



# *Odin's Last Rune*

Blisters, Battles and Beliefs  
on the Coast-to-Coast Walk



Almis Simankevicius

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GOOD WALKING  
BOOKS

# Odin's last Rune

## Contents

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Odin the Allfather	1 – Chapter
The Catalyst	2
BC 55 Roman Occupation	3
St Bees	4
AD 436 Adventus Saxonum	5
To Ennerdale Bridge	6
AD 440 Saxon Life	7
To Lakeland	8
Time on the Tree of life	9
To Grasmere	10
AD 750, Foods in Saxons Times	11
The Watchman of the Gods	12
AD 780 The North People	13
Balder's Death	14
Fell Walkers	15
The search for Balder	16
Kirkby Stephen	17
AD 793, The First Viking raids	18
Along the Swale	19
AD 836, Alfred and the Vikings	20
Historic Richmond	21
The World Serpent	22
The Settlement of the Danes	23
AD 845, The origin of Normandy	24
AD 925 Athelstan	25
Thor's unusual encounter	26
Osmotherly and Urra	27
AD 1014, Canute	28
The First Tremor	29
Lion Inn at Blakey	30
AD 1035, William of Normandy	31
Egton Bridge	32
AD 1035, Edward the Confessor	33
To Little Beck and the coast	34
AD 1066, England's Crown	35
Robin Hoods Bay	36
AD 1066 Senlac Hill	37
Ragnarok	38
AD 1066 A fiery Crown	39
Springtime	40
A Strange Tale	41

Appendix: Adventure Beckons!  
Recommended Reading and Historical Dateline

## THE RUNES

Runes are the symbols which make up the alphabet used by the Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Germanic peoples from around 1,500 years ago. They are also a magical and divinatory system.

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### RUNES that appear in this STORY

<b>R</b>	= RAD	:	means TRAVEL or JOURNEY
<b>X</b>	= GYFU	:	means a GIFT
<b>F</b>	= ANSUR:		means PROPHECY or REVELATION
<b>I</b>	= IS	:	means a FREEZING
<b>M</b>	= EHWAZ:		means PROGRESS
<b>J</b>	= LAGU	:	means WATER
<b>P</b>	= THORN:		means BOUNDLESS ENERGY
<b>H</b>	= HAGAL	:	means ELEMENTAL DISRUPTION
<b>&lt;&gt;</b>	= GER	:	means HARVEST OF PAST ACTIONS
<b>[</b>	= EOH:		means EVERGREEN, DEATH
<b>B</b>	= BEORC:		means PURIFICATION, RENEWAL

This book weaves together **three strands of writing**, the mythological, the historical, and a contemporary journey across England.

**A Rune** and its meaning begin each chapter of the myths, while the historical chapters have a date included in their headings.

The chapters that describe the contemporary journey have the walking man symbol alongside the chapter's heading.

## Odin the Allfather



### A journey

Amongst the icy wastes of the earth's northern reaches, bitter winds scoured and scraped the frozen tundra as they had done for millennia. In this desolate emptiness, a solitary fur-clad figure, circled by two ravens, crunched his way across the packed ice. The brilliant sun reflected from the countless ice crystals that covered the barren landscape. Jagged outcrops of dark rocks partially covered with frozen capes of ice contrasted with the blinding whiteness of the ice fields. The harsh winds sheared razor sharp slivers from the heavy icicles, whizzing them through the cold air, like streams of tiny arrows.

With a thin cord slung around a shoulder and a lustrous golden dagger tucked into his belt, the solidly built man made his way towards the only other living thing in sight - a gigantic ash tree. Strangely coloured leaves adorned the branches of the immense tree, which reached up into the distant skies; its roots lost in the depths of the earth. The incessant winds howled around the tree, causing the fluorescent foliage to flex and shimmer beneath the relentless sun.

The powerful figure stopped in front of the monstrous ash and looked up at it. Such splendour, so much power and mystery he recognized in the tree. This was Yggdrasil, the Tree of Life, which connected heaven and earth. He stood, awed by the ash, mesmerized by its magnificence.

