

Ireland 2023

Day -365 to -1 Trip Planning

This trip was designed to adventure to places where we have never been despite three prior trips, or places we really enjoyed, and as are most of our trips, is a bit fast paced for many people's tastes, and included a lot of short stays. As we age, we are doing fewer one-night stays, but only slightly fewer.

Our priorities are trad music, neolithic sites, ruined castles, birds (especially puffins), wildflowers, gardens, and history. Art museums, formal castles, and thrill rides are not on our list. As border collie owners that live in the woods, herding demonstrations and falconry are passed over.

So my planning method is to find bars with music, find lodging within walking distance, juggle the route to conform to the music nights at each bar, then use Google Maps "Things to do nearby" feature to fill out the drive between nightly stops. I try to leave some time to allow us to ad lib as desired. All our plans are pre-loaded into our old reliable Garmin dashboard GPS so I just select the route for the day with one click.

Although I start booking things as soon as flights are available, there are always last minute closures, flight cancellations etc. to keep me busy and neurotic.

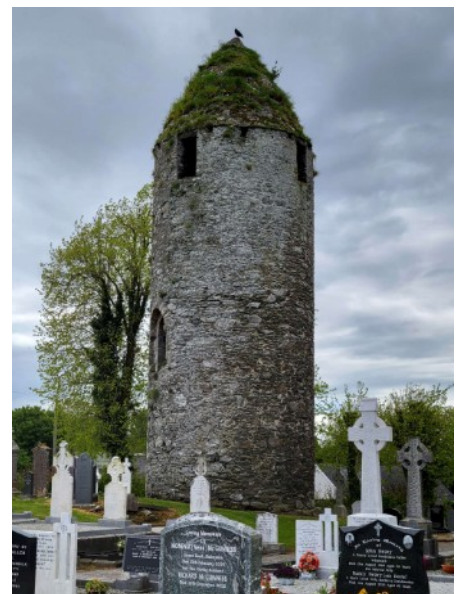
Day 1 – Arrival in Dublin to Belfast

After an 11am arrival in Dublin, it was straight to the Thrifty (Hertz) counter to pick up a rental car, and after an only brief argument about CDW, and a disappointing extra liability charge for using my own insurance, a newly added border crossing fee, and refusing the "€100 special" for a GPS (because they were out of the compact cars), we were off to Belfast in a Dacia Duster (with free GPS). First "spot" to stop at was Drominskin Tower, more for an alertness break, but it was one of the obscure things we saw that was more interesting than expected. Jumped back into mini-SUV and I ran into my first foul-up, thinking the toll plaza on M6 was in N.Ireland, which meant my carefully curated £2 coin was wrong, so I was in the wrong lane.

Irish Trad

Although the musicians probably have their own terminology, I classify what we find as either large or small "sessions" that may include solo ballads/laments and sometimes step dancing, "songs" which are largely audience sing-alongs of Irish classics, and the last, "bar music" which is a mix of Irish songs with modern covers of U2, Richard Thompson, Old Crow etc. There are of course hybrids across category lines.

Whichever category, even in early May, crowds are an issue. It can be a cat fight to get a seat, and pure luck to get a good seat. Then someone will decide to stand directly in front of you – and you can hear them complaining when someone stands in front of them! Sessions in particular, suffer from people claiming seats reserved for the players, and as the players slowly trickle in, the center of the session moves like an amoeba while tourists stand their ground. Although most bars post requests to respect the players, people can get very loud after a few drinks, often ignoring the music altogether. Both behaviors drive us nuts, and the crowding drives us home early.





Pulled into Belfast, immediately parking the car just off the highway, then we walked the 10 minutes to get to Ten Square Hotel. Although I always price shop, the hotel was much nicer than I expected. We showered and took a short nap, before heading out for dinner and music, heading to the pre-selected McHugh's Bar, which not only had satisfactory food (Fish & Chips and Irish Stew), but a fabulous fiddler Meiread Goode



with a guitar and flute, who entertained us until we just couldn't keep our eyes open. We talked with them as we left, and they tipped us off that they would be at Henry's the following night. We stumbled the few minute walk back to the hotel and hit the hay.

Day 2 – Belfast



Started the day with a great breakfast at the hotel, then wandered our way over to the Big Fish on our way to the Titanic Experience. I had initially thought to skip the Titanic as a “too popular” place, but a friend convinced us it was worth the pricey entry, so we included it. It was a very well done exhibit with lots of period history and other information. I thought the short

gondola ride was a little silly, but even it was well done.

Finished up Titanic just in time to walk into Mourne Seafood for our reserved time (probably unnecessary), and had an excellent seafood chowder and mussels.



We then took a bus out to C.S.Lewis Square, which we wandered around briefly, then walked back through East Belfast, getting to see a little of the evidence of sectarian effects. It was also Coronation Day, so there were street parties on the east side of town and “so what?” closer in. One bar patron commented that the only good thing about the coronation was all the bunting.



