

SAMHAIN

FIRE FESTIVAL 2025



FACE THE DARK...
FIND COMMUNITY

EVENT PROGRAMME

SAMHUINN FIRE FESTIVAL 2025

A BELTANE FIRE SOCIETY PRODUCTION

THE BELTANE FIRE SOCIETY MARKS THE CHANGING OF THE SEASONS BY BRINGING ANCIENT CELTIC HARVEST TRADITIONS AND STORIES ALIVE WITH A MODERN TWIST.

As the nights grow long and the veil thins, we gather together to mark the turning of the seasons with Samhuinn Fire Festival. Fire, music, and myth usher in the changing of the seasons, and celebrate the beginning of winter.

Samhuinn reimagines ancient Celtic traditions through modern performance, telling of the struggle between Summer and Winter, light and dark. On Calton Hill, you'll find drummers, acrobats, performers, and a cavalcade of mysterious characters amidst the transformative fires of Samhuinn.

This year, the festival looks to radical connection: the strength we find in each other, the wisdom of perspective, and the courage to face our shadows.

At the heart stands the Cailleach, the divine Crone, who asks:

Have you lived with care and courage?
Have you supported your community, and thought with nuance?

Guided by the Cailleach, we'll walk beside Her deer through the shifting seasons, and witness the Summer and Winter Court as they battle in the turning of the wheel.

Step into the dark this Samhuinn and find strength in fire, story, and community.



HOW TO EXPERIENCE SAMHUINN

THERE IS NO SINGLE PATH THROUGH SAMHUINN,
ONLY THE ONE THAT CALLS TO YOU.

There's no wrong way to experience Samhuinn, we only ask that you do not interfere with the trained performers' fire play, and never start your own.

Along your journey, you'll meet a host of strange and wonderful beings, each playing their part in the turning of the wheel. We recommend beginning at the Bonfire, where the neid fire will be lit (the flame that provides all light for the festival). From there, follow your intuition. Let the rhythm of drums, the glow of torches, and the voices of the crowd lead you deeper into the story.

At times, you might feel a little lost, but not to worry! Samhuinn is meant to move you, to draw you into its shifting world of light and shadow. Join the revelry when the moment feels right, or simply stand and take it all in.

All around you, performances, rituals, and characters will unfold. Sometimes overlapping, sometimes blending together. You won't see everything, and that's part of the magic. Every person's journey through Samhuinn is unique. If you'd like to plan your night, take a look at the festival map to see where key moments will happen.

We also understand that audience interaction isn't for everyone. Our performers love to share the energy of the night, but they also respect personal boundaries. If you'd prefer not to be interacted with, you can collect a consent wristband from the Box Office Tent - just look for the clearly marked collection point.

So step into the dark this Samhuinn — and find strength in fire, story, and community.

IF YOU PREFER TO ENJOY THE MAGIC FROM A
LITTLE DISTANCE, CONSENT WRISTBANDS WILL BE
AVAILABLE AT THE BOX OFFICE TENT.



OUR SAMHUINN CHARACTERS

THE CAILLEACH

The Cailleach appears this year as the protector of the Deer, as giantess, making her way around the hill to see if Summer is ready to end. If he is not, then Winter will be sent to force his transformation. At the bonfire, She will perform a saining ritual for protection and connection in our community and beyond, and then will gather the forces of Winter to bring in the season. She'll wash her cloak in the Corryvreckan whirlpool, and when She is ready, will finally unveil, and crown the Winter King.

This year, the Cailleach invites you to invest in Radical Connection, because connection is a radical act in a world where division is a tactic. Gather your community to you, support and care for your community. So when winter comes, can you look the Crone in the eye and swear to Her that you have done the work?

SUMMER KING

Salmon return to their home rivers in Summer. In Autumn they transform, fight, mate, and die. In Irish legends, there was a Salmon of Knowledge, who knew everything - and so did whoever ate him. Humans know more about the world than we ever have, but use that knowledge to kill it and each other for profit.

The Summer King is a Salmon of Knowledge who has prevented Autumn so he can live and rule forever. No one else is allowed to change while he forces the world to a halt. There is a song some people know about salmon: humming or singing it will enrage him.

When all his changes are released, the Summer King will transform, go mad, catch fire, ejaculate, and enter a living death, ready to be consumed by the Winter King. If you want to know what that looks like, find the glowing lamprey.

