

Once again it's fall, and we have just finished our annual trek to some place outside of California to try and broaden our ever-shrinking horizons (it just seems to happen!). This year we decided to look into some of our ancestors in the land of gnomes and elves -- Ireland. Kathy's maiden name is Dougherty, and there is a Foy in Bruce's family (maternal grandmother), so we decided it would be fun to poke around in that part of the world to see what we could dig up. Kathy's father, Edward Dougherty, had parents who had emigrated from either County Cork or County Clare (unclear) sometime in the late 1800s. Bruce's maternal great-grandfather, Eugene Emmit Foy, emigrated from Queenstown, Ireland in 1842. The map below gives a rough idea of the eventual damage we did, including additional before-and-after stints to the UK and Scotland (total of 4,998 miles) ...



In response to questions folks have asked in previous years, we will include a few details as to how we actually traveled. As usual, our battle plan was to take only light, carry-on backpacks and fly directly to a large city (London) which has a non-stop connection to San Francisco (\$1100 each, round-trip), rent a small economy-size car (VW Skoda Citigo getting 60 mpg -- total of \$800 from Hertz plus gas for five weeks), and take off in the general direction of where we wanted to go. We allowed ourselves five weeks and, as always, depended on finding B&B-style lodgings each evening wherever we happened to find ourselves -- a loose-footed strategy which always surprises people, but works well if one travels in September (off high-season) and if one doesn't wait until too late in the evening to start looking (around five pm is usually fine). The UK and Ireland are expensive, with a typical B&B costing \$60-\$80 per night per person -- more than half again (and sometimes twice!) what we normally pay on the Continent. They are very comfortable though, and the breakfasts are so large that, with a little foreplanning, one can stuff enough extras into one's pocket to cover lunch needs as well! We did end up staying in three "great piles of a hotel" when we waited a little too late in the day to find a B&B, but they disappointingly turned out to have somewhat elderly plumbing and overdone meals which were actually less appealing than our usual "pub grub."

Irish history is complex, war-like, and confusing, especially in the sense that many areas have multiple layers of history. For touristic purposes we found we could scabble about reasonably well amongst the layers by using a grossly simplified series of milestones as follows

Pre-history

First hunter-gatherers show up in Ireland around 8000 BC, as ice retreats

Celts from Continent show up around 500 BC and merge with locals to form Gaelic culture
(Romans never made it to Ireland)

400 -- St. Patrick shows up (start of Christianity under an Abbey-based system)

800 -- Vikings show up (pillaging and plundering, then intermarrying and settling in)

1200 -- Normans show up (more wars, settling in, source of "Norman keep" style of thick-walled building)

1600 -- Henry VIII shows up, destroying many Abbeys (two Cromwells -- Thomas under Henry VIII, then later Oliver!)

1840s -- Potato famine of the mid to late 1840s leads to a mass emigration, principally to the US

1920s -- Catholic Ireland becomes an independent country (Euro and kilometers), with the smaller

Protestant area of Northern Ireland around Belfast remaining a part of the UK (pound and miles)

2008 -- Collapse of the "Celtic Tiger" economy, quite evident with many "For Sale/Lease" signs on houses and buildings

A trip around Ireland is a very mixed bag of present problems mixed with the viewing of a fascinating past, but always ameliorated by the people themselves, who are uniformly wonderful, even to stumbling tourists such as ourselves. People still talk about "the troubles" of the past few decades in Northern Ireland, and it made us wonder how safe it would be to visit there (no problem right now). We decided to get a good sample of the whole place by first driving around the entire coastal perimeter of the island. We then returned to explore the parts that looked the most interesting to us, mainly the far Southern tip and its spectacular scenery. Happily, our daughter Julie was free to join us for our week's drive around the perimeter, but had to leave before we went back for our closer look.