Returned via McHugh’s again to catch the Saturday afternoon session, which included a fiddler, flute, and piper. More excellent music till 5pm, at which case we headed back for a brief nap. Then it was on to Henry’s (Jailhouse) where we scored a table in the music room, had Fish & Chips, and though displaced by a reservation for a pub crawl, we scored new seats, and survived another reservation by a hen party that no-showed, to hear the same trio as the previous

night. The crowd was much higher energy than McHugh’s and we stayed till then end. Although we were all the way across the room, after each round of applause the guitar player waved, which we thought was a generic gesture to the crowd, but at the end of the night, he walked over to our table to say he saw us and was happy we had come to see them. Felt like old friends (but the Irish seem to accomplish that easily). Short walk back to the hotel for much needed sleep.



Day 3 – Belfast

Another good breakfast, and we walked out into another beautiful day (you’ll hear this a lot) to walk to the National Botanic Gardens. Although small, they were very lush and filled with both common and odd plants and flowers. Chatted up one of the



gardeners, and he spend a long time explaining the history and sustainability of the gardens, identified many unfamiliar plants, told us about his mammal headaches, and was again, very quickly a fast friend. The small

glasshouse was filled with tidy specimens, and the tropical canyon eventually led us to the Ulster Museum. Housed in a



new-ish building, the museum attempted to cover all facets of life from earth history to art to The Troubles to Game of Thrones. Far more thorough than expected, and not seen easily in just a few hours.

After pushing our schedule, we took a taxi to Crumlin Gaol for our booked tour preceded by a stop in the attached Cuffs cafe. Surprisingly interesting tour with lots of thought provoking aspects.



Walked back to central Belfast, again seeing a different side of town, eventually targeting McHugh's again for the Sunday afternoon session, this time with a fiddle, pipes, guitar, several flutes, and accordion. They did a couple of beautiful songs that brought tears to our eyes.

Called it an early day, since we were still time-adjusting, and had a long vacation ahead of us.



Although not on our list of important sights, Belfast has a whole bunch of hand/foot powered trolley's running around, full of exceedingly drunk people, all looking to be having a good time. Maybe they have them in NYC as well?

Day 4 – Belfast to Portrush

After the accustomed breakfast, we checked out, had our parking



validated, then walked 10min to retrieve the rental car. Having promptly lost the parking ticket in the short walk, we had to talk with Customer Service to get it straightened out, then promptly made a wrong turn coming out of the garage as my GPS was still booting. A few U-turns and lights, and we were back on the toad, headed to Ballycastle Pier for the “fast ferry” trip to Rathlin Island, which was quite

smooth and uneventful. Promptly boarded the Puffin Bus for the crazy winding drive to the Seabird Sanctuary near the West Light, then walked down the steps to the bird observatory. Saw a very few puffins, but many razorbills, guillemots, fulmers, and various gulls. Had a long conversation with the Ranger and one of her volunteers, and Kathy committed to sending him a



duplicate of her geologic timeline scarf, which he had admired. Sadly, the puffin nesting area is greatly reduced by the rampant rat population and ferrets, introduced by farmers to control rats. Who could have thought that would cause problems?

After the same bus ride back to the harbor, we had lunch at McCaigs Bar, then re-boarded the same ferry back to the mainland after a brief walk along the tidal shore and a successful excursion to spot the golden hares. After we got back into the car, we had our first light drizzle of the trip as we drove on to The Dark Hedges. As we left the car for the walk through the tunnel of trees, the weather became wild – torrential downpour, thunder, and lightning strikes all around. Although we did get thoroughly soaked through our “water repellent” travel clothes, the special effects in what is a sort of dark and mysterious place was actually rather nice. It was probably not as nice for the couple (and their minister) who were trying to get married without losing their umbrellas to the gusting wind and water. Sadly, many of the beech trees comprising the Hedges are dying, either of some blight or simply old age. It’s reminiscent of the plane trees lining the canals of S. France – many dead, many removed.



By the time we got back in the car, the weather had cleared again, and we drove on to Portrush to our seaside B&B. The facility was just fine, but the entire row of classic houses along the shoreline were boarded up or derelict. According to the Irish Times, this is at least partly due to speculators buying aging homes, then waiting for them to be condemned so the government grant for restoration is enlarged. Sort of counterproductive.

Walked in light rain to Saffron Indian Food for a nice dinner, then finding negligible bar life and no music, headed back for an early night.



Day 5 – Portrush to Dunfanaghy

After a pleasant breakfast at Prospect House, the morning brought more beautiful weather, and we headed to Dunluce Castle, where we enjoyed numerous wildflowers growing in every nook and cranny in the stone fences and walls. Wandered around the ruins for 45 minutes before heading on to Giant’s Causeway. We parked at the overflow Carpark to avoid the high admission, and walked down the Blue Route to the causeway. Not as





impressive as Staffa (IMHO), but still interesting. This is the first time we encountered any kind of crowds (not counting the Belfast bars). We don't usually partake in audio tours or group tours, so I can't describe what we might have missed. Hiked back up the Shepard's Walk to avoid the bus and people traffic, got back in the car, then headed on to Dunseverick Castle. Dunseverick is a very ruined structure of one remaining corner of a structure – because it looked pretty routine and involved a long hike up/down a meadow to reach, we jumped back in the car to scare up some lunch. Stopped in Derry at Antoinette's Cafe, then on to Inch Wildlife Reserve. Walked along the estuary embankment identifying birds (using the Merlin app) and watching the geese and ducks from the blinds.