He announced himself to Yggdrasil, shouting to hear himself above the roar of the wind.

"Tree of the heavens, tree of the world, I come to perform this ritual upon your mighty boughs. Support me as you have supported the sky and the earth since time began."

Removing the thin cord from around his shoulder, he tied the heavy golden dagger to one end. With his mighty arm he threw the dagger up and over a thick branch, letting it fall back to the ground. He untied the dagger and clenched it between his teeth. Fashioning a noose from the other end of the cord he slipped it over his head and tightened it around his neck.

He grabbed the loose end of the cord and began to hoist himself up, effectively hanging himself. Once his feet were some distance off the ground he secured the loose end around the massive tree's girth.

He withdrew the dagger from between his clenched teeth and clasping it with both hands, pierced his heart till his powers began to drain away. His head slumped back while the blood stained dagger slipped from his tremulous hands and dropped onto the icy ground where it lay alongside

the crimson pools of rapidly cooling blood. The winds rose again, and the light of the day was replaced by an unimaginable darkness.

Odin hung heavily on this mysterious tree as the winds shrieked and buffeted him and the razor sharp ice slivers punctured his body. Odin, the Allfather, mighty chieftain of the gods, the god of the occult, patron of magicians and warriors, was at the mercy of his own action. The two ravens settled themselves on one of the inner branches away from the force of the wind and waited.

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The mysterious ash tree grew in the mystical centre of Asgard - the home of the gods, where Odin reigned, accompanied by his two jet-black ravens - Mind and Memory, who usually perched on his shoulders, keeping him informed of all that happened.

There were the other gods as well. Frigg, Odin's wife and the mother of his sons, was the goddess of the earth. The first son, Thor the Thunderer was the patron god of seamen and farmers. He was the god of the sky, ruler of storms and wielder of thunderbolts. Thor was the protector of the universe, guarding the world from the menace of the giants who lived just outside civilization. He had a mighty hammer, which he often brandished about and always carried with him to deal with any frost or mountain giants he encountered. Sometimes the giants outwitted Thor, but he usually triumphed in the end. Thor travelled in a chariot drawn by two magic goats. He was a violent but benevolent god and people felt closer to him than to Odin, because Thor was more like them, not distant like the Allfather.

Odin's second son was Balder, the god of light, the most loved of all gods. He was gentle and had a temperament that all liked. Balder's twin brother was blind Hoder, the god of the dark, and Odin's youngest son was brave Hermod who was fleet of foot and possessed an abundance of courage.

As well as Odin's sons there were the twin gods of fecundity, Frey and his voluptuously wanton sister Freya. These twins controlled the rain and sunshine and were responsible for fertility upon the earth.

Another god was Tew, the god of war, who was always busy with martial projects involving men on earth and was the one who did the fighting. Tew being the god of justice, fair law and regulation was renowned for his fearlessness. Odin, himself, rarely fought. He was more of a tactician, who used any available resource for victory.

In Asgard there was a fabulous palace called Valholl, to which Odin's daughters, known as the attractive and seductive Valkyries, would escort slain warriors. Here, the dead warriors were brought back to life to indulge in fierce battles and then feast at nights, having all their wounds healed as they slept.

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As Odin clung to what was left of his life that night, buffeted by the stinging winds, he reminded himself why he was hanging at the end of a

branch with his heart pierced. Although he was the chief of the gods, he was also part of the finite world, governed by Orlog – the universal law and as such, had a quest to fulfill.

Men of the northern realms of the earth had made a dark, mystical, sacrificial cult of him, calling on him to help them to victory in their wars against others, tearing flesh apart to win battles. Whole armies of enslaved men were sacrificed to him.

Odin was also the god of poetry and wisdom. Mankind needed these too, in order to live and grow.

His quest was to acquire wisdom and knowledge. So far, he had spent much of his time travelling and gathering knowledge from all he met. He hungered for learning so much that his search seemed never ending.

