

## Chapter 8

### THE ENGLISH OAK

#### *StandingNation-Human Alliance Bulletin*

##### “Gimme Shelter”

- 🌳 **TREES provide the shelter of their presence**, as they block and break cold winter winds.
- 🌳 **TREES provide the shelter of their canopy**, providing wildlife habitat—home—for other plants, worms, arachnids, insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals, thereby encouraging biodiversity on our planet.
- 🌳 **TREES provide the building materials and the tools for humans to construct shelter for themselves and as places where they do their work:** houses, barns, factories, office buildings.

#### *Diplomatic Relationships*

The English oak is known for more than the fame of its one specimen—later known as The Royal Oak—which hid King Charles II during the Battle of Worcester in 1651:

- 🌳 The English oak is the tree with the thickest crown in Northern Europe and offers much food and shelter for insects and wildlife.
- 🌳 Oak, of the English oak variety, has been sacred to ancient Greeks and Romans and to the Germanic, Irish, and English people.
- 🌳 Druids performed their rituals in oak groves.

- ❖ In England, the traditional Yule log was oak burned during the Winter Solstice festival, and later, during the 12 days of Christmas, either entire oak trees were brought in to be burned or the “Yule log” was made from oak branches, depending on the year and the location of the celebration.
- ❖ Oak is the national tree of England, and English oak—one of only two oak species native to Britain—is the most common oak tree in England.
- ❖ Until the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, English oaks supplied the timber for the wooden ships of the Britain’s Royal Navy.
- ❖ Over the centuries, especially during the Tudor period, paneling made from English oak provided paneling for many famous buildings.
- ❖ Not surprisingly, the English oak is a symbol of strength, protection, longevity, endurance, and survival.
- ❖ In both Britain and the United States, some couples continue the tradition of getting married in the shade of an oak tree, hoping the union will be blessed by the qualities the oak symbolizes.
- ❖ Some people have been known to carry an acorn as a good luck charm.

## A Tourist's Testimonial

[We] got up into a great oak that had been lopped some 3 or 4 years before and so was grown out very bushy and thick not to be seen through. And there we sat all the day.<sup>1</sup>

—King Charles II, King of Scotland 1649-1685 (and King of England, Wales, and Ireland 1660-1685)

## Tree-Tripping

I have been able to identify oak since I was young, probably because of my acquaintance with The Boundary Oak in elementary school, but could I parse out the differences between the species in the White Oak group? Three species of white oaks were involved in the history of my adopted city, Royal Oak, and I was interested in comparing the differences between a swamp oak (*Quercus bicolor*), a white oak (*Quercus alba*), and an English oak (*Quercus robur*). Because all three are in the “White Oak group,” I knew to expect more similarities than differences.

Find two trees that you can take a leisurely look at that are in the same genus, but are different species, and compare them.

Considering the leaves, the bark, the flowers, the seeds, the habit (tree shape), even the roots—whatever qualities available for observing:

1. How are these two trees in the same genus similar?
2. How are these two trees of different species different?
3. Once you have an idea of what makes them different, keep an eye out for other individual trees that are from one of these two species.

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<sup>1</sup> The account of King Charles II regarding his escape from Cromwell's Roundheads following the Battle of Worcester by hiding with another fugitive, William Careless, on September 3, 1651 in what came to be known as The Royal Oak in Boscobel Wood, part of the park of Boscobel House in Shropshire, England, as dictated to Samuel Pepys 30 years after the event.

## Tree Dreams

- 🔗 How many *Native Americans* do you know?
- 🔗 How many people over your lifetime have you known who you would consider “immigrants”? How many people in your life might others consider “immigrants”?
- 🔗 When did the four branches of your family tree represented by your four grandparents arrive on American soil? From where did they emigrate? Why did they leave that country to come to the United States?
- 🔗 Which trees in your yard, your city, and your local parks are native trees?
- 🔗 What trees in your yard or the area immediately surrounding you are nonnative trees? Do you feel differently about the nonnative trees? How do they contribute to the beauty of the area, the shade of your yard, your neighborhood’s or your city’s canopy?
- 🔗 How does your municipality officially handle tree planting and removal? Under what budget line(s) are such expenses listed in the city budget?
- 🔗 Are there consequences for a developer removing a tree in order to build a house in your neighborhood?
- 🔗 What tree stories are associated with where you live?

## Tree’s Big Idea: **RINGS**

For each growing season of a tree, a distinct ring of dead wood—an annual growth ring—is created around the tree’s trunk. The light-colored part of the ring represents the wood that grew in the spring and early summer, and the dark-colored part of the ring represents wood that grew in late summer and the fall. Scientists in the field of

dendrochronology determine the age of trees by counting from the outside of the trunk inward to the center. Tree rings can tell scientists in the field of dendroclimatology what the weather conditions were like during each year of the tree's life. Events and conditions affecting the individual tree—including drought, excessive rain, fire, insect plagues, fungus, disease epidemics, injuries, thinning, air pollution (CO<sub>2</sub> concentration), temperature, soil pH, plant nutrition and sunspots—leave their stories embedded in the tree's rings.

If we were looking at a cross section of a tree trunk, we would observe several different types of layers, each of which has a distinct purpose. The outer (dead cells) bark protects the tree. The inner (live cells) bark, also called phloem, conveys the food developed through photosynthesis in the leaves down to other parts of the tree. Moving inward, the cambium is a thin vascular layer of cells, which produce conducting cells for the tree: phloem on one side and sapwood on the other. Sapwood is the living wood in the tree, through which the water and minerals rise from the roots to the leaves. The heartwood—formed from the old sapwood and showing the annual growth rings—is the dead part of the tree that provides structural strength.