Unwrap the Magic of Winter at Butser's Alternative Christmas Event: ‘Midwinter's Magical Quest’

Thursday 12 October, 2023

Waterlooville, Hampshire - Butser Ancient Farm in the South Downs is opening to the public this Winter and inviting families to embark on an enchanting festive adventure to escape commercial Christmas, honour nature and bring ancient traditions to life.

As an alternative to the Father Christmas experience, Midwinter’s Magical Quest honours the balance of the feminine and masculine energies as the season turns. The majestic Deer Queen and jolly Holly King are back in Butser’s ancient dwellings and need your help to complete their quest and help celebrate the turning of the year.

The Holly King will greet all questers in our Saxon House, which is beautifully recreated from foundations excavated close to the nearby village of Chalton. This Winter it will be transformed into the Holly King’s Evergreen Hall, where visitors will be able to make evergreen crowns and decorations to put a Spring in their step ready for the adventure. The Holly King is the personification of Winter in folklore and his power peaks in Midwinter before he hands the crown over to his brother The Oak King of Summer. The everlasting cycle of the Oak and Holly brothers reflects the seasonal cycles of solar light and dark, renewal and growth.

As you follow the trail of folklore and lost traditions, you’ll come to Little Woodbury, our great Iron Age roundhouse. The roundhouse will become the Realm of Winter Wishes where families can cast their hopes and dreams into the wishing tree and learn the ancient craft of corn dolly making to find a hidden message for the Deer Queen.

Once questers have pieced together the magic throughout the trail, they will find the Deer Queen’s Grotto in Butser’s reconstructed Neolithic Horton House, which originally stood around 3800-3600 BC. Visitors will be able to share the knowledge they have collected to give Mother Deer what she needs to make the journey to return the Sun to the land safely on the Winter Solstice.

The Deer Queen is an important part of Butser’s event, bringing a female presence to this Wintery time of year. The character has been inspired by an ancient folktale from Northern Europe that tells of the brave Mother Deer who must journey South to bring the sun goddess back to warm the lands again. It has been said that this ancient story is the origin of Rudolph. Unlike other deer, both female and male reindeers have antlers. The difference is, after the Autumn rutting season the males lose their antlers while the females keep theirs to protect their precious growing fawns. Throughout the years and even today the deer and her antlers are drawn as the tree of life, carrying everything from small animals to celestial bodies within them. So, when you see antlered reindeer pulling Santa’s sleigh in Midwinter you can be sure that Rudolph and her gang are unmistakably girls!

We know that ancient sites in Britain have clear evidence of celebration at this time of year, with sites like Newgrange in Ireland and Stonehenge aligned with Winter sun. We also have evidence that ever since the Stone Age people around the world have revered the deer, with her image painted on cave walls, etched in stone and tattooed on skin.

Kristin Devey, Events Coordinator at Butser Ancient Farm, shared her excitement about the upcoming event: “We are thrilled to open the farm to the public once again this winter, offering a chance for more people to experience the wonder of Butser during this special time of year. Families can join us for under £35 and leave with a deeper understanding of Winter folklore, delightful crafts, and magical memories. Whether you're celebrating Solstice, Yule, or simply seeking a unique family Christmas day out, 'Midwinter's Magical Quest' offers an inclusive and non-denominational celebration that appeals to all. We invite local families to join us for a memorable and magical experience that honours the wonders of the season and its ancient traditions.”

Event Details and Ticket Information

The Midwinter's Magical Quest trail runs from 10am to 3:30pm on Saturday December 2nd, Sunday December 3rd, Saturday December 9th, and Sunday December 10th, 2023. Butser Ancient Farm also features a full schedule of festive events, including Tales of Winter Magic, Festive Fireside Storytelling,

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and a Winter Solstice Celtic Celebration complete with drumming, poetry, and prose.

Tickets for Midwinter's Magical Quest are available on the Butser Ancient Farm website at https://www.butserancientfarm.co.uk/christmas-yule-winter-events.

Scan Me:

Notes to editors

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About: Butser Ancient Farm is a living history museum nestled in the picturesque Hampshire countryside. The farm offers visitors a unique opportunity to step back in time and experience the lives of our ancient ancestors through reconstructed buildings, authentic crafts, and immersive events.

Despite its humble beginnings as a research site 50 years ago, Butser Ancient Farm has become one of the South East's top visitor attractions welcoming visitors throughout the year including some 35,000 schoolchildren who learn about the lives of our ancient ancestors from the Stone Age through to the Anglo-Saxon periods. As a not-for-profit, independently run community interest company (CIC) they rely on the support of many organisations and individuals, as well as their own fundraising events, to make their research and education work possible. More about the farm can be found at www.butserancientfarm.co.uk

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