



Ireland

A Circumnavigation by Bicycle • 2025

Christy G. Keeler, Ph.D.





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Note: This journal is
downloadable in e-format
from the above webpage.



My favorite picture from the trip—Uprooted tree roots

Cover Photos: Wicklow Mountains, Dún Briste Sea Stack, Sneem Seaweed Baths, White Rocks on the North Antrim Coast, Sneem River Walk

Facebook Post upon Return

It took me 40 days and 1485 miles by bike to circumnavigate the stunningly beautiful Emerald Isle and I was blessed to have Shawna with me for over a week of those days. I visited every county that touches the coast except Kilkenny and Limerick. In addition to meeting and staying with incredible people, I saw amazing geographical and historical landmarks such as the Norman Way, Copper Coast, Ring of Kerry, Kerry Cliffs, Sleat Head Drive, Cliffs of Moher (a bucket list item), and most of the famous filming locales for "Game of Thrones." I learned about the Great Famine, growth of Catholicism throughout the Republic (via loads of cathedrals and friaries), human habitation dating to 5000 BCE, Northern Ireland's Troubles, contemporary Northern Irish history, Viking conquests, and much, much more. I drank cider and Irish coffee, ate lots of fish and chips, tried Guinness stew and shepherd's pie, and loved brown bread ice cream. There were only a few places I missed: Mizen Head, Skellig Michael, Siege League, Glenariff's Forest Park, and more of the Wicklow Mountains. Plus, I didn't see any puffins.

It was truly a trip of a lifetime and I'm eager to venture out on my next distance bike tour (hopefully the EuroVelo 15: Rhine Cycle Route with Mike).

The Crew



Mike



Ryan



Winter



Art



Gretchen



Darlene



Brent



Shawna



Doug



Sarah



Kaye



Mayela



Herb



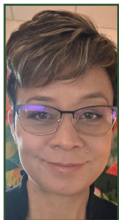
LeAnn



JoAnn



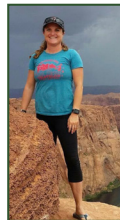
Heather



Lisa



Richard



Katie



Debbie



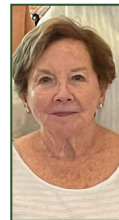
Michel



Dave



Char



Barbara



Denise



Devonee

The Numbers are In

Days away from Home: 43
Total Stages: 40
Total Mileage: 1,484.5 miles
Total Ascent/Descent: 69,089'/68,403'
Days of Rain (Heavy/Light and Intermittent): 5/7
Average Daily Distance: 43 miles
Average Daily Ascent/Descent: 2094'/2073'
Average Moving Speed (inc. walking): 7 mph
Shortest Distance in a Day: Stage 22 with 21.7 miles
Max Distance in a Day: Stage 40 with 88 miles
Max Daily Moving Speed: Stage 34 with 10.6 mph
Days without Cycling: 6 (walking an average 9 miles/day)

Bike Weight in Pounds
Base Weight (inc. tour tires/no water): 20.5
Touring Weight (at end/no water): 59.2
Touring Weight (with camping gear/no water): 73.2

Body Composition (before/after in pounds)

Weight: 164.7/165.6
Percent Body Fat: 39.5/36
Visceral Fat: 13/12
Skeletal Muscle Mass: 55.6/59.1

Expenditures in US\$

Total: \$6970
Tips: \$605
Breakdown (including tips)
Pre-trip (travel/incidentals): \$949
Bike Expenses (pre- and during-trip): \$1175
Food: \$1274
Accommodations: \$2487 (first week \$101, expected if camping \$650)
Other In-country: \$1085

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Stages

Stage	Date	Starting Location	Miles Covered	Ascent in Feet	Descent in Feet	Elapsed Time	Moving Time	Avg. Moving Speed (mph inc. walking)	Rain *Some **Lots	Sleeping Accommodations
		Totals	1484.5	69,089	68,403					
		Average	43	2,094	2,073			7		
		Dublin to Rosslare Harbour								
1	3/20	Rosslane Harbour/Kilrane	48	1803	1684	10:36	5:44	8.3		Wild Camping: Martina's Backyard
2	3/21	Fethard	35.5	1731	1733	08:50	6:04	5.8	*	WarmShowers: Sham Chase
3	3/22	Waterford (9.4 walking miles)							**	WarmShowers: Sham Chase
4	3/23	Waterford	39.3	1904	1994	09:42	6:44	5.8		Wild Camping: Waterford Greenway
5	3/24	Ballyvoile	36.5	1824	1947	08:51	5:46	6.2		Wild Camping: Empty Field
6	3/25	Kinsalebeg	42.6	1180	1165	08:46	5:24	7.9		AirB&B hosted by Aisling
7	3/26	Carrigaline	27.5	1899	1639	05:24	4:41	6.1	*	AirB&B hosted by Con
8	3/27	Kinsalebeg	43	2650	2580	11:16	8:11	5.3	**	AirB&B hosted by Elizabeth
9	3/28	Burgatia	32.9	2186	2452	07:38	5:11	6.4		WarmShowers: Lily de la Cour
10	3/29	Bantry	28.3	2552	2522	12:01	5:25	5.2	*	AirB&B hosted by John
11	3/30	Kenmare	35.4	1681	1693	08:18	5:56	6		Black Sheep Hostel
12	3/31	Killarney (11.4 walking miles)								Castle Lodge Guesthouse
13	4/1	Killarney (9.5 walking miles)								Killarney View House
14	4/2	Killarney	26.3	1490	1563	06:08	4:10	6.2		Hallissey's AirB&B

Stage	Date	Starting Location	Miles Covered	Ascent in Feet	Descent in Feet	Elapsed Time	Moving Time	Avg. Moving Speed	Rain *Some **Lots	Sleeping Accommodations
16	4/4	Caherdaniel	30.6	2650	2599	09:59	5:35	5.5		AirB&B hosted by Lucas
17	4/5	Portmagee	44.6	2611	2662	11:48	6:29	6.9		Seagull Cottage B&B
18	4/6	Glenbeigh	47	1855	1926	06:49	5:23	8.4		Grapevine Hostel
19	4/7	Dingle	57.2	2534	2457	10:36	7:01	8.2		AirB&B hosted by Damien
20	4/8	Listowel	60.8	3062	3124	13:04	8:25	7.2		Aille River Tourist Hotel
21	4/9	Doolin	42.8	2320	2339	13:22	7:33	5.4		AirB&B hosted by Christopher
22	4/10	Kinvara	21.7	568	562	02:55	2:27	8.9		AirB&B hosted by Paddy
23	4/11	Galway	61.1	2036	1922	11:52	6:44	9.1		AirB&B—Abbeyglenn Castle Hotel
24	4/12	Clifden	29.4	2856	2801	09:43	5:55	5	*	Otter Hostel
25	4/13	Derrynaslignaun	51.9	2677	2579	09:10	6:38	7.8	**	Mary's in Mulranny
26	4/14	Mulranny	53.6	2586	2492	08:50	6:35	8.1	*	AirB&B hosted by Emmanuel
27	4/15	Ballycastle	32.3	1265	1396	06:46	4:49	6.7		Heyday Hostel
28	4/16	Ballina (9.6 walking miles)								Heyday Hostel
29	4/17	Ballina	39.1	1520	1487	06:33	5:03	7.7		AirB&B hosted by Roisin
30	4/18	Sligo Town	36.7	1843	1781	10:49	6:19	5.8		WarmShowers: Victor

Stage	Date	Starting Location	Miles Covered	Ascent in Feet	Descent in Feet	Elapsed Time	Moving Time	Avg. Moving Speed	Rain *Some **Lots	Sleeping Accommodations
31	4/19	Bundoran	24.6	1058	1028	06:11	3:47	6.5	**	AirB&B hosted by Patricia
32	4/20	Donegal Town	56.6	2237	2173	12:42	8:00	7.1	*	Serendipity B&B
33	4/21	Derry (7.1 walking miles)							*	Serendipity B&B
34	4/22	Derry-Londonderry	60.8	2246	2188	11:22	9:11	10.6		Finn McCools Giant's Causeway B&B
35	4/23	Bushmills	45.2	2928	3089	11:24	7:43	5.9		The Shed Galboly
36	4/24	Galboly	46.3	1757	1767	12:04	7:29	6.2		Botanical Backpackers
37	4/25	Belfast (7.1 walking miles)								Botanical Backpackers
38	4/26	Belfast	68.4	2971	3024	11	9:18	7.6	**	AirB&B hosted by Orlando
39	4/27	Dundalk	73.1	2824	2388	13:49	10:35	6.9		AirB&B with Birdie
40	4/28	Powerscourt	88	3759	4453	14:15	11:15	7.8		AirB&B with Rachel
41	4/29	Rosslare Harbour (7.4 riding miles; 4.7 walking miles)								Abbey Court Hostel

Before the Big Event



Approaching Powerscourt

Before the Big Event

The Reason



Yearbook Picture, 1996



My mom, Connie Geldbach—angel and-world traveler

Way back in the olden days (before this millennium), I was hired to teach geography to eighth graders. I knew nothing about geography so when I saw an announcement for a free two-week trip to Reno, Nevada to learn how to teach geography, I was elated. The free trip was the clincher. That two weeks changed my life—I grew to love geography and love teaching and met many teachers for whom I had and still have the greatest respect. One of these, Herb Thompson, still serves on my adventure crews (those people who read my daily crew posts where I whine about how hard my life is). Another of these remarkable people was Linda Agreda (now Linda Goodman). Linda spoke fondly of a bike trip she took with her son to Ireland. Still another amazing woman was Gretchen Braner who told of cycling centuries (100-mile events), a distance I simply couldn't fathom at the time. The convergence of these extraordinary people furthered the love of traveling that my mom, Connie Geldbach, placed in my heart and gave me a goal I knew I wanted to accomplish—riding my bike around Ireland. It would be several careers (a teacher, visiting professor, and pedagogy consultant), retirement, an empty-nest, and many previous trips far and wide before that dream would become a reality.

Let's be honest, it was a pipe dream. At the time, I could barely ride a bike and was so swamped with work that there was no time to do anything other than grade papers. Then, there was my loving husband, Mike, the birth of my two precious children, Ryan and Winter, and the 185 pounds on a 5'2" frame that stood in the way. Not that I was complaining.

Then at age 40, I remembered an exercise my eighth grade teacher had assigned almost 30 years before. We were told to write down our lifetime goals. Who knows what happened to that paper, but for some odd reason I remembered most of the list. They were activities like having a successful marriage and two fantastic kids, writing a book, hiking the Grand Canyon (an accomplishment my dad, Art, and sister, Gina, had achieved), earning a doctorate like my dad, running a marathon, and diving the Great Barrier Reef. I still wanted to accomplish those goals, but knew I'd need to start right away. As everyone knows, bodies start to fall apart at 40 so my timeline was limited.

I'd run on the track team in high school and received the "Most Spirited" award because there was little else they could say. They'd had me running the 800m races because no one else wanted to run distance and 800m was about as far as I could run. Now with my renewed dreams four decades later, I started walking so I could reach that marathon distance. Then, I would walk to one light pole, run (aka "shuffle") to the next, and repeat. Before I knew it, I was into the double-digit miles category, no longer walking and feeling great... until I wasn't. As every runner knows, new runners overtrain and overtraining leads to injury. I kept injuring myself and wasn't sure I could ever reach that marathon, but was getting stronger. So, cross-training took center stage.

I would hit the gym to swim. I'd swum very badly in college... again being pigeon-holed into the 800m distance. I also participated in cycling classes on stationary bikes. I began to really enjoy riding and bought my first bike. Ryan and Winter named her Sapphire because she was shiny blue just like the leading dragon in the *Eragon* series. She cost a big chunk of money when we didn't have much to spare so I was committed to proving to Mike that the investment was worth it. It proved fruitful; ten years later her frame boasted over 20,000 miles.

Still struggling to run, I devised a new plan. What if I switched from running to triathlon? I'd be able to swim (my forté), bike (what I really enjoyed), and run (just short distances so I'd stop breaking myself). It worked! I finished my first triathlon, a sprint distance (750m swim, 16-mile bike, 5K run), and was absolutely hooked. Plus, I was in good enough shape to hike the Grand Canyon. I reached the Colorado River and made it back to the rim of the Grand Canyon so proud I'd completed one of those eighth grade goals. I kept hiking, eventually bagging peaks and trails I'd never dreamed possible (see my previous books).

Like most triathletes, the bug doesn't go away and my obsessive personality put me on the fast track to increase distances in my triathlon pursuits. Yes, I continued to be the slowest person in the field, but I could complete those triathlons before the time cut-offs.



Ironman Coeur d'Alene 2015

I did my first Olympic distance triathlon (1500m swim, 28-mile bike, 10K run) and continued working my way up. I eventually finished a half distance (2000m swim, 56-mile bike, 13.1-mile run) and was rearing to do an Ironman (4000m swim, 112-mile bike, 26.2-mile run all of which must be completed in 17 hours). That run, though, was still a struggle. Ironman races weren't cheap so Mike made a deal with me. If I could complete a marathon, I could register for an Ironman. It happened on December 26th, 2013 and led to the completion of eleven Ironman-distance races over the following in years.

Still struggling with the run, I limited my run training, compensating with hiking. Over the years, I'd gathered the gear and learned to hike with a relatively light pack and (according to Shawna, another of my crew members) could "cover any distance in any terrain... at my speed." I did just that and ended up doing several 40-day adventures including hiking the Camino, Nepal, and Peru. I had the hiking thing down despite the fact that two guides from different countries both deemed me the second slowest person they'd ever led (after an 80-year-old woman and a Russian man with Giardia).

By this time, I was strong and endurance was my forté. One hundred mile rides were just training days, no longer competitions. I couldn't justify paying to ride a century when it was a typical Saturday workout. I loved being in the bike saddle and still had that Irish wish so finally bit the bullet to try something new. It was time to pack my panniers, catch a plane, and discover what bike touring really meant.



Killowen Old Parish Church Cemetery

Pre-Trip Prep

Going Solo



Shawna and Christy in Patagonia



Braving Chilean winds

Everything started great. Shawna (previously mentioned) and I had hiked the Patagonia “O” two years before and were very compatible on the trail. Plus, she was no girl to slough off when hard became harder. She would set a goal and work her butt off to reach it. Every single time she set a goal, it would happen. She’d wanted to be an Ironman. She is. She’d wanted to complete an ultra run. She is the bearer of a 100-mile belt buckle. She wanted to hike the 50 peaks of the Las Vegas Mountaineers Club. She set the record for the fastest to complete the task. And, she wanted to learn to play the clarinet. She borrowed an instrument and ended up playing in the university’s community band. Shawna was a badass and she agreed to accept the Irish challenge alongside my slow derrière. I was happy to have a buddy on the ride for friendship and safety, but, of course, sharing the cost of sleeping indoors each night was a boon.

Two things happened. First, Shawna took a trip to Ireland with her family two-and-a-half months before our planned departure. She had a great time with the family, but she was done with Ireland. She had video of her sons being blasted by winds so fierce that it looked as if they would take flight. It was Patagonia’s John Garner Pass remembered. Then, there was the rain, grey, cold, and wind that made her rethink her desire to ride through that horror. Shawna decided to give me the freedom of solitude for my March departure. In her defense, she knew

I liked traveling alone and that I would have taken the trip regardless of her presence. I was not upset; the pictures and videos from her December trip were daunting. No worries. I'd done tough things by myself before.

Back to the money thing. With just me seeking nightly accommodations, I found that there really weren't a lot of options in many of the areas on the path. Those that were available tended toward the \$100/night range. I really wanted my average daily cost to stay below \$30 (what I'd achieved on el Camino de Santiago), but was willing to up that number to \$50/night if needed. Those hotels and B&Bs simply weren't in my budget. This meant one thing: camping. Arghhh! First, sleeping on the ground and I were not good friends. Those 55+ year-old bones had nasty things to say when sleeping on the ground and even nastier things to yell when trying to stand in the morning. Plus, cold and I were arch enemies. Sleeping in a tent when it would be 40°F outside would be nothing less than miserable. And, that extra bulk and weight of adding a tent, sleeping bag (I'd need my -10°F bag which would cost me four pounds), and sleeping pad—ugh! But... money. I would brave the hardships and take the tent.

There were some indoor options. Several hosts from websites like WarmShowers and CouchSurfing were willing to put me up for a night whether it be on the floor or an ensuite within their home. There were also hostels. When I'd backpacked through Ireland in college, I found hostels everywhere. It was like hiking the Camino... you'd show up in any town and there'd be a bed available on a student budget. I didn't care about sleeping with 49 other travelers in a warehouse of bunkbeds; it was (sometimes) warm. Maybe I could also find some budget motels. A problem with my strategy was that I didn't know where I'd end up each night so couldn't plan ahead. This meant I'd be scouring the Internet each night to see if I could find a place to stay the next night. If not, I'd have to start searching for a place to pitch my tent right before sunset. It would all work out just fine. No worries.



Some of our WarmShowers guests from over the years

What is WarmShowers?

I learned about WarmShowers about eight years before this trip. It was a website connecting touring cyclists from around the world. Those who were on tour could search upcoming towns to see if there were any hosts in the upcoming area. If there were, they contacted the hosts to request to spend a night or two with them. While many hosts did not respond and others would not be available during the desired dates, there were times when the stars aligned.

Hosts offered different amenities. Some permitted cyclists to pitch tents in their yard. Others were willing to babysit bikes and bike bags so cyclists could rent a car for a quick side trip. And some even had a room, hot shower, and WiFi where guests could luxuriate after weeks without a bed.

Our family served as WarmShowers hosts for years and met incredibly adventurous people from all over the world, some of whom continued to be friends long after their stay. For instance, we had one Korean man who'd never cycled before, yet decided to ride across the USA. He stayed with us for several days. I dropped him on the Las Vegas Strip one day so he could see the glitz and glamour and picked him up hours later. I also took him out to Lake Mead where he sat, terrified, in a kayak for the first time. I kept him in the shallows and walked through the water holding onto his boat. After his multi-month bike journey, he returned home only to return to the States the following year. That year, he kayaked down the Mississippi! He wouldn't let fear stop him. We again hosted him from our cottage in Bemidji, Minnesota. Lake Bemidji was the first large lake he encountered so I kayaked alongside him through the lake and onto the next dam. In another case, a Chinese man who'd be a vocal leader in Hong Kong's fight for secession spent several days with us. During that time, his bike was repaired and he gathered tools needed for when he entered Central America where everything would become dicey. One couple we hosted were from East Germany. Mike (my husband) and I enjoyed a spaghetti dinner while they told us about growing up in a communist country. They told us first-hand about what it was like to experience the demise of the Berlin Wall and its aftermath.

I'd used a WarmShowers host during one of my overnight sojourns along the Paul Bunyan Trail in Minnesota. It was so nice to show up and have an in-home bike mechanic right there to solve most of my problems. For the rest of the problems, he drove my bike and me to the nearest bike shop so we'd be safe to continue the following day.

If you come to our house, be prepared to tell your story. In return, there will be cookies, a warm shower, your own room, a washer and dryer, a hearty dinner and breakfast, and some extras to boot. These are no small things to those who have been living in the wild for quite some time. Welcome!



Beached boat in Kilmore Quay

The Trail



Eurovelo 1—Atlantic Route

I was very familiar with Adventure Cycling Association (formerly American Cycling Association) from years of fantasizing about riding one of their many mapped U.S. trails so sought a similar organization that covered Ireland's bike paths. I found EuroVelo, an organization that mapped long-distance routes throughout Europe. Each route had an assigned number and one of those routes even circumnavigated the Emerald Isle. It was the EV1—Atlantic Coast Route, the first and longest (at the time) of their offerings. It followed the Atlantic Coast touching the southernmost part of Portugal and snaking through six European countries before ending in the northernmost part of Norway. Those completing the path would cover 6,618 mi/10,650 km traversing the entire west coast of the continent. I wasn't that ambitious; I just wanted to ride through Ireland like Linda and her son. So, I'd just do the Ireland and Northern Ireland sections, a daunting 1,585 mi/2,550 km of mostly coastland. It would mean climbing an even more daunting 71,195'/21,700 m where the wind and spitting rain surely raged with its greatest ferocity. No worries.

