

Ireland 2019

Summary

Since this will be a blow by blow description of a two week trip, and include way more info than many people would want to digest, here's a very brief summary of the holiday.

Three nights in **Dublin**

Arriving direct from the US west coast, our first day including nothing more than a brief walk, stocking up on provisions, a nice dinner at **Oscar's**, and an early music session at the **Cobblestone**.

Day two included the **National Botanical Gardens**, **Glasnevin Cemetery**, **St. Patrick's Cathedral**, the wives going to **Dublinia** while the menfolk ducked into **The Brazen Head** for an early trad session. After joining back up at pub, we had dinner, and walked home via the Cobblestone for more music.

Day three saw us in the car for an outing to **Newgrange**, **Monasterboice**, **The Battle of the Boyne Museum**, and **Hills of Tara**. Followed by dinner at **L. Mulligan Grocer** and brief stop at the Cobblestone.

Clonmel, Tipperary

Driving from Dublin, we stopped at **HolyCross Abbey**, followed by the **Rock of Cashel**, lunch in Cashel, then **Cahir Castle**, and arriving at **Fennessy's Hotel** for the night. Enjoyed a music-less visit to **Bennigan's Pub**.

Clonakilty, Cork

From Clonmel, we visited **Carey Castle**, **St. Patrick's Well**, and then **Charles Fort** before arriving at **An Sughan**. Surprisingly, we found no music in Clonakilty, but had a good dinner at An Sughan.

Cahirciveen, Kerry

Visiting **Drombeg Stone Circle**, lunch at **The Atlantic** in Kenmare, onto the **Ring of Kerry**, stopping at the **Kerry Cliffs** before arriving in **Iveragh Gardens**. Walked to **Quinlan & Cooke Seafood** for dinner

Killarney, Kerry

After a wonderful Landing Tour on **Skellig Michael**, we headed for **Ross Castle** before arriving at **The Gardens**. Had a good dinner at **Mac's** followed by **Sheehan's** for music.

Ennis, Clare

After spending some time doing laundry, we visited **Lough Gur Wedge Tomb**, the **Lough Gur Stones**, a brief stop at the visitor's center, then to **Gray Gables**. After dinner at **Alexander Knox's**, we stayed for music.

Kilronan, Inish Mor, Galway

After a brief stop at **Ballygriffy Castle**, on to the Rossaveal ferry to **Inish Mor**, arriving at **Clai Ban** in Kilronan. Lunch at **Rua Cafe**, long walk to **Teampall Bheanain**, back to **T. Joe Watty's** for dinner and non-trad music.

Galway, Galway

The next morning we bicycled out to **Dun Aonghasa**, lunch at **Teach Nan Phaidi**, then the **Black Fort**, sweater shopping, then back on the ferry to Rossaveal, for the quick drive to Galway and **Prague House B&B**. Dinner at **John Keogh's Gastropub**, followed by Brazilian trad music at **Bierhaus**, an early trad session at **Carroll's**, then a later session at **The Crane**.

Athlone, Westmeath

Visited **Dungaire Castle, Poul nabroune Dolman**, lunch at Cassidy's in Carron, a short hike at **Slieve Carron** in the Burren, **then on to Clonacnoise** Monastery and **Arch House Apts**. After dinner at the **Dark Horse**, on to **Sean's Bar**.

Carrick-on-Shannon, Roscommon

Short walk to **Athlone Castle**, then the **Derryglad Folk Museum, Roscommon Castle**, lunch at **The Open Table** in Boyle, **Carrowkeel Passage Tombs**, to **Carrick Plaza**. Dinner at the **Oarsman** followed by semi-trad music at **Flynn's Corner House**.

Dublin, Dublin

Self-induced car troubles blew the day, so we arrived at **Customs House Square Apt**, then dinner and music at **The Celt**. Next morning, we split up at the airport and went on to a brief stay in Iceland while our friends went to Amsterdam.

Blow-by-Blow

This is our third trip to the island, and since the trip was triggered by a couple of friends that were interested in a first trip to Ireland, we planned to see many new things to us, but repeat some of our favorites for their benefit. None of the repeats seemed old, so it worked out great. Our goal was to find traditional music every night, but June was a little too early for nightly sessions.

Also, my personality is a little bit AR, so I planned the trip to be chock-full of things to do, with lots of driving in order to cover the most ground. Our next trip will definitely include at least two days in each location so the pace can be dialed back a bit. This exhausting pace led to a missing a few desired stops due to running out of time or missing closing times.

Day 1

When I made our plan, I recalled getting a few things done our first day. I failed to remember that we had arrived from England or France, so jetlag was not in play. Suffering from the red-eye, a long car rental process, including the usual argument over the collision damage waiver (which agents must get a commission on!), and hitting rush hour in Dublin, we went straight to the VRBO. Paul (the owner) met us at the curb, showed us all the ropes of the parking garage and entry, and while showing the apartment, offered lots of advice on dinner, music and things to do. The unit was listed as “Aran Quay” on VRBO, and given the great location and comfy accommodations, it’s a great find. According to Paul, Dublin is legislating against short term rentals to help the housing shortage, but he hadn’t seen the final plan or any enforcement yet.

After a quick trip to the Lidl Market across the street, we walked over to L. Mulligan Grocers to find you needed a reservation on a Saturday, so we eventually settled on Oscars on Smithfield Square for a dinner featuring huge portions and our first Guinness.

