

Kay & Drew's 2009 Ireland Trip

11-21-09 (Sat) Day 1 in Ireland

We flew Continental Airlines and met Luke from Limerick on the flight to Shannon, who told us there was major flooding in Galway. We arrived in Shannon around 6:00am. Customs was simple; the officer just looked at our passports and asked how long we would be staying. Shannon is a very small airport. We got our car and headed out of the airport. There is only one road in/out, so it's hard to get lost.

Just a few minutes from the airport, we saw signs for Bunratty Castle, so we stopped for a look. We walked around in the rain for a while before finding out that they didn't open for another hour, so we settled for a picture.

We drove to Tralee to our first B&B (The Piper's House run by Patricia and Mick Dooley), which was the only one we had pre-booked. We took a nap, then Mick and Drew swapped guitar techniques. Kay asked what the drinking age was, and Mick said 18 but no one would get too excited if someone younger had a drink.

Later, we went to birthday party with the Dooley's at Katie Brown's pub in nearby Ardfert. They had great prawns and seafood chowder, but Kay's burger tasted like meatloaf. The music seisiun started at about 10pm with 2-3 fiddles, flute, penny whistle, bodhran, uilleann pipes, keyboard, 2-3 guitars, accordion and mandolin. Later, people sang. Lots of fun until 1:30am!

11-22-09 (Sun) Day 2 in Ireland

We missed our breakfast time and had to get dressed in a hurry, then headed off to Dingle Peninsula despite the rain. We did not go over Conner pass due to fog. Seals Head Drive was fantastic. We stopped at a museum/gift shop on the drive, where many of your gifts came from, and then stopped in Dingle Town on the way out for lunch at John Benny's Pub. We hadn't seen a sign and weren't sure we were in Dingle, so Kay asked the barmaid, "Where are we?" With a straight face and without missing a beat, she replied, "Dublin." After lunch we both bought hats in one gift shop and then shopped in the Kerry Woolen Mills shop, where Drew found some Grandfather shirts.

Just off the peninsula around 4:30pm, we stopped at O'Neill's Railway Pub in Camp, called ahead for a room in Kilarney and talked to the bartender, Eoghan (Owen), until their seisiun started at 7pm. Gordon, et al were very nice and made Drew feel very comfortable in the seisiun.

At 8:30 we were off to Kilarney and arrived at Falshea House B&B, run by Shiela, about 8km north of Kilarney around 9:30pm. Drew was playing guitar in the sitting room and Shiela came in to listen. She liked country, so Drew did all the country songs he knew.

11-23-09 (Mon) Day 3 in Ireland

Monday was Kay's day, with plans to kiss the Blarney Stone, which was just north of the badly flooded city of Cork, and a visit to the Waterford Crystal showroom. At breakfast, Shiela called a friend in Blarney to make sure it wasn't flooded. We tried to stop at Ross Castle on the way out of Kilarney, but the road was flooded, so we just got pictures of the flood and the street sign marking the way.

We skirted around to the north of Cork to get to Blarney. The castle itself was neat, with steep winding staircases up and down the main tower. At the top of the tower, you lay down on your back, grab 2 hand rails and slide your body down to kiss the Blarney Stone, which is quite unimpressive (just a small keystone in an arch), while a "volunteer" holds on to you. It is better to tip the volunteer before hanging over the castle edge than after!

We arrived in Waterford too late, so we stayed at the Dunroven B&B. This was convenient to the showroom, but it was on a very busy street, and the room was smaller than the others. When the lady who owned it found out that Drew had an Irish band, she warned him that, "Singin' dem rebel songs is allegil now since da Good Friday Egreement was signed." We ate at the Holy Cross Pub, which seemed more like a roadhouse. No music that night, so Drew was bummed.

11-24-09 (Tue) Day 4 in Ireland

We met a fellow from Dublin at breakfast who said he was traveling on business and that he was one of the three people in the country working that day. More on that later...