On the way out of the Reserve, Kathy requested a

stop at An Grianan, a neolithic fortress on a nearby hilltop, with the traditional east facing solstice-shadow-hitting-a-cave-wall thing. It was prominent enough to being included on Ptolemy's Map of the World. Carried on to The Willows B&B in downtown Dunfanaghy, where we settled in for a

two



night stay. Very old, but nicely restored, building, with thick stone walls allowing absolute silence in the room.



Searched the entire town for music, and discovered everyone had lied on their Facebook page. Portrush and our two nights in Dunfanaghy were the only nights out of the twenty day trip where music wasn't in walking distance. We had a few Guinness at Patsy Dan's, then had a very delicious dinner at Lizzie's

(part of the Oyster Bar). One more Guinness each, then early to bed.

Day 6 – Dunfanaghy

After a delightful breakfast, we headed for Horn Head. "They" claimed there might be puffins, but I think it's the same people that claimed music 7 nights a week. Beautiful viewing weather of the head and the N. Atlantic. Like many places around the Irish coast, there is a Napoleonic Tower that was used to spot invaders back in the day. Drove the short way to





Lurgabrack, where we squeezed our car into the huge parking lot with only one other car, and took the short hike around the forest, identifying alien foliage and birds. Made a brief stop in town for eye drops on the way to a closed Doe Castle, then proceeded to Glenveagh National Park, where we walked the 2 mile nature trail, then after a short shuttle bus ride to the castle, walked the Garden Trail through the walled garden of the otherwise closed castle. Ate a nice lunch at the Castle's cafe before heading on to Ray Church.

Ray Church is your typical ruined Irish church, with every square foot covered by graves, and we saw an excellent example of proof that lichens will take over man's creations. Driving on the The Workhouse, which I had marked as a "disposable" visit if time ran short. As Google Maps driving estimates had been highly accurate, we were ahead of schedule and made the stop, grateful we did. The Workhouse provides an excellent, in depth explanation of rural life during the Potato Famine, and the pain that poorer families had to suffer. Very nice free audio tours through the building full of recreated scenes of the times.

Returned to Dunfanaghy for a pleasant dinner at An Chistan, then over to walk the docks for a bit, then over to Molly's Bar for a Guinness and whiskey (or both).

Day 7 – Dunfanaghy to Donegal



After another excellent breakfast, me with my usual full Irish, and Kathy with something meatless, we checked out, said goodbye, and headed for Assaranca Waterfall. Given the rains of the previous few weeks, flow was spectacular, and we walked along the sheep field talking with lambs before deciding that since it was a little cloudy, retracing our drive to the Glengesh viewpoint would be pretty pointless, so we proceeded in the ccw direction around the coast, on to Glencolmankille Village. The

village had seven or eight buildings, each done up as a different use, with period furniture, manikins, wall decorations., etc. Glencolmankille was pretty much the





adopted baby of a single priest, who dedicated his life to saving the town from drying up and blowing away. It's hardly thriving, but it seems to be getting by just fine. Made an unplanned stop at Cloghanmore Megalithic Tomb was interesting – another obscure one found by Kathy on her smartphone

Then we headed on to Slieve League, where we parked, and the hiked the relatively long climb up the paved road to the overlook. We had scattered clouds, so the cliffs shifted between spectacular and just great as the shadows passed. Had an ice cream at the overlook, then dropped back to the carpark where the ranger explained we could have driven up if we

asked. We then made our way to The Atlantic GH in Donegal, where a good friend was joining the entourage via bus from Dublin.

We then walked our laundry over to M&N Cleaners, Barb arrived at the GH, and we headed off for dinner and music before she could decide she needed sleep. After dinner at the Old Castle, we headed for The Reel, where a guitar player along with John, the bar owner, played jigs/reels/airs until we all grew tired. A five Guinness night is hard, sometimes!



Day 8 – Donegal



We

started out the day, as usual, with breakfast, then strolled over to the Abbey of Donegal to look at old graves, then proceeded to Donegal Castle, which came with a nice free tour that explained

Irish history yet again, from yet another perspective. As we had booked a walking tour, we headed back to the visitors center for meet Neibh (pronounced Neve, sort of like Cobh being Cove). Our guide took us back to the Abbey for a little more in-depth look, then provided an excellent history lesson as we walked around Donegal Town. Definitely a good use of our time! We returned to the origin, and after goodbyes, saw Neibh drive away in her absolutely perfect Morris Minor.