We preceded our Irish trip with about a week's traveling through Cornwall and Wales just to get ourselves re-acquainted with the road system, as well as sampling two cultures which are closer to the Irish than that of the English "mainland" (bad, bad word to the Irish!). Later, after having spent about two weeks in Ireland and feeling that our ever-shrinking brains had absorbed as much as they could, we returned again to the "mainland" for a few days of exploring some outlying areas where we had never been before -- primarily the northwest and northeast coasts of Scotland and the Isle of Skye. To give a feeling for what we saw, an overview of selected, but very abbreviated, highlights runs as follows:

Bexhill -- A couple we met in Berlin last year, Sue and Alex, invited us to shake off our initial jet lag by staying with them for three nights in the coastal town of Bexhill, due south of London. This turned out to be a great idea and included guided tours by them to places like Rye (medieval town), Battle (Hastings, that is), and Hever Castle (Anne Boleyn's family home). Their condo in Bexhill faces the ocean in the front, with a bowling green in the back, and was quite delightful. Alex left his German homeland during the war to pursue a career in the porcelain/china industry and is also a gourmet cook. Sue is originally from South Africa and worked for many years as a psychiatrist. They were wonderful hosts and provided a marvelous springboard for our transition from San Francisco to the UK, as well as furnishing us

with a complete and comprehensive set of well-annotated UK maps!



Kathy, Alex, and Sue on Their Front Balcony



Bowling Green Behind Their Building

Cornwall and The Minack Theatre -- After winding our way through the West Country to Cornwall, we worked our way to Land's End, where we were told about an interesting place called the Minack Theatre -- an improbable place carved out of a steep coastal hillside during the 1930's by a lady named Rowena Cade and her gardener Billy Rawlings. Regular performances of plays are held only during the summer months, although it can be visited year round.



Rowena Cade's Minack Theatre near Land's End in Cornwall

The Rectory -- Working our way north, we found an engaging B&B called The Old Rectory in St. Juliot -- the actual place where Thomas Hardy met his first wife Emma (from whom he sadly later separated, somewhat marring the story line!). The property is quite up-market and features a large Victorian walled garden with piggies, ducks, chickens, and a deck overlooking the sea. We were served dinner as well, which was fortunate as the place is quite out in the country and down a long one-lane road. The owners are the descendants of the original Vicar's family and run a very tight ship ecologically with their own solar array for power and much of their food grown themselves. We shared dinner with a very pleasant couple from Taunton who were there for a 4-day walking holiday. They looked a little too fit for us to be able to keep up with, so we declined their very generous invitation to join them for an 8-mile walk to the sea and back. Several Londoners staying at The Rectory added an element of unexpected "toffiness" to the mix, but perhaps that's not unusual in such a setting -- it was here we first encountered the accepted wisdom that Ireland is a place to which very few mainline English ever travel!



The Rectory (with great stone wall)



View where Thomas Hardy met wife Emma

Tintern Abbey -- One of England's most beautiful Abbey ruins (and subject of a Wordsworth poem), our stay in the area was enhanced by Jenny Smith, the lady who ran the B&B we stayed in, along with her other overnight resident, a "walker" --- a rather tall, older man named Len, who was walking the Wye River in 14 to 16-mile increments with a backpack and a walking stick, either camping out at night or intermittently staying at B&B's to get washed up and have a "good English breakfast" (orange juice, muesli, eggs, bacon, sausage, haggis, kipper, stewed tomatoes/mushrooms, toast with butter and jam, and tea/coffee) . He is actually South African, but moved to England after his sons did and has taken advantage of the wonderful walking opportunities ever since. He felt that things had gotten a little too sticky security-wise in South Africa, and he and his wife Glynda made the move after deciding that his chosen profession of chartered accountancy would offer them a brighter future in the near-by town of Bristol! Fascinating man ...



Jenny Smith's B&B



Tintern Abbey

Wales -- Some friends of ours, David and Pamela, had told us about a little coastal village called Barmouth, from whence one side of Pamela's family originated. It provided an excuse to drive up the Welsh coast and see some seaside country we might otherwise have missed. In making the drive we came to have strongly reinforced in our heads the fact that, in addition to mountains of slate, there are roughly three sheep for every person living in Wales!



Barmouth Main Street



"Shingled" Welsh Coast near Barmouth

Ferry from Holyhead to Dublin -- Ireland is handily served by two coastal ferries from England, and we took the one from Holyhead in Wales to Dublin, a very pleasant 4-hour ride allowing one to view the receding English coast as it is replaced by the approaching Irish coast. After meeting our daughter Julie at the Dublin Airport, we made our way north toward Belfast in Northern Ireland, stopping to visit a number of places, including an incredible rock formation outside the town of Bushmill known as the Giant's Causeway.