The Waterford Crystal showroom has some amazing pieces - chandeliers, sports trophies, grandfather clock, etc. We did some shopping and got two different stories on the fate of the factory. One sales clerk said that Waterford Crystal is still being produced in countries other than Ireland, and although this site was closing, they were close to opening a new showroom downtown. This was also to have the glass works for making the high end items only. Another clerk made it sound like it would only be a tiny shop and didn't mention any manufacturing.

On the way to Waterford city center, we saw several groups of picketers at schools, clinics, and hospitals. At a traffic light, Kay opened her window and asked why they were striking. It was a one day national strike of government workers. Downtown Waterford would have been a nice place to spend more time shopping, but we did stop manage to stop in a music store to play some Brendan White bodhrans. Kay used a neat public toilet in Waterford city. After paying, the door slid open and closed automatically. It also self disinfected and cleaned the toilet and floor after each use. There was also a creepy mural of a young girl's face on the side of a building across the marina. Similar murals had been up all over the city for some event, but they decided to leave that one in place.

On to Kilkenny... Kilkenny town seemed crowded with people for a Tuesday night. More on that later...

After checking into the Celtic House B&B in Kilkenny, we tried to find the Smithwick's brewery. We eventually found the guard shack near the shopping area, and they said, "We don't give tours." Back at the B&B we dropped off our laundry at a place just a block away. They did it for us while we played!

We ate lunch at Matt the Miller's, which had excellent Bangers and Mash. The gravy had a slightly sweet taste. Kay's burger once again tasted like meatloaf. We had noticed that there was no smoking in the pubs (a pleasant surprise) and heard one of the patrons say it had been in effect for 5 years. After lunch, we waked around to find places that were suggested as possibilities for music later in the evening. That turned out to be a bust though. No music for a second night. :(

11-25-09 (Wed) Day 5 in Ireland

At breakfast we talked to a couple from Colorado who had found one place with music, but they had to look hard to find it. They were on their way to Dublin, then Scotland.

Drew's Great, Great, Great Grandfather was born in the parish of Broadford in County Kildare, so we headed there to find his roots. On the way, we stopped in a gas station and saw a newspaper headline taking about the National Day of Shopping yesterday, which must have been why Kilkenny town was so crowded. We couldn't find Broadford on the map, so we thought we would start in Kildare town. Before we got there, we stopped at a pub in Kildangan for a rest. Drew asked an older fellow there if he had heard of Broadford. He said he had worked there for 15 years and gave us directions. We found Broadford and stopped in the church there but couldn't find anyone to ask about any records. In the pub next door, we found out that Broadford town was actually in a different parish, so we were probably in the wrong place anyway. It felt like the Visa commercial where the guy and his dad go to Norway and find out they weren't from there after all.

It was too late to head into Dublin, so we found a place in Maynooth for the night. The owner said we should try griffithsvaluation.ie or the census of 1911 for more info on Drew's heritage.

In town that night, the ATM ate Drew's card. :(

11-26-09 (Thur) Day 6 in Ireland

If you die and find yourself on the M50 motorway you apparently weren't as good as you thought you were. Finding our way in Dublin was hell!!! What should have been a 30min drive to the Seaview B&B in Raheny turned into over 2hr being lost in the heart of Dublin.

After we finally found the B&B, we caught a bus back to city center. First we found the statue of Molly Malone for pictures, then we got the hop on hop off tour bus to go to the Guinness Storehouse. On the way, we learned many interesting things, including that Dubliners call their Museum of Natural History "The Dead Zoo", St. Stephen's Green was originally a leper colony and the Guinness family was quite philanthropic in Dublin. Guinness was a lot of fun! They have a huge giftshop and Drew got to pour his own pint.

Back on the bus and off again to find some dinner and music in Temple Bar. We ended up on a place called The Auld Dubliner, where a guitar and button box duo were playing.

PS: The buses we rode were very tall double-deckers. Sitting on top, we were even with some of the rooftops.