A short walk to The Cobblestone found more Guinness and an early session featuring a half dozen women playing Irish flute, a concertina, and the lone male playing the fiddle. I think they might be a weekly gathering, as they all seemed to be friends. Music was quite good, but suffering from jet-lag, we stayed about an hour, then returned to our lodging, which was next door to the pub.

Day 2

Following a much needed night’s sleep, we ate a light breakfast in our kitchen, and headed out for a longish walk to the **National Botanic Gardens**.

Music in Ireland

On our 1997 trip, the bars were all smoke filled, and music seemed to converge spontaneously. A few years ago, the smoke was gone, but so was the appearance of spontaneity. This year, all the music appeared to be organized, with most musicians seemingly hired by the pub. The Cobblestone was an exception where a quid pro quo was not obvious.

Perhaps catering to tourists, the music is often available before the traditional 9:30-10pm at more and more places.



National Botanic Gardens

Along the way we poked around the King's Inn, which is Ireland's oldest law school, and took a side trip along the Royal Canal, watching the swans.



National Botanic Gardens

After a brief wait for the 10am opening, we spent about two hours walking through the gardens. The impressive Victoria Lily (that we saw 20 years ago), was under renovation, so our friends missed that encounter. There must be an absolute army of grounds keepers and horticulturists on staff to keep everything in such good order. We were impressed how the Irish government continues to support cultural and historical features, although the impact of tourism probably provides a good incentive. We ate lunch at the Gardens.

We then walked over to **Glasnevin Cemetery**, poking around looking at tombstones, before heading back downtown. We stopped at **The Brazen Head** to discover they had an afternoon

session starting in just an hour, so we proceeded to **St. Patrick's Cathedral**, only to discover it was closed due to an impending mass (what an unexpected event at a church – how rude!) . We split up, with Lisa and Kathy heading for **Dublinia**, a Viking history museum, while Mike and I headed back to The Brazen Head to get good seats for the session. The exhibit at Dublinia featuring a lifelike figure with sound made a large impression.



Dublinia

At most of the pubs we visited, persistence was rewarded with good seats. Mike and I were at the bar when the girls arrived, and we almost immediately jumped into a table right next to the players.

The session

was two guitars, an accordion, and arriving a little late, a male vocalist that played an amazing spoons. He had to keep a water glass full of

ice to keep the silverware from melting!

After the great session ended, we ordered dinner. Afterwards, we headed back to the apartment, stopping at the Cobblestone once again for another hour of music and the mandatory Guinness's, again, calling it a somewhat early night.



Glasnevin Cemetery

Day 3

We got the rental car out of the garage and headed north to **Newgrange**. The Visitor Center was being renovated, so the website advised arriving early since it would be first-come, first served for reservations. Arriving at 9am, we found ourselves with a short 20 minute wait, in what was a much smaller crowd than we had seen three years ago. Not only was it less crowded, but they waived the admission during the work.

Our (mandatory) bus took us to **Knowth** first, where we had about 20 minutes of tour followed by another 20 minutes to wander around on our own. Knowth is a 6,000 year old collection of passage tombs, most of which line up to allow the sun to enter the tomb at the equinox. The principal mound has a sunrise and sunset passage.



Knowth

Getting back on the bus, we returned to the visitor center before re-departing to Newgrange, which is sort of Knowth 2.0, in that it is much more elaborate and focused on the Winter Solstice sunrise. I can imagine the clan chiefs trying to one-up each other with construction projects, even though they took generations to build. We talked with an Irishwoman who now lived in Australia, and she insisted we add the Battle of the Boyne Museum to our plans, even if we had to sacrifice something else.



Newgrange

We headed farther north to **Monasterboice**, which is a derelict monastery with a tower keep for defense. Given the wealth of similar places throughout Ireland, this might have been less exciting than others. It's remarkable that even derelict structures are used for modern burials, with many graves dated very recently.

Despite my hesitation to inject yet another sight into our schedule, we proceed to the **Battle of the Boyne Visitor's Center**, where an audio and visual display of the details of this 1698 battle helped understand the Williamite/Jacobite War over the independence and religion of Ireland. The museum had a

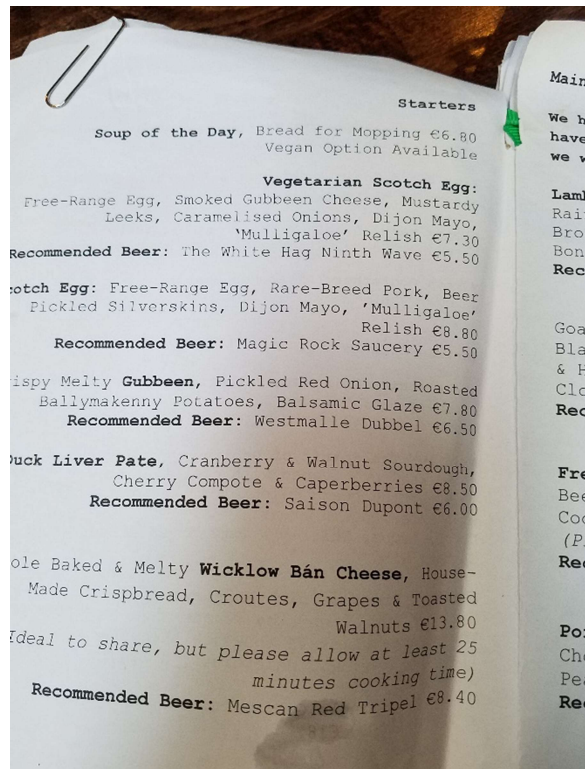
convenient cafeteria, so we had lunch rather than search for something on the way to the next stop.

