



## The Labyrinth and the Sea

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I have always been charmed by the sea. The ever-changing colors, the invigorating smell, the taste of the salty spray in stormy weather. And most of all, the movement of the water, both waves and tide. As most children do, I played at the seaside and built dams and canals to try to force the water my way.

I still build dams and canals at the seaside. But when I give them the shape of a labyrinth, it becomes a different story.

I like outdoor labyrinths best. When properly designed and situated, they enhance the natural beauty of the earth, like ornaments can beautify the human body. Positioned between heaven and earth, they feel like a focusing device: When we walk the labyrinth, we become more aware of our interaction with life below, above and around us. We connect what is inside and outside us and our heart is nourished. We only need to choose to enter the labyrinth.

It is nice to draw a labyrinth on the beach in the wet sand with a stick. The drawing itself is like a dance, gracious arcs which build up to a pattern. People walking by get curious and before long children are running the path and find out their own games with the lines on the sand. A small community is formed, an experience shared. The tide passes and the pattern is washed away, leaving a clean drawing board to start anew. I only need to choose to draw the labyrinth.

Some four years ago Jim Buchanan created a sand labyrinth at Irvine Beach, Scotland, with the aid of many volunteers. The photo's and story of the sand digging and the tide coming in and moving out were enchanting. So my wife and I started organizing our own labyrinth digging events at the seaside.

This year, at Ascension Day, was the third time, again different from the earlier ones, but similar in the created feeling of belonging, beauty and big fun.

The day is picked because of the favorable moment of high tide, around the end of the afternoon at that location. But where is the appropriate spot on the beach? I investigate two days earlier with my dowsing rods. They clearly indicate a specific location on a sandbar, which will be flooded when the tide rises.

Although I think a different spot would be more suited, I trust my rods and draw some circles around the center. When the water rises, the rods prove to be right: They indicated exactly the highest spot on the sandbar!

This is the first time we have made it a public event, instead of only on invitation. How many people will be willing to come with their own spades and do some heavy digging for two hours to create something that will be washed away an hour later?



Around noon I set up the pattern on the sandbar: a three circuit classical labyrinth, with an extra opening at the center, to make the water flow in more freely. A diameter of 60 feet, making up a total dam length of about 540 feet. Will there be enough people to build these dams, before the tide comes in? But my dowsing rods have clearly indicated that 60 feet is the appropriate size, and they were right the first time too.

I know deeply that the labyrinth is about trusting and stepping into the flow of life, but it's a big labyrinth to dig, the tide has its rhythm, and I tend to feel responsible.

We meet with our yet unknown fellow diggers at the beach tent for a quick lunch. After my short briefing about labyrinths, meaning and technical details we go to the sandbar and start digging. The miracle happens: about 50 people, half adults, half children, equipped with big spades and very small ones have come. In a quarter of an hour everyone finds his spot to dig, as a family, or as expert diggers working together, talking together, taking pictures, expressing satisfaction about the project, having fun. In about one hour and a half, the labyrinth is ready and looking fine. The sea is already drawing near and we walk the labyrinth together in a long procession, greeting each other as we meet on adjacent circuits. Remarkable to feel close with many people I meet for the first time, heart warming to share the joy of walking this path we created together.

The weather is fine, little wind, the sun is bright with patches of clouds passing by. The tide comes gently today, flattening out over the sandbar and slowly filling the path of the labyrinth without overflowing. Some people keep walking, others remain in the center, some take pictures, many children are bathing or running the splashing path.

The water has flooded the sandbar, but still the structure holds completely and stands out in the water, showing its pattern magnificently.

With the rising water come the waves. Suddenly they break over the outer dams, and the structure begins to disappear. Ten minutes later no sand is visible above the water, but for some time concentric water circles are visible due to the uneven sand floor. And then no sign of the labyrinth-that-was is visible in the sea.

But the experience is still visible in the eyes of all who joined in: inner space, satisfaction, relief, lightness.

When I start thinking about the symbolism of the event, many strong images arise:

The tide is like the breathing of the sea. Breathing in is choosing to live, engaging life as it comes. Breathing out is letting go, knowing that we cannot possess life, but that it is given to us for some time, as it is given to many others, be it plants, animals or fellow humans. The sea has this dialogue with the tidal area of the land, claiming the land, and letting it go, to return later again, sometimes taking more, sometimes giving back.



Walking the labyrinth is like breathing in and breathing out, in many respects: we go in and we go out. We choose to walk the path, the symbol of the path of life, as an expression of our own vitality. We let go of some of our burdens in our walk to the center. And again we take courage to start the walk from the center outwards. We return to the world, letting go the sacred space of the labyrinth, to engage life anew and share our renewed feeling of inner space with the world.

Building the labyrinth together, in the full knowledge that we will have to let go our work when the tide gets to its next phase, is celebrating life as it comes, mobilizing our own vitality to participate, and opening up to a deep connectedness that gives meaning to ourselves and anyone next to us. Walking it together is a great joy, everyone beaming with pride and satisfaction about the joint effort to build a thing of beauty.

The sea has its own strong symbolism like in the old Greek myths about Poseidon, the short tempered ruler of the sea and shaker of the earth. Or the sea is felt as the realm of the feminine. In both cases, emotion and vitality are keywords.

A sea labyrinth feels for me as very different from a land labyrinth, due to the moving water involved, the sound and smell of the sea, and the feeling of sand and water around one's feet, getting quite wet in the process.

Drawing a labyrinth at the seaside triggers some of my uncertainties, and they demand my attention. Working with the tide is about dealing with uncertainties. Will the tide keep to its predicted curve, or will the water height be different and the rise of the tide early? I like to complete the labyrinth, but will I be given enough time? It sounds like life questions, and that's what they are.

So each time I have to accept the challenge and go for it. Breathe life in, and let the uncertainties go. I know I can trust the process to be meaningful if I'm ready to step in and accept what will come. The labyrinth has never let me down.

I just need to draw, walk and share it. The labyrinth and the sea will do the rest.

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