11-27-09 (Fri) Day 7 in Ireland

We decided to spend a few days in one place and thought Lisdoonvarna would be a good spot. It was close to Doolin, a town we heard was famous for its traditional music, and it was also close to Galway for Drew's Medtronic tour on Monday. We got slightly lost on the way out of Dublin and ended up in Howth, which was the farthest point east, so we saw the Irish Sea. More on that later...

We zoomed across Ireland on the M6 motorway, which took us about halfway to our destination and exited just before Mullingar. On the next road we got gas, and Drew asked the attendant if they had had flooding. He gestured to chest level and said that at the bridge down the road it had been that high. After a diversion around a flooded street and a drive through a still flooded park, we tried to find someplace for lunch. No lunch, but we were advised to go south to Ennis to avoid the flooding and then head NW to Lisdoonvarna... so we did.

If we haven't mentioned it yet, there is a national shortage of street signs in Ireland, so we got lost in Ennis. As we tried to find a place to turn around, Drew spotted a sign on a pub saying something about the ancestral home of Mohammad Ali. We had to check this out! After giving Drew directions, the

bartender said that Mohammad Ali's Great Grandfather was named Grady and had gone to America and married a black woman, and one of their descendants was Ali. Ali, his wife and daughter had visited earlier this year or late last year, and there was a monument on the Green in the center of the roundabout just outside. How crazy was that!

Back on the road, a while later we saw a herd of cows on the road, coming from around the corner at the next junction. Drew stopped, and they went right past us down the middle of the road. On the left came a little man riding a bicycle carrying a whip under his arm.

We finally stopped for lunch in Cunseen. When we were done, the owner was talking to Kay, and we found out that there was a traditional music festival going on in Enistymon, 10km from our B&B! Our waitress' husband was a fiddler who was going to play at McMahon's.

At some point, Kay looked at the map and commented that if we went to Lahinch, we would have gone from the farthest east point, Howth, to the farthest west point of Ireland on the same day. We made another wrong turn in Enistymon and, of course, we ended up in Lahinch.

Finally at the Woodhaven B&B, we sat by the fire for a while, then went into Doolin for supper. The B&B owner had recommended O'Connor's Pub, but we couldn't find it, so we ate at Fitzpatrick's. We wanted something more traditional than the solo guitarist that started at half 9 (9:30) at Fitzpatrick's, and we heard that a wake was going on at O'Connor's for the previous owner's wife, and there was music. We found it, but it was very crowded, and no music was playing, so we went to McMahon's pub back in Enistymon. Great music!

11-28-09 (Sat) Day 8 in Ireland

This was our only sunny day so far. The B&B owner said last night they had been calling for a frost, which would almost guarantee a sunny day. We had a late breakfast and headed into Lisdoonvarna to drop off our laundry then we were off to see the Cliffs of Moher, which was a 20min drive. This was an uncharacteristically sightsee-ey thing for us to do, but it was the one thing we felt obligated to see. On the way, Kay read that the area we were in was called The Burren, that it was supposed to be very rocky and desolate and that few trees would grow there. There was a dearth of trees, but all in all, it still looked pretty green to us, and we got a nice view of the cliffs.

Back in Lisdoonvarna, we took some pictures. Some people along our travels had warned us that Lisdoonvarna was really quiet this time of year, but we would call it dead. The Match-Maker Festival is in September. Apparently, what happens in Lisdoonvarna stays in Lisdoonvarna during the festival, then everything leaves Lisdoonvarna.

A shopping trip to Lahinch, just a few km from Enistymon, revealed that Lahinch is a surfing and golf hotspot of Ireland. We actually saw people surfing (a lesson is available for \$150) and later talked to someone who played 18 holes (for about \$300).

Supper at O'Conner's in Doolin with some music was nice, but the wake was still going on, so we left for Enistymon.

