



SEASON OF CREATION



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**Cruachan: Praise be, my Lord,
through Sister Water.**

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Mountain' (2015) Birlinn General ISBN: 9781780272207**



Praise be, my Lord, through Sister Water.

St Francis of Assisi's canticle inspires us to communicate with all the elements of our common home. Pope Francis's encyclical 'Laudato Si' ('Praise be') draws upon St Francis's nearness to nature while offering us a very 21st century plan to conserve the planet that we have carelessly damaged.

Sister Water is vital to life itself, recognised as such since time began and earning herself a place in the mythologies of every land.

Cruachan – mountain site of the well of youth in Celtic mythology. It was home to the goddess Bheithir, who guarded the well. Its magical waters kept her young and beautiful until the fateful day when she left the cover off the well and its waters cascaded down the mountain to form Loch Awe. Youth and beauty gone, the goddess was now Cailleach nan Cruachan, the old woman of Cruachan.

There were those in the 1950s who believed that the beauty of Cruachan and Loch Awe would be lost were a plan for a hydroelectric scheme to go ahead, using the water from the loch and a dam to be built into the mountainside in a complex and innovative pumped storage system. Sister Water to be harnessed.

And then there was to be disruption to Sister Mother Earth. When I began to research the project for my book 'Cruachan – The Hollow Mountain', I wondered if this had been a step too far for the local people living on the fringes of Loch Awe, at the foot of the mighty Cruachan.

But this project was listening not only to a centuries-old canticle but also to the cry of the poor. Without electricity, the

Highlands would remain poor, lit by candlelight in the middle of the 20th century. It was a project ahead of its time – like other hydro schemes that had started to light up the remoter parts of Scotland, this would be kind to the environment.

Thanks to the persistence of politician Tom Johnstone and the genius of engineer Sir Edward MacColl, the pioneer of hydro-electricity in Scotland, the Cruachan project was begun in 1959, and in 1965, the Queen was standing inside the now hollow mountain to switch on the electricity.

Of course it wasn't all plain sailing. Men died, because this was dangerous work and the machines and health and safety precautions of the 21st century were unheard of in the mid 20th century.

But the end result was clean power – and the beauty of mountain and loch was preserved. Some may say enhanced. The earth removed to hollow out the mountain for the innovative machinery was put to good use connecting people by creating roads along the lochside and elsewhere.

Praise be, my Lord, through Sister Water, through Sister Mother Earth – and through Sister Air, clean and clear because of careful stewardship of our common home. And now wind turbines, like angels on our horizons, also praise my Lord through Sister Air, and all Creation thrives around Cruachan.

Picture credit: The Herald