The good news was that the trail was well-established, well-marked in Ireland (apparently not so much in Northern Ireland), and had GPX files I could download to my Garmin watch to keep me heading in the right direction. The Republic of Ireland website had information about each of its 40 stages including suggestions of iconic places to stop, vetted restaurants, bike shop locations, and more. I figured I'd be able to handle Northern Ireland after 40 stages in the Republic. Additionally, there was a route manager for the Irish section, Doug

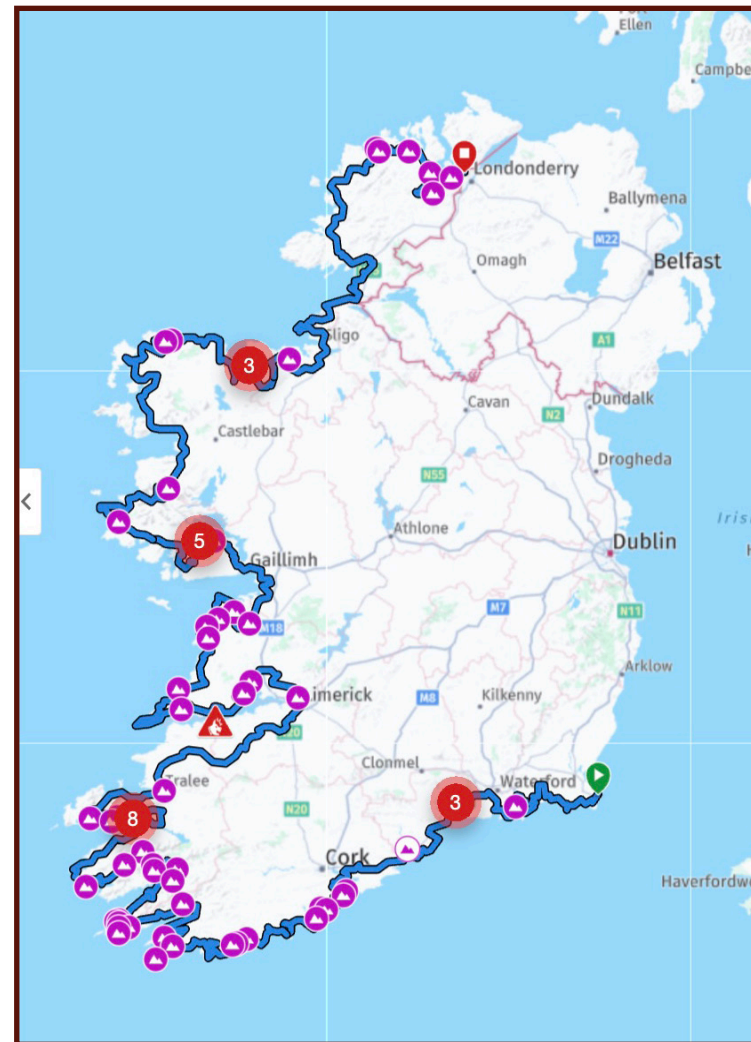
Corrie (later added to my crew), who was wonderful at answering my nearly endless barrage of questions. He became my “man on the ground,” my human link in an unknown land. He helped me choose gear and decide about places to stay. Plus, he taught me about Ireland and what I might face along the way (e.g., road types, wind direction, grocery stores). He was a great resource and true gem even before I set foot in his hometown!

EuroVelo

Developed by the European Cycling Foundation, EuroVelo was a system of long-distance bicycling routes throughout Europe. The goals of the organization included creating a system of 17 courses totaling 56,000 mi/90,000 km of sustainable transportation routes while encouraging bicycle tourism throughout the continent. In addition, they laser-focused on safety using dedicated bike paths, quiet rural roads, and low-traffic urban streets—all with signs and local commitments to upkeep road surface safety.

Each European country took responsibility for developing, maintaining, and promoting their routes and generally received funds from EU development, national, and local funds. A coordinator was assigned within each country with managers dedicated to single routes (or sections of those routes) within that country. In some countries, there was financial compensation for those in these positions.

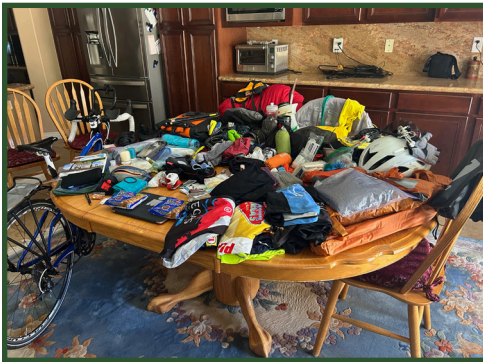
EuroVelo 8—Mediterranean Route and EuroVelo 15—Rhine Cycle Route were the two most used routes while EuroVelo 1—Atlantic Coast—was the longest given that it followed the entire jagged, rugged coast of the European continent south to north.



EV1—Ireland

Gear

What's a Girl to Take?



Everything that went to Ireland



How I envisioned I'd carry everything

Before catching that plane, there was a lot to do. I was very familiar with covering long daily distances having logged loads of consecutive daily hiking miles ascending the Himalayas, Andes, and more. I also knew that because of my Ironman training I could ride long distances on my bike and even climb untold feet (even earning myself a jersey for 8000' over 100-miles). Granted I wasn't in Ironman shape when it was time to fly to Dublin, but I knew in my heart and bones that with my experience and resilience I'd be able to do it. I also knew I had the skills, knowledge, and gear needed to solo travel abroad while carrying my own gear. Fortunately, my by-then-56-year-old body would have the benefit of wheels to help with the carrying task (unlike had been the case on backpacking journeys like the John Muir Trail).

What I didn't have was experience with bike touring or bike packing. I'd completed a few measly overnight tours, but those were a Grand Canyon-sized cry from an epic Irish adventure. Some of the gear needed for a bike tour would be uniquely different. The camping gear wouldn't change, but there would be a whole new set of essentials I'd need—including the bike and all its accouterment. And, of course, I'd need new skills. These issues became major stressors in my planning exploits. First, I needed to buy gear.

Most touring cyclists buy bikes specifically made for the purpose. These were not road bikes nor triathlon/time-trial bikes (oh, yes, I'd bought my road bike, Sapphire, and my triathlon bike, Sweetie, by this time), they're called touring or hybrid bikes and are built to carry a lot of weight. Some bikepackers use mountain bikes, but none use road or tri bikes. Not me. I was (as evidenced throughout this manuscript) as cheap as a church mouse (assuming they're cheap). There was no way I was shelling out more money and having to store a third bike. I would trick out Sapphire and show the world it was doable. I had a lot of experience on road and tri bikes and felt really comfortable in an aero position. My bikes and I were close; we'd worked as teams for as many miles as it takes to ride around the equator plus some. We'd stick together. Furthermore, I wasn't one to accept change lightly and I didn't want to hurt their non-existent feelings. We'd go together and make it as inexpensive as possible.

Inexpensive... right!?! Tricking a road bike into a touring bike was no cheap feat. I had to buy a rack, panniers, lights, the works. Of course, I would have had to spend that money on a touring bike as well, but it seemed different. I was assured Sapphire's carbon fiber frame could handle the weight so I soldiered on. That soldiering came to over \$800 including all the tips I gave to the mechanics at Southwest Bikes in Northwest Las Vegas who spent endless hours helping me choose the right gear and counseling me so I'd have the faith to undergo my journey.

Just five days before my flight, I had everything I thought I needed. That gave me two opportunities to experience riding with the weight before packing Sapphire into her posh travel bag. The first ride was 13 miles with a gain of 400' over the first six miles. It felt good... slower than usual, but that wasn't surprising. Then, for the true test, Las Vegas offered an opportunity unheard of when you want it in the desert—a storm. I would be able to authentically experience what it would be like to ride in Ireland's spring weather conditions. I was so nervous. What if I couldn't handle the weight in the rain? What if I fell at every turn? I needn't have worried. The Las Vegas storm provided little more and sprinkles and 11 mph winds. I'd have to go with the flow and trust I'd be able to handle the real thing when the real thing happened.

I had a final session with the boys at Southwest Bikes who deemed Sapphire ready to play and had Mike and Ryan help me pack her for travel. It was time to enter the unknown. I had an ominous feeling that, thankfully, never came to fruition.

Bike Touring vs. Bikepacking

“Bike touring” and “bikepacking” are distinct travel types. Bike touring suggests more comfort—staying indoors at night, having everything prearranged, maybe even riding in a group with a guide and SAG. The latter, SAGs, are vehicles accompanying cyclists or their athlete types (e.g., runners). Short for “Supplies and Gear,” their primary purpose is safety. They help in emergencies big and small. Have a flat? They carry replacement tubes and manpower to get you back on the road lickety-split. Too tired to go on? Jump in the back of the van; they’ll haul your bike and exhausted butt to the night’s lodging. Is your gear heavy? They’ll drive it to the next destination. Hungry? Here’s an all-natural, homemade granola bar while you’re still pedaling... or let’s just break for a gourmet lunch on that beautiful ridge. Bike touring is by no means easy, but it does offer comforts not common when bikepacking.

Bikepacking is for your hardcore adventurers. Instead of riding a short 150 or 500 miles, they ride from Nome, Alaska to Tierra del Fuego, Argentina. In fact, many of the WarmShowers guests we hosted in our home did just that. They sleep on the ground most nights, must forage for their meals in convenience stores of small towns, and carry extra spokes and chains in case there’s a break in the middle of Kazakstan. These are your badasses. When they have an opportunity for a one-night homestay or cheap hotel, they revel in a shower and real mattress.

My trip would fall somewhere between these two. I planned to stay indoors when I could find cheap accommodations like hostels or homestays, but also sleep in the cold when none were accessible. I wouldn’t be traversing two continents, but I would be traveling the distance of two small countries. I wouldn’t be living on the road for two years, but I would be out there for the same amount of time Jesus suffered in the desert.



Oh, SOOO Irish—Tullagh Church in County Cork

Departure

On My Way with a Hang-Up



Goodbyes at the airport



Adventure ON!

I said a sad goodbye to Ryan and the dogs and then another sad goodbye when Mike deposited me with all my gear at the airport. I was on my way! But, wait... there had to be a complication so I was glad to get it out of the way right at the start. American Airlines charged for all bags except bike bags so I felt comfortable paying the \$75 fee for my gear bag. It was only 26 pounds and the gate agent took it from me, placed it on the luggage belt and then asked me to put the bike bag on the scale. It was 56 pounds—6 pounds over the 50-pound weight limit. She was going to charge me. I said I'd just put six pounds into the extremely within-weight-limits other bag, but, no... she said it was gone. I noted (albeit nicely) that had she not made the mistake of putting the first bag on the belt so quickly then this wouldn't be a problem. She insisted on the payment so I played a Karen and asked for a supervisor. The gate agent next to her said "She's one of those." Well, yes, I was one of those.

The supervisor came over and said I would have to wait for my bag to go all the way through the system and circle back before I could collect it. Or, I could put six pounds in the two Trader Joe's paper bags she'd brought for the alternative option. So, I unlocked and unzipped the bag and started searching. I took out some of the heavier items like a tool bag and we both noted that my box cutter and a slew of other tools wouldn't make it through TSA. She had me put those aside and shuffle through the bag more to see what else could be removed. I found my helmet and then my pedals... nope... those pedals have sharp edges,

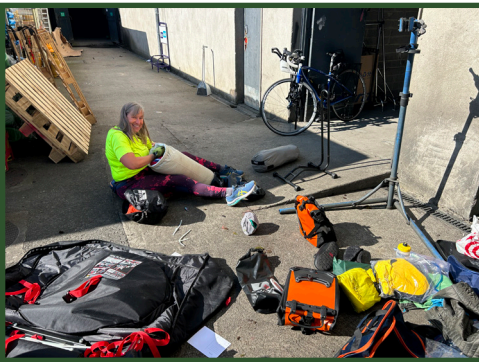
and my bento bag... but, oops, that knife couldn't go through either. I had a bag of clothes to change into when arriving in Ireland so those came out, too. I was down to just over 50 pounds. Then, I removed the bag into which the bike bag lives for storage. 49.6 pounds! She said I could go over-weight only with the items that wouldn't be able to go through TSA. So, I gathered all the dangerous items and returned them to the bag. They were heavy and she agreed to let me wrap them in the bike bag's bag so they wouldn't move around. It was officially approved... at 53 pounds and a 20-minute use of airport personnel time.

I was at the airport with plenty of time so wasn't worried and hit the Priority Club for breakfast—a yogurt parfait, latte, and, of course, blackberry mimosa (they're free so there was no way I was missing out on that). Next, was a leisurely stroll to the gate and I was off to Philadelphia in the very back seat of the plane. I hunkered down and started writing my next book (aka this journal)—no rest for the weary. Okay, I wasn't weary... yet; that would come in time.

The Philadelphia airport ended up being great. They'd just opened a Chase Sapphire Club and my Priority Card worked there. Though I missed getting a free facial (they'd just closed), the employees were great and I had leftover food for the next day's train ride. I made it to my Dublin flight in time, changed into my slippers, opened my 65°F sleeping bag (the one I use for travel or when I go to movie theaters), finished my journal entry for the day, and listened to the last bit of a book I wanted to finish before officially starting my trip. It was time to click the Inspire (an in-body device that interrupts apneas when I sleep) so as not to snore the whole plane awake. Time for some Z's.

Arrival in Ireland

A Special Surprise



Prepping at Duff Cycles



Finally! It begins.

Accommodation: Anchor House B&B Kilrane
(anchorhousekilrane@gmail.com)

I arrived in Ireland and whizzed through customs. Both my suitcase and bike bag were there and even though there was an equipment failure with one of the bike bag straps, I was able to move everything successfully. I quickly found a cab that could take Sapphire and I to Duff Cycles where I'd made arrangements to store the bag during my time in-country. They greeted me warmly, thankfully remembering I was coming, and found me a place to begin the arduous task of putting my bike back together. While doing so, the owner of Duff Cycles, Calvin, and I talked marathons. He was a Boston qualifier—impressive! One of the employees was from Nepal so we chatted about the Annapurna Circuit while he helped me with the chores I found particularly difficult.

Then, there was a huge surprise! Doug Corrie (you may remember he was the route manager for the EV1 Ireland section) showed up unannounced at the bike shop. Just as he had been over the months I was preparing for the trip, he was an immense blessing. He helped put the bike together, took me shopping and to the bank, and, blessing of blessings, led me by bike to Connolly train station where I met my train for Rosslare Harbour. Yes, I probably could have done it all on my own, but it would have been so much more stressful and reaching the

train on time may not have happened. He even fixed Sapphire when her back axle failed. I'd been having problems with it for weeks and hoped his manly closing of the lever would keep the bike together for the rest of the trip. I just had to pray that if I were to have any flat tires that they would be in the front. Doug racked my bike in the train (I certainly would not have figured out how to do that on my own) and bid me farewell with an offer to help if I needed anything. What a kind and helpful man! Everyone said the Irish were exceptionally nice people... Doug definitely lived up to that reputation.

It took me forever to sit down in the train. I kept fiddling with my gear and trying to find what I needed. I finally found a comfortable seat with a table and USB wall charger so could sit back and relax during the remainder of the short ride. I spent the time eating lunch (leftovers from the Sapphire Lounge combined with airplane snacks), writing in my journal, reviewing the terrain and landmarks I would see the next day, and watching through the windows as we traveled south along the east coast.



Crew Post

Great news—I made it to the beginning of the trail! The flights were mostly uneventful and I was able to find a taxi to transport all the gear to Duff Cycles (three miles from the airport). It took almost two hours to put Sapphire (that's my bike's name) together with little bits of help from the bike shop employees.

The greatest surprise of the day was that the man I'd been communicating with for months because he's the route manager for the EV1, Doug, met me at the bike shop. He helped finish prepping Sapphire for the road and took me shopping for some last minute items before escorting me by bike to the train station. There was a little complication with the back skewer... again... that he was able to fix before helping me load into the train. Everyone has been so nice here.

I'm staying in a B&B tonight with only one thing on my mind—sleep!

The Challenge



Colorful Kilmore Quay

Kilrane to Fethard

The Journey Begins



With Maura



Full Irish breakfast

Distance: 48 mi/ 77 km
Ascent/Descent: +1803'/-1684' +550m/-513m
Moving Speed: 8.3 mph/13.2 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 10:36/5:44
Accommodation: Martina's backyard
Weather: Gorgeous

Maura, my hostess at Anchor House B&B, created quite the breakfast ambiance. She'd asked if I wanted a full Irish breakfast and listed a menagerie of epicurean delights the term implied. It sounded like enough food for a week. I assured her I didn't need that much and said simple bacon and eggs with some bread-to-go would be plenty. I was thinking a single piece of bacon, a hard boiled egg, and a chunk of brown bread. I guess it's not the Irish way because with the fried ham, eggs-over-easy, and brown bread came tomato, granola, yogurt, additional toast, and fruit... all served lavishly with cubed butter and jam. I wasn't complaining.

Maura chatted with me quite awhile about my route overall and the day's plan in particular highlighting and recommending where I should pop in for a visit. The information was so helpful, but the chat may have also been a means of procrastinating because I knew I'd be cold outside. I finally finished packing; it was time to bite the bullet and hit the saddle. I turned on some tunes and was surprised when "This Could Change Everything" by Francesca Battistelli started playing. It seemed prophetic.

My first stop was Lady's Island. The island contains a castle and tower from the 1400s that were owned by the deLaporte (now "Lambert") family, a family that arrived with fellow Normans. The island eventually became an honorific to Mary and retained that title for centuries. As such, it became a pilgrimage site during the medieval period and has remained so to this day. Pilgrims to the island walk all the way around it barefoot (sometimes in the water), often reciting the rosary. To enhance the experience, the local religious community created a walk that contains stations of the cross. Each station was decorated with an ornate mosaic displaying various events from the life of Christ. Under each was a placard for devotional reading, all referencing a Biblical event and providing implications for modern times. Nearly all of them affected me quite powerfully. I felt as if God had put them there as a means of centering my mind at the beginning of this Irish journey.

From a Station of Cross

"Faith sees a positive outcome. Fear sees the worst scenario.
Faith places us above circumstances. Fear places us below.
Faith creates that which is believed. Fear does likewise.
Faith allows us to walk on water. Fear makes us sink.
Faith extends our comfort zone. Fear reduces it.
Faith risks the game of life. Fear plays it safe.
Faith expands our world. Fear constricts it.
Faith makes mistakes. Fear makes excuses.
Faith sees divine order. Fear sees chaos.
Faith conquers. Fear falters."



One of the Mary's at Lady's Island



Stations of the Cross



Where treasure was not hidden

From a Station of Cross

“A friendly smile can light up someone’s day.
A warm hug can break down a wall of isolation.
A word of encouragement can enable someone to keep going.
A helping hand can help someone to succeed.
A listening ear can help someone to see a way forward.
A thoughtful gesture can make all the difference.”

Also on Lady’s Island was a strange tower wall bearing symbols including crosses. Lore states that in the 1800s, treasure hunters thought treasure was buried under the tower so dug out its foundation. Now, the tower slants at an angle even more pronounced than the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

I’d spent a lot of time on Our Lady’s Island and realized this was going to be a long trip if every stop took that long. It was time to move on.

I was traveling along The Norman Way, a name given to a section of the coast designated by the Irish government to spotlight the southeastern section of the country. Maura said there were few other big draws to the area so focusing on Norman historical origins could serve as a draw and, of course, increase tourism euros. For the next few days, I stopped at many structures along that path. There was a good website detailing each of the landmarks and Maura had helped me decide which I had to visit and which I could see as I was pedaling by.

My second stop was at Tacumshane Windmill. Although a more recent construction (1846), the windmill was an example of a Norman alternative to the waterwheel. This area of the coast (like most in Ireland) was rich with potential for gathering power from wind. The Normans took advantage of the natural resource and used the power for activities such as irrigation. The Tacumshane mill provided evidence that there was a field system in the area. I read that night that Ireland was so wild that it had few inhabitants until people like the Normans tamed the countrysides with the help of mills like these.



The wood used to make the Tacumshane windmill was almost all recovered from sunken ships, a fact that became meaningful a few stops later.

Maura had also mentioned I could get a key at the local pub enabling me to go inside the windmill. A note on the windmill door confirmed this so I went to the pub and knocked and knocked. Apparently, no one would be bothered this early in the season... a circumstance that much to my demise followed me throughout the day.

Not being able to see inside, it was time to move on. Next stop? St. Ann’s Well. I never learned the full story, but there was a little cut-out in a brick wall filled with water that I assumed to be a holy

Tacumshane Windmill

well. Just in case it was, I did the whole “spectacle, testicle, wallet, and watch” thing. The grounds were manicured beautifully and there was a lovely building on the hill above the well that, unsurprisingly, wasn’t open for viewing. I hated not knowing more about what I was seeing.

Across the road from St. Ann’s Well were remnants of a church. Perhaps I’d be tired of taking photos of all these old churches and castles as the trip progressed, but this was not that day and there was an attached graveyard with ancient-looking gravestones—who’d want to miss that? I was excited to see how old they were and never saw any older than the 1900s. I assumed they must have used some pretty crappy stone for the grave markers to look that old after a measly century—a fact later debunked when asking ChatGPT about the friaries I was visiting later in the trip.

I continued on taking pictures of more historical artifacts such as the Ballyhead Castle. It was a nice day and I was in no hurry so stopping at each landmark felt right. The next day when it was cold, overcast, and rainy, I wouldn’t have the same motivation to stop often.

I was told that Kilmore Quay was a fishing town where I should definitely stop. I saw many boats in the single marina and it was definitely a cute town where tourists surely stopped for ice cream and coffee. Along with the boats, there was a lot of what I would call “sludge.” According to a placard, these were sandbars resulting from on-shore drift which made sense because there were groynes creating rocky slopes on one side and was a long peaceful beach on the other.

My favorite part of Kilmore Quay was its memorial garden created in remembrance of those who lost their lives in this exceptionally rough part of the sea. It was such a deadly place that it earned the moniker: “Graveyard of a thousand ships.” The memorial had engraved plates listing the type of accidents that the quay had known. Some of these included a sinking lobster boat, a lost fishing trawler, many boats and ships lost at sea, deaths of swimmers, and deaths of scuba divers.

The quay also boasted about its sand dunes, but I didn’t see any ATVs. [Oh, wait... this wasn’t the US Southwest.] I did, however, see a man and son fishing. A sign read that it was a good location for bass, but they were a protected species. I wonder if there was a game warden that would be checking the family haul for the day.



Cemetery



Beached boat



A groyne



Anchors aweigh



Along the path



Windblown trees



The tide is out



The turret remains, but where's Repunzel?

One place I did not visit was the Saltee Islands. I'd heard about the islands on the podcast I'd listened to on the plane ride to Dublin and thought it'd be fun to visit. What wouldn't be fun was dealing with the strange ferry schedule and the 4-5 hour roundtrip it involved. One of the islands, Little Saltee, was uninhabited and dangerous to reach because of currents and rocky shores. The other, Great Saltee, the larger of the two (duh!), was privately owned so the owner offered visits for a fee. The big draw for Great Saltee was its official bird sanctuary. While it was popular with birders for lots of good reasons, the rest of us usually went because of its puffin population. After all, who wouldn't want to see those cute things! Anyhoo, I skipped it.