The world is truly a small place now. We went into a pub called Cullinan's where a flautist and squeezebox player were playing. Drew joined them with his mandolin and found out the flautist, David Levine, had a daughter in Tucson and that he himself had played with Sven in Phoenix (Seamus McCaffery's). Just before leaving Cullinan's, Drew also found out that the squeezebox player's daughter was an intern at Medtronic Galway. Kay learned from an English couple there that the proper etiquette would have been for O'Connor's to have been closed for two days, but that the current owner was a philandering idiot who was wrecking one of the best pubs in Ireland. She also said that we were quite lucky to even see the cliffs, and that she had once taken some visitors to the cliffs 6 times and they still never saw them through the haze and fog.

11-29-09 (Sun) Day 9 in Ireland

Drew photographed his Irish breakfast for all of you to see, then we left for Galway. Very shortly into our drive along Galway Bay, we saw why The Burren was called rocky and desolate. You need to see the pictures to understand. In about 20min, it started to green up just a little, and we had to stop for a herd of cattle crossing the road. About a half mile down the road, we saw a cow walking along the road. We decided that there was an equal chance that it was lost, or that the farmer had told it to go back to the barn for some reason and it knew exactly where it was going. ;)

Arriving in Galway, we drove around to scope out the B&B's before booking one, and then we headed downtown. There was a large outdoor pedestrian mall, where we did some gift shopping and had some pastries and a bowl of seafood chowder before checking into the Ross House B&B. There were other B&Bs closer to the bay, but we had gotten no reply from them when we called. Later, we went out and settled on Italian for dinner. It didn't rain that day, but it was very cold.

11-30-09 (Mon) Day 10 in Ireland

Drew had a tour at the Medtronic Galway facility, and on the way, we passed Ballybrit Racetrack, home of the Galway Races. After the tour, we headed for Shannon. There was a very long diversion around Gort, where one road was apparently still under 6ft of water.

At the Knocknagow B&B in Shannon, we re-packed all the clothes and gifts into 1 more checked bag and 1 less carry-on.

12-01-09 (Tue) Departing Ireland

Why not end the trip the way we began, in a driving rain! At the airport the Hertz attendant drove us to the terminal, so we didn't get soaked. That was good, because we already had hypothermia from the lack of heat last night. The airline clerk didn't charge us extra for either the guitar or the extra bag.

One thing we didn't mention earlier is that the gift stores offer "tax back" receipts. Residents of the EU pay a Value Added Tax (VAT) of 17.7% in Ireland. If you are not a resident of the EU, you can have this tax refunded. The receipts have to be stamped by customs first to prove that you have taken the goods out of the EU. Unfortunately for us, Irish customs didn't open in time for us to get them stamped. This means that any tax that was deducted in the store will be added back to our credit card in 60 days. :(

Odds and Ends

1) All of the toilets we saw were a different style than the states. The sewer connection comes out the back into a large drain pipe that bends and goes down through the floor behind the toilet. The mechanism inside the tank seems quite different also. There is almost no water in the bowl until you flush it.

2) All of the sinks we saw had dual faucets. (Separate hot and cold)

3) All of the homes we stayed in had radiators for heat, even the newer ones. They were on a timer schedule that apparently didn't match very well with getting up late and staying out late, because our rooms were generally cold when we were there.

4) Driving in Ireland was a blast. In better weather, and with a sporty convertible, you could make a vacation of just driving (100kph speed limit around blind turns on roads just wide enough for 2 cars). The 4 door, 6 speed manual transmission Honda Civic we had was great. The side mirrors even had a button to fold them in automatically for really tight spots. They drive on the left, so the driver sits on the right, but the shifting pattern and pedal pattern are identical to a car in the states. Drew found out after the trip that some cars have a button you have to press to shift into reverse, which apparently, the rental car agents take a great deal of delight in forgetting to mention.

5) We meant to ask what the road sign "Community Alert Area" meant? We saw these in various places along the roads.

6) Speed bumps are called "ramps"