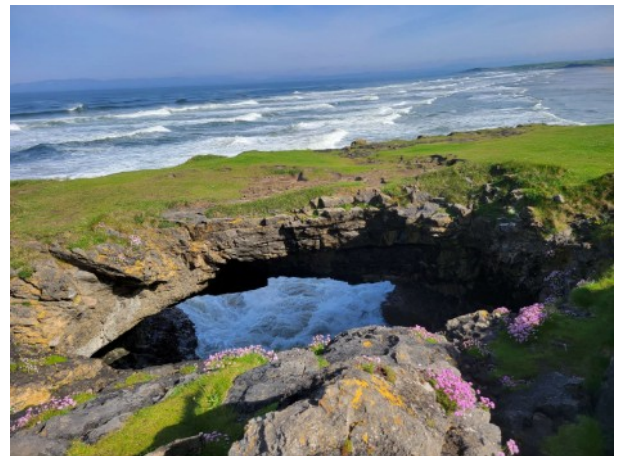


Had a light lunch at Simple Simon’s Cafe and climbed in the car for a short drive to Salthill Gardens. As avid gardeners, Barb and Kathy were thrilled with the garden, which is a one acre walled garden created over the last forty years by the owner, Elizabeth. It is a stunning range of carefully manicured formal areas and far more wild sections. Elizabeth was working in the garden while we were there, and was always game to help identify plants, and explain why things were the way they were. This might have been Kathy’s favorite part of the whole trip! All for €6/pp! After about two hours of wandering, we headed back to Donegal Town.

First stop was to pick up our laundry, then a quick stop at the Famine Graveyard. The graveyard could use with a little info sign. Barb went to a charity shop and acquired a collection of whiskey glasses, which we put to immediate use, sharing the Silkie whiskey we had bought earlier, then took short naps. On to La Bella Donna for some excellent pizza, followed by finding a table at The Reel, this time with music by a guitar and fiddle/banjo (and John gets weekends off, I guess). Although not strictly trad, it was what I call “songs” which means sing-alongs (Whiskey in the Jar) mixed with some instrumentals. Good musicians playing fun music. Headed home shortly before last call, and called it a night.

Day 9 – Donegal to Westport

After breakfast, we checked out, retrieved the car from the carpark, and headed to Fairy Bridges, arriving at just the right time for the best tide (I claimed to have planned that). Although the blowhole was interesting,



the wildflowers were stunning. Of course the beautiful sunny morning didn’t hurt. Walked a bit along the coastal path, then headed of to Glencar Waterfall. Very easy footpath to the falls, with a loop above the falls with a few stairs. Our next stop was Devil’s Chimney, but the small pullout was full of cars, and there was no one about to leave, so we skipped it.



Since that put us a little ahead of schedule, Kathy insisted we take a short diversion to Knocknashee Hill, a passage tomb just a little off the main road. Then we added



tomb just a little off the main road.

Lavagh (Court) Friary and it's small cemetery. Returned to the car and had a lunch of leftover pizza. Finally got back to the main road via a long loop, and found Clooneen GH, where we had a wee bit of whiskey and took naps.



Headed out for dinner, then on to Porterhouse for a 6:30 session. Two good musicians, playing pop-Irish again. Real sessions take a lot of players, and are often volunteer, so they are becoming harder to find! After the gig ended, we headed next door to Matt Malloy's (Matt is the flutist for the Chieftains), where there was a genuine session starting up eventually growing to 3 fiddles, 5 accordions, a concertina, uilleann pipes, banjo and a few flutes/whistles. The bar has four rooms, with at least one other simultaneous performer. When we arrived, we got seats, and the crowd wasn't too bad, but it got denser and louder until finally we had to flee. The loudest and most obnoxious



were all tourists, largely Americans.

Day 10 – Westport to Clifden

At breakfast, we met several of the musicians from Malloy's – it turns out there was a competition



happening in town that had brought them to Westport. After checking out we headed for Connemara NP, with a threat of some rain. We hiked the relatively easy Blue Trail (middle distance), avoiding the ascent to the summit. Rain spit a few times, but no need for rain gear. We had a quick light lunch at the Hungry Hiker Cafe (part of NP), then got back on the road.

The original plan called for heading to Galway, but Barb claimed to have an ancestor's grave on Omey Island, so we traded Clifden for a second night in Galway. After an early arrival in Clifden, we headed out to Clifden Castle and the Sky Road, which we

managed to do in a confusing way. We missed the castle altogether, so just did the Sky Road loop rather than back tracking. Eventually making it to the castle, it was a wonderful ruin with lots of nooks and crannies to explore.





The “problem” with Omev Island is that it’s only accessible at low tides. The advice is to call Sweeney’s Bar and ask about access (as they no doubt have a tide chart with a line drawn across it). I had tried to ascertain in advance exactly what tide level was necessary, but was unable to get anything but warnings about being trapped. Although we stopped at Sweeney’s for dinner, the kitchen was closed, so we drove to Omev just to see. Although it was actually high tide, it was a low 1.5m tide, which presented us with an easy, dry route to the island. My advance tide calculations were somehow off by an hour, and the height didn’t match the tables I had found. It’s hard to tell when the isthmus actually

became passable, but I’m thinking 2.0m might be low enough.