I continued riding along windswept roads, but fortunately had the wind at my back. It wasn't really pushing me forward since I was usually on roads unexposed to the ferocity outside a foliage barrier. In several cases, there was evidence of trees suffering from severe winds off the ocean for so long that they were in a permanent state of windblown-ness.



Afternoon tea/writing session

Also on the podcast I'd heard two nights before, I learned that The Red Door was a must-stop place for cakes in Carrig On Bannow. I wasn't up for cake, but afternoon tea and a scone sounded divine. I ordered and then spent the next hour online trying to find a place to lay my head that night.

I made it to the end of Section 1 of the EV1 upon reaching Wellington Bridge and stopped briefly in a store to see if they had camp stove gas (something I couldn't bring on the plan) or bungee cords. No, they didn't, but I would find them at a store right after the bridge. I crossed the bridge (later to learn it was the first of two bridges) where the path turned north. Darn it! That store was the other way. No worries, I wouldn't be cooking food that night anyway. The bungee cord thing, though, was

becoming quite the irritant. Mike had said straps were great for holding my front paneers. I didn't think he was right, but gave him the benefit of the doubt. I was finding, though, that they were a pain in my arse. Bungee cords would be much easier for me so I was on a mission. Being my first distance cycle tour, I had so many things to learn, not the least of which was to identify what gear worked best for me. Well, the northward turn meant that store never materialized.

What did materialize was the road from hell. It must have been last paved in the 1960s and was mostly at grades varying between 6 and 12 percent. You'd think this would be awesome on the downhill, but would be very wrong. With the road conditions, everything on you and everything on the bike would jiggle. I was worried something, me included, would jiggle right off! And, after going down



My saviour (aka guy with Google Maps)

that massive hill... you guessed it... gear flew off and I had to walk back up that hill to retrieve it. Ditto multiple times. Lest you misunderstand, these were not short hills. They went on and on and then on some more. It was at that point that I set a new rule. I would force myself to ride up to 6% grades. As soon as it hit seven or if I could see it was heading that direction, I'd permit myself to walk my bike. I also decided that if I hit six and the road continued to ascend for a long distance, I would walk. I hadn't had to walk my bike in over a decade, but this bike was over four times heavier than either Sapphire or Sweetie (my tri bike) without gear, even when they carried five bottles of water (desert traveler as I was). I could give myself a break, especially since I had a lot of miles still to go on this trip without any recovery time. I wouldn't be too proud to walk beside my girl.

I finally reached the end of that treacherous experience and, lo and behold, at the top stood two construction workers. They asked where I was going and proceeded to tell me the road was closed; I would need to go back the way I came. Unconscionable! I simply couldn't do it. One of them spent a lot of time with me trying to find an alternative route. Relief came when he found one and gave me directions. I went on my way with a smile on my face. That is... until I returned to the EV1 and realized I needed to make an immediate right turn. This became my first of what I knew would be many falls. I was a little bruised, but fine otherwise. What wasn't fine was my side mirror. Good! That thing was really giving me a headache! Several cars drove by and they all stopped. The woman in front popped out of her car to check on me. How sweet! I gave her a thumbs up and went to lifting what was truly my albatross. Lifting Sapphire was such a chore; she was just so darn heavy.

The missed turn came at Tintern Abbey, one of the places I really wanted to visit. Once I made the correct turn, I saw a parking lot so found a hidden copse of trees where my bike would be less conspicuous and I could get away without having to lock it. Then, I walked the mile to the abbey. I hadn't realized the EV1 went all the way to the abbey so, after viewing the ruins, had to walk all the way back up just to ride back down again. Coincidentally, "Oops!... I Did It Again" by Britney Spears started playing at the time. It was all good; Tintern Abbey was well worth seeing and I needed the exercise, right?



Tinturn Abbey



Along the path



St. Paul's Church of Ireland

Next, I stopped for a picture of the town of Clomines, a deserted medieval settlement across Bannow Bay. It didn't look anything like Nevada's boomtowns, but it had the same feel. It was a place that had been vibrant and thriving at one time. Unlike in Nevada where towns died because miners had stripped the area of all its precious metals, Clomines thrived until famine, the Black Death, conflict, and silting of the shipping channels took their toll.

It was getting dark and I needed to find a place to stay. I saw there was a campground in Fethard so rode the few extra miles to the city. No one answered the door and it was locked when I tried to open it. I'd seen another campground back a ways so tried that one. Ditto. Then, I checked Google and found one more. I rode to it and noticed all the serene areas along its entryway that would each fit my tent perfectly. It was already post-sunset so I had to tap on the window for the owner to respond. No, she was closed for the season and, no, I couldn't camp somewhere on her property anyway.

I was getting desperate so decided I'd just wild camp until I saw a family building front yard garden beds in the dark. This construction project seemed quite popular this March in Fethard. I asked the man if he knew of anywhere I could camp, hinting several times that I'd be able to set-up my tent on "someone's" lawn. He never offered his large verdant yard, but called someone who called someone who got back to him. I was to ride my bike to a fourth place. If no one answered, I was to go next door and knock on that door because the woman who lived in the second house was the sister of the man who ran the campground. What? Well, okay. Sure enough, there was no answer at the official campground and, only because someone drove up to the second house and it was well-passed dark, I decided to try my luck with the sister. The man with the green lawn had coached me to say: "I'm looking for Martina. Tom Martin said you could help." That was the clincher because Martina and Tom were both volunteers for the Coast Guard. I felt like Will Smith in "Six Degrees of Separation." She let me in and called her brother who indicated I could stay at the campground for a price, but there would be no available bathroom. I decided that if I was going to wild pee than I might as well wild camp for free.

I thanked Martina and her daughter, Lily, for their help and decided to hit the beach where I'd been told I could legally wild camp. On the way there, the wind was ferocious so I decided to turn around and find a place in a wooded area with more protection from the wind. That would make it easier to pitch the tent, would be warmer, and the trees would shield my tent from some of the rain expected overnight. As I was riding back, a car came up. It was Martina. She said she hadn't realized I was on a bike (several people told me this even though I was wearing a bike helmet...odd) and would I please come back and stay in her backyard. I gleefully agreed.

With the wind still blowing hard, I struggled to get my tent staked so Martina came outside and helped erect it even bringing a hammer so I wouldn't be using rocks to pound in the stakes. She let me use her bathroom before I headed off to bed in my cozy room for the night enjoying the sound of wind on my tent cover and then the pitter-patter of rain.

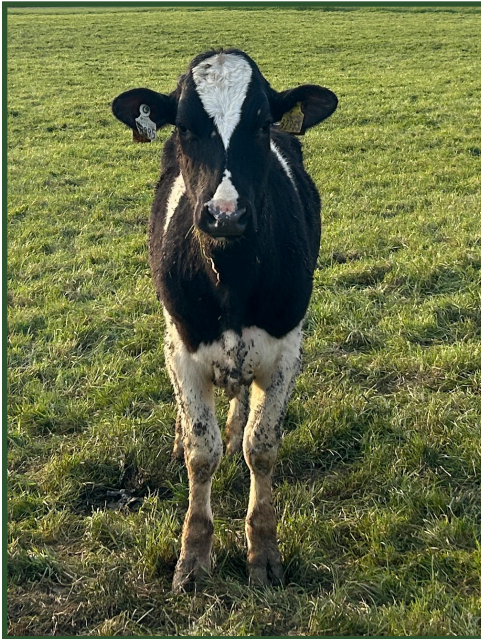
Crew Post

It was a long day, 10.5 hours with just under 6 in the saddle. I didn't make my desired 60 miles, but was happy with almost 50. I rode along The Norman Way all day. There's a lot of information about that part of the EV1 so I stopped often to see what I'd read about. And, yes Mike, I read every placard at every stop. I tried four campgrounds between sunset and over an hour after sunset. At the last option, the sister of the owner sent me to a beach. She drove after me in the dark and caught up about 10 minutes later. She said she hadn't realized I was on a bike and invited me back to her home where she helped me set up my tent in her windy (but much less windy than the beach) backyard.



Fethard to Waterford

Rainy Ireland



Distance: 35.5 mi/57.1 km
Ascent/Descent: +1731'/-1733' +527m/-528m
Average Moving Speed: 5.8 mph/9.3 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 8:50/6:04
Accommodation: Sham Chase, WarmShowers Host
Weather: Beautiful morning; Cold, rainy afternoon
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vxOQ5np4nMO>

*All daily data (e.g., average moving speed) combines walking and cycling.

I figured I'd be up early with the sun, but after not falling asleep before 2 AM, it was an 8 o'clock start to break camp. The chore was lessened with a decrease in windspeed, but it still took about an hour to get everything packed on the bike. Martina came out to check on me right before I finished so I took advantage of her bathroom and left a thank you postcard and €20 note hidden under the card. We bid each other farewell.



Fethard Castle



I was down for lots of riding covering lots of miles each day in Ireland, but had honestly not taken visiting places along the route into account. I'd just planned to do a month of drive-bys. I started thinking about the alternative—actually seeing something Irish while in Ireland and made a commitment: I would take advantage of being in Ireland and actually see Ireland.

I'd ridden by Fethard Castle the night before, but hadn't stopped because I was too busy trying to find a place to sleep so I began my day by backtracking a mile to check it out. Interestingly, in addition to the 14th century castle they had a motte that dated back to the 1200s. I know, you're telling me I spelled that wrong, but nope. What is a "motte" in that case? Well, that was the same question I had. The answer is a man-made mound of dirt on which a wooden defensive structure is built. There were nearby supporting buildings and the entire complex was surrounded by a fence and, sometimes, moat (see how that happened?). It was neat to see the mound; minuscule in size compared to

the castle and I couldn't imagine having a defensive structure on the top of that small thing. After a self-guided tour reading every placard, I rode to the beach that had been recommended the night before.

Carnivan Beach was quite well known throughout Ireland and frequented by visitors sitting atop its bluffs. Local dog walkers let their pups swim in the cold water while they enjoyed scenery and serenity. It was truly stunning and I took a nice walk around the island until reaching a "No Trespassing" sign.

The man who helped me find Martina the night before had informed me there was a second beach that was much more protected from the elements and tourists than Carnivan. I walked to this other beach, Baginbun, and saw about ten ladies wearing swim parkas. Really?!? There was no way I was even putting a toe in that water and yet they'd each completed a 20-minute swim in the bay sans dry suits. They told me the water was 9°C, a balmy 48°F!

I'd spent enough time in Fethard; it was time to move on. The rain started and I rode by lots of castles and churches with cemeteries (usually all three were right next door to each other). After all, what land baron would want to have to walk far to worship God? Then, again, contracting out a pilgrimage was not unheard of in Catholicism.



Dog walking on Carnivan Beach



Overlooking Carnivan Beach



Just after the "No Trespassing" sign



Baginbun Beach



It wasn't officially on the EV1, but everything I'd read said to take a side trip to Hook Lighthouse. I put it into Google Maps and figured it would be easy to find. A wrong turn (my mistake, not Google's) led me to Hook Pier instead. I learned that the pier was built in 1847 as a Famine Relief Project and continued growing into the 1990s. There were tons of lobster traps. What wasn't there was the lighthouse and now my maps app wasn't cooperating. I asked some unsuspecting men where I could find this world renowned structure and they had no idea (but they were very nice about it). They consulted the Google and sent me back from where I'd come. Eventually, I made it. With my feet soaked under my shoe covers and cold sinking into my bones, I parked Sapphire and went into the museum to try to patch what I had thought were waterproof cycling shoe covers. They weren't and this was the one time duct tape couldn't solve all my problems.

I checked out the museum for awhile and found much of it dedicated to the Coast Guard. Being "the graveyard of a thousand ships" made this a critical part of the region's history. It made sense that so many ships were lost to sea; there were rock jetties everywhere in the sea of unforgiving rock cliffs.

I was famished because I hadn't eaten anything since the tea and scone the previous afternoon and a small fig bar I'd acquired on the plane. There was a cafe at the lighthouse complex so I broke down and bought "homemade" (I wasn't sure whose home it was made in) vegetable soup accompanied by coffee with loads of cream. As expected in any tourist attraction, the prices were inflated, but I badly needed to eat. I enjoyed my coffee (aka cream with a drip of coffee), soup, and side black bread while working feverishly online to find a place to lay my head. I didn't want a second night desperately trying to find a place to pitch my tent. Plus, the rain would leave my tent rain cover soaked all the next day and it was legitimately almost freezing. Though it was officially 51°F, the "Real Feel" was 37°F due to frigid 17 mph winds. Snow was falling between rain drops.



Lobster nets



Hook Lighthouse

I spent about an hour trying to find where I would spend the night, really struggling to find anything under \$90. The gods intervened and I received a WarmShowers email from Sham letting me know I was welcome in Waterford for the night if I could just make it that far. It was already almost 2 PM and the EV1 routed me about 25+ miles. Doug worked from home out of the goodness of his heart to help me and found way to surpass the route's southern loop to Rathmoylan Cove by going straight from Passage East to Waterford. This would enable me to reach Waterford by sunset. I would be cutting off about 12 miles of the route, but I'd already added about 12 miles with my previous out-of-the-way forays. I finally had a plan for the night.



Hook Lighthouse shoreline

Before that plan took place, I had to enjoy the place where I was. Hook Lighthouse was probably built in the 1300s though its origins could date back to the fifth century. It looked pretty good for being such an old guy. Still in operation, it was the oldest continuously used lighthouse in the world. I chose not to take the tour that allowed visitors inside the lighthouse. It was expensive and I had walked up 115 stairs (the big draw for the tour) many times already. Instead, I moseyed around the grounds.

When it was time to go, a tour guide ran outside to remind me I'd left my battery pack charging. God bless her! I thanked her, finished stuffing everything into bags, donned all my rain gear and added more layers for warmth. Water saturated my trail runners and socks as I pedaled north. Surprisingly, the cold wasn't horrible because

the shoe covers worked like a wetsuit circulating water around my own body heat. I was more concerned about blisters if I couldn't keep my feet dry. And, without staying indoors for a night, they wouldn't dry meaning I would potentially have days and days of wet feet. Trench foot, for sure! The WarmShowers stay was a real boon.

As I headed north toward Waterford, there were times I wanted to stop and take pictures, but hated having to stop the bike, remove a Rubbermaid kitchen glove (the secret to keeping my hands dry and wind-proof), remove my phone, take the picture, put my phone back into a water-safe place, shove off trying to gain momentum, and then try and try again to get my



First roadkill sighting

left foot into the pedal cage. The result was that I would arrive sooner because I didn't want to stop. But, fast I was not. I stopped several times to drag my bike up hills, still committed to my 6% gradient rule. The fun part would have been zooming down those hills except for two new complications. First, I had to limit my speed because I wasn't comfortable enough with the bike's weight and my ability to balance it if I started swerving. Second, my brake pads were not happy with the rain. I now understood why cyclists in wet climates invested in disc brakes.

I was ecstatic when I made the ferry at Ballyhack. I'd hoped to see the castle there, but was more eager to reach Waterford so boarded the first ferry. I made the five minute crossing with about seven cars and was only €2 poorer. Then, it was up more hills and a much longer commute than I'd anticipated. Just my luck... I'd arrived at rush hour so there were cars everywhere and I was on a highway instead of trail. I wasn't normally nervous around cars, but the left-side driving, rush hour traffic, terrible weather, and exhaustion were wearing on me. I spent a lot of time walking beside Sapphire on sidewalks.



Sham smiling over our dinners

When we finally arrived, Sham welcomed me like an old friend and helped me carry everything up the stairs to the front door then up to the cozy room I'd have all to myself. I enjoyed a hot shower (hence the "WarmShowers" name) and Sham let me do laundry. Though I still had plenty of clean clothes, I wasn't sure when I'd be able to launder them again so took advantage of the opportunity. He was an incredible host!

To thank him for his kindness and generosity, I offered to take him to dinner. I told him I hadn't yet had a traditional pub night so we took a bus to The Reg. Sham had to stop at his office along the route so the bus driver kindly informed me when I was at the correct stop. She also pointed to the pub. Nice! I ordered right away. It was already almost 9 PM and I was super hungry. I ordered my first pint of hard cider (a drink I remembered fondly from my college days in the British Isles) and fish and chips and ate every morsel on my plate as we talked about Sham's many amazing world adventures. The conversation turned to Trump (not my doing), Ukrainian refugees, and immigration policies both in the USA and Ireland. Sham expressed concern that Ireland had so few Irish citizens anymore. During the conversation, Irish music played in the background. Around 10:30, The Reg switched to a night club so we finished our drinks and took the bus back to his home (a two-story row house with three bedrooms). I set out my clothes to dry (it seems dryers are uncommon everywhere except the USA) and settled into my room to journal. I was already two days behind!



The ferry



Arriving in Waterford from the ferry



Jessie, Sham, and Bigotes



My first WarmShowers home

A Day in Waterford

Cold, Rainy, and Somewhat Productive



Look—a church



Time for a prayer

Distance: 9.4 mi/15.1 km of walking (6.6 mi) and biking (2.8 mi)
Accommodation: Sham Chase, WarmShowers Host
Weather: Constant rain (often hard) and freezing “Feels Like” temperatures
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/v8qkrdznX36>

Again, I couldn't fall asleep. It was 3:30 AM when my body finally gave out and I was so happy when I was able to sleep until 10 AM. I knew the rain would persist throughout the day so was in no hurry.

Sham had convinced me to take a detour to the Copper Coast, not really out of the way, just a different more difficult path. He was from that area and reminisced of it's beauty. He knew people in the area and was working to find me a place I could lay my head indoors, out of the downpour, for the night. He did not succeed. In the meantime, I had things to do.

First was visiting two hardware stores where I finally found bungee cords, but the fuel for my camp stove was still illusive. Next, was a cycling shop for much-needed waterproof shoe covers. Apparently, these covers were a spring item and Ireland was at what they still considered the winter season. Should I have come the previous month to avoid the rain?!? What they had could keep my feet warm as had my previous covers, but that wouldn't do—I needed complete waterproofing.

I also asked at the bike shop about switching to a different gearing system. Doug was concerned about my ability to handle the hills in Eastern Ireland with Sapphire's racing set-up. The mechanics asked to see the bike to make a decision so sent me back to Sham's house to get it. Along the way, they had me stop at another bike shop where I might find waterproof shoe covers. Fortunately, the new shop had them, but they were too small so I returned them for a bigger size a few minutes later.

Upon seeing Sapphire, the mechanic at the first shop told me we could change her gearing and it would help me up the hills. The problem... he couldn't get the part for another two days. Furthermore... the new system wouldn't work well if I were carrying a lot of weight on the bike. Obviously, that wasn't an option so I saved myself over 100 euros for the replacement. Now, a little thought bubble over my head looked something like Doug saying: "this would be easier if you had a hybrid bike." The thought bubble on the other side of my head said: "This would be easier if you weren't carrying camping gear."

The guys at the bike shop, Elevate, were so nice and agreed to babysit Sapphire while I kept working on my shopping list. No, no one in Waterford had the type of gas canister I needed for my pocket rocket camp stove. Didn't Irish people camp? I would have to keep looking in the next big city, Cork, which I would be skipping if I went to the Copper Coast. C'est la vie. I'd already learned all good plans were simply pipe dreams or, at least, suggestions.

I got a recommendation for a pub where I ordered what I think was shepherd's pie with mincemeat. It tasted good even though I didn't know what mincemeat was. I'd always thought it was something made from gross meat [think: brains, tongue, intestines] and mixed with spices that smelled like Christmas. It didn't taste like Christmas and, to the best of my knowledge, didn't have the texture of either tongue or innards based on what I imagined tongue and innards would feel like.



My new Aladdin shoes



Mural on a city street



Lunch and journaling

Another travel idea I received in the podcast from the plane was to take the tour at House of Waterford so I walked there. Unfortunately, tours already ended for the day, but their gift shop was open so I could browse for things like model crystal cars and harps costing tens of thousands of euros. Mike said he didn't want any 2-for-1 €350 shot glasses.

Sham recommended I skip the crystal icon instead visiting a glass blowers shop. It was closed, too. I returned to Elevate, reclaimed Sapphire, and left a tip for their generosity. Between the hills, my discomfort riding in the city with lots of cars, and a braking system not compatible with wet surfaces, I walked Sapphire most of the way back home all the while wondering how I'd be able to keep carrying this weight over hilly terrain.

I broke down on my "no zero days" plan and asked if I could mooch another night at the house; Sham must have seen the desperation in my eyes and agreed. I really wanted to avoid the downpour and still needed to catch up with the world's eight hour time change. He and his girlfriend, Jessie from Monterey, Mexico, had a date night so I was left on my own for a peaceful night alone. I showered and had dinner—a piece of bread and cheese from their kitchen, Top Ramen from the gear I'd brought from home, and a chocolate covered shortbread cookie I'd picked up at a coffee shop Sham had recommended. I wrote and wrote and wrote, eventually catching up to modern times in my journal. Their cat, Bigotes, curled up on my lap as I wrote, nodded off, woke up, and repeated the act time and again. I was tired and hoped desperately that I'd be able to sleep through the night. It was 10 PM and I headed to bed.



The shot glasses Mike could live without



Need a crystal saxophone? Anyone? Anyone?



I love bakeries!

