of the*

Kings of Britain (Penguin Classics), would connect Tintagel to King Arthur (who, like George Washington, slept a lot of places). More recently, there was Charles Henderson, who died in 1933, on his honeymoon, in Italy. He had been the historian, par excellence, of Cornwall, since the age of seven, with an obsession for collecting old documents before they were forever lost. Marsden also covers the artist colony at St. Ives, personified by Peter Lanyon, who died due to an airplane accident, when he was 46. The author yomps across Bodmin Moor, though he does not use that term, and might eschew it, since he takes time to “smell the roses.” He also provides a fascinating account of the discovery and manufacture of the clay that could make porcelain, thought to be an exclusive Chinese secret through the Middle Ages. The clay proved to be an economic dynamo for Cornwall. And he does get beyond Land’s End, by boat, to the offshore Isles of Scilly. Good books lead to others, and this work demonstrates the point. There are some of Marsden’s other works, including *The Crossing Place on the Armenians*, and *Chains of Heaven on Ethiopia*, of which he says: “...it has been painted in layers of meaning by people – from Herodotus to Coleridge, and from Samuel Johnson to Marcus Garvey...” And Marsden nagged me about a long-scheduled re-read of *The Magus* when he wrote: “John Fowles, whose mother was Cornish, wrote an extended essay based on his lifelong fascination with Scilly.” A wonderful 5-star, plus, introduction to the writings of Philip Marsden.

In 2010, Philip Marsden, whom Giles Foden has called “one of our most thoughtful travel writers,” moved with his family to a rundown farmhouse in the countryside in Cornwall. From the moment he arrived, Marsden found himself fascinated by the landscape around him, and, in particular, by the traces of human history—and of the human relationship to the land—that could be seen all around him. Wanting to experience the idea more fully, he set out to walk across Cornwall, to the evocatively named Land’s End. *Rising Ground* is a record of that journey, but it is also so much more: a beautifully written meditation on place, nature, and human life that encompasses history, archaeology, geography, and the love of place that suffuses us when we finally find home. Firmly in a storied tradition of English nature writing that stretches from Gilbert White to Helen MacDonal, *Rising Ground* reveals the ways that places and peoples have interacted over time, from standing stones to footpaths, ancient habitations to modern highways. What does it mean to truly live in a place, and what does it take to understand, and honor, those who lived and died there long before we arrived? Like the best travel and nature writing, *Rising Ground* is written with the pace of a contemplative walk, and is rich with insight and a powerful sense of the long skein of years that links us to our ancestors. Marsden’s close, loving look at the small patch of earth around him is sure to help you see your own place—and your own home—afew.

"Fascinating and hauntingly evocative. . . . A truly wonderful and enjoyable book."