

Pillion Post Motorbike Journey across the Sea to Ireland with UCGB July 2016

Getting there. 'From Bantry Bay up to Derry Quay and from Galway to Dublin Town,' the music from Van Morrison and the Chieftains whirled round my head as the 'Star of the County Down' got me in the mood. Pete and Mimm rode over from Norfolk and had a break with us at Pete and Ilzes' shed in Nottinghamshire for brunch. We then ventured across lesser known parts of the Derbyshire and Staffordshire moorlands, and lunching at the favourite Hulme End café. Overnight in Chester we enjoyed an excellent evening a meal and walk around the walls of Chester in order to reach the short distance to the ferry the next morning. Gill and Stuart had stayed in Holyhead and met us at the ferry.

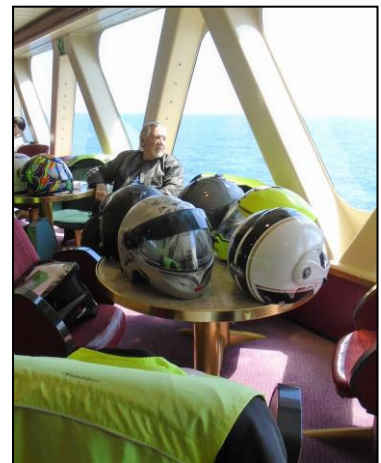
Day one. The fast ferry to Dublin Port and ride to Tullamore in Offaly. Overnight in Tullamore Hotel.

We aimed to meet up with Andy and Caroline and Martin and John at the ferry at Holyhead. They had come via the South and the Isle of Man. So now we were 10! The fast ferry took about 1 ¼ hours and cost about £190 pounds for a rider pillion and bike. We lunched on the boat.



We planned to drive West to Tullamore, spend one night there, then ride over to the Burren in the West and then up the Atlantic Drive up to Galway. From there we would explore more of the coast line, up to Sligo and ride back through the middle of Ireland on some lovely green scenic rides close to the Northern Ireland border via Trim and on to Dublin. We would overnight near Dublin airport in readiness for the ferry back the next day.

I didn't know what to expect, and although I've been to Ireland several times before, this would be different on a bike. This trip was organised by Andy Morrison and his Irish wife Caroline. Over the years they have made many trips across the water to friends and family so this trip was familiar yet part new to them both. Andy had done a Reccie for us in March to sort out hotels and routes but I suspect the weather and the overall conditions were quite different for our trip. We had the most amazing warm and dry weather. Not the Ireland I remember at all! Since my last visit the main roads had been developed, helped with EU money, and we took advantage of a tolled tunnel that allowed us to avoid Dublin altogether, and then a tolled dual carriage way on the next stretch (1 ½ euro then 3 euros respectively).



Once this road ended we started to enjoy the more familiar Ireland. This was delightful. The beauty of Ireland is that they drive on the same side of the road from us in Great Britain and as a visitor they speak mainly English. Ireland is part of the British Isles but independent, friendly and different and is proud of its own culture. We enjoyed Rural scenery, rolling hills and lots of small towns built along the main street. This is when you realise that most of the population live in Dublin and a total population of 1 -3 million, many of whom live in Dublin, which means that the rest of the country is relatively sparsely populated and the roads are empty, a sharp contrast to parts of mainland Britain

with a population of 60 millions plus. We stopped at Larkins Beer garden, Edenderry, for a welcome break of teas and coffees. It was nice to sit in the outside area as by then it was getting pretty hot and reached about 30 degrees! I got my first chance to hear the locals talking which was like something out of the Commitments. 'A load of F'ing S!' a young lady pronounced as she left a pub on the main street. I started to get into the lingo after that!