Crew Post

I asked if I could stay a second night in Waterford with my host and he was very kind and accommodating. I had a lot of chores to do and the rain was heavy and it was cold. I wasn't excited about wild camping in the cold and wet.

I walked all over looking for waterproof shoe covers, gas for my camp stove, and bungee cords. I succeeded in getting two out of three, hoping to get gas for the stove in Cork in a few days.

I have enough time tonight that I can catch up with my journaling and hopefully fall asleep at a reasonable hour. I just haven't been able to sleep until the wee hours of the morning and have only been able to manage five or six hours of sleep each night. I need to get into the right time zone.



The dock in Kilmore Quay

Waterford to Ballyvoile

Slow Going



The Waterford Greenway



Flat and fast

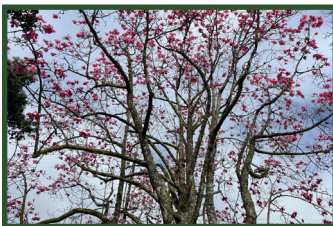
Distance: 39.3 mi/63.3 km
Ascent/Descent: +1904'/-1994' +580m/-608m
Average Moving Speed: 5.8 mph/9.3 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 9:42/6:44
Accommodation: Wild camping along Waterford Greenway
Weather: Windy and cold
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vYvEGj9n7w6>

I slept better, but still not well. No lallygagging and bitching... I needed to get the show on the road. I packed everything, left a thank you card for Sham, and hauled Sapphire and all my gear to the curb where I re-attached all the gear (the bike was too heavy for me to ever carry when fully loaded). I took time fiddling with my Garmin and anything else I could think to fiddle with (surely procrastinating) before waving goodbye to Sham, Jessie, and Bigotes. Off I pedaled at a snail's pace. Getting started seemed so hard! In retrospect... it seemed hard all day.

Sham gave me directions to get to the easy-to-find Waterford Greenway and I promptly got lost. I didn't have an address for the entry to the greenway so was trying to use the EV1



Mount Congreve Gardens



GPX file on my Garmin combined with directions provided by strangers along the route. It was a sad attempt complicated by terrible cold and horrible winds. The expected about 1.5 miles turned into 5 and the 10 minute route to the greenway took over an hour. Needless to say, I was so relieved and even woo-hoo'd aloud when I finally found it.

The Waterford Greenway was super nice—well-paved, wide, and (having been a rail-trail) was pretty flat. What it wasn't was protected from the weather. I'd always experienced greenways that flowed through trees on either side and was counting on this to block the wind. No such luck. The greenway ran right next to the River Suir where whitecaps were on the day's menu. Siri told me the temperature was somewhere in the 40s with a "real feel" of 33°F. I believed it. Throughout the day, wind speeds fluctuated between 19 and 22 mph, often as a headwind.

Despite the weather, the Irish were out en masse for Sunday strolls. Dog walkers, parents with babies, and runners and cyclists comfortably shared the trail. With my duck yellow rain jacket and touring gear, I was out of place until I eventually saw two young guys who looked like they might be bikepacking. Their bikes were enviously very light so they must have left their camping gear at home. Not me. I was in-it-to-win-it by making everything as hard as possible. My burden to carry.

Riding along, I saw a sign for Mount Congreve Gardens so pulled over. I'd read it was one of those things I should see so stashed my bike where I hoped no one would steal it and walked to the entryway. First was a café. Sham had offered to make me breakfast, but I told him it wasn't necessary because I'd stop for tea and a scone on the road. When I went inside and found the prices to be typical of tourist attractions, I decided to wait and eat elsewhere. Instead, I paid my €11 entry fee (purchasing it over the Internet on my phone because it was cheaper than having the lady at the counter ring up the sale for me—I be thinkin'!).

The visit took almost two hours walking through the park, but wasn't terribly impressive. I'd imagined Huntington Library's grounds or Kew Gardens. I was, however, there at the absolute worst time of year. Flowers would start blooming in just weeks. I read a lot of placards and eventually decided I needed to get back on the trail. Hungry and thirsty, I downed the granola bar and some well water Sham had insisted I take before leaving in the morning. A little blessing that thank goodness I hadn't refused.

I rode and rode and at one point heard this huge smash. I assumed it'd been from one of the houses so ignored it. Then, there was a noise on my back wheel. Oh, no! Had I broken a spoke or done something serious? Nope, just lost the bags sitting on the... what's that thing called... rear rack. I had to untangle bungee cords from my back wheel, return to the scene of the original "boom," and repack. The good news was that I was improving on packing so it was taking less time. I still didn't know where I hid everything, but figured that knowledge would come with time.

I was back on my way and eventually hit the Copper Coast, a UNESCO Global Geopark. Sham had really wanted me to visit the magically beautiful area. It certainly was, but the wind put a damper on how much I was willing to admit it.

I saw what I thought was a castle along the coastal shore and stopped to check it out. To my amazement, I learned it wasn't a castle; it was an ore mine. The area's geologically significant mining contributed to its UNESCO distinction. I took pictures of the not-a-castle and coast and, famished again, quickly hurried on. It was already almost 4 PM. Sham recommended the cafe at the Copper Coast Visitor Center, but they were closing just when I arrived. I asked the woman working where she recommended and her response

was that there was only one place where I could buy food nearby. The Engine Pub it would be. I had a hearty meal of what may have been cabbage, lots of mashed potatoes, ham, and cider while charging my phone and dozing off at my iPad's keyboard.

I needed a place to stay for the night and with no prospects decided to just ride until I found a place that looked like it would work. It was a full five miles later when I was back on the EV1 post-Copper Coast detour that I finally found a patch of land that would work. There were no "No Camping" signs, but it was right on the side of the trail. I'd hoped for something more private where I would be less likely to get that knock in the middle of the night, but hadn't had any luck. It was 7 PM, already 20 minutes after sunset so I laid out my tent, erected it amidst pokey foliage, crawled in, set my alarm so I'd awaken before people hit the trail, and journaled until I could no longer keep my eyes open. I was happy to be wild camping. It wasn't so bad to be outside as long as there was no rain and this old lady was tucked into a -10°F sleeping bag.



The Copper Coast



Not a castle



Crew Post

I'm sending this early because I may lose cell service. It's been a slow day. What should have been a 1.5-mile ride to the Waterford Greenway ended up being a miserable, hilly, confusing, cold 5 miles accompanied by 22-mph winds. That may sound bad, and it was horrible, but there was no rain to otherwise damper the weather. It wasn't a great confidence builder. The Waterford Greenway, though, was really nice if you didn't factor in the day-long winds and 34°F "feels like" temperature (according to the app... I'm not exaggerating).

I made a stop at Mount Congreve Gardens which would be beautiful in any season other than this one and I took a detour to see the Copper Coast (a UNESCO Global Geopark site) where I enjoyed dinner at a pub in Bunmahon. At 30 miles so far and still 1.5 hours before sunset, I'm not done for the day. I'll just ride until I find a hidey-hole to pitch the tent.



The Waterford Greenway



Dinner and journaling

Ballyvoile to Kinsalebeg

Last Night of Camping



Irish Tidy Town



Tea and a scone... ahhhh

Distance: 36.5 mi/58.7 km
Ascent/Descent: +1824'/-1947' +556m/-594m
Average Moving Speed: 6.2 mph/10 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 8:51/5:46
Accommodation: Wild Camping
Weather: Nice
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vE6J5gdN3gO> (AM)
<https://www.relive.com/view/vXOnAGwzpBv> (PM)

I felt guilty about wild camping along the trail, but it was a very comfortable, grassy area and the grass was a bit flattened so I may not have been the only one to have slept there. I finally slept well even though I was a bit cold in the night despite the -10°F bag and had to add layers. I switched off my alarm at 6 AM because I was so comfortable. I'd not worry about offending a dog walker. I'd heard two morning runners before I finally decided to drag myself into the day. It took just over an hour to break camp. The sun was shining and it was warm so I was able to dry the tent before re-packing it. There hadn't been any rain, but the condensation on the inside of my tent was pretty bad. I needed to learn how to avoid that in the future.

The trail continued on the Waterford Greenway and I really enjoyed it. Yes, it was a lot of tree-lined path, but I liked tree-lined path and the wind it broke. The sun was such a wonderful morning gift. As soon as the greenway ended, there were great views of the ocean with the tide out and mud flats housing lots of sea birds.

Breakfast of tea and a fruit scone (which I learned simply meant it included raisins) came within the first five miles at a darling coffee shop. Local walkers and cyclists sat outdoors soaking in the rays while I enjoyed the indoor warmth and ambiance. While there, I received a message from Doug who informed me there was an alternative route he'd newly created for the EV1 that was easier and shorter to Youghal. That sounded ideal so I downloaded it and thought I'd added it to my watch when leaving the coffee shop. After the first 15 miles of that new route, I was pretty sure I was on the old route. It didn't seem short and it was in no way easy. There were two gigantic hills that went on-and-on-and-on. I walked both. Sapphire and I were getting good at that. I seldom dropped her as I'd done in previous days. We both needed to lose weight.

The coastline was marvelous with bluffs decorated in green grass and black rock that descended as cliffs into a sea crashing against black jetties. I reached the town of Ardmore and remembered reading on the EV1 website that there was a 2.5mi/4km cliff walk so parked Sapphire (actually locking her to a fence this time, something I'd not been doing often) and started walking. First, I saw the fishermen of the area fiddling with the boats they'd just brought in. Then I saw a gaggle of teenagers, two of whom were jumping into the frigid sea! Later that day, I saw a woman walking from the shore into the water. What was it with the Irish!?!

I made it to the start of the official "Cliff Walk" and learned that it served as the destination for pilgrims wanting to honor St. Declan. It started with a little stone lookout building perched perfectly to see a larger structure in the background along with those amazing



cliffs. Then there was the holy well. Pilgrims started the final part of their pilgrimage there. They took some of the water and used it to create the sign of the cross followed by saying the Lord's Prayer and rosary. I did the sign of the cross and Lord's Prayer because it couldn't hurt, but skipped the rosary because I didn't have one nor did I know the words. That probably ruined the whole thing cursing me to infinity and beyond. Following the holy well, pilgrims walked clockwise three times around the path repeating the rosary and then splashed with more holy water. I didn't do the three loops, either. Heathen! The walk was truly spectacular because of the cliffs (I supposed that was how it got the name "Cliff Walk").

The top like a sentinel was a huge structure meant to warn ships from its dangerous waters. It wasn't a lighthouse; instead, the 12 men that worked there used a series of actions like raising flags to alert sailors and the next towns of potential disastrous events. They found over time that the whole flag business wasn't working well given that you can't always see very far in Ireland—the rain and fog and, well, dark of night. Also along the walk, there were lots of what looked like recently harvested fields. I saw a truck loaded with something resembling turnips that just screamed "farmer" to me. It reminded me of something I learned the day before that Congreve had said: "Want to be happy for a day, get drunk. Want to be happy for a week, butcher a pig. Want to be happy for a month, get married. Want to be happy your entire life, become a gardener."

I wasn't sure where I lost the trail, but it was no worry because I was able to see two worthwhile attractions during my foray off-course. First was a beautiful white pony that let me pet her. I tried to get a picture with the church spire behind her, but it just made her look like a unicorn. I liked it so sent it to the crew saying: "And you said they weren't real!" I also walked by the town church, another highlight I'd read about on the EV1 website.



Sunset was two hours away so I needed to get food and find a place to camp. I asked some locals for a good pub that served food and they told me the one in Ardmore was already closed. Instead, they recommended Whitehorses Restaurant. That seemed to be my only choice so I walked in, sat down, and organized my multitude of junk (i.e., devices needing power, iPad, glasses, ...). When I saw the menu containing about six main course items, I asked the server to choose for me. Then, I asked the cost—€27! OMG! I was glad I'd be wild camping that night since I'd just shelled I out my entire day's budget in one meal.

I think I received some type of pork cutlet that came with potatoes and vegetables. It tasted great and the staff let me stay until after closing. They realized I was cycling and were really accommodating. I really appreciated them so left a thank you postcard. It was nice to have a little something to leave behind for those who were so kind, even just a simple thank you note. I hoped that some who received these cards would look at my website, see my past journals, wait six months, download the Ireland journal, and read how much they were appreciated in print. As I was leaving, I told one of the servers I had a picture to show her. Because the restaurant name was Whitehorses, I showed her my unicorn picture. She loved it, but not because of the imaginative horn. She knew the horse (as I'm sure everyone in town did) and just smiled. The pony would make the journal, too.

I had about 30 minutes before dark so started riding. The goal was to find a place to camp before sunrise that wouldn't require me to knock on anyone's door. I'd started looking for possible places the day before so had an idea of the type of spot I needed. It would be an unused field surrounded in foliage to hide my tent and it would have an open, vine-entrenched gate. That would mean that no one had been there for awhile and surely wouldn't care about hosting me for a night. I found my residence just after sunset, a field sitting fallow for quite while. The weed-covered gate was open so I figured it was probably mostly abandoned and forgotten. There was a large foliage berm between the field and highway so I didn't think anyone would know I was there. Perfect!

I set up the tent in record time meaning I was down to less than 20-minutes—a dismal record, I knew. I'd been as low as 8 minutes when on the John Muir Trail and 8 years more agile. Everything was in the tent so I gave myself a wet wipe bath, brushed my teeth, and dressed for bed. It was already cold, 48°F inside the tent so I gathered lots of warm gear within reach before spending about an hour journalling and another hour planning the route for the next day.



Home for the night

Kinsalebeg to Carrigaline

A Bit of a Snafu



A morning sighting



Morning low tide

Distance: 42.6 mi/68.6 km
Ascent/Descent: 1180'/-1165' +360 m/-355m
Average Moving Speed: 7.9 mph/12.7 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 8:46/5:24
Accommodation: AirB&B hosted by Aisling
Weather: Overcast then Gorgeous

Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vdvm4D4kGNq>

I was up at 6:30 AM, but it was cold outside so I procrastinated by reviewing maps and reading about what I should see along the day's path. I eventually packed up and was ready to go at an unacceptably late 9:30. What always takes so long, you ask? I lose everything. Yes, inside the tent. Then, I realize whatever was missing was already in one of those already closed bags. But, not that bag... the other one... or was it the other one? You wonder how it's possible to lose things in such a small space? Yeah, so do I. I lost a cycling jersey the day before and didn't find it until I saw something weird in my shadow. It was my shirt hanging from the waist of my pants. I couldn't help but laugh... it was a camper's equivalent of walking around dragging toilet paper on a shoe. Thank goodness I was in the middle of nowhere. Road traffic filled my night with white noise while the morning greeted me with

lots of birdsong and cow moo'ing. During my extended wake-up period, I learned there was a shorter and much easier way to get to Youghal (pronounced "Yawl"). I bid farewell to my nice campsite and was "on the road again" to the tune of the John Denver song.

Doug told me the EuroVelo organization focused on cyclist safety above all else so avoided every major road when possible. There were lots of parabolic loops in the Irish EV1 as a result. I chose to live dangerously (my *modus operandi* anyway) and took the busier bridge. I lived. It wasn't bad at all for someone used to riding 100-milers (called "centuries" in cycling parlance) on the US-95 in Vegas. The Irish drivers thus far had been very accommodating by consistently giving me a wide berth.

The main visitor draw in Youghal was the clock gate tower. Vehicles drove through the stone gate that was decorated with clocks on the top. The story behind it was that one of the original gates of the town began collapsing in the 1770s so the town replaced it with this clock gate tower in 1777. Interestingly, they built the tower with only three clock faces. The townspeople didn't think those west of the wall needed to know the time. In addition to telling time, the tower's first purpose was to house the town guard and it even housed a temporary jail for those awaiting arraignment or punishment. One of those punishments occurred in 1798 when several members of the United Irish Party were hanged from its windows.



Youghal clock gate tower

Right next to the tower were several cafés so I stopped in the first one with scones in the window. A woman saw that I was on a bike and asked if I'd be taking the new greenway between Youghal and Cobh. This was the updated track Doug sent the day before that he'd assured me was shorter and easier. Oh, that explained why I was cursing the previous day's ridiculous amount of climbing; he'd been referencing this. Woo-hoo! I enjoyed my tea and scone knowing I was in for an easier afternoon. I was off to



Midleton-Youghal Greenway



Stopping along the greenway



Grazing through history



Creative repurposing



Ferry docking



Fred's shop from heaven

Cobh (which I learned was pronounced “Cove”) on pleasantly flatter terrain.

A few missed turns and I was on the Midleton-Youghal Greenway. The tree-lined greenway seemed to be a point of pride for the locals. It was 14 mi/23 km long at this point and already had amenities like bicycle repair stations, carparks, and toilets. The path traveled through several towns so I stopped and took pictures of a church and other cool old buildings. I still wasn't over my love of grazing sheep and I especially loved seeing cows grazing among the ruins of what must have been the home of an extremely wealthy person centuries ago.

As soon as the greenway ended, the climbing commenced. It was 2:30 PM and I'd already completed 33 miles with plans to go another 10-20 miles. I'd been having trouble shifting gears for several days and wanted to have a mechanic check it when I next saw a bike shop. I hadn't seen a shop and the worst finally happened. Sapphire stopped shifting. She was in her easiest gear (thank goodness) because it happened during one of those awful climbs. I wasn't sure if I could still ride her or not; I worried riding might cause further damage. But, when I considered the alternative—pushing her 8-10 miles—I figured I'd give it a try. Her wheels worked just fine so gravity gave us a good boost on the downhills. The flats... not so much. I would just spin aimlessly until I'd fall below 6-7 mph at which point I would gain a minuscule amount of power. I quickly sent a text to Doug who was on it immediately. In the meantime, I met a wonderful young man, Preston, a math major at the university, who said I could take the bus to the next town. He helped me get on the right bus, put my bike in the holding area (a chore given its weight and gear hanging from every bar, tube, and wheel), told me when to get off the bus and where to go, and then... get this... even took the bike off the bus for me. Preston told me he was on his way to the gym at the college. I figured after picking up Sapphire in her full regalia, he could probably skip the gym.

Doug contacted me with the name of a shop that would be open for two hours and was just minutes off the actual EV1. I had to become a speed demon. I thanked Preston profusely and boarded a ferry. The ferry ticket taker didn't even charge me (I guess I looked pretty pathetic by that point). Once off, I still had about 6 mi/10 km to go before reaching the shop. I found a bus stop and waited... and waited. It was over ten minutes late and upon arriving, I was informed bikes weren't allowed on the bus. Arghh!

Sapphire and I sucked it up. We rode 5 mph except on downhills and made it to the shop at 4:25 PM. Closing time was 4:30. Whew! Fred was awesome. He immediately identified the problem, said he could fix it first thing in the morning, and made a quick work-around so I could ride Sapphire to where I would stay that night. He offered to let me camp on his personal property, but it was six miles away and neither of us trusted Sapphire (poor thing was sick after all) to make the 12-mile round trip. I wouldn't be able to ride around looking for a campsite outside of town so started looking online for places to stay. Everything I found was well over €100 until I checked AirBnB and found a steal at €80. I booked it and happily checked in. Fred said I could leave my camping gear at his shop.

From the cute little cottage behind my host's (whose name was Aisling which means "Ireland") home, I went for dinner still stinky and gross from a day's hard labor. I only found one non-fast food non-foreign-cuisine restaurant. It was expensive like the previous night, but I needed to sit down and process all that had happened during the day.

It worried me that the shifters may have failed because Sapphire was carrying too much weight. I was also stressed that I'd been covering so few miles each day and it'd be unlikely I'd be able to complete even the Irish EV1 (not permitting me to ride in Northern Ireland) at this rate. Those hills were killing me; I was walking so much. What if I made a big change? What if I lost the weight? Ditching the camping gear would help with the ascents and enable higher daily mileage. I'd surely enjoy the cycling more and I certainly wouldn't miss the 3-4 hours each day that it took to make and break camp. I could be warm every night in a hotel/AirBnB/WarmShowers home/hostel. That sounded really nice. What didn't sound nice was the €100+ nightly fee this new plan would require.

Mike and I talked via WhatsApp and he was okay with me ditching the camping gear. Ryan and I also talked and he gave me some "Would you rather do this with the money or that with the money?" questions and made me feel a little better about choosing to stop camping. I put the question out to the crew and every single person that commented said to ditch the gear. I'd made up my mind. Logistics were next.

I had fish and chips and hard cider while doing all this pondering and communicating. I racked my brain for the best options for dealing with the unneeded camping gear. My first thought was to take the train to Dublin the next day, drop them off at Duff's Cycles, then take the train back. My second plan was to leave them in Carrigaline and then take the train back from Dublin once I was done. This made more sense because it would be more manageable without Sapphire in tow. An option suggested by Denise (a crew member) was to donate the gear. That, for me, was out of the question. I'd been upgrading to ultralight camping gear for well over a decade and was finally happy with my set-up. A fourth, and very popular, option was to mail the gear back to myself. Doug even offered to have me mail it to him in Dublin to help with the cost. Later, I came up with yet another plan. Perhaps Jamie (my niece studying at Trinity College in Dublin) and a friend would be up for a trip to Carrigaline?

I finished dinner still unsure of how I would proceed, returned to the AirBnB and did laundry (free!), showered, and journaled. I didn't have to make any decisions before the morning.

Crew Post

There's been a bit of a snafu. After a beautiful morning making great progress, I hit some serious hills and my shifters stopped shifting. Doug, the EV1 Ireland trail manager (who's been an amazing help every day of this trip), helped me find a bike shop. I nursed Sapphire the seven miles to the shop and was assured she can be fixed tomorrow morning.