Proceeding south, we pulled in at the **Hills of Tara**. This collection of crude hills looks like it might have been one of the poorer chieftain's efforts at matching his betters to the north. Nonetheless, we learn a bit more history, and eavesdropped on an organized tour to learn about the hawthorn tree and their relationship to fairies. Even today, a farmer will not cut down or even remove a dead hawthorn in respect for the risk of fairy reprisals.

Departing Tara, we returned to the apartment long enough to park the car, then headed to **L. Mulligan Grocers** for an interesting dinner experience.



Hills of Tara



L. Mulligan Grocers

Being Monday, there was no waiting, and we were seated and received our menus, which were inserts into old books. We ordered food like Vegetarian Haggis and Vegetarian Scotch Egg. Very odd but very good dishes.

After a very pleasant meal, we once again headed for The Cobblestone for an hour or two of trad. Each night the music was unique, although perhaps it repeats in a weekly basis. A few more Guinness, then back to the apartment.

Lisa tried to do a load of laundry while a machine was available, for our first of several experiences of how long and how poorly the combined washer/dryers do their jobs. Everytime we found a washer available to us, we ended up packing wet clothes the next morning.

Day 4

Leaving Dublin for the countryside, we headed to **Clonmel**, Tipperary. When I planned the trip, another friend with family in Clonmel was planning on joining us, and although they had scheduling conflicts, we kept the stop.

Along the way, our first stop was **Holy Cross Abbey**, a largely intact 10th century monastery. No one seems to have taken any photos, but it was interesting, nonetheless.

Another 15km found us at the **Rock of Cashel**. Located overlooking the town of Cashel, it was easy to imagine life in that era.

We ate lunch at **Feehan's** in Cashel, before heading to our next stop, **Cahir Castle**.



Rock of Cashel

Cahir Castle is in excellent condition, and is partially furnished to provide a realistic experience of life in the 13th century. The tour provides a clear vision of how daily life looked, what the class structure was like, and offered best guesses to many questions.

From Cahir, it was on to Fennesey's Hotel in Clonmel. There's a nice mural of a priest that was hung at our hotel. We marched off to look for possible music, but after several false leads, we sat down in Bennigans Pub for a Guinness while we thought about eating. The proprietor Paul came over and after introductions, told us everything you could ever want to know about all the things to see around town. Paul even went next door to get menus, then walked back over with our pizza order. When they rang him up, we took our refreshed beers next door to sit down to authentic Irish pizza – not super, but fine. Returned to the bar for one more round, then headed back to the hotel.



Cahir Castle



Carey Castle

Day 5

We spent a little time looking up possible family connections for our absent friend, but eventually our first stop was a short drive to **Carey Castle**. After puzzling over unsigned paths in all directions from the marked parking area, we hiked down a few hundred yards through the forest to emerge at a derelict castle. Although it didn't have massive defenses except against livestock, it did have what remained of a tower for defense, and being there all alone gave a chance to explore all the nooks and crannies. Together with the nice forest walk, it was a surprisingly fun experience. Not sure how I discovered it as a place to visit.

Dashboard GPS

A true salvation for travelers, I had pre-programmed our daily routes into my Nuvi, knowing she would "recalculate" if we added stops or wandered off our way. I also configured it to "**avoid tolls**", both because I didn't want to worry about automated toll payments and because it would take us off the beaten path a bit, which it did repeatedly. There is such a dense network of roads that a wrong turn always resulted in a modified route rather than a "Make a U-turn" command from the dashboard.

The new route often sent us through a farmer's yard or narrow single-track.

From there, it was on to **St. Patrick's Well**, one of many early Christian holy wells spread throughout Ireland. People have been coming to the well for more than 600 years, continuing to today. A volunteer with the caretaking organization bicycled up to give us a little info and chat (and probably to reduce vandalism).

After a nearly two hour drive towards Cork, we arrived at **Charles Fort** near Kinsale. This Fort played a major part in the Williamite War, as a base for the Jacobites. It was later occupied by the British army, until 1922. It's in very good condition for its age and includes a good visitor center with details about construction, the wars, and later use by the British.



Charles Fort

We then drove on to **Clonakilty**, arriving at **An Sugan B&B**, actually a hotel. An Sugan was a little spendier than our typical lodging, but our original reservation was cancelled at the last minute due to some sort of emergency, so I took what Booking.com could find at the last minute.

We surveyed the well known bars for music, and discovered being there on a Wednesday was the one day of the week there was none anywhere, at least until July. So we returned to the bar at An Sugan and had a good meal with a few beers, then retired early, at least by Irish standards.

Day 6

After the usual Full Irish breakfast, at least for Mike and me, we took a brief walking tour of town, then drove the short trip to the **Drombeg Stone Circle**. In addition to the usual stone circle, there were ruins of several tiny stone huts along with a spring with cooking area. We had been here in 2016 and enjoyed it both times.