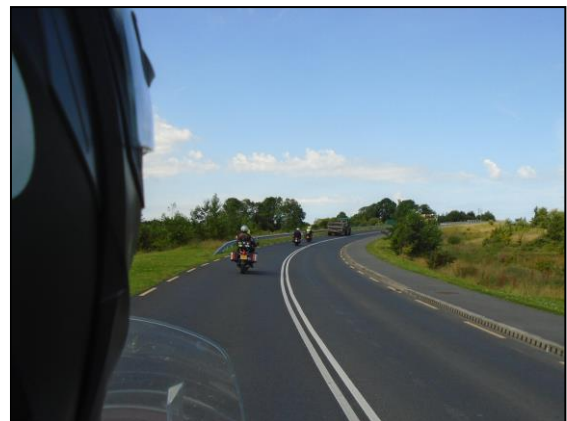


We reached Tullamore and the Tullamore Hotel was an excellent choice.

Here we met up with the South West contingent of Ba, Mike and Peter who travelled from the South West England via Rosslare to Ireland. We also met up with Caroline's Irish relatives Joe and Mary and their friend Stuart who came up from the South of Ireland up on a scenic tour through the Wicklow Mountains. Then we were 16 bikes two of them brand new!! A mixture of

Triumphs, BMW, Honda, KTM and others!!!? Pillion riders do not have to be too technical.

Naturally the tour starts with admiring the bikes and the welcome in the Bar. The Guinness was up to scratch! At this point we gained from the knowledge of John and Stuart who have expertise in motor vehicles and in particular accident investigation. John advised us that the main causes of accidents in Ireland were tractors and dogs and animals that are not fenced in. John suggested that many of the tractors drive between their fields, as they have always done, and could even be driven by fourteen year olds who have no knowledge of the rest of road safety. 'Just let them do what they want to do and you'll be Ok. They may suddenly come out of a field or veer off to the right or left without any signal.' This was sound advice and sure enough this was exactly what happened. We held back and they generally disappeared as soon as they came.



That evening we enjoyed a meal altogether booked by Andy at the hotel. The staff were excellent and it's a place to return to.

Day two. Ride over to Galway Town via the Burren. Stay for two nights in Hotel Galway.

The next day the weather was still getting warmer and the sleeveless shirts and any air vents possible were needed. It was always a welcome relief to get back on the bike again to enjoy some breeze. For our first stop we went to a place called Portunna which was a Marina on Loch Deag and the Shannon. Unfortunately the toilet block had not been built yet! Due for completion in August!

Portunna looks an interesting place to return to, with a ruined monastery and an old workhouse. We stopped for a few photos of the Shannon and the Marina and were on our way to our lunch stop when Pete was told that he had left his bag, with all his valuables including his mobile in it. He had

put the bag down to take a photo. We were impressed by Irish honesty as someone found the bag and took it to the Priest. The Priest checked the mobile and found his home number and phoned his wife, his wife phoned another of our party she knew was with us, hence the message. We stopped for lunch whilst they went to retrieve the bag.

My other half, who has close Irish ancestry, started humming 'Forty shades of green' through our intercom as we rode along through lovely landscape. The song was written by Johnny Cash that really captures Ireland. We crossed the Shannon and after a lovely green ride we reached Gort and O Grady's Bar was a very nice stop. Here I got into the fish chowder, that was excellent. They also make very strong tea in Ireland. Two tea bags in a pot where I use one between two.



We came out of O Grady's and encountered a local who commented on our impressive array of bikes. Where were we from? I said England but some are Irish or have Irish connections. At this he pointed to his family who live in England.

'When they came back here they are more Irish than we are'. I said, 'I know, my husband's been singing 'Forty Shades of Green' as we have been riding along'. His reply was, 'You read it did you?!'

We had a glorious ride Westwards through the Burren National Park and miles of Karst scenery made up of limestone, which was part of the Carboniferous era over 350 million years ago and then scoured by glaciers when an ice sheet covered much of Ireland. The weather shaped the rest and I remembered the klints and grykes of old. I should say that I also get the geological tour through the head phones too, which is wonderful to make sense of the landscape. The word 'Burren' comes from



the Irish 'Boireann' meaning a rocky place. It certainly was.