Anyway we walked over to the graveyard and poked around for Barb’s ancestor, without finding exactly what I thought we were seeking. It turns out there was some confusion with Barb’s sister’s report, so although we did find some cousins, we struck out on Great-Great-Grandpa. Still an adventure. The graveyard was infested with rabbits, so we were a little concerned about zombies reaching up through the rabbit holes and ground nesting bird homes.



We headed back to Clifden, parked the car in front of The Arch House, checked in, then headed to EJ Kings for Fish&Chips. After dinner, we walked next door to Lowry's where a real session was starting up (and we got seats!) and we had Guinness and/or Connemara whiskies. After the session ended, there was a switch of several musicians and it became a little more song oriented. One of the new musicians had a voice sounding like Johnny Cash, and they did a good cover of one of his hits. We made it until about 11:15 before heading to bed.

Day 11 – Clifden to Galway



Yet another good breakfast, fueling our drive east, first stop Ross Errilly Friary. We had a nice bovine-hosted tour, but a placard or two would have been appreciated. Very large and expansive structure, with passages going in all direction, and rooks living happily on every ledge. The upper stories were closed. At this point, Kathy found the Guinness Tower on Google Maps, so we went on a wild goose chase trying to find it, eventually giving up. Headed on to Kilbannon Church ruin, which was your typical four-walled chapel filled with graves, not like we have them at home, or anything derogatory.

Found the instructed carpark for The 7 Boutique Hotel, checked in, had lunch at Tigh Neachtan, wandered around a bit at the Spanish Arch, then met up with two more friends aboard their AirB&B boat for tea and beers. At this point Kathy began suffering from a non-Covid cold. Headed back to the hotel, took naps, and the five of us had an excellent meal at a Tandoori Indian place. We parted with our friends and headed back to the hotel for whiskies and a brief nap. Headed over to The Crane Bar on the east side of the river, got good seats and thoroughly enjoyed a long session. The Crane Bar has never let us down in three visits!



Day 12 – Galway to Doolin



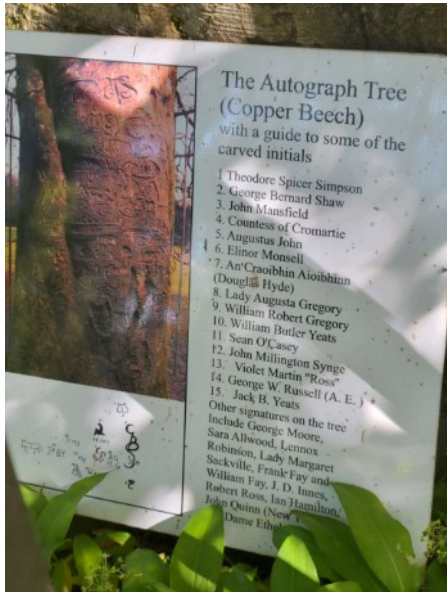
After another excellent breakfast, it was off to our Horrible History Walking Tour with Brian. He walked us around old town, relating curious stories, building histories, and doing a good job of coloring an otherwise gray stone town. It turns out our hotel was historical as well, but Brian didn't know it (yet). Then back to the car and on to Athenry Castle, where we got the only open parking spot. The castle is a pretty simple three story structure, but well restored.

Lots of good signage and a pleasant 10 minute video. The ranger that collected our money provided an exhaustive rundown on the whole place, having been there for years. A small bonus was that in one of the gun slits, there was a rook's nest with three newborns. They were just about to cover it up to protect them from a school field trip the next day. After walking around the grounds, we ventured off to the small town surrounding the castle, had a very nice lunch at the Old Barracks, then walked around some more ruined castle walls before returning to the car to head for Doolin.



Because our walking tour started before originally planned, we had some time, so I found Coole Garden on the road along the way. Originally owned by a wealthy family, the woman of the house had

many guests stay, many of them famous writers and poets of the era. The museum included many stories told by one of the grandchildren and included restored rooms and the like. The garden itself was quite beautiful, filled with many rare specimen trees, including the Autograph Tree, carved by the many visitors. One of those great spots you never expected!



Then, it was on to Doolin, where we checked into our various lodgings and re-connected all five of us at McDermotts for dinner, then adjourned to Barb's room for some Silkies. Barb's room was at the Oar Restaurant and Rooms – No Food. The lack of breakfast was a problem both mornings for Barb as there was nothing open or a big line. The second couple wandered off to their glamping POD nearby, while we headed back to McDermott's for music. Good music with a fiddle, accordion, and bouzouki. Stayed pretty late, then back to the B&B.