So, here's the thing. I question if this might be the result of all the extra weight. Also, I feel guilty every time I wild camp in Ireland because I know it's not legal. And, I'm not covering many daily miles which I attribute (whether true or not) to all the extra weight. I have the option of ditching all the camping gear (10-15 pounds) and continuing forward staying in hotels every night. The problem is that hotels are really expensive, averaging about \$100/night. What are your thoughts?

Day 7 (March 26)



Lots to think about



Carrigaline AirBnB



Harvest time in Ardmore

Carrigaline to Kinsale

Back in Business



Distance: 27.5 mi/44.3 km
Ascent/Descent: +1899'/-1639' +274m/-500m
Average Moving Speed: 6.1 mph/9.8 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 5:52/4:41
Accommodation: AirB&B hosted by Con
Weather: Overcast with intermittent sprinkles
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vevW5pkx7G6>



I was up with the alarm today at 7:30 AM so I'd be at the bike shop the moment it opened. I arrived 15 minutes early and Fred opened his doors shortly thereafter. He took my precious baby into his hands and said he'd call me within an hour or two. He also gave me a box I could use to pack my camping gear (bike shops are always good places to get huge boxes). I had a lot to do before receiving that call. Not the least of which was to try to get my camping gear to Dublin. Duff Cycles agreed to accept the box and keep it with my bike bag until my return. Hallelujah!

I returned to the AirB&B (a cute little cabin behind the landowner's home), packed, and put the items I'd be mailing to Dublin into Fred's box. Then, I carried that heavy, awkward monstrosity to the post office about 3/4 of a mile away. Though the service wasn't great, a

first for me in Ireland, they were able to mail the 14-pound box for only €13! I was dumbfounded! I couldn't send a small package across Las Vegas for that cost.

One errand done, I went on a hunt for several items. The reading glasses I carried on my phone broke on the plane and the expensive replacements I'd purchased a few days before also broke. I also needed a sleeping bag alternative. Keeping the -10° bag didn't make sense because I wouldn't need that much warmth, plus it was four pounds I could off-load. But, staying in hostels would require something other than my sleeping sheet (which I'd kept) for warmth. Finally, I needed new rain pants. This one really frustrated me because I'd just bought the pants at REI for a pittance on sale before leaving the States. They worked great; they were gigantic and I could dress like I was taking on the abominable snowman underneath and still have room to pedal. And, dammit, I had my light gloves in the pants pocket when I lost them. What did you do with your pants, you ask? I wasn't exactly sure, but thought I must have taken them off in a restaurant because I didn't want to get everything wet and then left them on the floor. Smart. I hoped there was some poor Irish guy walking around in a nice pair of men's XL waterproof pants now; I'd hate to think they went in the trash.

I tried three stores and finally had luck at the third, Dunne's. They had inexpensive men's rain pants (~€12) and I was able to find the too-big size I needed. They also had the glasses. I didn't want to spend another €20+ and was relieved to find they were only €3! I left with only one item remaining on my list and was pretty happy with that.

Fred called after an hour-and-a-half to say Sapphire was ready. He'd put on a new cassette with more power gears for climbing hills and fixed the shifters. Fred was a gem! He only charged for the parts (a measly €35). I'd tried to give him an extra €35, but he refused until he realized he didn't have change so let me leave a tip of €5, embarrassing since he'd saved my bacon. I left him a thank you postcard and he emailed me later to say how much he appreciated the card and it was going up on the shop wall.

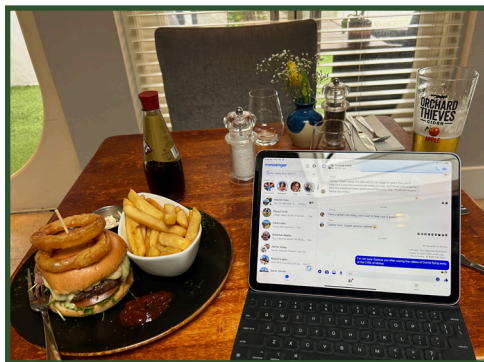
I was really enjoying being able to give out the postcards. Shawna and I had discussed what might be a good thing to take as gifts for those who helped us along the way. Playing cards from Vegas are the standard gift, but they were too heavy. We thought and thought until Shawna suggested postcards. They could include our pictures and contact information and would be perfect for writing short, personalized thank you notes. They were working great. People often asked me where to get more information about my adventures and I could just refer them to the postcard. Thank you, Shawna, for such a good idea! When she decided not to join me in Ireland, I had to switch to just my picture on the card. Ryan and I drove to the famous "Welcome to Las Vegas" sign on the Strip and he snapped Sapphire and me (in my Las Vegas Triathlon Club jersey) for posterity.

Sapphire ushered me back to the AirB&B where I reloaded the bike. She was now 14-pounds lighter and with a much sleeker, sexier frame. I was jealous of her since I was definitely in need of a sleeker, sexier frame. Off we ventured. Then, off again a different

direction. Nope, not that way either. Or, the next. The fourth try finally had us on our way to the next town. The first 14 miles (including the multiple first attempts to find my way out of town) were partially on lovely greenway and partially on a shark-tooth elevation chart. I was thoroughly enjoying the trip when the road was nice and relatively flat; the alternative wasn't so nice.

That's when I saw the sign—2.5 mi/4 km to Carrigaline. WHAT? I'd just covered 14 miles walking Sapphire up countless feet of vertical terrain. We hadn't even seen anything all that cool and were basically back where we started. What was this travesty! I finally figured it out. Being on the EV1, I was avoiding major roads again regardless of the consequences to my mental sanity and physical discomfort. This left me questioning why I was following the EV1 in the first place. Yes, I wanted to bike around Ireland, but I also wanted to see Ireland, not just the coast, farmland, and peoples' homes. I'd read about all the cool stuff Ireland had to offer; I wanted to see it. I made another major decision and would embrace a new plan; I would avoid "junk (or dog) miles" (a term often used by crew-member Rosanne meaning miles that weren't filled with delightful wonder). I would take the EV1 when I felt like it, but not marry myself to it. I would follow the coast (after all, that was where most of Irish history as well as modern culture happened), but alter the path so I could more easily (this may have been the true motivation) and quickly reach the landmarks I sought. The decision was freeing.

Google Maps brought me to Kinsale, just 9 miles as opposed to the 14 and lots of ascents of the EV1. This new decision just might



Dinner and work time



Caution/ Quidditch Game Ahead



Wrong turn, again

work. I hit a pub for a pint of hard cider, a burger, and fries—my first meal of the day not counting the leftover fried fish I’d recovered from the refrigerator in the morning. I spent the time talking to Mike, Ryan, and Winter and finding a reasonably-priced place to lay my head for the night eventually booking an AirB&B under €80—the absolute cheapest place I could find and exorbitantly more than my daily budget. Lest anyone think the AirB&B was a wise choice, note that the short 2.5-mile included a climb of almost 400’. Saving money was costing an arm and a leg... literally. I walked Sapphire to the final peak for the day, celebrating the accomplishment and checked in for a shower and quiet space to journal.



Thank You Postcard

Kinsale to Burgatia

Lusitania, Friary, and Lost



Goodbye to my AirB&B hosts



Distance: 43 mi/69 km
Ascent/Descent: +2650'/-2580' +808m/-786m
Average Moving Speed: 5.3 mph/8.5 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 11:16/8:11
Accommodation: AirB&B hosted by Elizabeth
Weather: Cold, wet, and windy
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vevW5pxGGG6>

Choosing to ignore the coastal EV1 route made my life a lot easier. I just had to figure out the direction I wanted to go each day and what to see along the way. There were several attractions on my list for the day, but when discussing them with my AirB&B host, I learned that the first place—Charles Fort—would mean backtracking. I figured I'd be seeing plenty more forts so could miss that one.

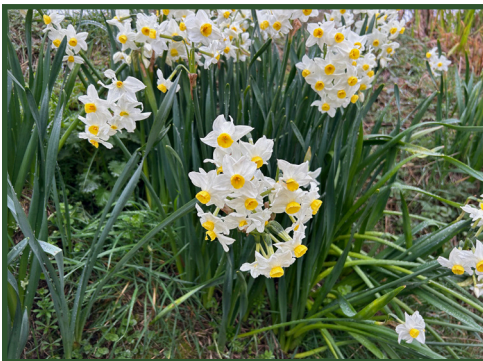
After packing, repacking, and doctoring my gear (i.e., cutting off the bottoms of my new rain pants and covering the cuts with duct tape—they were a men's large and were dragging on the floor), I was ready to go. Mom and baby waved goodbye from the front door while older son insisted on putting on his rain boots, climbing to the top of the little berm by their home, and waving goodbye as I rode off. Poor thing hadn't realized how long it was going to take me to get moving and surely froze his little tushy off! It was cold, rainy, and windy—the Irish trifecta.



Fixing my new rain pants



Lusitania Museum



It's spring!

My new first stop was the Lusitania Memorial and Museum. I learned it wouldn't be opened when I arrived, but would still be able to see all the outdoor monuments. I started the audiobook "The Red Tent" to keep my mind off the pelting rain and wind and rode to the monument. Excited to visit the monument because my mother's sister was a fan of Titanic history, I quickly learned my error. The Carpathia (also of the Cunard Line) was the first to arrive and saved all 705 survivors from the lifeboats, not the Lusitania. Whoops.

The Lusitania was actually remembered for being a casualty of a 1915 German U-boat attack during World War I. Germany put ads in U.S. newspapers warning travelers about traveling on these ships because the ships could be mistaken for war vessels; vessels Germany had the right to shoot down. Unknown to the Germans and most of the Irish, though, the Lusitania did in fact have weapons of war aboard. Despite not knowing, the Germans shot down this civilian ship killing 1,198 of the 1,959 souls aboard. That just wasn't nice and contributed to the U.S. joining the because of the aggressive Germans.

The monument was really neat. There was a museum and tower to see, but they were not open so I only walked around the grounds reading placards. One of these wrote of a memorial wall behind the rope that said "Only ticket holders beyond this point." There was no one there and I'd ridden a long way in that miserable weather. Plus, I couldn't see the ocean to truly appreciate the actual site of the bombing. Discouraged, I gave myself permission and ducked under the rope to see the memorial. I was glad I did because it was really touching. But... when leaving the forbidden area, an employee drove up. I asked her if she wanted me to pay and she let me go without paying or even calling the police for trespassing. She surely saw my bike out front and figured anyone riding in that rain had to be mentally ill and deserved a break.

Then, I did what I did a lot; I went the wrong direction. When riding during the day, I usually had no problem turning at the correct intersections just



Harry Potter and the flying car

as required. When I wasn't moving, though, I would get turned around and not be sure which way to start. This inevitably meant I would go the wrong way and then have to backtrack and start over. It was so frustrating and far too common!

My next stop was a coffee shop recommended by my AirB&B host. It was great and with the lifting fog offered a beautiful view of the ocean while riding away. I had tea and a "fruit" scone (which I learned meant it had raisins in it) while reviewing maps and chatting with ChatGPT about where to visit over the next few days. "She" was really helpful. While at the shop, I also spoke briefly with a woman about the trip. She was also a cyclist and unbeknownst to me was meeting a friend for tea to discuss walking the Camino. Her warm Irish welcome and morning smile motivated me to write a quick thank you note, leaving the postcard with her. She emailed me later in the day to thank me for the card and say: "I admire you for your courage and strength to take on such a challenge and wish you good luck on your tour around Ireland. May the wind always be at your back." That was so sweet. I immediately got back to her and said she could read more about the Camino in the journal linked from the card I'd left. What an unexpected, happy coincidence.

I rode another ten miles to Timoleague Abbey and Friary. This huge church/educational complex dated to the 13th or 14th century and served in the 1700s as the equivalent of a modern-day university. Students came to learn and while there produced manuscripts. Many of the students were French so they put a stone fleur-de-lis on one of the walls. Like St. Patrick using the shamrock to teach of the three-in-one God (or so the story goes), the fleur-de-lis was a way the French taught about the holy trinity. Unfortunately, I never found it on the wall. I also learned there was a small window in one of the walls used to give the Eucharist to lepers. Lepers were permitted to enter a secluded part of the church where priests would place the Eucharist on a little spoon and pass it through a hole to those outside. A really generous god, eh? [Perhaps this is a bit judgmental since



Enjoying the view



Timoleague Abbey and Friary





leprosy is a bit contagious so could infect the entire friary]. A third surprising feature of the abbey was all the recent gravestones randomly placed within its walls. I asked ChatGT why all the grave markers were from the 1900s and she informed me that many bodies had been buried inside the church for centuries. Grave markers only became popular in the 1900s so that was when they started appearing. People had been burying their loved ones within the church walls for centuries because they felt it was blessed to be buried so close to a holy place. I wondered how many sets of bones had appeared as later burials took place on top of older burials.

Michael Collins

The next stop was Clonakilty. I'd hoped to visit the Michael Collins Museum, but the last tour started 20 minutes before my arrival. I was bummed because I had no idea who he was; I needed to learn about him before leaving Ireland. A statue was outside his house that provided a little information. Also in the neighborhood was an old church, probably where he worshipped when young. The church served as a re-purposed post office on this day. Was putting post offices in old churches a good way to thwart violence against postal workers? Maybe we needed to try it in the USA. Across from the post office/church was a cathedral. Fortunately, it was open to the public so I walked in, said some prayers, and took some pictures. It reminded me of the Camino's Spanish cathedrals. While beautifully adorned, this one didn't seem to have the dripping gold stolen from the Incas ubiquitous in Spain.

I'd received an invite through WarmShowers to stay with a person in Clonakilty, but had wavered about when I would arrive so they finally swooshed my request to the curb. Understandable. I learned from the experience; be flexible about when your WarmShowers guests arrive. They can never fully plan what lies ahead. In lieu of the no-longer-available free offer, I'd found an AirB&B outside Clonakilty. It was getting late and I had about seven miles to go so picked up a pre-made dinner at a butcher shop and brought it with me to enjoy at my home-for-the-night.

It looked like a nice little jaunt from Clonakilty to where I'd reserved the space—Burgatia. I started out using Google bike maps and was quickly disheartened. The ascents and descents were equal to what I'd experienced on the EV1 and there was even an about half-mile section on a dirt road. Ryan entertained me via WhatsApp while I walked my bike over the rocks and until I found a paved downhill. Upon reaching the bottom, of course, I realized I'd gone the wrong direction so had to lug Sapphire all the way back up.



Post office/
convenience store



Cathedral by post office



But, wait, maybe it was that way? I should ride down again. Which left was that? There were two lefts. Does the map mean that right turn or the one in 50 feet? Seriously, another downhill that ends in an uphill? I was so wet, cold, and frustrated and was even beginning to get nervous. The sun was just about down and my phone (with the so-called directions) was dying. It'd been 53°F ("Feels Like" 47°F) with 21 mph winds earlier in the day and was getting worse as the sun descended and rain picked up to include drops slamming directly into my face. I had to do something different so told Google Maps I was a car instead of a bike. It was a godsend. Yes, I was on a busier road, but it was much flatter keeping me from needing to walk every few minutes. Plus, it was much shorter. I just had to make it to the AirB&B before my phone died. I didn't.

I was moving quickly and strongly on the national road and was going the right direction. I checked my phone to see my next turn was a right and then it turned itself off; the battery was dead. I would either need to ask neighbors how to get to the AirB&B (though I didn't know my host's name or address—those were in my phone and packed iPad) or stop in the pouring rain, pull out my external battery, connect the cord while still being able to access it under all my extra outerwear, and wait for it to reboot. I made the right turn and miracle of miracles! My host's husband was waiting in his car with his lights on and window down. He gave this long Irish explanation of how to get to the house which I eventually realized was just a "take your first left, your first right, and go a long way until you reach the bottom of a huge hill and see a silver car." I was so happy after having honestly been scared. It was dark and cold and I'd been going in circles and then flying blind without a map. I followed his directions to a "T" requiring I push Sapphire up several hills with (no kidding!) 13% grades and then walked her down similar grades because I couldn't trust the brakes and my maneuvering skills in the rain on grades that intense.

I reached the bottom of the hill and this "Motel 6" had kept its lights on for me! Elizabeth, my host, greeted me at the door, took pictures to show how bedraggled I looked and how happy I was to have arrived, then ushered Sapphire and me to the laundry room where I could put my horse to bed tired and wet. Elizabeth was so helpful, kind, and understanding. Surely, she also thought I had a mental disorder given my willingness to put myself through what I had that night. Despite my looking and feeling like a drowning rat, she eventually welcomed me into the rest of her home. While she went to bed, I had a shower and ate my cottage pie, potato something, chocolate chip cookie, and cider at the kitchen table writing about the day.

Crew Post: The cycling was a bit better today as I'm getting more comfortable with the new weight, but heavy rain, cold ("feels like" 47°F), strong winds (21 mph), and too many hills (up to 13% grades) continued to complicate things. Nevertheless, I had a nice day for awhile. I visited the Lusitania Memorial and Timoleague Abbey and Friary and had a nice ride to Clonakilty with the fog lifting briefly. Then the NOT fun really started. Google Maps had me on dirt roads and wasn't clear about where to turn so I would ride down a hill only to have to walk right back up it. Over-and-over-and-over. Heavy rains after sunset with a dying phone battery had me in the worried-zone. I finally found my AirB&B thanks to my host's husband who found me in his car and gave me directions. So relieved to have made it and so glad tomorrow is a short day with little or no rain.



Burgatia to Bantry

“Overlander” and Famine



My AirB&B after the rain



Burgati breakfast spread

Distance: 32.9 mi/52 km
Ascent/Descent: +2186’/-2452’ +666m/-747m
Average Moving Speed: 6.4 mph/10.3 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 7:38/5:11
Accommodation: WarmShowers (Lily de la Cour)
Weather: Gorgeous (a little chilly in late afternoon)
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/v1vjPDgdzY6>

I awoke early to Elizabeth’s beautiful breakfast table. It looked over fields of green pastures on this sunny morning. I ate bowl after bowl of granola and she also made me an egg for that needed protein. I packed and she wished me a good continued trip. She had been such a beautiful example of Irish kindness.

I began the day with a huge climb (surprising, right?). Seriously... it was 5.5 miles of walking beside Sapphire with a 706’ gain and took almost two hours. Hashtag—worth it! I was visiting Drombeg Stone Circle. I’d envisioned it would look like Stonehenge or the magical stones in the Netflix show “Overlander,” but it was more like a Lego version. It was so neat! There was the circle of tall stones that during the winter solstice would align with the main axis of the circle. I wasn’t quite sure what that meant, but I bet it’d be really neat to witness. My Google search didn’t help to remedy my confusion.



Drombeg Stone Circle



Poser on the altar



Bathtub view 3000 years ago

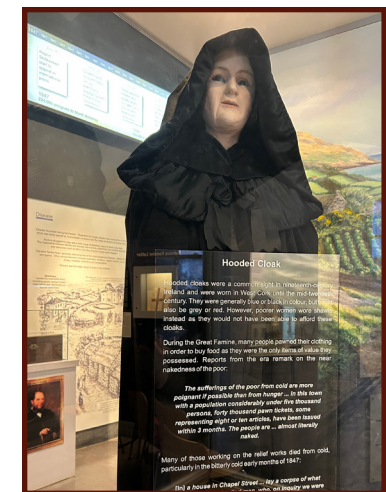


Stone Circle from a distance

The circle was made of 17 stones with two tall stones serving as the entrance and one flat stone across from these that looked like an altar. The circle was used for burial ceremonies and when excavated beginning in 1957, several bodies were found including that of a child carbon dated to be from ~1100-800 BCE. Beside the circle were a few other structures. One, as I understood it, was a kitchen. Water flowed into it and they would put stones from the fire into the water to boil it. This was used to boil meat, but thought to possibly be used for bathing as well. It was quite the scenic backdrop for a bath!

My travels took me ten more miles west to Skibbereen. I'd heard wonderful reviews about the Skibbereen Heritage Center as a place to learn about the famine. I was so frustrated I wasn't able to find more audiobooks on the history of Ireland and was glad to have this opportunity to learn. It was later than I'd hoped to arrive, but I was so glad I made the trip. I spent over an hour there and could have spent several more.

The museum was so well designed, telling the story of the Irish horror in chronological and uncensored detail. I learned a lot. For instance, there was no alternative to potatoes in terms of growing efficiency. In fact, it would take triple the amount of land to provide as much food in oats or wheat. Early in the seven-year blight, three-quarters of the potato crops were so "diseased and rotten that even pigs declined to eat them." (Illustrated London News, 1845) I also learned the Irish were big eaters and had to read the placard several times to confirm what I'd read: men ate around 14 pounds of potatoes a day, women ate about 11, and children ate about 5 pounds. That meant eating a tenth of their body weight in potatoes everyday and didn't seem right. I knew that Louis and Clark Expedition members ate six pounds of bison a day (in addition to other food, I'm sure) and thought that seemed ridiculously voracious. I forgot to ask about the gluttony when at the museum and was so perplexed that I emailed museum personnel the next day. They immediately responded:



Mom's hooded cloak



Harry Potter's bat signal



Sapphire and Lily

“It is, indeed, correct as this was practically the only food that up to half the population of Ireland subsisted on, alongside a bit of buttermilk or fish. It was actually quite a nutritious diet compared to the poor in other European countries who were often living off bread and beer. Comparisons between 19C Irish and British soldiers in the British army show that the Irish were taller and better built, reflecting this superior diet.

The stats were compiled by a Danish statistician, Joel Moykr in his book ‘Why Ireland Starved’ some years ago and are accepted as being correct, also quoted in the ‘Atlas of the Great Irish Famine’ by UCC if you want to check out these excellent publications.”