As we rode through this special scenery I also spotted the odd relics of old Ireland, a derelict croft, the restored thatched crofts and the occasional ruin from castles of a former age. No time to photograph it all.

Looking out from up high is one of the real perks of riding pillion, riders see a very different road. I take pictures so that others can see what we went

through, as I trust that rider's eyes are predominantly on the road! I also started to counting donkeys which seem to be kept as pets rather than working animals nowadays. We stopped to admire the scenic view, to take group photos of course, but also to see the special flowers that thrive here including orchids.



At the coast we encountered spectacular views of the beaches, the Arran Isles and then the Achill islands. We reached the coast at the Cliffs of Moher. This was the end of an enormous river estuary which deposited materials forming the Cliffs about 320 million years ago. The cliffs rise up to 702 feet in parts and range for 5 miles over the Western seaboard of County Clare.



Moher was the most touristy spot we found, with loads of people and coaches all coming to stop at the visitors centre. It was too hot to go up high to the top view point in bike gear, and even hotter in the café looking for ice creams. After a very long queue naturally I had Dingle Gin Ice cream and Mimm had Irish coffee. You have to sample the local delights! Another time it may be better to move further round the Atlantic Drive for refreshments where it's less busy.

I never thought that we would have wall to wall 30 degrees on this journey but it enabled us to see the coastline at its best. Apart from the glorious sea coasts I loved the flowering hedgerows of Fuschias, Rose of Sharon and Buddleas and Rosebay willow herb. Along the coast there were signs of older ways and even a few more donkeys although I have no photos as we sped past them.

As we rode along the Atlantic Highway on a gorgeous afternoon we could only enjoy the sunshine a chance to get off the bike and hear the stillness of the sea. Perfect! What a glorious day!



We booked into our Galway hotel for two nights after a long day's ride and a hot sweaty day. On arrival some enjoyed the technical puzzle of Joe's bike which started overheating when we reached rush hour in Galway. Lots of technical assistance and advice offered with various solutions! This always provides considerable interest and entertainment for our riders.



A drink in bar was compulsory 'In die Leder' as our German friends say, when they go for a drink straight off the bike. We enjoyed our evening meal in the hotel bar and I recommend the special bread rolls which contained fish chowder. My other half commented that he had not seen anything like it? I made the mistake of having this as a starter and followed by a sea food salad. They were both enormous.

Four of the group ventured into Galway to experience some fine winning and dining and to

look for some Irish music. They found both but spent considerably more. The bars were full of atmosphere and many young people enjoying themselves. Maybe they felt old?

Day three. From Galway we did a circular ride around Connemara, which is made of numerous peninsulars.

We rode from Galway to Clifden then towards Westport and back South again to Galway. This was yet more of the splendour of the coasts, the beaches, the rivers and the lochs.

Our lunch was outside a supermarket as the lunch stop had closed.

Lunch in an old pub in Clifden was very welcome and the afternoon ice cream stop was next to the pub where the 'The Field' was filmed.



After that we took in yet more glorious scenery with good views of the Twelve Bens.

Yet more lovely spots that emphasise the beauty of Ireland. We spotted various forms affected by the ice age including corries and U shaped valleys as well as the fiord coastline.

I found it difficult to know where we went, as we had moved in to the land of the Gael. The place names were all in Gaelic. The language originated in Ireland and in most areas the

Gaels were Anglicised and supplanted by English. The Gael Tach is a core area where the language is Gaelic and the signs in Gaelic were totally unfamiliar. This was a long day's drive and this time I headed straight to the bath to sooth the aching limbs before returning to the bar. Again we had an early evening meal in the hotel but we determined that when we reached Sligo we would sample the local bars too, as I hardly saw Galway town.

Day Four This was Galway up to Sligo.

