



Climbing Brandon: Science and Faith on Ireland's Holy Mountain

Chet Raymo

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An acclaimed science writer celebrates an enduring symbol of Ireland's Celtic past, Christian tradition, and love of nature

Mount Brandon is one of several holy mountains in Ireland that attract scores of believers and secular trekkers from around the world. For thirty-two years, Chet Raymo has lived part of each year on the Dingle Peninsula, near the foot of the mountain, and he has climbed it perhaps a hundred times, exploring paths that have been used for centuries by pilgrims in search of spiritual enlightenment. But the history and geography of Mount Brandon are what drew Raymo to it and offered him a lens through which to view the modern conflicts between science and religion.

When Ireland converted from paganism, it became home to a kind of Christianity that was unique in Europe—intensely intellectual yet attuned to nature, skeptical yet celebratory, grounded in the here-and-now yet open to infinity. In this rich celebration of Mount Brandon, Raymo weaves together myth and science, folklore and natural history, spiritual and physical geographies. He takes us to a time on the wave-lashed edge of the Western world when Mediterranean Christianity ran up against Celtic nature worship and the Irish—with their fondness for ambiguity, double meanings, puns and riddles—forged a fusion of knowledge and faith that sustains us today.



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