WINTER KING

In a world so fraught with polarisation, where we're all (secretly) terrified of what others are capable of, we overlook our own hidden urges and capacity for violence, hatred and unbridled anger; our thirst for power and greed; our need for control, certainty and righteousness. The awakening of the Winter King marks the force of what lies beneath, and forces us to see things for what they truly are and first accept all that is, exactly as it is.

This year I will rise to power by facing my own shadows as I adventure to meet my counterpart, the Summer King. I will force him into transformation, and in doing so will understand the importance of my own place within the grand scheme of things. Our story is one of coming towards and facing our demons head on, and eventually integrating them so we may become whole and the balance can be restored.

OUR SAMHUINN CHARACTERS

BAT HEARTH

We are four normal, innocent bats, here to provide our performers with rest and refreshment at the end of the night. We're behind the National Monument.

For Your Glorious Pre-Festival Entertainment, we will be running a couple of dodgy, bat-made, free carnival games, from Doors Open (18:30) until the start of the festival (around 20:00, or when our Cailleach arrives!). Come try your luck, and win some lovingly-made trinkets and bat-friendly flower seeds!

During the festival itself, we'll be flapping about telling stories about BATS. You can contribute to Bat Research (research performed by bats) by answering our Bat Surveys, and maybe even learn your fortune for the coming year! We also have the honour of hosting some beautiful performances!

Bat Hearth will close before the final stage sequence, so we can get ready to give our beloved performers a chance to rest after the festival is over.

BRUADAH

Wake up into the dream
Sink into the whole
Remember all that you forgot
From back when you were old
Fire lights dawn from behind
Dusk feels fire's wonder
The timeless sun projects the dream
Both waking and in slumber

We are Bruadar - the dream. We will be holding a liminal space of transformation in fiery technicolour for all who choose to journey through us. We exist as momentary flickers in the innermost stories of Kings and creatures alike. Are we fae, psychopomps or machine elves? Let yourself drift and find out...

Behold the sacred visions of the Bruadar.

OUR SAMHUINN CHARACTERS

THE BLUES

The Blues are the guardians of the ritual, preserving the traditions that have evolved through our festivals, and guiding their enactment at each turn of the wheel. Our society's lore is held by the Blues, holding the stories through their considerable experience of the festivals, involvement in Beltane Fire Society and a deep connection to our rituals and traditions.

They help to define and guide the Court and other characters through the night, acting as a liminal boundary between the worlds. You can see them at the front of the procession holding the gaze of the Cailleach and guiding things from one moment to the next. Sometimes they pop up in other places to prepare a space - including ritually saining & opening the stage space before the court steps onto it.

BOG POINT

The Bog is the gate between worlds, and we are its denizens, a collection of brides and witches and monsters and manifestations of the Bog itself. We hold the knowledge of the ages, artefacts from both sides of the veil, and tales from before time. We sing those tales as they were before words, and we watch to make sure that witnesses treat the Bog and the hill itself with the respect due the powerful forces moving among them.

The Cailleach approaches and we know what is coming. We shed our summer forms to prepare for the coming change, and once renewed into creatures of winter we dance with the wisps that draw people into our depths. We draw others in as the night continues, bringing their bodies and tales into the Bog.

DANCE OF THE FALLING LIGHT

Each year when the shadows stretch long and the air turns silver with the coming cold, the Sun begins her retreat. Not all at once, but slowly—gracefully—as if in reverence to the stillness of the season. Summer light cannot simply vanish. It is too wild, too full of life and motion. And so our sacred order is born—keepers of the in-between—known as the Dance of Falling Light. Cloaked in the sun's final whispers of gold, we cross over into the deepening night. Each movement weaves our spell of farewell. With every circle spun, we gently free a thread of light and send it deep into the earth for safe keeping.

We do not mourn the end of summer. We celebrate its completion.

OUR SAMHUINN CHARACTERS

DEER OF THE CAILLEACH

We are the herd, the Deer of the Cailleach, who is, besides being the most powerful winter goddess in Celtic folklore, the protector of all the Scottish deer.