Rain was forecast and we had the option of a more direct route to Sligo and have time to take in Yates country on arrival, or ride 200 miles along more of the Ria coastline. The decision was to do a bit of both and see whether the predicted rain arrived. The coffee stop was not possible, as the place had closed down, so we had a drink in the supermarket which obligingly had a toilet too. After that the weather proved better than we thought and we found a lovely spot.

When the drizzle arrived we decided to avoid the coast, where visibility would be poor, and headed towards Sligo. This was a change of plan for Andy but what a change. We had time to go to the Megalithic site of Carrowmore, the largest megalithic burial area in Europe, just outside Sligo.



There was plenty to see here but we could only sample some of the immediate tombs and mounds. Some monuments we saw on top of the Bens around, which were too far, but impressive nonetheless, and a place to return to. It was amazing to think that the ice age ended some 10 thousand years ago and there is evidence that people have lived in this area for over 7000 years!

This was a tea stop without the tea but we were recommended a place near by at a golf training centre which provided a good soup and drink. We then headed off to Sligo taking in more of the Atlantic coast en route. We had a quick change round and wondered around Sligo town in search of Yates but some found Hanagan's bar instead with the novelty of the twin toilets. We decided to have an early meal in the hotel and go back out to the bar later.



This was part of the 'real Ireland experience'.

Later we managed to squeeze into the snug at the front and sampled yet more Guinness alongside music, this time from Argentina. The most exciting point was the ladies going in search of the twin loos.

Having researched twin loos further, a Manchester night club and this pub introduced them, as 'Ladies like to chat to each other when they put on their 'lippy'. So Caroline and Mary escorted Mim



to the toilet followed by Brenda and Gill. We have the photographs to prove it. I am not sure whether this will catch on, but there is also a group encouraging people to build double toilets to help people in the developing world training people in their use and in basic hygiene.

W.B.Yates, Nobel prizewinner and part of the Celtic revival movement, 'was off', as the centre was closed, but we picked up the odd poem on a wall and the memorial to the famine. Again a lot more to see and do

next time. No time to look at other Yates locations.

Day 5

We the enjoyed lots more ice age scenery, comprising of u shaped valleys, drumlins and green carboniferous hills parallel to the Shannon. Lots of lovely green viewpoints and travelling at speed along empty roads. We eventually reached Trim for an ice cream stop.

Trim in County Meath was a complete surprise. An 11th century Norman castle and town based on an important crossing point of the Boyne . Trim castle was used in the film 'Braveheart'. Much earlier the monastery there was thought to be founded by St Patrick .There is a lot to see here and definitely worth a visit. On this journey, the journey was the destination, so a return is called for to take it all in.



By now we had to keep going, to get across Ireland so it was a very quick picture stop at Cong to photograph the replica of the cottage used in the Film 'The Quiet Man' with John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara. There is now a visitor centre next door which rather spoils the view of this quaint old cottage.

As we rode towards Dublin it was the parting of the ways, from our Irish contingent with fond farewells and lots of gratitude for the kindness and hospitality. It had been a pleasure to travel with them as our guides to Ireland and its culture. Many thanks. The South West group went back across the Shannon homewards via Rosslare.



Now we were 9 to stay at the Hotel at Dublin Airport. This was a good stop apart from the initial hassle about having to book in first, before we were allowed to place the vehicles in the secure parking. Judging from the passers by we were keen to get our bikes out of sight as we were not in

the best part of town. Once settled in we enjoyed a leisurely evening taking the ferry back the next day.

Lots more farewells and very many thanks to Andy and Caroline who had done the planning and Andy who took on the task of leading a trail of some 9 plus bikes plus around different terrains.



It was a brilliant trip for so many reasons. The great company, lovely rides along beautiful scenery, in fine weather for the most part. Ireland and its people and culture charmed us and I am sure that we will be back to explore further afield. You never know we could encourage the creation of an Irish Ulysses Club.

Mrs Vanamonde from the Pillion August 2016.