Driving for another 1 ½ hours found us hungry and in Kenmare. We saw a parking spot, and had a good lunch at **The Kenmare Brewhouse** in the square.



Drombeg Stone Circle

Leaving Kenmare, we missed a critical turn just outside town, that “recalculated” and told us to proceed on (rather than making a U-turn). We found ourselves on **Priest’s Leap**, which is one of those detours that car GPS



Priest’s Leap

units just don’t recognize as being silly alternative routes. Anyway, it was a 6.5 mile climb up and over a high pass on a single tract dirt road, with lots of tight turns, sheep encounters, and simply stunning views. Luckily, we never saw another vehicle, especially the omnipresent tour bus.

We eventually rediscovered civilization and took the **Ring of Kerry** in the clockwise direction up the coast. The waiter at lunch had told us all the buses went counter-clockwise, so we shouldn’t buck them, but since it was my day to drive and I’d much rather have a few brief moments than following a bus all day, we ignored his advice. Since our last trip the road had been vastly improved, with wide lanes, leading to zero scary encounters. We had been on the inland portion

last trip, so perhaps things haven’t changed that much.

After arriving in **Portmagee** and reconnoitering the parking for tomorrow’s **Skellig Michael** trip, we drove on the **The Kerry Cliffs**. This is a private concession that charges 8 euros for simply viewing the cliffs from the edge. Although it’s a cash cow for the owners, the view is spectacular, and worth the fee. We met some other tourists who thought it was almost as spectacular and devoid of the dozens of tour buses as at the **Cliffs of Moher**. Our plans were pretty sketchy about Moher, so that was good news.

Returning through Portmagee to **Cahirciveen** and **Iveragh Heights**, our B&B for the night. The B&B has a great ocean view, beautiful gardens, and cows in the back yard. We hiked into the small town center, surveyed the possibilities for music, then settled into **Quinlan & Cooke Seafood** for a nice meal and the obligatory couple of Guinness. Still no music, so back to the B&B.

Day 7

I had exchanged emails with our boat skipper, and it looked like the trip to Skellig Michael was a go. Apparently, about 30% of trips are cancelled due to wave conditions on the islands, and July is worse than most. Eating a slightly lighter breakfast and applying Scopalamine patches, we headed back to Portmagee to board the Celtic Victor. Always a popular destination, the use as a set for Star Wars had driven numbers crazy. Apparently later in the summer, there are Imperial Storm Troopers on every corner in Portmagee and everyone dresses up as a character. Only Lisa had any interest in that aspect. Kathy came for the puffins.



Skellig Michael

After a 45 minute cruise through somewhat choppy seas, we arrived at Skellig Michael and had an easy disembarkation on the stone quay. OPW (the Office

of Public Works) ran a lottery this year to award permits to skippers to carry a modest number of tourists to the island. There are 15 boats each with a 12 person limit, and they arrive and depart according to a strict schedule. Although everyone is overlapped, it spreads out the groups so it doesn't seem too crowded. They instruct you to be back at the quay in 2 ½ hours, which gives you plenty of time to see the sights.

The docent explained the gannet nests – *The way the gannets walk this world is young couples nest low on the cliffs, then work their way up to higher nest sites over many years together.*



Skellig Michael

After a brief warmup hike just above the shoreline, you arrive at the foot of “the stairs” to await a safety briefing. There are 600 stairs to get to the location of the monastery remains, and they do deserve a safety talk. They vary in pitch, width, texture, and closeness to the precipice on one side. Between people coming up and down at the same time, and people stopping suddenly to take pictures or watch puffins, it's understandable why there is a helipad for emergencies. It appeared some people were turning around due to the workout, but most had no problem.

Once you get to the top, you can listen to a history lecture and/or just crawl around the beehives the early monks built as living

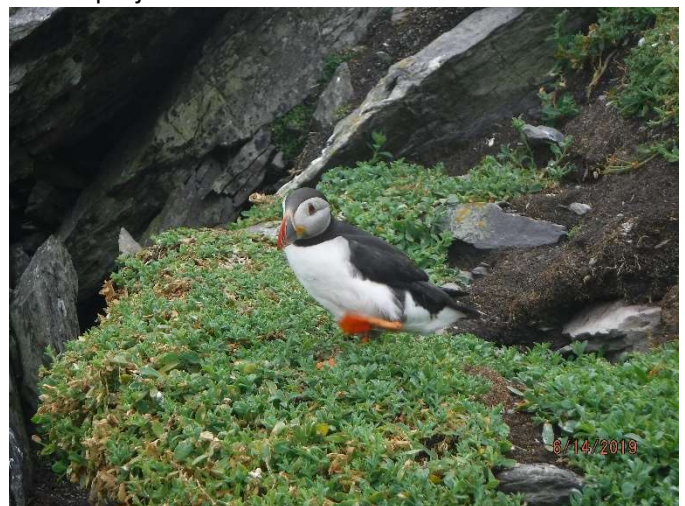
quarters. It's quite a building project to create a level space on a sheer cliff. After years of stair construction, they had to build the level area by building a tremendous retaining wall of rock, backfilled with more rock. It is estimated to have taken more than 100 years to complete the project.