Our group is firmly rooted in the tradition of the guardian stewards, in that we escort the Cailleach and we will be looking after the Summer and Winter monarchs, as well as being an interface with the audience, ready to answer questions and give directions. But we are also deer: we have the options of costume and antlers as well as our traditional high vis vests. We'll be on the hill when the doors open, you may see our herd watching the sunset, cavorting over the hill, having fun. Because that's what we think deer do.

We are deer, we are stewards, we are a group to help all people on the hill on this magical night of Samhuinn.

HERALDS OF WINTER

Onwards, ever onwards, through dawn and dusk, through endless tomorrows. Each season rises, fades, and returns, part of the earth's eternal dance of renewal. The Heralds of Winter embody this rhythm, drumming the heartbeat of change as we summon the Cailleach to lay summer to rest and birth the year anew. For ten years, our crew has carried this pulse, born from Samhuinn 2015, growing through cycles of joy and struggle, through crisis and stillness. We persist, bearing witness, keeping time with the turning world. In this tenth turn, we return in service to the festival and its community.

OBSIDIAN

Obsidian forms when volcanic lava is cooled rapidly. Birthed from this powerful volcanic energy, we are a group of fierce elemental entities that harness both the powers of creation and destruction to usher in seasonal transformation. On Samhuinn night, Obsidian is called upon by the forces of nature to summon an eruption – a sudden and shocking cataclysm needed to bring about Winter and restore balance to the Earth.

With acrobatics, fire spinning, ritual, and physical storytelling, we evoke the story of life on Earth: an ancient dance between the forces of creation and destruction beholden only to the steady flow of geological time. Our journey mirrors these forces – steady, powerful, focused on our task to realign the seasonal boundaries and bring about Winter by whatever means necessary. Obsidian represents cataclysmic change that, while violent, ultimately embodies a necessary reset and cleansing.

OUR SAMHUINN CHARACTERS

PHOTOPOINT

Photopoint is the volunteer documentary team capturing the fleeting magic of Samhuinn, preserving it in images that echo long after the fire fades. We witness the festival as it unfolds – from quiet preparation to wild celebration – sharing glimpses with the wider world and offering our community a way to remember the wonder they've created.

We work closely with performance groups and courts, exploring their creativity and our own through collaborative photoshoots. With a lens tuned to firelight and movement, we aim to tell the story of Beltane in all its vibrant, glowing detail.

REDS

Born of skin-clinging heat and fevered exhalations, the Reds return as Summer's last defiant blaze, wild creatures of chaos filled with ominous pulsating purpose. As winter's shadow encroaches upon Calton Hill, the Reds are no longer bound only for play, mischief or lust, they instead dance on the edge of mania and obsession connecting to their darkest wildness. They feel the roiling press of forces, corpulent stagnation versus harrowing integration, and respond in kind, their bodies speaking in foolish flows and fearless fluid feral movements. The Reds will burn bright against Samhuinn's encroaching dark, not fading but exploding into their final blaze.

REMORIA

Behind the Acropolis, to the east of the hill; A space for you to remember a loved one or let go of an old way of life sits. Let this space be the first step towards a new path. You'll be guided by a volunteer and as you leave our sacred space you will have the opportunity to see a list of different services if you need further support. We have a disabled access entrance to the south of our space. Let it be known we are not performance but ritual and a space of respect the space is likely to shut at 9.30pm

RUNACH SOUNDSPHERE

Born of the Samhuinn Fires last year and whirled by the winds of Beltane, Rùnach Beathrach returns to Samhuinn with a powerful musical project, forged in fire and steeped in the mysteries of time.

Drawing from the imagined ancestral sounds of the Celts, Norsemen, Picts and Scots, Rùnach conjures a magical dark-folk melodic soundscape that weaves in and out of liminal space and time. The violin, viola and harp stir the heart, the hurdy gurdy, bass and drums plant your feet on the earth, and powerful vocals spiral the energy upward in a ritual of ecstatic connection.

OUR SAMHUINN CHARACTERS

SUAIL

Suail is the sound and the motion of the Sea. An amorphous host of bodies, moving and singing the vast inhuman patterns of wave and wind. Gradually, human folksong emerges from over the waves. The waters remember echoes of generations gone: of the people who have lived and died by the grace of the Sea.

On Samhuinn night, Suail will sing to their closing the life-cycles of human, fish and beast; will unleash the first sea-storms of Winter; and will yield up the power of the Sea to the Cailleach to help drive Her turning of the Wheel.