This self-sacrifice was the next step in his search, and by hanging on the Tree of Life for nine nights he would learn the occult arts and understand the secret alphabet of the runes. And to do this he had to be open of heart and lighter than air. In his brutal way, Odin had managed to achieve this state of being.

## The Catalyst

One rainy Saturday afternoon I found myself in the local library. This large contemporary citadel of information and knowledge attracted all kinds of seekers, enthusiasts, students and pensioners enjoying an unhurried perusal of daily newspapers. Oriental patterned carpets covered the library's extensive floor space, which, together with the maze of wooden shelves crammed with books, lent the interior an exotic ambience.

The comprehensive travel section, containing commercial travel guides and personal accounts of fascinating global journeys, held a singular attraction for me. As I scanned these shelves a book fell into my hands. On its distinctive red and white dust jacket there was a simple map of a route extending across England from the Irish Sea to the North Sea.

The book was Alfred Wainwright's pictorial guide to the Coast to Coast Walk. I flicked through the pages, marvelling at the hand drawn landscape sketches and intrigued by the unusual place names; Keld, Kirkby Stephen and St Bees.

Moving from west to east, the walk crossed the Lake District, the Yorkshire Dales and the North York Moors, from St Bees in the west to Robin Hood's Bay in the east. The combined effect of all this was to re-awaken that interior denizen who dwells within many of us – the Travel Bug. Having been awoken, the Bug prompted me to think, "one day I'll walk that path."

Alfred Wainwright was a celebrated British *fell* (hill) walker who had written a number of guidebooks in the 1970s. They combined a personable writing style with meticulous sketches. Since then his guidebook

“A Coast to Coast Walk” has been eagerly read by walkers and become a classic travel book.

I found the book fascinating and I waited for the opportunity to do the walk with my partner, Carol. Researching the walk and the history of the areas we would cross, took some time, and before we knew it the “day” arrived.

We would begin our walk in the pleasant seaside town of St Bees, situated in Cumbria on the edge of the Irish Sea, then trace an easterly path across northern England to eventually meet the North Sea at an old village called Robin Hood's Bay.

Early spring seemed the best time of the year to walk the route. It would still be slightly chilly with fewer fellow walkers, making accommodation easier to find. Also, spring was the season of renewal after the harsh winter months, so walking across a terrain of emergent growth and catching glimpses of the animal kingdom returning from its annual hibernation was an attractive proposition. We figured that 18 days on the journey would give us sufficient time to soak up the beauty of the landscape and the history and character of this part of England. Over the next few months I saw a number of articles about the Coast to Coast Walk in the travel sections of various magazines and newspapers. As well as impressing us with the marvellous scenery and experiences that awaited the aspiring walker, the articles also warned about wet weather and the hazards of low visibility, especially on the moors and high fells.

We discovered through our background reading that this route had a rich history, especially the time between the departure of the Roman legions from Britain and the arrival of the Normans, when waves of new continental invaders assaulted Britain. This period from around 400-1066AD, was known as the “Dark Ages”.

I found it fascinating to notice and be aware of the legacies of Teutonic and Nordic mythology brought over by the early invaders. These myths and beliefs shaped the history and culture of the land and in due course became an integral part of English life.

The Coast to Coast Walk would take us 190 miles across the landscape of northern England, rich in folklore and history; over lands invaded and settled by Romans, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings and Normans. We were to discover that the further we journeyed along the route, the more we would experience Germanic and Scandinavian influences and legacies. Our journey would become entwined with an ancient terrain, stone villages, myths and past events.

## BC 55 Roman Occupation

As Julius Caesar observed the misty land across the water, he tightened his cuirass and wrapped his military cape around him. The temperature had dropped noticeably and the strong wind had changed direction.

“By Fortuna, the winds are with us!” exclaimed Caesar. Now that the conditions were favourable, he gave the signal for the commencement of the invasion fleet to cross the broad channel of water.