Without planning it, arrival in mid-June makes the island especially magical because the puffins are nesting. They nest in small holes in the rocks and holes they excavate in the grass. On our visit, the chicks were just starting to hatch, but none had emerged from the nests yet. The adults were very curious and seemingly unafraid of all the white legs and plaid shorts.

In addition to puffins there are shearwaters and petrels hidden during the day as well as gannets, although they are mostly on the smaller island.

After an even smoother cruise back to Portmagee, we zipped by the B&B to retrieve a lost pair of pants, then proceeded to **Ross Castle in Killarney National Park**. We got there just in time for the last tour of the day, and spent an hour climbing stairs, listening to history, and peering out slit windows. Built on a plan similar to Cahir Castle, we were starting to get familiar with the living arrangements.

We drove on to find our lodging at **The Gardens** in Killarney. More along the lines of a motel with every room fronting a beautiful garden, all hidden behind a wall in downtown Killarney. We settled in, then walked 15



Skellig Michael

minutes to what was called a 24 hour laundromat. Unable to find it, we eventually discovered it was two washers and a dryer in a kiosk at a gas station. The washer didn't do much extraction, and the dryer element appears to have been broken, so we returned to the room with soaking clothes.

We strung clothes lines in the rooms, then headed off to look for music prospects and dinner possibilities. Surprised to find no potential music, we had a nice dinner and beers at **Mac's** then moved over to **Sheehan's** located in the Killarney Grand Hotel. We sat next to some nice folks from Galway that play at The Crane Bar regularly.

Day 8

We originally planned Saturday morning in Killarney so Mike and Lisa could do the Park Run with the locals, but neither were feeling up to the task after a week of too many Guinness's and maybe a little left over seasickness.

While Lisa and Kathy did some shopping, Mike and I drove to a nearby laundry, where we waited for our clothes to finally dry. Due to the poor extraction the night before, it took more than an hour to get everything acceptably dry.

After about an hour of driving, hunger kicked in, and we stopped **The Orchid** in **Buttevant** for lunch. There were a bunch of older men having coffee at the window table, mixing English and Gaelic between speakers. Probably been there every morning since 1768, when it was built.

Finally getting away, we headed to **Lough Gur**. I had mislabeled the Wedge Tomb as the Visitors Center on the GPS, so it caused some consternation in the back seat when we went right past a sign to the real visitors center. Nonetheless, we found ourselves parked on the side of a narrow road next to the wedge tomb. After a brief look-see, we proceeded to the real Visitors Center, which was more of a Lakeside Park. Being behind schedule

(as usual), we aborted after a short exploration, and went to the Stone Circle.

Lough Gur Stone Circle was a little different than most of the "Druid" style circles, in that it was nearly solid stones, with surrounding mounds, more like an arena with spectator areas. There wasn't a lot of signage, but there was probably a thorough explanation at the skipped Visitor's Center.

Our next stop was **Bunratty Castle**. We had visited a few years ago, and although it was a little on the "Disneyland" side of authentic, it consisted of a complete village surrounding an intact tower castle, featuring people dressed in period costume spinning wool, cooking gruel,



Lough Gur Wedge Tomb



Lough Gur Stone Circle

blacksmithing, and carousing in the great hall. Although we got there long before the published closing time, they closed early to prepare for the nightly feast, where tourists dressed up as lords and ladies and ate legs of lamb without silverware. After having visited Cashel, Cahir, and Ross Castles, all built in the same era, I don't think our five minute miss of the last tour wasn't that big a loss.

So, we got "back on the bus" and drove on to **Grey Gables B&B** in **Ennis**. Very nice lodging with a very helpful proprietor (the owner's son, actually) instructing us on the best music and food.

It turns out the picking for music were slim so we ended up eating and listening at **Alexander Knox's**. The food was excellent as was the music.



Not!

Day 9

Our initial plan was to take the ferry from **Doolin** to **Inishmor**, but the B&B in **Kilronan** (on Inishmor) would not accept a reservation if we were coming from Doolin, as she claimed the ferry service was too weather dependent. She suggested the bigger ferry from **Rossaveal** as a more reliable conveyance, which meant a long drive.

So, leaving Ennis, we took a short detour to **Ballygriffy Castle**, which was behind a locked farmer's fence with no parking area, which led to a pretty quick visit. Proceeded on to Rossaveal via **Galway**, getting there early enough to take an earlier ferry, leaving RIGHT NOW, so we didn't get to see much of the marina.



Teampall Bheanain

After the 30 minute ride on the 100 passenger ferry, we arrived in Kilronan, and walked up the main street to **Clai Ban B&B**. This was the only day of our trip that we actually got rained on, so we just pattered around for a bit, then walked back towards town, had a quick lunch at **Rua Café**. With a break in the drizzle, we walked around the harbor towards the airport, eventually getting as far as **Teampall Bheanain**, a tiny temple ruin from early Christian days.

We then went to **Joe Watty's** for dinner with the usual Guinness. After discovering their music was "folk" rather than trad, we marched off to survey the other pubs for trad. Despite signs to the contrary, no one else had any music at all, unless you count a disc jockey. So we returned to Joe Wattys to listen to the

folk/ballad music. Although the music was entertaining, it wasn't what we wanted to hear, so after the usual four or five pints, we trundled off to bed, which was practically next door. Of course that's why I chose Clai Ban.