Day 13 – Doolin

After two of us had a nice breakfast served hot in our room, the three of us headed to Black Head Lighthouse, although hunger forced a stop at a small market for some fruit and snacks. The proprietor was very forthcoming on

his opinion of the apple selected. Arriving at the Lighthouse and taking the one-car pullout, there was nothing to do there. The gate was locked, and besides possibly getting a better view a little closer to the cliff, no real reason to visit. Where we parked the car however, we found our first Blue Gentians (which we had searched for unsuccessfully four years before in the Burren NP). We had hoped to visit Caher Bridge Garden (recommended by Elizabeth at Salthill) but the owner was tied up with a tour bus full, so we just headed back towards Doolin a few hundred meters before finding a pullout with only a car or two. We climbed the rock wall and walked the rocky terrain to the cliff edge, find many treasures – orchids, more Gentians, Sand wort, roses, bloody crane bill, geraniums, trefoils, snails, brackens – each in their own little niche. There were also cows which remarkably, weren't very destructive if you watched where you stepped.



On to Fanore Beach, we walked down to the low tide, amazed by the change in sand consistency as you reached the high tide line, exploring tide pools, and getting a little exercise.

I was planning a stop at the Burren nearby, but it was full of tour buses and we thought our private burren earlier was far more interesting, so it was on to the Doolin Pier for our evening boat trip to the Cliffs of Moher. We had driven by the road access a few years

earlier and had been repulsed by the crowds, so we opted for this only slightly less crowded approach. The 45 minute round trip the length of the cliffs gave lots of opportunity to spot puffins, razorbills, and others, plus the boat operator provided a detailed history of the cliffs and the structures above. Far preferable to the topside experience, although rough seas might change the balance!

The five of us had a very nice dinner at Russell's (one of the few additions since our visit 25 years



earlier), then we took an after dinner stroll to Killallae Church graveyard, then walked farther up the single track to the Court Passage Tomb, a small stone structure within a stone wall surrounded cleared circle. Somebody was up to something at sometime! Actually quite a moving experience despite being pretty low on anyone's bucket list. While walking, we heard our first in-person Cocksos.

By

the time we finished the walk, it was time for more music. Although there are at least three great choices in Doolin, Barb had read a note at her lodging that said tonight was McDermotts (and the prior night should have been McGann's), so we went back to McDermotts again, found good seats and were enchanted by Blackie O'Connell on the pipes with friends on flute and bouzouki. They were incredibly good and we stayed till then end.



Day 14 – Doolin to Dingle



Another hot breakfast in our room while Barb ran into a crowd at the only open cafe, so we stopped at Vandeleur Walled Garden on the way to the Killimer Ferry for a very early brunch. It was more a cafe and plant store with a nice walled garden than anything spectacular, although there was a fun maze to get lost in. We then arrived at the Killimer ferry dock, as first in line. Took less than



30 minutes for the ferry to arrive and take us across to Tarbert.

Driving on thru Listowel, the castle was closed as expected, so we carried on to Conor Pass where we had the only other rain on our trip, though to be fair, we drove up into a cloud, where visibility was zero. Headed on to Dingle, where we checked into our lovely Bambury's B&B, where our hostess Bernie explained things and showed us to our room. Having a reservation at Out of the Blue in a few hours, we headed out, after leaving some laundry in Bernie's care. Still missing lunch, we had a snack of Nachos (first Mexican food of the trip) and Guinness, then headed back for a nap.

Ate great seafood meal at the highly recommended Out of the Blue, then walked up to a church garden for a stroll while we waited for the music hour. We fell upon Nellighan's Bar for no obvious reason besides the promise of music, which turned out to be a good session with more than 15 players. We stayed until the bitter end, then stumbled home for a really sound sleep on the best mattress of the trip.

Day 15 – Dingle



After a breakfast on par with the mattress, we were notified that our Blasket Island tour from Dunquin was canceled due to the ocean swell. I might have asked which end of the trip was the problem, but other possibilities were probably fully booked if not also canceled. Drove the planned route with the omission of Dunquin, which gave us more time at each stop. First up was Gallarus Oratory, a unique version of a beehive hut, then Riasc Monastery ruins, then the Blasket Visitor Center, a new-ish €2.4M structure with fabulous video and audio features describing the history and demise of life on the island. Very impressive exhibit.

Headed on to Slea Head on a fairly narrow, winding mountain road. Most of the traffic seemed to be going against us, but we were in a string of three cars going against the flow. At one pinch point, a driver going the other way lectured us in a German accent that we

were going the



wrong way, and he knew, because he was a local. We all smiled and proceeded to Cashel Murphy, a chambered structure missing its timber/sod roof, with living quarters for several families, a communal room, some storerooms, and a hidden subterranean chamber

for maybe storage or refuge. This and several other attractions on the south side of Slea Head are on private property and are little cash cows for the owners. Went on to Dun Beag where we walked down to the remnants of a fort on the eroding cliff (mostly inaccessible due to recent storms) then back up the hill to the Visitor's Center. Nice video but otherwise a gift shop – another cash cow. Headed back to Dingle, since we were anxious about the Folk Concert at St. James Church selling out, acquired tickets, napped, and had beers at Foxy John's Bar, then met Barb for dinner at Sheehy's Anchor Down, which was food cooked on a food truck and carried onto the porch where we were seated. Nonetheless, good fish & chips.



