

Ireland 2011

My colleague, Cindy Haynes, and I took a group of 19 students to Ireland May 8-21, 2011. I thought it might be fun to create a blog about my travels through Ireland to keep my family and friends updated on what we saw and did. What follows are a few excerpts from my blog.

Monday, May 8-9, 2011

[Des Moines to Dublin to Waterford via the Irish National Stud and Japanese Garden](#)

We arrived to Dublin this morning after our all night flight. Our coach driver Aiden met us after we cleared customs and we made our way out of the airport to the coach.

Our first stop was at the Irish National Stud and Japanese Garden. Yes it is an odd combination- but it works.



These guys were getting moved to a new paddock.



This beautiful chestnut is Invincible Spirit; their most famous stud and is insured for just over \$60 million.



A shot of the Japanese garden.



And finally, tired students on the coach.

Tuesday, May 10, 2011

[Waterford to Cork](#)



We started the morning with a lovely full Irish breakfast at 8:30. Three kinds of sausage on the right, which weren't really my style!

Our first stop was Mt. Congreve Garden. An amazing collection of rhodies and azaleas; many of which were in full bloom. Our guide George had been working at the garden for well over 60 years. We only had 2 hours and needed a full day and then some to really see the place.



From there we drove south to Midleton and the Midleton distillery. The tour was interesting and the tasting room after was also great.



Caskets of whiskey in various stages of aging.

Wednesday, May 11, 2011

[Cork to Blarney Castle to Old Head to Cork](#)

A full day of travel today... all good.

The nursery we visited first thing had a lot of mature trees and an interesting selection of species. The two guys who gave the tour are second generation nurserymen and have brought in a lot of technology to make their

production more efficient. They dug this Dawn Redwood to show us their scoop digger. It was interesting.



windy- imagine that. The superintendent gave us a great tour and the course itself was breathtaking. The pictures don't do it justice.



After we left the nursery we headed to Blarney Castle. The grounds around the castle were beautiful and had a lot of mature trees. We climbed to the top of the castle, then laid down to kiss the Blarney stone. It was a little awkward laying down and bending backwards, but it worked.



Afterwards we had about 2 hours to wander around before leaving so Cindy and I walked around and took lots of photos, after enjoying a warm drink and scones at a little cafe.



Next we headed down some very long and winding roads to Old Head. Amazing. The course juts out into the ocean 8 miles and is completely surrounded by water. It was really

Thursday, May 12, 2011

[Cork to Bantry/Garinish Island to Derdeen Garden to Kilarney](#)

Packed up and on the coach by 8:30 for a 3 hour bus ride to Bantry and a 15 minute ferry ride to Garinish Island. We had about an hour and a half to check out the garden. The garden was pretty neat with a lot of rhodies again, a couple of perennial borders and some beautiful buildings.



It was a long, winding and narrow road through the valley and through the mountain pass.



All of us, in particular the coach driver Aiden, were happy to be back on flat and curving roads in the valley on the other side!

We arrived at our swanky hotel in Kilarney which is the heart of Ireland's tourist industry. After we got everyone checked in, Cindy and I walked around the city for a while checking

things out and ended the evening with a lovely dinner at a nice Italian restaurant. I'm looking forward to having dinner before 9:00 when I get home!

Friday, May 13, 2011

[The Ring of Kerry](#)



Another full Irish breakfast and then on the coach at 9:00 for a quick drive the Muckross House. Patti, our tour guide, gave us a great tour of the mansion and then we had an hour or so to check out the surrounding gardens. The estate was originally 11,000 acres and was purchased by a wealthy Californian couple for their only daughter who was going to marry an Irishman. Overtime they acquired another 15,000 acres and in the late 50s gave the whole place to the Irish government and it became Ireland's first national park.

Next we were off for a 5 hour drive around the Ring of Kerry.

We stopped at a Peat Bog Village (think Living History Farm; the frogs are on chunks of peat)



then stopped to watch a sheep and Border Collie demonstration. The guy who did it was fantastic. He had 10 or so different breeds and talked a little about each one.



A few more stops for photo ops around the rest of the ring and then back to Kilarney by 6:00.

Tomorrow we head north to Galway.

Saturday, May 14, 2011

[Kilarney to Galway](#)

Today we left the swanky Kilarney Towers Hotel and headed north to Galway.



Along the way we stopped at a great destination garden center. I could have spent hours there and wanted to purchase about one of everything for my house. I guess the good news is, I have a luggage number and weight limit.

From there we continued north and took a 20 minute ferry ride across the River Shannon to County Clare. It saved about 2 hours worth of riding in the coach.