Day 10

After breakfast at the B&B, we walked back to the harbor to rent bicycles. We then headed out the five miles to **Dun Aonghasa**, Inishmor's most famous attraction. A Cliffside fortress built in the 800's to defend against the Vikings. Spectacular views in all directions and one of the many rockworks all over the island. Although it was pretty robust, I doubt if the Vikings would have been slowed down had they shown an interest.

We had lunch at **Teach Nan Phaidi** which is right at the end of the road to Dun Aonghasa, then bicycled back to town via the upland route, then headed towards the Black Fort. The road got rougher and rockier, so the girls turned back while the less intelligent proceeded until we had to park the bikes and walk. The fort was similar to Dun Aonghasa, except included a much larger area of Cliffside rockwork including a large outcropping out over the cliff.

We rendezvoused in town, where some serious sweater shopping took place. Then it was back to board the ferry to Rossaveal.

Despite the short description, this was probably our favorite adventure after Skellig Michael.

Upon returning to the mainland, we made the short drive to **Galway** and **Prague House B&B**. We had stayed here last time and knew it was pleasant and was in a great location. Our last visit to Galway was tarnished somewhat by the huge crowds due to final exams being done or some such nonsense, so we were leery of it being crowded, which it wasn't.

After a good dinner at **John Keogh's Gastropub**, we followed our ears to the **Bierhaus** for what turned out to be very energizing traditional Brazilian music. When they quit, we moved onto **Carrolls Pub**, where we finally found a trio that included a uilleann pipe, which to my ear, is what trad music should always have. After they finished, we moved on to **The Crane Bar**, where we knew there would be more trad. Another Uilleann pipe, along with a growing group, including a guitar, accordion, eventual two fiddles, and even a harmonica by an audience member. All three music experiences were the best, and Galway is on our re-visit list yet again.



Dun Aonghasa

Day 11

After yet another hearty breakfast, off we went towards our next adventure. Heading for **Poulnabroune Dolman Wedge Tomb**, we drove by a castle near Kinvara, so due to loud protest from the back seat drivers, we pulled into **Dungaire Castle**. Situated right on the water the castle had been restored and inhabited until the 1960s. It had been used as a set in a few Hollywood movies. Worth the stopover.

Then on to Poulnabroune. The roads have been significantly widened since our 2016 visit, and the crowd was actually smaller than our last trip (a month earlier). Kathy struck up a conversation with the staff docent (or maybe guard), and he was a wealth of information about the native plants, the local history, and his opinions of Ireland in general. Quite interesting.

When we said where we were headed, he ventured we'd probably have lunch at Castle-something.



Dungaire Castle



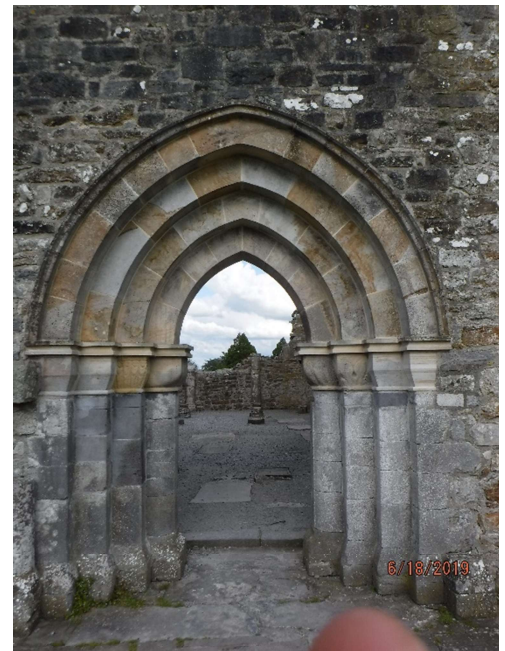
Slieve Carron – Bee Orchid

Well, after popping out of the maze of roads from Poulnabroune, and turning east, we spied **Cassidy's Pub** (Castle-something?) and had a good lunch and maybe one Guinness. I think Mike was driving.

After lunch, our next stop was **Slieve Carron**, part of The **Burren National Park**, where we hiked about 2 miles to an old monk's residence (old residence, not old monk), and met several locals who were visiting daily to see certain flowers in bloom.

Back on the bus, we headed to **Clonacnoise**, which we had visited in 2016, but by

our rented river cruiser. It was the creation of a monk who introduced Christianity to his home town after some serious traveling. It is a huge cemetery, including many modern graves, and a collection of two towers and six or seven small temples.



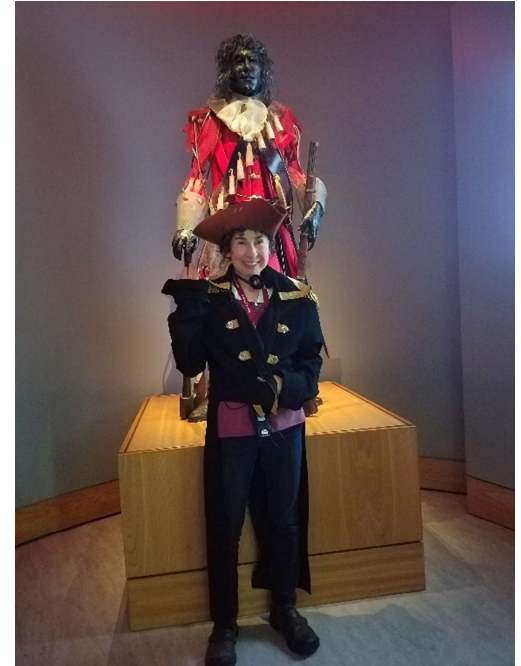
Clonacnoise



Sean's Bar

It was a short drive to **Athlone**, although it took a while to get straightened out on our lodging, the **Arch House Apartments**, as the instructions were a bit confusing.

