

The Winter Solstice in Potton

In Potton, at the White archaeological site, we have the opportunity to have a place chosen, a very long time ago, to mark the Winter Solstice sunrise on December 21.

An imposing terrace was landscaped on a mountain side and held by a remarkable retaining wall. It offers a full view on the eastern horizon. There, are three aligned standing stones, one of which, about one meter high, bears on its top two engraved markings. One points due south, the other to the precise azimuth of the winter solstice sunrise. This is proof that the site was landscaped to observe the sunrise at the time of the winter solstice sunrise. This was a day of worship and celebration, just as we do today.

When was the site created, and by whom? We ignore it, but it is one of the multiple stone ruins left around here by clever stone builders who paid much attention to astronomical events which they monitor through fixed markers on land. You know Stonehenge in England or Newgrange in Ireland? The same tradition here in Potton! To be in tune with the cosmos, as were ancient people, provides a great interior gratification.

It is reasonable to assume that the White site witnessed rituals to worship and celebrate the day of the winter solstice, as it was in immemorial time. This is a day to cheer the return of the light after months of increasing darkness.

The White site could have been established around the year 1000 our time, the Middle Age Optimum, when the climate was a lot milder with little or no snow. Afterward, following the year 1350, a drastic cooling occurred in the Little Ice Age, which would have made it difficult to reach the terrace to celebrate rituals. Would this be an indication that the site was created before 1350 AD? You are invited to live this human experience which goes way back in time. As in previous years, I will animate this outing.

We meet at 6:15 a.m. on the Tourist Office parking lot in Mansonville. From there, we carpool to the site and walk on snowshoes to the site, about 20min. After, all are invited for coffee, croissants and muffins at Gérard's.

Price: \$12pp, of which, \$10 to be given to the Potton Heritage Association for its Round Barn fund.

Looking forward to seeing you on **Sunday December 19**, and I wish a Happy Winter Solstice to all!

Gérard Leduc PhD
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Environnement Équinoxe enr.
450 292 3522
leduc.potton@xplornet.com