I had a long way to get to Bantry so tried to rush. That didn't happen... hills. It took almost 3 hours to cover the about 18 miles. The weather cleared along the way and I was able to see a rainbow, but was too tired to ride to the end to check for treasure a leprechaun may have left. Along the way, I hunkered down and listened to a book I was really enjoying, “The Family Experiment,” and kept on spinning and panting.

After several wrong turns, I finally made it to the home of my WarmShowers host, Lily. She was the happiest, most optimistic person and we had a wonderful evening together. She heated up my leftover black pudding pie and concocted a tasty side of cabbage while I showered. We had a nice dinner learning about one another, both of us in the field of education. I loved hearing about her background as an athlete and all the many adventures she'd taken. She convinced me that Mike and I would enjoy a bike tour along the Rhine, a tour I'd considered in the past. She'd also completed several Caminos (mostly in Portugal) so it was fun to compare notes.

After dinner, we retired to the couch with tea and something like Moon Pies to continue chatting. When we got on the topic of books, she asked about my most recent read. When I said “The Family Experiment,” she pointed to her bookshelf—she'd just completed it herself. Peas in a pod! Next, she gave me suggestions on places I should visit as I headed north and I happily added them all to my list. We talked until late and though I had great intentions to journal before bed, my eyes just couldn't make it happen.

The Irish Famine

The famine was said to be the “worst humanitarian crisis in 19th century Europe” killing 1 million and leading 1.25 million Irish citizens to emigrate from their homeland, “a larger permanent exodus than any other famine in history.” (Placard in the museum) Skibbereen served as the poster-town for the famine. After drawings of people from Skibbereen appeared in the Illustrated London News, journalists from around the world came to report on the famine from that very town.

I’d always wondered why this water-faring people didn’t turn to the sea for their subsistence and learned that many fishermen sold their boats and gear early in the famine thinking (just as many other Irish) that it was a temporary situation from which they’d quickly recover. Also, many of the rivers and lakes were owned by British landlords who limited their use. Of those that could legally fish, the weakness that came with starvation, complicated by the inclement weather and hazardous Irish coastline, made the heavy physical labor of the sport impossible.

Relief works started fairly early in the form of work schemes and soup kitchens. Work schemes enabled desperate people to earn money to buy food. Work such as building roads and piers and draining land was hard physical labor, especially for those who were hungry and suffering from hunger-related diseases. These projects (reminding me of the Civilian Conservation Corps in the USA) employed 98,000 and lasted only from 1846-1847 because wages were so low and often went unpaid. Citizens used the pittance they earned to pay for soup for their families in the established soup kitchens.

Soup kitchens began serving so many people daily that they simply couldn’t keep up with demand. Newspapers around the world reported a torturous view of starving people flocking to the kitchens. The other pitiful sight was all the barely clothed and naked people. Individuals would pawn their clothes so they could afford food. Women of the time wore heavy hooded cloaks for warmth that also served as blanket and warmth for children. They sometimes pawned these cloaks with the intention of rebuying them later in the week... that later never came.

Disease, as expected, came with the weakness of hunger, mass movement of people (i.e., moving from place to place seeking nourishment), exposure, and bodies littering the streets. Homes were burned with dead families still in them so the diseases killing them would not spread.

“The ravages of typhus among their immediate friends and neighbours, the dismal visits of the funeral cart, the call to inmates to bring forth their dead, ... would leave but little ground of hope, that they escaped the famine, they would avoid the fever.” (Video in the museum)

Disease was the major cause of death during the famine and “famine fever” was common. Illness included typhus, dysentery, smallpox, cholera, consumption, scarlatina, measles, edema, and diarrhea.

The next response was work houses. These were a very last option for those who were destitute. One in four of the one million who died during the famine died in workhouses. They were so overcrowded that in one of the girls’ dorms, each child had the equivalent of two-squared-feet in which to subsist. They were disease breeding grounds. Some admitted themselves to the workhouses for the sole purpose of knowing they would be buried as opposed to left on the side of the road.

Bantry to Kenmare

That Hill! (aka Priest's Leap)



Distance: 28.3 mi/x km
Ascent/Descent: +2552'/-2522' +778m/-778m
Average Moving Speed: 5.2 mph/8.4 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 12:01/4:25
Accommodation: AirB&B hosted by John
Weather: Sprinkles, then in the clouds, then very nice
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vevY7x19rJ6>



I awoke at 6:30 AM and rolled over hoping to rest longer. I awoke the second time two hours later. Spending a lot of time dragging Sapphire up hills was surely the impetus for needing extra sleep. I had so many morning plans that it was good I had only a short ride to my next destination, Kenmare. I thanked Lily for her kindness, took her picture, and started out. My plan was to visit a bike shop (again) because my shifters continued to act up. But, they were working adequately in the morning and I was too lazy to try to find a shop. The other chore was finding a sleeping bag. Fortunately, Lily pointed me to an outdoor shop that, remarkably, existed in this small town. I knew I was getting closer to the outdoorsy part of the country since there hadn't been any such store in any of my previous locations. I found exactly what I needed—a light sleeping bag I could use in hostels.



Bucolic



Serene



Pastoral

Because I hadn't journaled the night before, I stopped in the artsy shop Lily recommended where I could find a coconut, hazelnut, chocolate chip scone and some tea. I sat in their window typing on my iPad for well over an hour. Because they didn't kick me out, I wrote them a thank you postcard. Two other ladies saw the postcard and asked about it. We had a nice chat before parting ways. Many people asked about the trip; the helmet and ridiculous yellow rain slicker were usually dead giveaways.

The one thing I'd wanted to see in Bantry was the Bantry House and Gardens. I'd read they were closed until April 1st (just a few days away), but hoped I'd at least be able to walk the gardens. No luck. I left Bantry sorry I'd missed its most famous landmark, but completely fulfilled after such great interactions with her people.



Crapola!



Not bad for a bathroom



Traffic jam

I was glad to have a short 21-mile ride ahead of me. I figured it would be cheating, but justified the short day by blaming Shawna. Shawna had contacted me a few days prior saying she wanted to join me on my adventure. I happily welcomed her to join me on the Ring of Kerry and beyond. That gave me a few extra days to get to Killarney. I was sure there'd be plenty for me to do in Kenmare so went with the flow.

I checked possible routes to Kenmare on Google Maps. There were three: one for cars and two for bikes. The car route was much longer than the bike routes so I scratched that off the list. I checked the two bike routes and one supposedly had less climbing than the other so that was my pick. I was on my way. That route, however, was in no way what I'd expected. What a surprise, eh?

Imagine asking someone how to get from one point to another. A straight line is usually the most convenient answer. That is exactly what Google Bike Maps gave me—a straight line... over a mountain. Yes, a mountain. I had no idea where I was so just kept walking Sapphire up and up. I would come to a false flat and think I could ride, but when I'd get on the bike, my Garmin would inform me I was on a 9% grade and my body would laugh at me. I kept seeing the top so kept walking up. Nope, false summit... again... and again. I kept checking my phone to make sure I was heading the correct direction and, yes, I was. Then, I saw a sign reading: "Narrow, Steep, Mountain Pass Road. Not the Main Route." With that (and I am not kidding), I turned around and rode back down the road only to realize that, yes, I had been going the way my map app was telling me to go. And, of course, that meant I had to re-push Sapphire back to where I'd originally ridden.

The hill went on and on and on. Had I any idea where I was or when it might end, I might have felt a bit better, but that wasn't the case. And, as I ascended I entered into the clouds and it became cooler. I started looking to the sides of the road imagining where rescuers might find my cold dead body. "Did she die of exposure?" "I don't think so." "Exhaustion?" "Doubtful." "So, dear coroner, what's your verdict?" "Stupidity, she definitely died of stupidity."

As I began approaching what I later learned was the top (there actually was a top), a few cars drove by. One just kept driving despite my hand in the air begging them to stop. Perhaps they thought I was waving at them to say what a lovely day it was in the windy mist. Another car stopped and informed me that I was about 0.5 miles and 400' from the top. Normally, 400' would make me cringe, but by this point the incline was so steep that I was gaining altitude fast. There were times I walked on my toes just to stay upright. Unfortunately, when going that slow, my Garmin couldn't record the grade. The highest I saw was 13%.

At one point, I came to a stone bench. It appeared randomly without a sign, no seemingly special locale. When I saw that it was rather tall with a recessed area under the seat, I knew exactly what it was. It was where I would curl into a fetal position, wrap myself in my emergency blanket, and die. That was surely where they'd found the last five cyclists that tried to cross this pass. Instead, I doped myself with a few caffeinated Shot Blocks (gummy cubes of energy) and that helped.

When I was sure the ascent would never end, I heard voices. Humans! Not vultures—a good sign. I shoved Sapphire up a few more feet to the official top. Hallelujah!

I had one of the men take a picture of me with Sapphire and his dog, Bailey. Next, I took a picture of Sapphire with the sign of the peak we'd just reached—Priest's Leap at 1516'. This had been listed on the sign below, but I'd been in a suffering trance at the time so didn't realize that was the name of the place I was going. Priest's Leap? What was that supposed to mean anyway? Did some priest ride his bike up this mountain and then leap off the top because he'd fulfilled his lifetime goal? I wanted to leap off that god-awful mountain, too.

Normally, I am a speed demon on the downhills. Watch out in a triathlon because I'll be passing you like a pro, smiling in my most aero stance and yelling: "On your left!" Not in Ireland and not because they drove on the left. As with my previous downhill Irish riding, I was a scaredy cat. I didn't trust my brakes or my hand strength. The road debris (e.g., rocks, potholes, water) and gradients were ubiquitous so I had to walk about 90% of the downhill. So as to not curse the entire way, I called Shawna so we could discuss her upcoming arrival. I was so excited she'd be joining me. Then, I called Mike and Ryan to keep my mind off the struggle. We kept getting cut off. Eventually, I'd descended almost back to sea level and could actually ride again. I put on running tunes as the sun came into view and felt a renewed sense of comfort. The scenery was bucolic, so green and full of serenity. How could I have been so crazed just a few minutes before? And, for a brief moment, I thought it might have been, well... hashtag-worth-it. Upon completing my circumnavigation of Ireland, I still believed Priest's Leap was the most difficult ascent of the entire trip.

I rode into Kenmare and found a pub where I sat for hours eating fish and chips and journaling. It'd been quite a day! Eventually (and after buying some dark chocolate because I earned it), I got back in the saddle and headed for my AirB&B. Two miles became three or more with a few wrong turns, but the star-studded sky and warm night air made the final push quite pleasant. This day was awesome—I was riding my bike around Ireland!

Crew Post

Imagine someone asking you how to get from Cedar City to Parowan and you telling them to go through Cedar Breaks. Seriously. That is exactly what Google Bike Maps had me do today. After a lovely scone and tea breakfast and failed attempt to see the local famous Bantry House and Gardens, I climbed what I would have been proud to have hiked. No more Google Bike Maps! I was literally in the clouds counting sheep. The only saving grace was that the sun came out on the way down and the scenery was so pastoral.



Just the start



I should have listened



The sole “flat” section



Bring out your dead

Priest's Leap



Counting sheep in the clouds



The actual top



Misery meets joy



Down—notice the road surface



Arriving after sunset.jpeg

Kenmare to Killarney

Finally Riding for Real



Distance: 35.4 mi/57 km
Ascent/Descent: +1681'/-1693' +512m/-516m
Average Moving Speed: 6 mph/9.7 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 8:18/5:56
Accommodation: Black Sheep Hostel
Weather: Clear and cool
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/v36AVgxgBZq>



I had great plans to sleep in, but couldn't so read about what I should not miss seeing in the area. I chose two sights to visit before leaving Kenmare—the Stone Circle and sacred well. I had yogurt and granola for breakfast at the AirB&B, packed up, spent nearly 20 minutes searching for a surely-never-to-be-found missing cycling glove, and started out. I used Google Maps (the car route this time) to head to my first destination. I must have missed a turn and instead of telling me I'd missed it, Google just recalculated to have me ride around several blocks. This happened several times. Clueless, I kept wondering why I kept seeing the same stores before realizing there was only one Main Street and I'd been riding around it for almost an hour. And, of course, there was that additional wrong turn that had me screaming down a steep road only to have to drag Sapphire right back up. The flat two mile ride from the AirB&B had become 4.75 miles and added to the search for

the missing glove took me over an hour. All was good; I was finally at my first destination for the day, the Kenmare Stone Circle. This was another of the over 100 rock circles found in southwestern Ireland. While said to be one of the largest in the area, it seemed small within its tree enclosure. Unlike the Drombeg Stone Circle from a few days before, this circle had a large, altar-like stone in the middle, a “type of burial monument known as a ‘Boulder Dolmen’” according to the pamphlet I received at the entrance. This style was said to be uncommon outside southwestern Ireland. The center rock looked like a good place for a human sacrifice, but nothing was said about it. There weren’t any human sacrifices scheduled for the day I was there and I didn’t volunteer as tribute.



My wish

Another difference between the Kenmare and Drombeg circles was that this one was on private land. The owners asked for a donation of €2.50 to enter the well-groomed, tree-encircled monument. A benefit of the cost was that I was able to spend time with the man at the ticket booth for a chat. He told me all about hiking Carrantuohill, which of the three routes would be best for me, and what I could expect. I had hopes to hike to the peak sometime within the next week. When in Scotland in college, I tried to summit Ben Nevis, Scotland’s highest peak. I was stopped by a blizzard about 100’ from the summit. I always regretted not reaching the top so hoped to make up for it by climbing Carrantuohill. Alas, I never did.

In addition to seeing the Stone Circle, guests were given a card on which to write a wish to leave on a fairy tree. The area just outside the circle was home to three Hawthorn trees, a genus said to be magically enchanted and a sacred symbol of love and protection. Furthermore, they were said to bring good luck from the fairies living beneath them to landowners. The trees themselves represented meeting places between the mortal and fairy worlds and were often found near sacred places including ancient pagan sites and holy wells. No one was permitted to cut down Hawthorn trees and a placard in this copse said: “Indeed, many roads in Ireland have been diverted to avoid cutting one down.”

A tradition was to write wishes on paper and tie them onto Hawthorne tree branches. Upon paying our fees to enter the area, each of us was given a pen and card with attached twine. On mine, I wrote: “Prayers for Martin [the man in the ticket booth] and his family. Wishes for Shawna and I to have a fantastic adventure.” I placed my card on the tree and fully believed it would come true. I never knew the outcome of the Martin part, but the Shawna and I part proved fairy magic is a legitimate thing.

My final stop in Kenmare was Our Lady’s Well, another well dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The well’s sacred significance, however, pre-dated Christianity and was just reprovisioned for the new religion. It was in a small serene area with lovely foliage. I never saw the water; Mary must have been busy that day.



Our Lady's Well



Looking back at Kinsale from Moll's Gap

After the Priest's Leap fiasco the previous day, I was frightened of what I would find on the road on this day. Doug had gone out of his way to design two routes for me in hopes of lessening my climbs. He provided me with GPX files for each option; I chose the easier of the two so would miss Dunloe Gap while still having the opportunity to climb Moll's Gap, a pass between Kenmare and Killarney.

Doug majorly earned my respect (again) because it was a perfect route! It was one of those routes where all the local cyclists go for training and a challenge. It reminded me a lot of the Red Rock Loop known and loved/hated by cyclists in the Las Vegas Valley. It wasn't easy, but it sure was nice to be able to get in the saddle and slowly grind up a hill as opposed to push Sapphire up ridiculous grades. The road was well paved so I was even excited about opening up with speed on the way down. I was finally in my biking element. This was the first day I felt my skill matched the terrain. Yes, I was excruciatingly slow compared to other cyclists that day... and even slower compared to the speed I would ride with an unweighted Sweetie (my triathlon bike). But, I never had to get off to push—what a great feeling!

At the top (the "Gap" or what I would consider a "pass") was a large artisan shop and café. I ordered (of course) a scone and tea and sat for well over an hour enjoying the view and writing in my journal. I saw lots of cyclists from my perch at the peak as they worked their way up the final meters of the beast. Next thing I would know, they were sitting at the table behind me enjoying coffee and a piece of cake. They looked so fancy with their cycling shoes and slick bikes. I was jealous.

Moll's Gap

This pass earned its name from Moll Kisanne, a woman who ran an illegal pub (called a shebeen) where she sold homemade Irish whiskey to travelers and (probably) rebels. The pass was remote and often used to traffic rebels and contraband while evading British troops in the 18th and 19th centuries. Before that, it may have been used for holding outlawed Catholic masses during the Penal Law period (1600s and 1700s).



An incredible rest stop



Teenagers took my picture



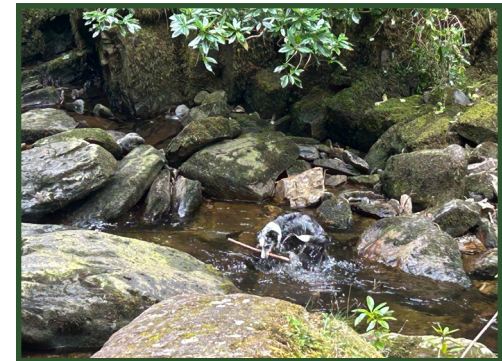
Views down from Moll's Gap



Lots of fly fishing

There were also loads of groups on motorcycles, plenty of general tourists, people out in their classic cars for a special Sunday afternoon ride, and busloads stopping during Ring of Kerry tours. Avoca Café/Shop was a happenin' place and I wasn't eager to redress into all the layers needed to scream down from the pass on my way to Killarney. I eventually gave in and was exhilarated with adrenaline.

I loved the trip down from Moll's Gap. The road was smooth and the gradients between three and six percent so I could speed comfortably and safely. I was also starting to get the hang of keeping my chain on its chainring (as opposed to it regularly falling off mid-spin) so I could trust it would be there without having to check it every few minutes. In addition to the enjoyable riding, I entered Killarney National Park and the scenery was outstanding. I just couldn't imagine how stunning it would be in the spring, summer, and fall when flowers and green foliage covered the countryside. There were so many lakes and they cascaded one into another as I descended the valley. Unfortunately, the foliage surrounding the road was brown following winter. I stopped at many of the



Killarney National Park

overlooks for pictures and a huge smile was plastered on my face. Upon reaching the bottom, I saw a parking lot for Torc Waterfall; curiosity required I stop. It was a short walk to the waterfall where the Irish and foreigners alike were basking in the magic of the area. One man had a darling whippet/collie mix that jumped through the pools in the stream to fetch whatever stick his owner threw. There was so much green. It was what I remembered from when I'd visited Ireland in college. So many shades of green!

I rode into town and was glad to be in a town I remembered so fondly. It was so clean and fresh and I loved having access to bike lanes. I rode to where I thought I'd booked for the night, Black Sheep Hostel, and was fortunate to learn that they had an available bed despite my having reserved for the following night. It was such a nice hostel with sheets, blankets, warmth, comfortable spaces, kind employees. I was ecstatic to be in Killarney. Somehow, that place marked an accomplishment.

I stowed my bike in the hostel's backyard, moved into my second floor women's dorm, and since my gear organization had improved to the point where I could unpack and pack more quickly, I speedily threw on leggings over my stinky tri shorts and walked to a recommended pub for salad, black bread (yum!), and cider. It was such a pleasant place to sit and write.

There had been a bit of a complication. I'd received a text from Shawna saying she'd booked us a hotel room for the next two nights. I hadn't even realized she'd be in country the next night so had already booked two nights at the Black Sheep. I let the staff know my bed should go to a deserving person since I couldn't get a refund. Shawna and I texted back-and-forth as she boarded her flight. She'd planned the entire Ring of Kerry route and even booked hotels. This was wonderful, but I was worried about the route she'd selected and the daily mileage so did a bit of panicking and planning on my own. We would make it work. She was on her way and I was ready to welcome her to Ireland. That was all that mattered despite the pins and needles I experienced while thinking about telling her the designed plan wouldn't work.

I returned to my private little pod in a sea of six pods and appreciated access to an en-suite bathroom. All that and a bottom bunk, how could you beat it? I snuggled myself in, closed the privacy curtain, pulled out some dark chocolate, and began planning what I would see the next day.



Time to journal over dinner

Crew Post

Doug, I am LOVING you right now! I just climbed to Moll's Gap and it was easy! Thank you so much for helping me to not make yesterday's mistake! For the rest of you, today was like a slightly easier Red Rock Loop. [Do you hear the angels singing?] I only had to push my bike when I was lost riding through town (turning two miles into seven). The rest of the day was perfect. With a lighter bike, I was even able to go fast downhill and the road took me directly into Killarney National Park. What a beautiful country!



Torc Waterfall



Black Sheep Hostel



My berth



Blessed space for myself

Killarney

Seeing the Sites of Killarney



Welcome to Killarney National Park!



Creative repurposing

Distance: 11.4 mi/18.4 km (including a lot of walking and riding)

Time Traveling/Moving Time: 8:04/2:17

Accommodation: Castle Lodge Guesthouse

Weather: Beautiful

Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/v36AVgDgLGq>

I slept well in my little pod, but awoke for awhile and stressed about Shawna's arrival. She'd worked hard to plan the Ring of Kerry trip, but I was asking her to change everything because I was worried it wouldn't be doable. I guess I felt a bit like I was losing control of my own journey. I needed to get over it and was sure all would work out fine once we were creating the schedule together. Fortunately, I was able to get back to sleep and even slept until 9 AM. Just in time to make it to the kitchen in time for free breakfast!