It was about another two hours and we arrived at the Cliffs of Moher. In summary: tall rocks that drop off into the ocean and windy (that's why I've included the photo of Cindy and I!) Impressive, but the Oregon Coast has some equally large and spectacular spots.



Aiden (our coach driver- in case you forgot who he was) gave me a quick lesson on Gaelic football and hurling this afternoon. I am hoping to be able to watch a game tonight or tomorrow with him and have him explain what is going on. We'll have to see what is on TV.

Tomorrow we go see more pretty horses- Connemera ponies.



These aren't Connemera ponies but I included this photo since we followed this trailer for about 30 minutes. You can see how narrow and winding the road is.

The Burren was next. Probably the coolest thing so far. The topography and geology was spectacular. We had an interpretive naturalist who met with us and described a number of the plants as we ventured our way across them and to the ocean's edge. We hiked around for about 2 hours and could've hiked for another few hours.

Sunday, May 15, 2011

[Galway to Brigit Garden to Connemara Pony Stud to Kylemore Abbey back to Galway](#)



We left our cozy hotel and faced a drizzly and cool day. We started with a short drive to Brigit's Garden. Our guide described in much detail the many Celtic myths and legends that were demonstrated in this garden. We even had a chance to help make a Brigit's cross.

Then it was time for the Connemara Pony Stud visit. Pretty horses is an understatement! They are beautiful animals. The gentleman who toured us around his farm was delightful. I am amazed at how much access he gave us to the ponies; especially the stallions. A foal goes for about \$6,000 Euro, although it obviously depends on which stud it is out of. This stop ended far too soon as far as I was concerned. (I had to limit myself to just a few photos!)



So we left the pretty horses and then went to the pretty gardens. Kylemore Abbey is located in the middle of nowhere. More long and winding roads.



We first toured the walled Victorian Garden. It has been restored in the past 10 years or so, although there is still a lot of work to do to

bring the huge greenhouse complex back to life.



We were able to tour a few rooms of what was originally the castle then turned Abbey. I can only imagine what it would have been like to be a girl at the boarding school (they closed the school down 2 years ago). The nuns live across the road now (or in a nursing home in Connemara).

Tomorrow is 8 hours on the coach- Ugh. We end the day in Belfast.

Monday, May 16, 2011

[Galway to Strokestown Park & Gardens to Clonmacnoise to Belfast](#)

Hard to believe we are over halfway through the trip.

it was great to actually get a chance to move after sitting so much the past few days.

Tuesday, May 17, 2011

[Belfast to Rope bridge to Giant's Causeway to Belfast City tour](#)



Hour drive to the rope bridge and then our first time to contend with rain. The bridge was open so we were able to cross over. I thought it would be longer based on the photos I'd seen. It wasn't much compared to a suspension bridge I crossed somewhere in the Coast Range one summer.



Our next stop was just a few minutes away and was the Giant's Causeway. It was really cool. The photos don't show it very well, but these tall pillars of rock were all really similar in size. Perfect stepping stones. For both of these two stops we had a fair amount of hiking involved-



From the Giant's Causeway we headed back to Belfast for a guided tour on our coach of the city. Wendy did a great job explaining the 'troubles' in Belfast since the 1960s. It was interesting to see the fences that are still there separating the Republic from the Unionists, as well as the other signs of what happened for 40 or so years. It also makes me realize it is still just a 12 year old truce.



Wednesday, May 18, 2011

[Belfast to Dublin](#)

We left Belfast this morning and headed to Dublin. We took a bit of a wrong turn somewhere along the way but ended up making it to our first garden just an hour or so late.

Thursday, May 19, 2011

[Around Dublin: Knockmore Gardens, Glendalough and a Potato Farm](#)

Friday, May 20, 2011

[Dublin: St. Patrick's Cathedral, Book of Kells, Guinness Storehouse, City Center](#)



At St. Patrick's Cathedral this morning we arrived just before the boy's choir was getting ready to do their morning prayers. We were able to sit and listen to them sing as well as participate in the service. It was nice. St. Patrick's was huge and beautiful.



The last stop of the day was the Guinness storehouse. The building was great and the interpretive display was really well done. After climbing 10 stories the payoff was The Gravity bar at the top with a 360 degree view of the city and a 'free' pint of Guinness. I opted for a glass of Sprite!

I've finished packing and my suitcase closes, my carryon is the right size and my backpack is not over loaded. All is good.



Looking forward to our 6:00 am breakfast, 7:00 bus departure for the airport and 10:00 flight.