Ferry from Holyhead to Dublin



Julie and Giant's Causeway near Belfast

Sheep Farm -- We stumbled onto a Sheep Farm for our B&B for the night with hosts Marley and Newell Bingham who live right across the street from the "Brethren Church," run by the son of one of Newell's cousins and heavily populated with the graves of several generations of Bingham. Newell grew up in a multiple-family, tiny-roomed peasant cottage on the land, which purportedly is very similar to those in which generations of tenant farmers lived before being forced to emigrate during the potato famine of the 1840s ...



Newell with 1840s peasant cottage



Newell's two sheepdogs at work

Galway , Limerick, and the Center -- In general, we found the central part of Ireland to be lovely with its perpetual greenness (guess why?), but a bit too much on the flat and agricultural side for us foreign tourists! We tended to hug the coasts with their more California-like coastal scenery. Galway and Limerick are the two principal towns, and we spent a long morning in Limerick touring a fascinating and extensively restored King John's Castle -- the King John of Robin Hood and Magna Carta fame. The towers have sweeping views of Limerick, the Shannon River, and the surrounding countryside, and there were a number of recently excavated fortifications to be seen -- well worth a visit.

It was in the nearby village of Charlestown in the central area of Ireland that we first learned about the phenomenon that many young Irish will not take work at basic levels -- kitchen help, clean-up, etc -- and will simply leave to find work elsewhere. The couple we stayed with described their area as being "poor" and recounted that, on a recent Saturday, 14 local lads had left to emigrate to Australia! The farmers had also experienced great problems with the wetness of last winter, which had forced them to import cattle feed from the Continent. Their son, who works in the computer industry, has to commute all the way from Charlestown to Galway every day in order to work -- no small distance. Much of the peat industry is also shut down with the now-preferred "hard coal" being imported from Poland.

Cork and Queenstown (Cobh) -- We landed in Cork at rush hour, which made for a very interesting exercise in orientation therapy while negotiating narrow, seemingly one-way (but not) streets. It also gave us a very good look at the downtown area and convinced us we might be better off looking for a place to stay in nearby Cobh. Cobh (pronounced 'Cove') had its name changed to Queenstown in 1850 following a visit by Queen Victoria, but had it quickly changed back to Cobh around 1920 after the Irish separated from England! It is a beautiful area of great historical interest and is best known as being the last port visited by the Titanic in 1912, as well as having been the closest port to the Lusitania when it was torpedoed in 1915, and as being the port from which the greatest number of "coffin ships" were launched to the United States during the potato famine years of the 1840s -- some 2.5 million people left Ireland via Cobh between 1845 and 1851! Bruce's great grandfather made it out in 1842, so was spared the worst of it.



B&B view of the harbor in early evening



B&B close-up view of the harbor at night



Cobh B&B Outside



Cobh B&B Inside (not too shabby!)

The harbor shown in the photos above is the one through which the great ships (Titanic, QEII, etc.) pass when entering and leaving their last European port (Cobh) on their Transatlantic voyages. Leaving Cobh, we made our way back to Dublin to drop Julie off for her flight onwards to Warsaw to visit friends, spending the night in our first "great pile of a hotel" -- the Fitzpatrick Castle in Dalkey, a seaside suburb of Dublin.



Fitzpatrick Castle Hotel in Dalkey



Passage Tomb of Knowth near Newgrange

Passage Tombs – After saying farewell to Julie, we made a short trip just north of Dublin to the Boyne River Valley to visit the Newgrange/Knowth/Dowth area -- the site of a fascinating trio of paleolithic (3000 BC) burial sites called "passage tombs" -- an Irish version of Stonehenge, but in its way even more spectacular with (barely) accessible sun-aligned interior shafts which are preserved even today (not for the overly tubby or the claustrophobic!). Thanks to Kathy's sister Rosalie for the excellent suggestion!