We walked down the block to the **Dark Horse** for a nice dinner (and Guinness) then across the river to **Sean's Bar**, the oldest bar in Ireland, founded in 900AD. The music wasn't like Galway, but it was still entertaining, and besides, it was the only music in town. As bewitching hour set in (when too many beers makes you fall asleep), we adjourned to the apartment, where we struggled with the washing machine once again.



Athlone Castle

Day 12

After breakfast, we walked back across the bridge in time for **Athlone Castle** to open. Due to some renovations one exhibit hall was closed, so the price was lowered and the audio equipment was free. Besides being in excellent condition, the visitors center has exhaustive signage and displays describing the same Williamite War as on the Boyne, although this was apparently the final battle.

The next stop was a sort of hidden gem I dug out of Google during the planning process. **Derryglad Folk**



. Derryglad Folk Museum

Museum was one man's effort at collecting, organizing, and displaying all sorts of stuff. In Oregon it's called a flea market, but this was on an entirely different level. The creator/owner/curator accompanied us throughout the several buildings, explaining things as we went. He played some 1920s recorded music on a period phonograph, and he had the world's largest wad on Bog Butter. Apparently, before refrigeration, people use to bury their butter in the bogs, and frequently lost track of it, only to be discovered by the peat cutters 75 years later. Genuinely interesting things scattered throughout. Nothing like I expected!

Next stop was **Roscommon Castle**. This is an accessible castle (and free) that is one of the larger ones, but most of the upper rockwork is badly collapsed. The stairways in each of the four corner towers were closed, so it was purely a ground floor tour. We were starting to get tired of castles, but each had something unique to offer.

Continuing north, we stopped for lunch in Boyle at **The Open Table**.

After lunch, it was on to **Carrowkeel Passage Tombs** in County Donegal. Arriving in the small parking area with sign, we found the instructions confusing. Another visitor drove past explaining that you can drive much farther than indicated, so we proceeded through a farm gate, up a dirt road, to a junction occupied by another car and a sign indicating walking, so we parked and walked about a mile on a road that looked to be



Roscommon Castle.



Carrowkeel Passage Tombs

often traveled by cars filled with lazy tourists. At the end of the road, there was yet another sign pointing uphill where we could see some rocks, so we climbed up a few hundred yards. Meeting another two tourists coming down, they said “you can enter one of the three tombs”. Another few hundred feet and we were at a small passage tomb. Two more tombs were located farther up the hill. We were able to enter all three, so the prior advice givers must have been wimps. It turns out there are many more tombs scattered in the general area, but these were the only ones on this particular hill. Amazing structures – still watertight after all these years!

After a fun crawl and hike, we drove on to **Carrick-on-Shannon**, where we discovered my first major screw-up of the trip. I had made our reservation at Carrick Plaza Suites for the next evening. After the desk clerk figured out what the problem was, she offered a a larger suite for the same price, and didn’t charge me for the second night, which was way more than fair.

We had chosen Carrick-on-Shannon as a stop because of our enjoyment of Anderson’s The Thatch on the 2016 trip. We had

driven by on the way into town and saw that they opened at 8pm and planned to have music. Unfortunately, it's a taxi ride unless you have a designated driver, so we would be stuck out there till midnight or later. Having dinner at the **Oarsman**, the bartender thought The Thatch was an odd choice, so we changed our plans and ended up at **Flynn's Corner House** a short walk away listening to semi-traditional music. Our decision will forever haunt us.



Flynn's Corner House

Day 13

Our plan was to head directly to Dublin, to walk to many museums and other sights, but I made my second screw-up of the trip.

Needing to return the rental car with a full tank, we stopped just a few miles from Dublin and promptly filled the diesel tank with regular gasoline. After a few phone calls, we eventually had a pump-out service show up. After



Whoops!

his having his own problems, we managed to lose three hours of our day. Arriving at **Customs House Square** to our last night's lodging, it took a while to decode the instructions on locating the apartment. By the time we got settled into the digs, most of the planned sights were closing soon, and we were hungry, having skipped lunch dealing with our fuel issue, so we walked over to **The Celt** where we had a nice dinner and a few hours of music.

Knowing we had a long day tomorrow, we abandoned our prime seats in front of the players, and headed back to the lodging and crashed.

Day 14

For a pretty anti-climactic wrap-up of the trip, we dropped Mike and Lisa off at Terminal 2 for their flight to **Amsterdam**, then checked in the rental car and got ourselves over to Terminal 1 for our flight to **Iceland**.

Iceland 2019

Although not Ireland, we used the Icelandair "free stopover" plan to include 48 hours in Iceland. In hindsight, we wish we had stayed longer, but it was what it was.

