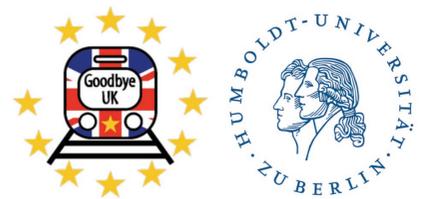


King Arthur and the Geography of Wales

By Ana Ornelas



Lleyn Peninsula. Courtesy of Stray Croc



Snowdonia National Park - Courtesy of Tim Felce (Airwolflhound)

Snowdonia

The Snowdonia National Park, in North Wales, is one of the biggest national parks in Wales, and home of the highest mountain in all of the UK. The region offers breathtaking landscapes, and many tourist attractions, specially connected to outdoor sports. However, adrenaline junkies are not the only ones attracted to Snowdonia. Fans of the Arthurian legend also visit the scene, as the myth tells the story of King Arthur defeating a powerful giant on top of the Snowdonia mountains. So much so, King Arthur's fans have the chance to experience a themed journey through "King Arthur's labyrinth" - an attraction which takes guests inside a 5th century version of Britain, featuring reenactment and explaining the biography of the King and his connection to Wales. No information is available on how many tickets are sold every year - But King Arthur's labyrinth is cited on all main websites promoting tourism in the Snowdonia region. Snowdonia also serves as setting of 2017's King Arthur and the Legend of Sword, by British director Guy Ritchie. The movie promotes an "action hero" side of the myth, with Charlie Hunnam playing King Arthur.



Courtesy of Warner Bros. Pictures

Bardsey Island

In practically every recount of the legend of Arthur, the island of Avalon has a key role. It is where the Excalibur sword was forged and where the king's body rests after his death. So it comes as no surprise the "actual" location of the island is an object of heated debate. Wales' own official tourism website connects Bardsey Island and Avalon - but some say this belief comes from a coincidence. A famous duke, Arthmael, contemporary of King Arthur, was buried on the island, and later on people mixed up the two stories (Barber and Pykitt, 232). And even if today the island attracts mostly tourists seeking for a complete shut down from modern life (Simmons 2010), some are lured by the idea of stepping into the magical island of Avalon.

Especially after the Island itself was put in the spotlight by American author Marion Zimmer-Bradley's series of novels The Mists of Avalon, transformed into a movie in 2001. The story shifts the focus from King Arthur to the women in the story - Viviane, Morgana, and Guinevere.



Courtesy of TNT

Llyn Padarn from Penllyn. Courtesy of Eric Jones



Excalibur Lake

Excalibur was the magical sword, destined for Britain's true king, and forged in the mystical island of Avalon. Arthur was legitimized as King when he was able to pull the sword out from pure stone, proving he was predestined to the crown. In some versions of the legend, Excalibur is even the source of all the powers of Arthur, and without it, he has no special skills. Such a powerful weapon would come in handy for any king following Arthur, however, it was thrown in a lake, never to be found again.

One of the favourite games of die-hard King Arthur fans is trying to guess which lake could have been the "true" lake keeping Excalibur. Most of the ones collecting the fame are located in the Snowdonia region. However, skeptics point out most of them are too remote (Carradice 2012). And yes, we are still talking about a mythological moment! Loch Ness isn't the only lake attracting tourists wanting to see for themselves - people from all over also want to visit the possible locations of Excalibur.

The sword became so important to the entire Arthurian mythology. The moment in which Arthur pulls it out of stone is a symbol of the legend itself. One of the most famous recreations of this scene can be found in Disney's 1963 The Sword in the Stone.



Courtesy of Walt Disney Pictures

Aerial view of Caerleon Roman amphitheatre. (© Crown copyright (2013) Visit Wales)



Caerleon, Newport

Camelot is described as a vibrant city, capital of King Arthur's kingdom and home of the roundtable. And it is connected to the town of Caerleon even in Geoffrey Monmouth's famous recount of the story of Arthur (Reno 203). Of all the links between Wales and the legend, this one seems to be the one with most sources to support. The amphitheatre left by the Roman invasions is one of the region's archeological treasures. Some say it was the place of many ceremonies with King Arthur and his knights.

The depicting of Camelot is always an interesting part of Arthurian culture. The recreating of a "dark age" metropolis is an exercise that brought to life many extremely creative ideas, but Shrek The Third's Camelot cameo, full of references and irony, is particularly commendable. King Arthur is also featured in the 2007 Pixar animation, as an awkward, insecure teenager who is bullied by a high school jock version of his most famous knight, Lancelot.



Courtesy of Dreamworks

Courtesy of BBC



Carmarthen

One of the most prominent supporting characters of King Arthur's story is, no doubt, the wizard Merlin. He is object of intense fascination by modern Pop Culture, inspiring many other wise mentors in other heroic tales (Morris 28). Merlin is featured in many movies without the presence of King Arthur and is even the focus of a BBC series launched in 2008. This time, his character is not a serene ancient, but a dorky youngster, who helps King Arthur with his powers, at the same time he tries to conceal them.

Carmarthen is cited various times as not only being Merlin's place of birth, but also, his burial site. The 13,000 habitants town today even has a centre dedicated to the wizard, promoting festivals and activities to educate the public on this fascinating character of the Arthurian legend.



Courtesy of <http://www.visit-carmarthenshire.co.uk>

Arthur's stone in Gower



Arthur's Stone, Herefordshire. Courtesy of UKGeoFan (talk)

Legend has it that once, King Arthur found a pebble inside his shoe and threw it far away. Touched by the king, the pebble transformed into an over 25-ton stone, which is nowadays visited by tourists from all over the world.

Today the visiting of Arthur's stone in Gower is free of charge and Instagram is packed with photos of people pretending to lift it. Arthur's bravery and extraordinary strength is a recurring theme, often presented as something supernatural, which also makes room for some mockery (Kendrick 2010).

1975's Monty Python and the Holy Grail was a poke at the all-mighty ways of the legendary king.



Courtesy of Micheal White Productions

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