Food had been an issue. I'd been eating lots of carbs for breakfasts (bread and tea with milk) and then nothing until a heavy dinner of meat, potatoes, and cider... often with a dark chocolate bar chaser in bed. I'd entered the country about 25 pounds overweight and didn't appear to have lost an ounce. I knew I was gaining muscle, but these eating habits were not helping me remove the unneeded extra poundage Sapphire was surely suffering. I hoped when Shawna came I could share meals with her both to save money and because

I absolutely didn't need as much food as I was downing. I felt bloated most of the time, but compelled to always empty my plate. Also, sitting down for morning tea and an evening meal were my only times other than sleep to not straddle a teeny racing seat. [Triathletes and sport cyclists get it, but normal people just can't figure out how we find those seats comfortable. Of course, being on any seat day-after-day-after-day takes its toll.]

There were signs in the communal dining area encouraging the current generation to turn off their phones and get to know each other instead. I had plans to do this, but everyone else was on their phones or computers and I was frantically trying to figure out where I would be staying that night. I would be checking out of the Black Sheep Hostel, donating my second night's room to a random stranger, and moving to the hotel Shawna had booked for both of us that evening. I wanted to know where that hotel was before I checked out so I wasn't caught stranded. Shawna arrived in Dublin and texted me the hotel information as I finished breakfast of black bread, butter, and jam (just after having decided a diet might be in order). I stuffed the remainder of my breakfast in a baggie so I could eat it later.

I'd used ChatGPT to help me plan my day. She'd (I'd decided ChatGPT was female and my intimate friend) told me about all the must-see places in Killarney and organized an itinerary to ensure I saw everything in an efficient way. My first visit was to St. Mary's Cathedral, just a short walk from the hostel's front door. I'd seen so many cathedrals in Spain that I was to the point I was as a young child. My parents kept making me visit yet more churches and castles. My dad was stationed in Ramstein, West Germany at the time so we were expected to see ALL of Europe while there. My parents certainly tried reaching that goal while my sister and I learned all the bad words used by my dad as he reconstructed the tent from hell several times each month. I knew how to make a 7-and-7 at age seven because it was absolutely necessary following each new campground build. My refrain by the time I walked into the Sistine Chapel at age nine was: "You've seen one church, you've seen them all!" Here in Ireland, I was reaching that point again.

That said, there was a difference between the cathedrals in Ireland and those I'd seen in Spain while walking the Camino. I'd found those of Spain to be gaudy with their gold-gilded, gem-studded, everything-ornate interiors and exteriors. While the Irish cathedrals were equally as



St. Mary's Cathedral

formidable, they didn't seem to have the bling common of the Spaniards. I'd reacted so poorly to the Camino's cathedrals because I felt strongly that God didn't want his houses to be built on the backs of those who were slaughtered for their riches (e.g., all of Central America). The Irish cathedrals I'd seen thus far (albeit not many) had several significant differences. First, they were open and free. I felt comfortable walking into an Irish House of God whereas, even as a pilgrim, I was treated as if I was walking into a museum in the Spanish churches, one where I was a guest and unworthy to fill its space. It gave a feeling that God was more accessible in Ireland. Next, there were people praying in the Irish churches. It felt like a living, breathing, active faith and though most parishioners were older, there were young worshippers on their knees as well. There were very few cathedrals in Spain where I saw people coming in on any given weekday just to praise and commune with God. It's likely this wasn't truly the case, but noticeable enough to leave an impression. Third, besides the whole crucifixion business, everything was really positive in Ireland. There were liturgical placards teaching about kindness, forgiveness, generosity, and hospitality. There were pamphlets inviting the congregation to participate in service activities helping those in need within the community. One church (not a cathedral) had a hand-drawn sign outside inviting guests to come join the sewing club each week as they knitted blankets for cancer patients. While Spain left me estranged even from my much more liberal Protestant faith, I could get behind this form of Catholicism. God was the good guy—here to help us help each other... not, in my (unchristian judgmental) opinion, the god of judgement, fire, and brimstone of Spain.

From St. Mary's Cathedral, I walked across the street where I officially entered Killarney National Park. The park was created when several large estates conglomerated along with the surrounding wilderness to form a single entity. Between Ross Castle's history dating to 15th century Irish clans and continuing through the John McShain family donation of the Killarney House and Garden estate in 1979, human and political history play an important role in the park's identity. This was complemented with the immense beauty of surrounding lakes and forests creating a truly fulfilling and unique park experience.

First, I visited Knockreer House and demesne and learned what a "demesne" was. It's basically an estate including all the land and everything on that land owned by the person who owns the big house. In terms of the antebellum South in the USA, a demesne would consist of the plantation house, all the farm and grazing land, all the outer buildings and stables, and all the slaves and stock owned to work that land. The Knockreer house on this day was simply a locked building that seemed to be used for administrative purposes. The grounds were lovely with lake views separating it from Ross Castle. I could picture the Kennedy's throwing around a football on the lawn.

I walked around the grounds and onto the demesne of the next major edifice, Killarney House. During any other time of the year, the gardens would surely be spectacular, but everything was just beginning to think about blooming when I was there. I saw jaunting cars jaunting along with their gigantic, strong horses and jarveys (the drivers) telling their passengers lore of the region. At one point, I passed a fenced area where red deer, the wild mascots of the park, grazed.



Killarney House Museum



View from Killarney House



Children's art winners



Children's overall winner

The house was originally built in the 1700s and owned by Sir Valentine Browne. That iteration burned in 1913 and was renovated in 1959 by the great American contractor John McShain known for his work on the Jefferson Memorial, Pentagon, and White House. I'd hoped the house would be decorated as an era museum, but it was not. It'd become a visitor's center for Killarney National Park and provided a great user experience about the area. Like with the Skibbereen Heritage Center a few days earlier, this museum was well-curated, guiding patrons through history. It started with pre-historic geological changes contributing to its current topography and other geographic features and walked tourists through time all the way to the environmental concerns faced due to issues like invasive species. It told of phenomena like the Killarney bryophyte (think: moss) populations that were so rich in genetic variety that they welcomed botanists from around the globe. The park's bryophytes included dozens of varieties, some of which grew nowhere else in the world.

In addition to the permanent collections within the museum, there were two temporary art exhibitions. One was of artwork completed by adults while the other resulted from a children's country-wide art competition. Many of the works by these youngins' were incredibly creative with skill levels rivaling or exceeding those displayed in the adult art competition.

I returned to Black Sheep Hostel via the memorial to Father O'Leary who again evidenced this different kind of Catholicism. He was pivotal in humanitarian activity throughout his life including providing safe harbor for Jews and downed airmen during the Second World War. I picked up my bike and rode to Ross Castle where I took the €6 tour with a knowledgeable and fun guide. We learned about the history of the castle including its many inhabitants, deterioration, and reconstruction. My favorite parts were learning about the first owners, the clansmen, and then the

Aoibhe Devereux, Age 16
(overall winner)

Tumtha (Immersed), 2024
Acrylic on canvas board

"This is a portrait of my younger brother on our holidays. I wanted to immobilise this moment of him in the pool with the rainbows dancing on his skin, to capture his joy and youthfulness. I enjoyed painting this portrait because I was constantly reminded of all the fun he has on our family holidays and all the fun we have together. It's my favourite picture of him because it shows who he is, a boy who has fun everywhere especially tumtha (immersed) underwater."

British who entertained dignitaries of the region during dinner on the top floor in efforts to build alliances. We heard about castle defense and all enjoyed learning about where residents of yore used the toilet and the fumes from the toilet that kept their garments (hung above the latrine during the night) free from lice. Oh, the smell of mediaeval Europe... even lice avoided it!

Moving my gear from the hostel to the hotel and eating dinner were my next chores. Along the way, I tried to find The Sughan, the youth hostel I'd loved so much when visiting in 1988. It was no longer there. The Laurels Pub had, sadly, taken its place. I reminisced at Laurels Pub while enjoying lamb-based shepherd's pie with fries and a cider and then picked up a cookie and chocolate on my way back to the expensive hotel, glad I was only paying half. I had a shower, washed some tri shorts and underwear with the Scrubba to buy myself a few more days without official laundry facilities, and spent the rest of the night writing.

"Killarney is the Mecca of every pilgrim in search of the sublime and beautiful in nature, the mountain Paradise of the West..."

—J. Sterling
Coyne



Ross Castle



Park by Ross Castle



Father O'Leary



The Laurels Pub



Shepherd's pie and a conversation with Shawna



First hotel in Ireland

Crew Post

I stayed put in Killarney all day in hopes Shawna would arrive. But, alas, an elf played a trick and her rental bike was not ready. Instead, she spent the day in Galway and I spent it visiting all of Killarney's major attractions (i.e., St. Mary's Cathedral, Knockreer House & Demesne, Killarney House and Gardens, Ross Castle, and Father O'Leary Monument). Many of these are part of the national park so there were tons of placards for me to read. Mike woulda loved it! I was too lazy to visit the Muckross House Gardens, but the cool part of it (where they dress up like old dead people) was closed so the novelty wouldn't have been there.



Waterfall in Killarney National Park

Killarney, Take 2

She's Here! She's Here!



Our AirB&B



Distance: 9.5 mi/15.3 km
Accommodation: Killarney View House B&B
Weather: Chilly
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/v1OwK3LrXEO>

I had a grand plan—hike Carrauntoohil. The woman at the front desk of the hotel where I was staying told me there was a bus that left at 9:10 AM so I dutifully woke up, got ready to go, and walked to the bus station. There was no one at the desk; they'd return at 9:15—not helpful. I tried to buy a ticket at the kiosk, but there was no option for Carrauntoohil. I was distressed by the time an employee arrived and informed me I was not at the bus station at all; I was at the train station. He redirected me and I faced the same dilemma there. There was no information desk and the bus ticket kiosk didn't list Carrauntoohil as a possible destination. Arghh! I realized the hotel's front desk woman had included a web address for the bus and when I followed the link, it was broken. I eventually learned that the company that ran that special bus was no longer in business. I wasn't committed enough to the hike so when learning my only remaining option was a cab (€60 round trip), I decided to skip it. I went back to the hotel and took a nap.



Church of Ireland



Upon awakening for the second time, I rode my bike over to the B&B where Shawna had booked what should have been her second night in Killarney. I checked in the bike and it was time to go pick up my buddy. On my way to the bus station, I visited main street trying to find a pub that would be a nice place for Shawna and I to share lunch, then I met her right when her bus arrived. I was so surprised with her little backpack. That woman could pack like nobody's business! We walked to lunch and the saga of her travels thus far poured out.

Getting to Dublin for her was uneventful as was taking the train to Galway. That was where the problems began. She'd scheduled to pick up a bike at a bike shop in Galway that would include all she needed for the trip—helmet, panniers, lights, lock, ... Upon arriving, the man working had no information about her and had not been informed of her intended arrival. They had no bike for her and couldn't get one before the next day's bus was scheduled to leave. She decided to just take the bus to Killarney without the bike and rent a bike in Killarney. The problem with that plan was that bike shops in Killarney would only permit her to rent a bike while cycling the Ring of Kerry, a 2-to-4 day journey. It would have to do. She was able to pick up the bike later in the day so we'd be ready to start the next day.

We shared fish and chips and I introduced her to hard cider. It was a relief to learn I was not the source of her frustration as I'd suspected (since she'd had to cancel all the hotel reservations she'd made in advance). I was just sorry she was having such a difficult time getting started. Also, unlike my experiences thus far, she'd not had positive interactions with the Irish. I was sad for her.

After lunch, we visited the Killarney Friary which I'd not seen the day before and we also visited Killarney House and Gardens (my second time). She was a fast museum viewer like everyone else I knew and I was still reading placards I'd missed the day before when she finished. We walked to the bed and breakfast and officially checked in. She went to pick up her bike and I went to pick up dinner, a salad we would share in the room even though eating anywhere in the B&B (including the dining room) was officially forbidden. I was not happy with the owner who had every excuse why we couldn't eat inside. I'd asked where we could eat—"Outside" replied Cruella. "But, it's cold and windy outside." "There are plenty of close

restaurants.” Needless to say, I wasn’t a fan of Cruella, the B&B owner. To that, I silently said: “Hold my beer (or cider) while I eat in my room anyway!”

I had a shower and began journaling while Shawna avoided a nap and went to visit Ross Castle to keep herself awake.

Crew Post

She’s here! She’s here! Shawna made it, but not without complications. She was not able to rent the bike she’d scheduled to pick up in Galway so (after two flights and a train ride) took two more busses to meet me in Killarney. Long story short... she now has a bike, but can only use it on the Ring of Kerry which we start tomorrow. Today, we enjoyed lunch in a traditional Irish pub and (re-)saw the Killarney House and Gardens (there were more placards for me to read, after all!). I’m finally having a quiet night at home while she’s staying awake by visiting Ross Castle. Riding recommences tomorrow.



Killarney



Shawna tempting fate while eating inside the AirB&B



A jaunting car

Killarney to Kenmare

Mary Had a Stuck Little Lamb



More carbs, please



Finally on Tour! (Starring Christy and Shawna)

Distance: 26.3 mi/42.3 km
Ascent/Descent: +1490'/-1563' +454m/-476m
Average Moving Speed: 6.2 mph/10 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 6:08/4:10
Accommodation: Hallissey's AirB&B
Weather: Windy, but sunny and nice
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vLqe9431Ldq>

Shawna and I were up at a reasonable hour, dressed, and packed even before breakfast service at 8 AM. It gave us a few minutes to review brochures about the Ring of Kerry to make sure we wouldn't miss anything. And, we were able to do this in the beautiful, comfortable sitting room where we couldn't eat the night before. I felt sorry for Cruella's minion who was very nice and did all the work while facing criticism from the reigning evil queen. The slave, Aiescha from Namibia, made us a full English breakfast to share then some pancakes to finish it off.

It was time to push off for our duo journey via a quick trip by the bike shop for Shawna. She'd decided to dump her clip-in cycling shoes because the owner didn't have clip-in pedals



Muckross Abbey



Yew tree and arrow slits



Approaching Muckross House

to offer. He would keep them in hock for her. I suggested she ask for a chain and cassette cleaning (they were filthy), but she wasn't interested. This was probably good because the added grease slowed her down so she wouldn't be so frustrated at my 3 mph ascents. That is the exact speed she faced later in the morning.

Our first stop was at Muckross House and Gardens, the one must-see Killarney attraction I hadn't already seen. I was excited about it. After a few wrong turns on my part despite my Garmin telling me not to take those turns, we made it to the Muckross Abbey. It was a big estate like others I'd seen, but seemed particularly fortified with arrow slits. During the previous day's tour of Ross Castle, the guide talked about these. I just didn't expect them in a church.

A new fact I learned was that yew trees were commonly found in abbeys and churches because they were a strong, useful wood for making tools like longbows. Because the trees are highly toxic (especially to livestock), they were planted within the church complex so animals couldn't accidentally eat them. Alternatively, a building was constructed around them. Yew trees live for thousands of



Muckross House



Check out those gorgeous legs!



Notice anything hiding in my bottle cage?

years and had been mainstays of Druidic and Celtic traditions so the Christians repurposed them for their own religious purposes. Other benefits were the trees supplied shady, quiet spots for contemplation as was the case in the Muckross Abbey where the massive tree shaded the cloister. And, because of the longevity of yew trees, they came to represent eternal life, resurrection, and the afterlife. The Abbey also had lots of 20th century gravestones surrounding it.

From there, we cycled to Muckross House. The approach was really impressive with jaunting cars led by gorgeous, furry-footed (aka “feathers”) horses strolling down a long wood-lined path. It felt like riding into a mansion Anne of Green Gables may have frequented.

With my interest in history, it took forever for me to get through the house. Shawna wasn’t as much of a history buff so had a nice break outside. The house, built in 1843 by the Herbert Family and later foreclosed upon, was adorned with an original interior and there were docents in one of the rooms to whom I could ask umpteen questions. There was also an American woman with her two daughters reading from a pamphlet we’d all received so I just listened to her. She and I both chimed in with our own suppositions of what things were when we weren’t near a docent (which was always because though there were supposed to be docents in every room, there were two total and they were both in the same room).

I learned snooker tables are much bigger than pool tables and instead of solid versus stripes, each ball is worth a different amount. The children’s room was huge and children (and probably servants) had their own stairway. The stairway even had shorter steps for littler legs. [Can you say spoiled?] One of the woman’s daughters asked why it was that there was a back stairway for the children. At the same time, I answered “because kids are annoying” and mom answered “because they had a different family structure back then.” Oops.

Queen Victoria had her own set of three rooms for when she visited and she only visited once—in 1861. It sounded like she brought her own entourage to care for her which was lucky because those poor regular servants must have spent all their time washing linens. There were six washbasins in the basement! Twenty-two servants cared for the household and a long row of bells on a basement wall determined in which room the snooty’s called for help.

After our self-guided (except for the one room with the two docents) tour, I asked an employee if she could answer a few questions for me. First, I asked about the gigantic water heater in the laundry room. She responded it was “probably” a way to heat up water. Hmmm. Then I asked why there were three sitting chairs in the bedroom of the lady of the house. She gave me a strange look and answered: “For sitting?” She later said that maybe a servant sat there in case needed? My third question was how many servants there were. She knew that one, 22. I figured she probably got a good laugh out of my first two questions, but I thought her rather daft to not have better answers. I ended my interrogation there.

The plan was for us to ride around the islands surrounding the house to the east. It was supposed to be a nice ride with several bridges to cross. I took a wrong turn (who knew?) and missed the entire loop. The bonus was that we ended up at Torc Waterfall so Shawna was able to see it. I had no problem seeing it a second time. There weren’t any leprechauns peeking out behind trees this time nor fairies flying between branches, either.

It was time to climb. I’d forgotten that the bottom of the hill to Moll’s Gap was fairly flat and kept thinking we were on the ascending section. When we finally reached the big climbs, I knew I should have just enjoyed the flat while I could. It was about a six mile stretch with gradients varying between five and seven percent. No, it wasn’t easy, but it was definitely doable. We slugged it out (well, I did while Shawna stayed closely behind me), stopping a few times for pictures. It was quite a relief when we reached Avoca at the Gap. I enjoyed another tea and scone combo adding a delicious broccoli salad with hazelnuts (who woulda thunk that combination worked?) so I could call it lunch. Shawna watched out the window I hadn’t paid any attention to the first time I was there.

While I journaled, Shawna watched a drama unfold with the sheep outside. A baby lamb (it looked just a few days old) got stuck between a fence and gate and couldn’t get out. It didn’t think to back out or turn around and walk out while mom and all her buds chomped on prized grasses on the other side of the gate, completely ignoring the little doll. It was so stressful and Shawna’s poor heart was breaking. It was like watching a movie featuring a dog that dies at the end. That was until all the adult sheep decided to snack on the prized grasses closer to baby and baby figured out how to turn around and walk the eight feet out. We whooped and were so happy with the end of the movie. Shawna finally had closure. She went out and took pictures of the heathen parents with their little lamb with fleece as white as snow. Upon her return, we started down to Kenmare.



Ascending to Moll’s Gap



Torc Waterfall, again



Sticky pudding and trad tunes

Down was not as easy as I'd hoped because we were heading directly into the wind. I wasn't complaining because that hill had sheltered us from all that wind as we rode up to Moll's Gap. I could handle the 15 mph headwind since we were on a downhill.

We rode into Kenmare and immediately found our AirB&B conveniently situated on the main street. We picked up pastries for breakfast as we'd planned an early start for a long, hard ride the following day. Then, Shawna went to visit the "Lego" Kenmare Stone Circle while I barhopped to find a pub with live music for the night. After a shower and more journaling, I went out to hear the tunes at my best pub-find. It wasn't Shawna's plan to go, but LeAnn (a crew member) guilted her into it via Messenger. As a thank you for her joining me, I shared my sticky toffee pudding with Shawna. It was a fun band of three on mandolins, a fiddle, and a tin whistle.

****News Flash**** Shawna enjoyed the tin whistle so much she took it up as her third instrument after bass and clarinet. Not your typical trio, but Shawna's never never let "typical" boss her around.

Crew Post from Shawna

We had a great day today. Beautiful weather and fun friends. We did ~27 miles to see how I did on the bike. Killarney to Kenmare. Tomorrow we start the Ring of Kerry.

Crew Post from Christy

Ditto. Add in Muckross Abbey and House and lunch at Moll's Gap (again). Pub tunes tonight (but not with lazy ass Shawna at the start).



View from Moll's Gap

Kenmare to Caherdaniel

On the Ring of Kerry



On the way to Sneem



Distance: 39.2 mi/63.1 km
Ascent/Descent: +1785'/-1647' +544m/-502m
Average Moving Speed: 7.4 mph/11.9 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 8:27/5:19
Accommodation: AirB&B hosted by Lucas
Weather: Beautiful
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/v7O9ZDoArL6>

I slept terribly, but was still rearing to go at 7 AM. We were on the road right at 8 with about 15 miles to Sneem, a town we'd heard was beautiful and the gateway to the Ring of Kerry's best scenery. This would be our halfway point for the day and we arrived by 9:30. We started with breakfast from our previous night's bakery cache. We ate in a Sneem park; then, I bought coffee and we browsed a gigantic souvenir shop reminiscent of the biggest souvenir shop in Las Vegas that advertises: "If it's in stock, we have it."