Day 1

Arriving in Reykjavik in the early afternoon, we hopped in a rental car and headed to the southern area of the island, making our first stop at Lambafell Hotel, which was a gorgeous log structure nestled up against a cliff. Allowing hunger to control our plans, we headed to the **Black Beach Restaurant** near **Vik**. Not quite what I

expected - it was more like a cafeteria with a very limited menu. Good food nonetheless, followed by a brief walk on the namesake black beach, which was a very popular thing to do, at least based on the number of tour buses in the parking area.

On to Sólheimajökulsvegur glacier. Since it was early evening, there were just a few cars in the lot. We had carried mini-crampons in our luggage for this outing, but between all the warning signs about not crossing several barriers, we abandoned the idea. We did see several folks skating out-of-control down the path and a few minor avalanches.



Sólheimajökulsvegur

Slightly disappointed at the experience, we



Skogafoss

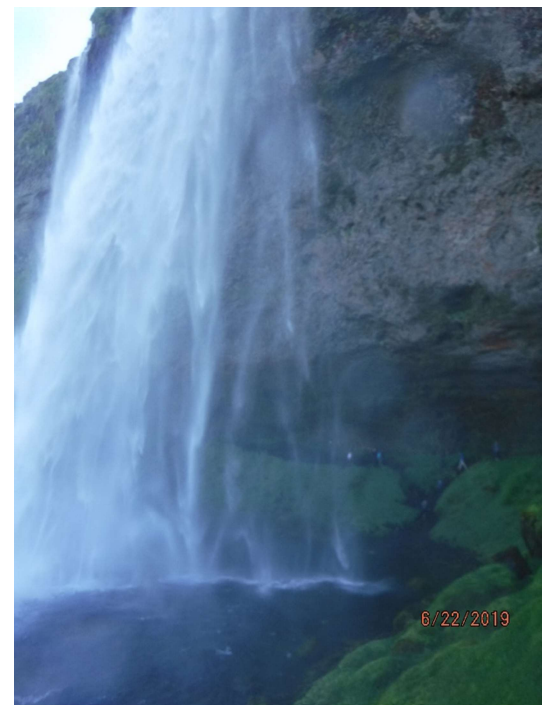
proceeded to Skogafoss, a large waterfall cascading off the glacier we had just visited. There was a stairway/trail leading up to the top, which was a nice aerobic exercise. There were a few more smaller falls upstream, and a lot of hikers that appeared to be headed for overnight adventures. Given the 24 hour sunlight, I guess “overnight” is sort of a misnomer.

We returned to Lambafell by about 10pm, closed the opaque curtains and got a good nights sleep.

Day 2

After a nice continental breakfast (no more full Irish!), we checked out and headed back to the west, making our first stop at **Seljalandfoss**, another waterfall we had seen the day before.

There were many tour buses in the lot and lots of tourists taking selfies, etc. There is a trail behind the falls, but judging from the folks emerging from the trailhead, it was pretty wet work. Wimping out yet again, we walked down to a few lesser falls, then climbed back in the car to head for the **Golden Circle**.





The first stop was **Kerid**, which is a volcanic crater/lake. Another nice aerobic hike down and back up, although there were a lot of fellow travelers. The remainder of the Golden Circle was chock full of tour buses, so private experiences were not happening.

As we headed west, we passed what can only be described as a national treasure. A farmer's fence was draped with hundreds of brassiers. I can see why they had to put up "no stopping" signs, or else a hell would break loose.

Seljalandsfoss



Next stop was **Geysir**, the geysers for which all other thermal water features were named. We saw it erupt three times during the time it took to park, walk to the geyser, and escape the traffic jam at the parking area. Although it claimed to bigger the Old Faithful (but smaller than Steamboat), I'm doubting the claim.

On to **Gullfoss**, another large waterfall. Another claim of being larger than Niagra Falls was a bit of a strctch, but it was pretty impressive. The claim dated from 1787, so maybe there was a little exaggeration over the centuries.

Next, and final stop, was



Thingvellir National Park, which commemorates the location of the original **Law Counsel** in addition to being the center of the North Atlantic rift, which is opening between the North American Plate and the European Plate. Iceland is "new" enough that you felt you were witnessing the motion, although it actually only moves about 2cm per year, although that is fast by geologic standards!





After checking in, we walked down to the harbor, scouting restaurants, and locating the famous **Sun Voyager** sculpture.

We had dinner at **Reykjavik Fish & Chips** for the namesake meal, then headed over to **The Drunk Rabbit** Irish pub for a last Guinness(es) and some cover music of American artists.



Heading back to the barn, we closed the black-out curtains, and slept.



Day 3

After another pleasant continental breakfast, we re-located the rental car the **Hallgrímskirkja Church**, stopping along the way to walk around **Lake Tjörnín**, a large lake in the middle of the old downtown. We briefly toured the church then met **Lalli**, our guide for **The Funky Walk**. Just the three of us proceeded to walk back towards old town, which asking questions and getting bucket fulls of Iceland's history, modern politics, and personal information about life in Iceland. A highlight was back at Lake Tjornin, where entering City Hall, we assisted with the deployment of the "map", which is a huge topographic model of Iceland. Normally on display, it had undergone some repairs to its carriage system, so we were able to pull cables, etc. while the motors whirred.

The Funky Walk should be your first adventure in Iceland, since it provides so much useful information, but our short stay just didn't allow it. Highly recommended!

Then on to the airport, and a long flight to Seattle, then a short hop home in the wee hours on the morning.