Cornelius Kelly and The "Fingers"-- We spent several days visiting the "five fingers" -- five peninsulas on the very southern coast of Ireland which provide a variety of interesting and, at times, quite spectacular scenery along the rough Atlantic coast. An oddity of a mid-morning trip down the Beara peninsula (the third of the five fingers) was stopping to pick up a local hitchhiker -- an older gentleman named Cornelius Kelly who was hurrying to catch the ferry over to Beara Island to attend the funeral of his recently departed pub-owner friend O'Shea, a gentleman he had known for over 40 years and whom he described in very warm terms as having been a surrogate father to him. It was a charming encounter and ended with a minute-long handshake and an invitation for us to attend the funeral with him, an offer we regretfully declined, picturing the effect that an extended (several days long!) Irish funeral might have on our travel schedule. As we said farewell to him, he mentioned that he had almost declined our offer of a ride upon having seen our English license plates and was very happy to find that we were not members of that benighted population! He also

decided that Kathy's Irish maiden name of Kathy Dougherty should be more properly transliterated as Kathleen O'Doherty, a variant that rolled off his tongue with a real Gaelic lilt. We may just have missed a great opportunity (and also missed taking a great picture, as we felt it would have been inappropriate given the possible gravity of the occasion).

Rosslare and Ferry back to England -- To try a different route back to England than the one we took over, we drove to the ferry terminal at Rosslare in southern Ireland to take the ferry back to the interestingly named town of Fishguard on the Welsh coast. After landing and driving inland, we came across a nice-looking hotel offering rooms at only L29/night/person in the resort town of Tenby -- an unusually reasonable price. Upon making closer inquiries we were told by a very Michael-Palinish-talking lad that that was a special per-person price for seven people in a room!



Attractive-looking beach-hotel B&B in Tenby



The zinger -- special price for 7 people per room!

Midlands, Lake District, Pennines -- We later drove inland, speeding through the so-called industrial "Dark Country" of the Midlands (Manchester, Liverpool, etc.) to tour a bit of the Lake District, but found it far more congested than we had expected and soon found ourselves heading toward the Pennines, an equally interesting if more stark area whose winding roads and hills seem to attract large numbers of cyclists and motorcyclists. We managed to grab the last room in a local pub in the remote town of Alston and ended up having a pleasant experience with "pub grub" served up right downstairs by a cheeky and thoroughly transplanted Indian lass named Deborah, who, as the pub owner describes her, will "let you know what you think." Interestingly enough, in stark contrast, a night or two later we stayed in our second "great pile of a hotel" in the little coastal yacht-harbor town of Ardfern.



Alston "will let you know what you think..."



Posh yacht-harbor B&B in Ardfern

In general, "pub grub" is quite good, with the smaller "starter" plate of smoked salmon being an excellent choice, which, along with an order of chips, comprises more than enough for a complete meal. Sharing meals (or desert) between two or more people in the pubs is also no problem, especially as one frequently simply orders from the bar. If one can stay

up until 9:30 in the evening or so, the "pub grub" can be complemented with an evening of "trad" music, as the traditional Irish music for fiddle, guitar, banjo, penny-whistle, etc, is called. As frequently happens, the pick-up "B&B + pub grub" experience can be one of the most interesting parts of a trip by car. The three actual "hotels" we stayed in seemed to specialize in busloads of people who rolled in all at once to consume a fixed menu, which was quite expensive and not nearly as good as the pub experience -- the English continue to specialize in very ordinary cooking for their main meals (sample -- overcooked sliced or stewed meat, cold potatoes, and "mushy peas" with treacle or overly sweet tart for desert)! The more ordinary fish and chips generally continue to be excellent, however!

Glasgow and the Isle of Skye -- We were lucky enough to find our next B&B right on the coast in Cairn Ryan -- one that also served dinner -- run by Fiona and Allen, an older couple from up the way in Oban, who had moved to Cairn Ryan 17 years ago to run a B&B after Alan had completed his career -- first in the Merchant Marine, then as a designer in the ball bearing industry! We had an amusing conversation about the misdirected Allied efforts to destroy the German ball-bearing industry in Schweinfurt during the war -- amazing the things one finds to talk about in a British pub! We also found ourselves talking to an older couple who gave us very interesting advice about where to travel north of Glasgow -- making a long loop along the coast, over to the Isle of Skye, then back over to Inverness. After making confirmatory inquiries in Oban, north of Glasgow, we were assured by an alert young man at the local tourist information office that B&Bs were available on the Isle of Skye "in abundance" and so decided to follow the couple's advice, witnessing some marvelous, almost surreal scenery along the way



Isle of Skye



Isle of Skye

and also took this rather odd-looking pair of photos just opposite our little B&B in the Skye village of Broadford



Before ...