TORCHIES

There is no light at all. If your eyes could cut through the gloom, you'd see that your breath mists in the shivering cold. You have no idea where your neighbours are. But the wood grinds against itself and again and again until smoke curls into the air alongside your breath. The smoke becomes an ember and feeding that ember feeds us through the winter.

On the night of Samhuinn, the Torchbearers will bring that ember to life - the Neidfire. if you see a fire on the hill, it started with us. The cloaked procession of Torchbearers represents the liminal boundary between the everyday world and the space that our Cailleach, Kings, and spirits move through. We take our job as the veil very seriously, which is why we will be solemn and stoic on the night.

TECH

We help facilitate the tech needs of each Beltane group and the wider production. We create and provide light by fire cans, to help tell the Beltane story with fire sculptures.

On the night we are there to light fires and contribute to the safety and smooth running of the festival. From stage building to fire safety, we do a bit of everything: Tech is the glue that pastes the festival together by fire and sometimes nuts and bolts..

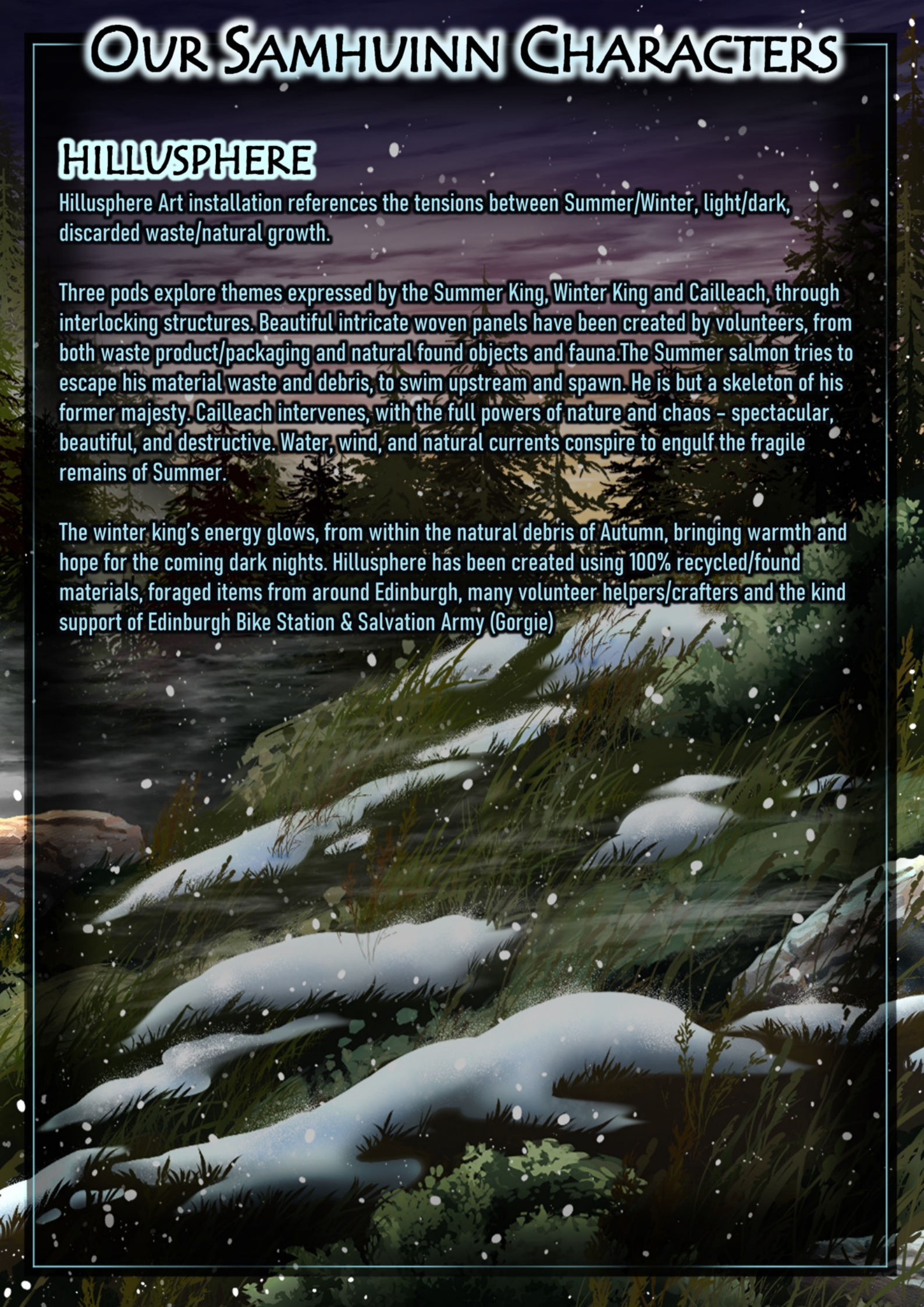
OUR SAMHUINN CHARACTERS

HILLUSPHERE

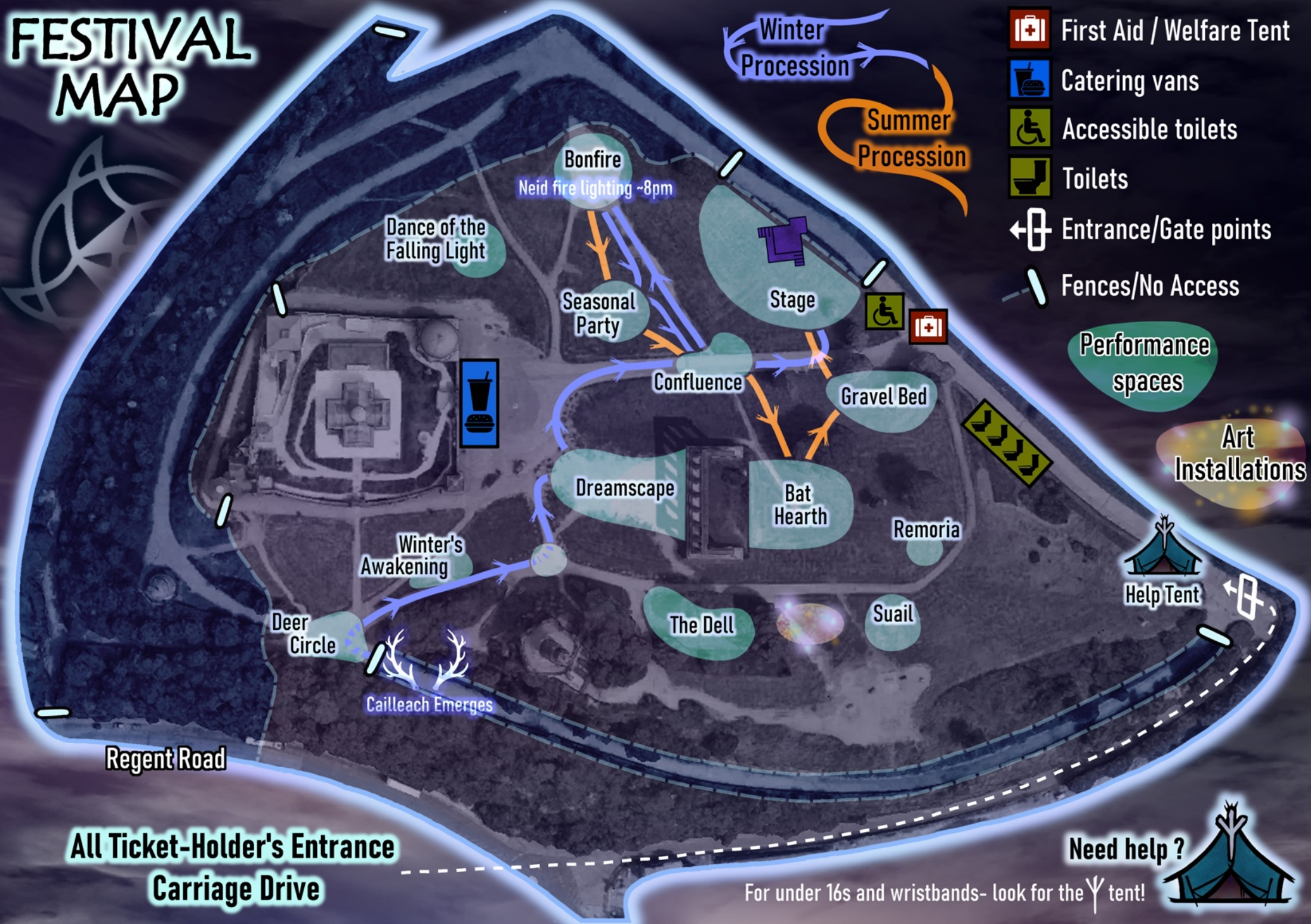
Hillisphere Art installation references the tensions between Summer/Winter, light/dark, discarded waste/natural growth.