Strolled up to the church, stood in line briefly, then found seats for the concert. The majority of the seats were filled from two tour groups, one a Rick Steves group. It started with a harpist doing a few tunes, followed by a guitar, flute and soloist (from Texas), and finally, the headlined uilleann piper with the same guitarist and the fiddler from the previous night's session. Too short to satisfy our music thirst, but it was nice not to be battling crowds on uncomfortable bar stools. So we headed from bar to bar looking for music, sort of giving up at John Benny Moriarty's Bar which was pretty empty but we were pretty thirsty. After a few minutes, the fiddler we had just

seen at the church walked in with his longtime music partner, and started playing away to a nearly empty bar. After a few hours, we were shot, so we exchanged a few words with fiddler Jeremy and headed back.

Day 16 – Dingle to Dublin

Said farewell to Bernie, and started the long drive to Dublin. We considered re-visiting Conor Pass but there were still low clouds and it would add an hour, so we headed up the M7. Hunger and a needed rest stop diverted us to MJ Finnigans just past Limerick, where we had a passable lunch (only passable as a vegetarian salad came with chicken). Another hour saw us to the Rock of Dunamuse, a badly decayed, but easily visualized hilltop fortress with great views, wildflowers, and lichens. Just one more hour to the airport car return, which went easily (no dings, scratches, nicked wheels etc. which seem to disappoint the agent). Took the shuttle to Terminal 1 and caught a taxi to Harvey's GH near Mountjoy Park. Check in was a little confused as the clerk gave us the keys to an occupied room, but at least it was vacant! Eventually settled into the room in an okay room in a restored house (done on a low budget) with a very low and soft bed. A new bed would make all the difference!



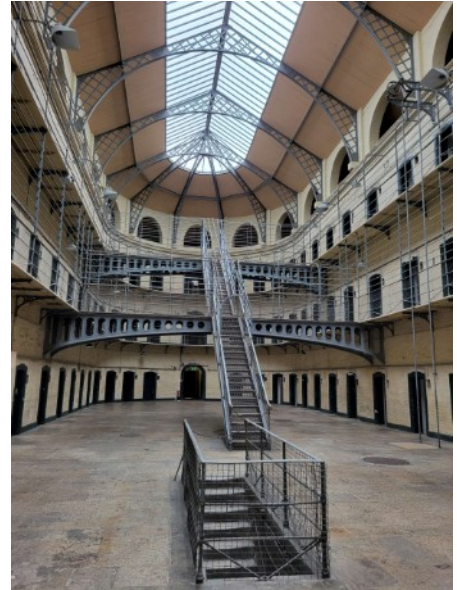
Walked over to The Celt for beers, sitting next to a nice local couple (Gabrielle & Paddy) who talked our ears off in the only-Irish style. Had some issues reconnecting with Barb since she didn't have a phone plan when outside of Wifi, but she eventually joined us. We headed to Temple Bar despite having avoided it for all three previous trips, but found everything crazy-crowded, not helped by a big football match and the big Katie Porter boxing match, so we fled towards Mountjoy, stopping at the

Ha' Penny Bridge Bar for a beer. They claimed to have music starting in 15 minutes, so we went to the upstairs bar, finding ourselves alone. A few minutes later a very young man arrived with a small case, pulling out several varieties of whistles. Although we were a little worried about what we were in for, a guitarist showed up, and promptly (by Irish bar standards) the crowd swelled and the music started. The flutist Kevin Meehan was a real prodigy, and the music was simply stunning.

With us both suffering from a head cold, we gave up by 10:30pm and walked back. In route, we came upon a bloodied unconscious man with a few people staring, so my GP wife, and Barb the ER doctor, administered some narkan, but his lack of reaction led to a diagnosis of drunk, so we headed on once a local Consultant arrived, followed by an ambulance in a few minutes. Parted way with Barb wishing her good travels home.

Day 17 – Dublin

After a better breakfast than the bed, we walked down the hill to EPIC, where we found that budgeting one hour was simply too little. We took the Redline Tram from EPIC to Kilmainham Gaol to make our noon appointment. Having just barely caught the Redline Tram, we didn't get a chance to figure out tickets, and by the time we did, it was too late – hopefully the Garda doesn't read this confession. As many are aware Kilmainham is a very popular destination and the website insists on strictly adhered to bookings, but on a Sunday mid-May, it was practically deserted. Very educational tour, and like Belfast's Crumlin Gaol, provided a good history lesson on The Troubles, if you still need one after a few weeks in Ireland. Interesting to see the actual story behind the song Grace.