Caesar was invading the island to extend Rome's dominion over the known world as well as assuring his own dignitas. He intended to bring the island's profitable trade in lead and tin under Roman control. The landing on the foreign shore was difficult and the subsequent skirmishes with the native tribes were bloody. However, events closer to Rome prevented Caesar from completing his ambition and he returned to the Eternal City.

It was a full 98 years later that the Romans sent a large invasion army to this island they called Britannia. In 43AD the newly proclaimed emperor Claudius, chose this military gambit as a gesture to secure his hold on power in Rome. His invasion fleet landed and the disciplined army proceeded to establish military bases from which they began to subdue the province of Britannia. There were continuing confrontations with many of the existing Celtic peoples such as the Cumbrii and Brigantes. Generally, the Romans preferred to make alliances with the tribes and confer upon them the position of “Client Kings” allowing them a measure of self-government.

The Latin invaders began the massive undertaking of building an infrastructure of roads as they moved across the newly conquered land. The road system was a high priority in every Roman conquest as the roads allowed military forces to move quickly. Eventually around 6000 miles of highways were built across the length and breadth of Britannia.

The main highways consisted of the Fosse Road from Bath to Lincoln, Watling Street from London to Chester and Dere Street from Lincoln to the north.

In the north of the country the Romans took over a cleared spot in the forest and built a fort at *Eboracum* (later known as York). By 69AD the continuing revolts and attacks from the local Brigantes made it necessary for Eboracum to become the hub of Roman activities in northern Britannia. Thus Eboracum in the north joined *Londinium* (London) and *Camolodunum* (Colchester) in the South, as a major Roman centre. The warring Picts, a fierce race from the north of the island, were too much trouble for the Latin occupiers so the Roman emperor, Hadrian, erected a massive long stone barrier (Hadrian's Wall) to keep them out of Roman territory.

Eboracum was favoured due to its large civilian population, known as Romano-Britons, and it became the choice of residence for numbers of Roman governors. In 306 while campaigning in Britannia, Constantius Chlorus, the senior Caesar of the west, died and his son Constantine was

proclaimed emperor of the Western Roman Empire in the military fort at Eboracum. There were rival claimants for the emperor's seat, which embroiled Constantine in various battles. On the eve of a major battle with one such rival, Maxentius, Constantine had a vision, which convinced him of his direction. In his vision, he saw a Christian symbol emblazoned on all his soldiers' shields. He won this crucial battle and established rule over the entire empire. He took it upon himself to make Christianity the official religion and stopped persecutions of Christians. In Britannia, this new faith gradually mingled with the existing Roman and Celtic religions.

The Romans had their hands full maintaining control over the province. The fierce Picts took every opportunity to harass them. As well, longhaired Teutonic tribes from the continent were making exploratory raids on Britannia's coastal settlements and many native British tribes were still opposing Roman rule.

## Adventure Beckons! - Practicalities

If you too have been inspired to follow in the footsteps of the Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings on a wonderful adventure, the following pages will answer some of those questions about *the doing of it*.

### **Timing:**

The thing about travel is that **any time** is the right time. It's just that you will have different experiences.

We began our walk in late April, which is mid-late spring in England. The most popular time is summer, from June to August. However during summer, the numbers of walkers can add accommodation problems adding further challenges to the walk.

### **Starting from St Bees:**

From Australia we flew to London and travelled to Carlisle in the north of England. From Carlisle, there are frequent trains, which stop at St Bees.

### **Returning from Robin Hood's Bay:**

Catch a taxi to Scarborough, bus to York and train to London. Alternatively, one of the companies that provide walkers' support services can arrange transport back to St Bees.

### **Distances:**

We averaged around 17km a day. That's about 3-4km per hour. Your body will let you know the distances suitable for it. Don't overdo it, especially the first 3 days of your journey. If you think you will need more time for your walk, you need to plan for it. We took 18 days whereas others have taken as little as 8 days. We found that even 18 days did not provide us with enough time to fully appreciate the views and visual feasts, which were presented to us.