After ...

which show a cubical boat cradle ingeniously "tractored" onto a foggy inter-tidal mud flat with the tide out (the "Before" picture) and after the tide had undergone a complete cycle (the "After" picture about 12 hours later) with a sailboat effortlessly captured in the cradle's sling for subsequent servicing after being "tractored" back to the small backyard of the local harbor master.

North Central Scotland, Dunrobin Castle, and Edinburgh -- Back from the Isle of Skye we spent a pleasant night in our third and last "great pile of a hotel" on the trip, "The Garve" in central Scotland



"The Garve"



Two very sweet and hard-working young lasses

The two girls pictured are hotel workers from Slovakia and Lithuania. Much of the serving, kitchen work, and clean-up work in English hotels is done by girls from Eastern Europe -- we talked to ones from Romania, Ukraine, Slovakia, Moldavia (now Moldova), and Lithuania (the minimum wage in Eastern Europe, where it even exists, is typically one-tenth that in Western Europe). They work for much of the year in England, going home for a few weeks in the off-season when they get a chance. Later, at Heathrow, we found the college-graduate "manager" of the Day's Inn (from Moldova) and the check-in girl at Hertz (from Ukraine) to be in similar situations.

Heading north, we pointed ourselves at the far northeast village of John O'Groats. We got as far as the fairy-tale castle of Dunrobin before turning back, after having been told the rest of the coast to the north was rather flat and uninteresting (and featured a number of off-shore oil rigs). The self-guided tour of Dunrobin included an incredible half-hour display of falconry featuring a hawk, an owl, a falcon, and an eagle (now retired!), all on an incredibly close wavelength with the falconer, a man devoted to the preservation and recovery of wild species and the elimination of artificial pesticides!



Castle at Dunrobin



Falconer, hawk (on pole), and large bag of much sought-after "Chicken McNuggets"

Falkirk Wheel and Linlithgow – We then headed back south to Edinburgh and spent an interesting afternoon negotiating the warren of downtown streets surrounding Edinburgh Castle, while stretching the capabilities of our little netbook GPS mapping program to its max (Navit -- free with pre-downloadable maps to avoid potential roaming mobile charges). We then headed back west to the little town of Armadale to visit the Scottish family of one of Kathy's exercise class participants. In the course of sharing a wonderful evening's meal with the three of them, they told us to be sure and not miss the local sites of Falkirk Wheel and Linlithgow (the birthplace of Mary, Queen of Scots) -- advice which we took.

The Falkirk Wheel is a "rotating boat lift" opened in 2002 which joins the Forth/Clyde canals with the Union Canal, effectively connecting Glasgow with Edinburgh. It replaces a series of 11 locks with a single rotating lift, which simultaneously lifts/lowers two boats+water in counterweight to effect an elevation change of 80 feet, and is a truly audacious piece of engineering. The simultaneous operation of lifting and lowering the boats (plus water!) is so well balanced that it requires only an amount of electricity equivalent to boiling 8 kettles of water. (Both this and the boat cradle we witnessed on the Isle of Skye seemed to be almost magical balancing acts -- so simple, yet so powerful.)



Falkirk Wheel rotating counterclockwise with two canal boats (+water), one on each end

In the afternoon we visited Linlithgow Palace, the birthplace of Mary, Queen of Scots (1542-1587). Mary's life was a series of ups and downs, including a one-year stint as queen of France around 1560, along with an 18-year stint of house arrest before being beheaded by Elizabeth I (whom she never met!). However, 1567 was truly a bad-hair year for Mary -- in February the residence of her second husband (and first cousin) Henry Stuart was destroyed by an explosion, and he was found murdered in the garden; in May she married James Hepburn (the man believed to have "excised" Henry Stuart); in June she was imprisoned in Loch Leven Castle during a subsequent uprising; and in July she was forced to abdicate in favor of her one-year-old son. After all that, beheading was probably a relief! It certainly gave Donizetti plenty of material for his bel canto opera "Maria Stuarda."

Long Haul Back to Heathrow – Eventually, of course, we made our way back to London and Heathrow Airport for a (blessedly) uneventful return home (having, of course, made our habitual stop in the little York market town of Thirsk to pay homage to transplanted-Glaswegian-made-good, Alfie Wight!) ...

Cheers, Bruce and Kathy