Finished up in a little less than the advised two hours, and started walking back towards town. Kathy demanded a brief stop at a formal garden within the Museum of Art, then we stopped at Bell Pesto Cafe for an excellent lunch. From there we continued walking to The Brazen Head, where we went in, hoping to get a seat for the Sunday 3pm session. One of the employees told us we couldn't "get in" to the music room until 3pm and that we'd be fine. On my way to another bar to buy beers, I could see that the room was already full except for a few reserved tables, two for the musicians and one other, and two unclaimed seats. So we circumvented the "advice" and seated ourselves by weaving through an alternate door. I made quite the splash by missing my stool slightly, and ending up on my ass, bringing shouts of "call him a cab" and "no more drinks". Luckily, I didn't do any lasting damage to my recent back surgery!

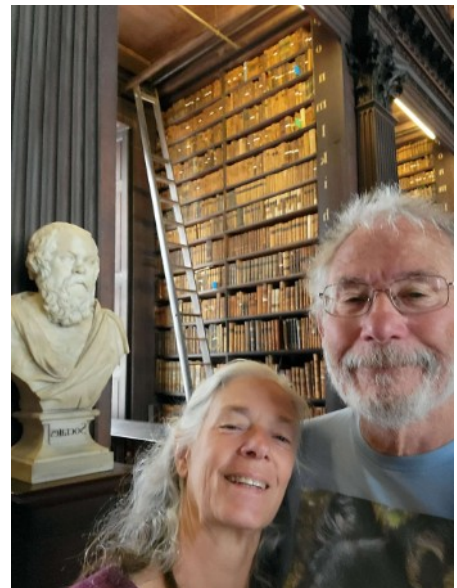


Musicians started trickling in, and we eventually had a great session going, with a few acapella solos thrown in. By the 6pm finale, The Brazen Head once again proved itself as an absolutely primo choice. We walked out, thinking about dinner and late music, but I was feeling pretty punky from getting Kathy's head cold, so we decided to head back to the room and think about our next move. Not really understanding how Kathy had soldiered on so well, we passed on both eating and late music, instead going to bed about 7pm.

Not they way I dreamt of spending our penultimate evening in Dublin.

Day 18 – Dublin

Feeling someone better, we had breakfast and walked back down Gardiner Street to Trinity College for our Book of Kells entry. The library was less than impressive, mainly because most of the



volumes were off-site being restored as part of a massive renovation. Wouldn't have been disappointed if we had skipped the whole thing, although the statuary busts were of interest.



Ended up arriving at the National Museum of Ireland – Natural History before it's 10am opening, so we re-arranged our plans and had a relaxed walk through St. Stevens Green and Iveagh Gardens before returning to the museum. We wandered around the exhibits of 18th and 19th century zoology specimens, some a little tired, but very interesting, all scrupulously organized by species, family, etc. This museum is nicknamed "The Dead Museum" for good reason.

Then over to the Little Museum of Dublin for a tour. This museum is unusual in that it just two rooms, each with walls full of posters and some antique items.

The guide is more of performer, who hops around the room pointing out individual items with their walking cane as they relate Irish history, and forcing the visitors to participate in minor ways. Very entertaining, although I'm not sure it deserves Trip Advisor's #1 Thing to do in Dublin prize.

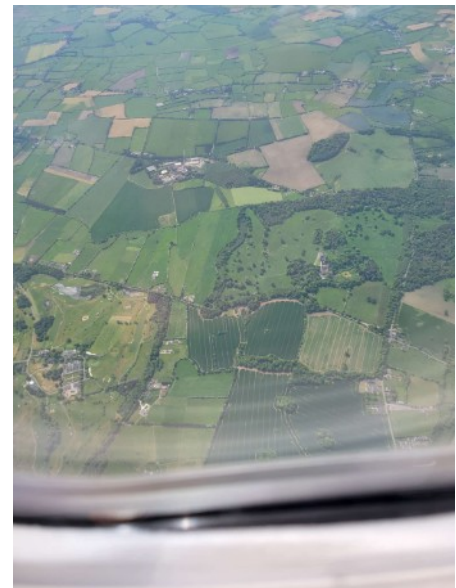


Had lunch at KC Peaches, then headed back to EPIC to spend a little more time, then the trip started to catch up with us, so we headed home early (again), skipping dinner, music, and even a single beer or whiskey. Definitely not how we envisioned our last night of vacation.



Day 19 – Dublin to Home

While having breakfast, I got a text for IcelandAir saying strong winds were disrupting our trip "and details will follow". Another text, from apparently a different system advised us everything was fine, so we packed up our stuff, called a taxi, and headed off to Terminal 1. After passing through security and sitting awhile, the first text was followed up with "everything is fine" so we boarded our flight to Reykjavik and arrived on time, although the landing was interesting because our ground speed was near zero as we touched down due to the gale force headwind. Wind buffeted the plane as we taxied, and needing to



descend an outside stair to board a bus, the stewardess warned “no hats” which was an understatement. The airport lounge was totally deserted and at least half of outbound flights were canceled, apparently due to the incoming cancellations. Luckily, our flight to SEA was not canceled, but it did leave 4 hours late. Even luckier, we had a five hour connection time in Seattle, so we made our final connection. Got home early in the local AM, after a very long ordeal.