Three pods explore themes expressed by the Summer King, Winter King and Cailleach, through interlocking structures. Beautiful intricate woven panels have been created by volunteers, from both waste product/packaging and natural found objects and fauna. The Summer salmon tries to escape his material waste and debris, to swim upstream and spawn. He is but a skeleton of his former majesty. Cailleach intervenes, with the full powers of nature and chaos – spectacular, beautiful, and destructive. Water, wind, and natural currents conspire to engulf the fragile remains of Summer.

The winter king's energy glows, from within the natural debris of Autumn, bringing warmth and hope for the coming dark nights. Hillisphere has been created using 100% recycled/found materials, foraged items from around Edinburgh, many volunteer helpers/crafters and the kind support of Edinburgh Bike Station & Salvation Army (Gorgie)



FESTIVAL MAP



F.A.Qs

WHERE SHOULD I ARRIVE? Please have your QR code ready for scanning, either in print or on mobile. Where possible, approach Calton Hill from Regent Road. There will be a ticket check at Waterloo Steps, but those with children or wishing to receive a wristband to indicate no performer interaction should enter via the Box Office via Carriage Drive. If you have additional access needs, please email access@beltane.org.

WHAT TIME DOES THE PROCESSION START/END? Gates open at 6:35pm (last entry 10pm), with the main procession kicking off at dusk. We recommend arriving early to soak up the atmosphere! The procession will draw to a close around 11pm.

WHAT SHOULD I WEAR? Wrap up warm and dress for the weather! The night will be alive with fire and sound so we recommend natural fabrics for comfort and safety around flame and ear plugs for noise safety around the drumming.

CAN I BRING FOOD & DRINK ON THE HILL? Alcohol is not being sold on site, but you can bring your own drinks (Please, NO GLASS). We also recommend bringing cash for our caterers in case, as there is no ATM on site.

ARE MY DOGS ALLOWED ON THE HILL? Dogs (excluding Guide Dogs) are not allowed on the hill for the festival.

WHAT SIZE SHOULD MY BAG BE? Please make sure to limit bag size to no bigger than an A3 piece of paper.

ARE CHILDREN ALLOWED AT THE FESTIVAL? Under 16s must be accompanied by an adult with a ticket. Parents and guardians please note - this event contains semi-nudity and uninhibited behaviour and discretion is advised. We also recommend ear plugs for little ones.

Missing persons can be found at the Welfare area.

WHAT IF I DON'T WANT TO INTERACT WITH THE CHARACTERS? Beltane Fire Society values everyone's comfort and boundaries. If you'd prefer not to be interacted with during the event, you can collect a consent wristband when you arrive at the Front of House tent. These will be clearly signposted at the entrance.

IS THE EVENT BEING FILMED? Yes! While not live streamed, we will later share a festival video on our social channels and website, as there will be film crews on-site capturing the action. For the safety of our performers and audience, please do not use flash photography. The fire should light up your photos nicely. Re-entry to the festival is not permitted.

ABOUT BELTANE FIRE SOCIETY

The Beltane Fire Society (BFS) is a community arts performance charity responsible for putting on the annual Beltane Fire Festival and Samhuinn Fire Festival in Edinburgh, having celebrated these festivals since 1988.

BFS is run by a volunteer Board of Trustees who oversee the year-round operation of the organisation and our dedicated volunteers who keep the fire burning year after year. The Society is funded entirely by donations, charitable grants and ticket sales.

Help us put on more 'fire' festivals by making a BFS PayPal donation.

WWW.BELTANE.ORG

[@BELTANEFIRESOCIETY](https://twitter.com/BELTANEFIRESOCIETY)

Taken some great photos?
Join the conversation and tag us using
#Samhuinn2025



Artwork: Becky Salter @wilder.ways.art.illustration