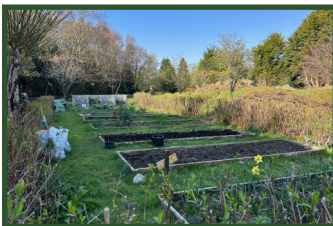
Next, we walked around the town's river walk that didn't really seem to be on the actual river. It started with the town church and continued to the community garden, a true community garden with individuals having raised plots as well as plots tended by local



master gardeners. Anyone was welcome to take what they needed. I enjoyed a taste of chives (which Shawna and I learned were herbs unlike green onions, a vegetable). There was rosemary, mint, thyme, ... all available in a greenhouse and then larger vegetables available outside. One aspect of the garden that I loved was the philosophy behind its development. The intention of its design was to make it available to everyone in the community with special attention to those who were mobility or sight impaired. Raised plant beds made it possible for those with limited eyesight to move around easily with white canes. Flowers attracted birds so they could hear the natural soundtrack and provided scents. A solar-powered fountain added water sounds to the pleasant atmosphere. Pathways were large and covered with rocks perfect for maneuvering wheelchairs. There were also activities for children like a maze and a large xylophone that Shawna availed herself of. And, two composting sections provided for local organic trash and fresh soil for the garden.



We walked from there to a small group recreation area with a barbecue pit that would be great for parties. The fire pit probably made it a great hangout for the surely only four teenagers living in town. Another section had rock pyramids, artistic structures designed and built within the last few decades. It was strange seeing contemporary stone artistic structures in an area where ancient structures were so common. Shawna and I had fun taking what we deemed creative pictures.



We'd seen a sign on our way into town announcing seaweed baths. As a joke, we discussed it. Then we talked about all the extra time we had on our hands... and the cold showers we'd had the night before... and, "What if we actually considered doing it for real." That sealed the deal and, even better, Shawna said she'd pay for it as a birthday present for me. We rode to the hotel where the baths were offered and were able to get an appointment half an hour later. We had no idea what we were in for, but it sounded like an experience we probably shouldn't live without.





We skinny dipped into barrels used for aging Jameson Whiskey that sat outdoors on the edge of a serene river. Our spa director, Brendon, filled the barrels with perfectly warmed water and then poured in the seaweed. It didn't smell at all, and the oil from the seaweed was soothing. We luxuriated for an hour, soaking, talking, and enjoying Milo the dog who entertained us. He loved to have us throw the stick, but didn't like to give it back; he preferred to play tug-of-war. He also loved to catch the water we splashed out of our barrels. Unfortunately, some of the pictures Shawna took of me splashing water for Milo may have included some exposed personal bits. Those accidentally made it into the crew video until we realized the mistake and deleted the X-rated evidence.



Brendon (who happened to be a professional tour guide when not bathing strangers) advised us about what we shouldn't miss as we continued our travels around the Ring of Kerry. He told us we were in the most incredible part of Ireland so should not rush through the surrounding areas. He went so far as to say I could miss the entire northern part of the country. I wasn't sure I'd be willing to do that, but Shawna and I had already decided to slow down and really enjoy our time together. Shawna still hadn't decided when she would be returning to the States so we had plenty of time to slow down and take in the sites.



Before our skin wrinkled and the water cooled, we exited our respective barrels refreshed with supple skin. We bid farewell to Brendon and Milo with a tip and thank you card. He told Shawna that he only received tips about once a month. They simply weren't expected; the Irish just wanted to go above-and-beyond for the purpose of helping others enjoy life. Being nice just to be nice... what a concept.



Before reaching the town where we would bed down for the night, we took a foray to Lamb's Head. Brendon deemed it his top choice of ten-out-of-ten



"Cars driving into rivers" sign



Lamb's Head



things to see in Ireland. He was right; it was incredible. A peninsula extending from the Derrynane beach, Lamb's Head was one of the most recommended beaches in Ireland. It's craggy jetties reached into the sea. Along its shores were a few pastures, one of which housed some of the largest, healthiest-looking horses I'd ever seen. Their feathered lower legs were so regal.

The only problem was that during the steep descent to Lamb's Head, my shifters went out again. I'd noticed them giving me heartache earlier in the day, but by this point, they'd simply given up. I was stuck in my lowest gear, back to 6 mph like I had been when limping into Carrigaline. It actually wasn't bad because we were riding either straight up when I needed the lowest gear or straight down when gravity was my friend. For the first time, I was glad we weren't riding on flats. I checked online to find the closest bike shop and they were all several days away. I was on my own this time.



Bikes at Lamb's Head



“Corcorman’s” home pub

We made it to our AirB&B where I mentioned the problem with my shifters and asked if there might be any bike mechanics in town. The host’s young daughter mentioned Corcorman, a local handyman. Just moments later, Corcorman came driving by and Lucas (my host) flagged him down. He popped out, fiddled with Sapphire, got her working, added WD-40, and I was hopefully set long enough for me to make it to a full-service bike shop. He refused to accept a tip. I

was disappointed I wasn’t able to thank him so Lucas suggested I pay for a pint at the local pub for him to enjoy later. Of course, there was only one pub and everyone would know who he was. I was so grateful to Corcorman! Shawna and I had chosen to take the much tougher route over the next few days because they were said to feature Ireland’s absolute best scenery. Hopefully, this fix would get me through those tough hills.

All we’d eaten was our breakfast pastries and a candy wafer we’d received at the B&B the night before. We quickly switched to evening clothes and rushed to the pub where we shared two meals—fish and chips and shepherd’s pie and chips. We ate every last fry and I drank every drop of my pint of cider while planning the next day’s route and accommodations. I also journaled and wrote a thank you note to Corcorman to accompany his two free pints. And, guess what?!? No one had any idea who Corcorman was. They would figure it out and I would figure out that I had the name 100% wrong when I returned to my host’s home.

It was back to the room at only 7:30 PM and I was already tired after not having slept well the last few nights.

Crew Post

Shawna and I decided to cut off some miles so we wouldn’t have to work as hard in terms of daily climbing. The result was that we had a lot more time on our hands so when we saw the sign reading “Seaweed Baths,” we really didn’t have a choice. We went skinny dipping in Jameson Whiskey barrels and absolutely luxuriated in the warmth and scenery.



Caherdaniel to Portmagee

Kerry Cliffs



Distance: 30.6 mi/49.3 km
Ascent/Descent: +2650'/-2599' +808m/-792m
Average Moving Speed: 5.5 mph/8.9 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 9:59/5:35
Accommodation: Seagull Cottage Bed and Breakfast
Weather: Chilly with sun and intermittent clouds

After another rough night's sleep and worries of an oncoming cold, we were on bikes by 8 AM. We knew we'd have three climbs and had decided to take the tough road anyway. The first climb was on an "N" road and totally doable. We hunkered down at my 4.5 mph pace and spent about 3 miles on a 2-4% grade. These were getting pretty easy for me. I was even okay with the 6% grades, but not for long, and definitely not the 8+ variants. To keep my mind busy, I started a new book, "Ship of Brides" by Jojo Moyes, an author I'd really enjoyed in the past. Along the way, Shawna and I stopped often for pictures. We were officially in the area of the Ring of Kerry that everyone touted about. Even with cloud cover and the browns of winter, the coastline was stunning. The scenery provided good reasons to stop, nicely breaking up the climb. I worried, though, about later in the day when we'd switch back to "R" and "L" roads. Shawna hadn't experienced them, yet. I'd whined so much about them before she'd arrived that now she'd be able to get a flavor to match my warnings.

We enjoyed seeing the Derrynane Beach from its opposite side while we climbed and were proud of ourselves when looking back at Lamb's Head knowing we'd cycled all the way to its tip. The top of the hill between Caherdaniel and Waterville offered terrific views of the Scariff Islands. Then, it was time for downhill. Yes!

We'd decided to pick up breakfast in Waterville and though I wasn't hungry, we stopped at the teahouse right on Ballinskelligs Bay. Full breakfast for Shawna (those are HUGE) and a fruit scone, tea, and Shawna's leftovers for me. I learned the Gaelic term for Waterville translated to "the little whirlpool," presumed to be the shape of the bay. From the café, we could see Ballinskelligs where we would be in just a few hours. It was such a picturesque place to stop.

After a slow slog up a 3-6% grade and then straight back down, we reached Waterville. Other than its raw beauty, the highlight was a statue of Charlie Chaplin. No, he wasn't from Waterville; he just went there a lot. We rode on, climbing again. It was another steep hill, but short. This was the first time I'd had to walk my bike since Shawna had arrived and I was glad it registered a 9% grade so I didn't look like I'd been a lazy loser with all my whining. Along the way we saw lots of sheep with their newly born lambs. Some were so young that they barely had any hair and you could see spots on their skin. I later learned the spots usually indicated they were between two weeks and two months old. They were darling.

It was time for the Big Daddy of the day. The 2.5 mile slog that climbed over 800'. I rode about the first half mile and had to walk the rest. Out of solidarity, Shawna walked right behind me and listened as I talked incessantly (trying to take my mind off my plight). I was definitely justified; we hit 14% grades many times. Reaching the top was heavenly, as were the views! Next was down and, like previous times on the trip, I tried riding down and simply went too fast. Note, I'd ridden just over 50 mph on several occasions back home. Speed and I are friends. These grades with mountain curves, extra weight on the bike, and brake pads smelling like burnt rubber pushed me toward caution. I tried riding downhill a few times, but ended up walking most of the descent. Our endpoint was Kerry Cliffs, just before which I was able to ride again.



Overlooking Derrynane Bay



Proudly looking back at Lamb's Head



Is there a best view?



Charlie and Shawna sharing a laugh



Kerry Cliffs



Kerry Cliffs are, strangely, privately owned. Guests must pay a fee of €5 to see them, but in return the owners maintain its pristine character. They limit the number of people and who can visit (i.e., which tour groups). Guests walk to the top of two hills that overlook the cliffs in their sheer glory. The water was so clear and its colors somewhat resembled those of the Caribbean. The walls stood 1000' above the Atlantic with stark perpendicular cliffs. I was afraid I would drop my phone while taking pictures. It would never be found and definitely not survive in a single piece. Nonetheless, I kept holding up my phone. I just couldn't get enough and wanted to remember it forever.

In the background were two sets of islands. In the front was Puffin Island, home to... you guessed it... puffins (aka "sea parrots"), thousands of whom nest each year on the island's grassy top. Parent puffins abandon their babies on the cliffs so the babies have to walk or jump into the sea when they get hungry. You don't jump off the cliff, you die of hunger! That just wouldn't pass Child Protective Services laws in the State of Nevada. Puffins were just one of many bird species that lived on the island and qualified it as an official bird sanctuary.



The Skelligs



Beehive huts



Portmagee marina

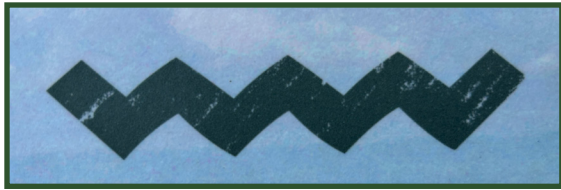
The other islands were the Skelligs—Little Skellig and Great Skellig. Great Skellig (also called Skellig Michael) was a UNESCO World Heritage Site rightfully earned because of its cultural significance. It was built to be a monastery between the 6th and 8th centuries for ascetic monks seeking isolation and closeness to God. Monks built over 600 steep, hand-carved, stone stairs to climb from the boat landing to the monastery. They lived harsh lives of prayer, work, and survival and were self-sufficient on the island. They ate birds and eggs, grew crops, and collected rainwater. They built stone beehive huts in which to live and there were remnants of a 10th century church. The monks departed sometime between the 12th and 13th centuries. Guests could still visit Skellig Michael by boat if coming during high season (which, of course, I hadn't done so was quite disappointed).

I took my time, a lot of time, enjoying the views at Kerry Cliffs and read every placard I could find. The place was magical. Though I didn't think I'd see fairies flying, leprechauns jumping, or an elf on a shelf hidden in one the the rock crevasses, there was something about the place that made it remarkable. Shawna and I shot our last pictures, hoisted ourselves onto our bikes, and headed to the nearby town of Portmagee—a town that in 2012 received an award as one of the top tourists towns in Ireland. Small and quaint, this fishing village was adorned with boats along its shores and marina and had a backdrop bridge to Valentia Island (sometimes spelled “Valencia”) where we would be visiting the following day.

The entire area had limited dining options according to Google so we had the ticket-taker at Kerry Cliffs make a recommendation. There were two pubs; if we wanted seafood special to the area, we were to visit Fisherman's Bar. We shared seafood chowder and shrimp and crab tagliolini with Irish bread on the side. After a quick stop at a convenience store for a chocolate nightcap, we biked to our B&B. It was a nice warm room and the host even washed our disgusting clothes. What a full day!

Crew Post

Kerry Cliffs—wow! The Ring of Kerry—wow! We were on our toes pushing bikes up 14% grades, but it was totally worth it!



Wild Atlantic Way sign

Portmagee to Glenbeigh

Arguably the Best View in Ireland



View from AirB&B



Arguably the best view in Ireland

Distance: 44.6 mi/71.8 km
Ascent/Descent: +2611'/-2662' +796m/-811m
Average Moving Speed: 6.9 mph/11.1 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 11:48/6:29
Accommodation: AirB&B hosted by Mary
Weather: Overcast and windy at times
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vAOZ7D2o3o6>

I slept horribly again so broke down and pulled out the sleeping pills. Once in my system, I got a good five hours of sleep. I even slept in a bit and we were still out the door by 8:30. Part of this “speed” increase occurred because we were improving with our gear. I mostly knew where everything went, what would fit where, and in which order I should place everything. That lowered my stress level a lot.

Our first job was to get out of Portmagee and over the bridge to Valentia Island. Looking back at Portmagee was a sight to behold with its fishing boats and colorful buildings. Right on the other side of the bridge was the museum I’d wanted to visit, The Skellig Experience/ Museum about the Skellig Islands. It was closed so we passed it and I marked it off my “really-want-to-do” list.



View of Portmagee from Skellig Experience/Museum

We passed the 1860s location of the first Trans-Atlantic telegraph line office and tons of incredible scenery. It was hard riding, but we had fun and were “wow’d” around every corner. “Stopping here for a picture.” “Gotta stop!” “Oh, my! Pull over.” We saw tall standing rocks, pastures galore, and more sheep than we could count. The lambs were our favorites, so little and sweet.

Our first big stop was at Geokaun Mountain and Fogher Cliffs, touted on local signs as “Arguably the best view in Ireland.” We weren’t sure who’d argued it, but it was pretty spectacular. The mountain was the highest point on Valentia Island and provided a 360° view from the top. We paid our €4 each, left the bikes at the bottom of the hill and walked up and up. It was so steep; I was glad we left the bikes behind. We started with the one-mile Loop Walk that circumnavigated the peak. It was brutally windy and cold on one side and quite pleasant on the other, both sides offering stunning views. We could see Portmagee, Kerry Cliffs, the Skellig Islands, Cahersiveen (our next stop), and all the islands in every direction. Farthest west, there were no

islands; we were at the westernmost part of Europe, what was considered the end of the world when everyone agreed the world was flat. It was kinda cool because I’d been at Finesterre, Spain’s end-of-the-world, a few years prior when I’d walked the Camino.

From the Loop Walk, we saw a lighthouse and granite quarry as well as the tetrapod (four-legged vertebrates) center. The center held a fossil from 385 million years ago that appeared to be evidence of the first animals transferring from aquatic to terrestrial life. Shawna and I had looked at a picture of the tracks online and couldn’t figure out what we were looking at. That sealed its fate; we weren’t riding all the way to the tetrapod center to see some divots in rocks.

Walking down from the Loop Walk, I found an area with lots of information about Druidic folklore. Of course, I read every last word, thoroughly enjoying it. I also learned a bit about gannets and their prominence in the area, especially on Little Skellig Island where there were known to be 27,000 mating pairs amassing the world’s second largest gannet population. Continuing down the path took me to the Fogher Cliffs. Much smaller than the Kerry Cliffs, they weren’t quite as impressive, but they were still pretty darn neat-o.



First Trans-Atlantic telegraph line office

We slunk back down the hill and mounted our trusty steeds. Our last stop on the island was to be the ferry terminal where we would take a quick jaunt to Cahersiveen. Along the way, we passed a beautiful, ivy-laced church tower. St. John the Baptist Church was built in 1815 with an active congregation of 60 people until a larger church was built nearby in 1860. I loved these old structures and they appeared everywhere we rode.

When we reached the dock, we didn't see the ferry or anything related to ferry tickets. After asking two different groups of people, we knew we had two options—wait for two weeks until the ferry started for the season or continue around the island, cross the bridge back to Portmagee, and take the long way around to Cahersiveen. It would add 14 miles. A two-week wait right there wasn't out of the question, was it?



Welcome to Carraig na Circe



Location of the first tetrapod
(four-legged vertebrate)



View of Cahersiveen



Fogher Cliffs



Remnants of a druidic circle?



Killowen Old Parish Church

The benefit of not knowing about the ferry's off-season was that we would be passing the Skellig Experience/Museum again and it would be open. Shawna, despite her reluctance because of my commitment to read everything in every museum, agreed we could stop. Besides, we were both starving since it was noon and we hadn't eaten anything since the night before. I sealed the deal when informing Shawna the museum had a café. We paid the admission fee and immediately went to order food. Shawna did the wise thing and ordered a sandwich packed with protein. I did the preferred thing and ordered tea and a scone—I was in Ireland!

When the overview film started playing, they let me take my tea into the theater to watch. We learned about the monks and how they came to choose and develop Skellig Michael Island for their worshipful use. Afterward, a docent spent time telling us about a strange phenomenon—seven monasteries exist on a single geographical line through the European continent. It was quite interesting and something that made us go: “Hmmm.”

We then took time to wander around the museum. I loved learning about how the monks lived, how they survived with crops, fire, water, seafood, fowl, meat, and dairy, and how they came to harness life using only those items. It was by sheer hard work on an inhospitable island. At any given time, twelve monks lived on Skellig Michael and when one would permanently leave, another monk would come to take his place. The island was so remote that the inhabiting monks had little-to-no interaction with the outside world so they could ruminate solely on God.

Before reaching the museum, I'd learned quite a bit of information about the island and the monks who lived there. I also knew the island and some of its man-made infrastructure was featured in a scene in one of the Star Wars movies. What I didn't expect was how much of the Star Wars theme would be in the museum. Perhaps many visitors only came to see this remarkable UNESCO Heritage Site because it had a brief scene in a movie. I was eager to see it because it had earned a UNESCO designation, and in two categories



Skellig Museum Café



Skellig Wars



Coincidence or God-inspired?

nonetheless! Less than 4% of the world's UNESCO sites claim this designation. First, Skellig was “one of the best preserved examples of early Christian monastic architecture” and, second, it had natural value because of its “rugged beauty” and “seabird colonies.” Receiving the double designation of cultural and physical importance was quite an accomplishment. A few seconds on the big screen just didn't call my name like the UNESCO moniker did.

I learned about animal-skin covered boats that enabled them to land on the island. And, I learned about the backbreaking work of building stairs from the shoreline to the upper community—2,300 steps in all with 600 on the only staircase still in use in the 21st century. I learned that probably two monks would share each beehive hut (replicas of which we'd seen at Kerry Cliffs the day before) and the colony dated back to 600 AD. At one modern point in history, metal gates were placed on the island to keep visitors out of a certain area. The weather was so horrendous (a hurricane came by) that it ripped the gates from their cement and threw them into the ocean. Yeah, I wouldn't want to live up there!

It was surprising to hear Vikings attacked the island on four occasions, possibly just for the fun of it since it was likely the monks had nothing worth looting. The monks abandoned the island in 1100 AD to worship at a monastery on the mainland. After learning all that, I asked the docent many, many more questions. He was so happy to share his vast knowledge so I think I made his day (much to Shawna's exasperation).

Done with questions and tea, we hit the road. I needed to stop in Cahersiveen, the first town with a bike shop. Sapphire needed some upgraded brake pads, a gearing tune-up, and more fiddling with her shifters. [Lest you think she was a crappy bike, note that she'd carried my sorry buttocks over 13,000 miles before wheels touched pavement in the Emerald Isle.] The tech, Steven, at Casey Cycles was awesome and wouldn't even accept a tip. These Irish bike mechanics!

We stopped numerous times for pictures, but mostly just pedaled. After passing the old railway (which, unsurprisingly, ended at a pub) and many empty beaches, we arrived in Glenbeigh. We'd hoped to continue another ten miles, but it was chilly and we were hungry so ducked into a pub for much-needed salad, a burger, and cider. A routine was beginning to form—we spent our dinners at pubs planning the next day's route and places to stop along the way. That was also when we booked our lodging for the present night. Shawna and I didn't want to book until the last minute in case our plans changed (as they always did). We were a far cry from what Shawna expected when she'd made all of those reservations back home. In addition to completing our bar chores, I had the opportunity to speak with a man and his son about their exploits cycling around the Ring of Kerry. He agreed it was hard work and gave us recommendations for what we should visit next. A quick stop at the grocery store for chocolate and we were ready for bed in our just-booked AirB&B.

Crew Post

Today was about beauty. We spent much of the day on Valentia Island hiking around a mountain deemed to offer “arguably the best view in Ireland” and went to a museum about the history of Skellig Michael and the monks who lived, worked, and worshipped there.



Valentia Island

Glenbeigh to Dingle

On Sleah Head Drive



Afternoon scenery

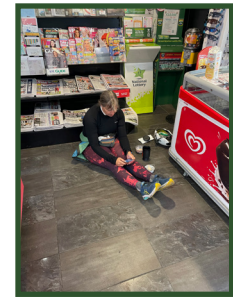


Distance: 47 mi/76 km
Ascent/Descent: +1855'/-1936' +565m/-590m
Average Moving Speed: 8.7 mph/14 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 6:49/5:23
Accommodation: Grapevine Hostel
Weather: A bit chilly with clouds and sun
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/veqzdmVgj7O>

Again with the sleeping pills and again I slept better. It was a good thing because Shawna and I had a long day planned. We'd looked at all our resources to see what there was to see along our route—lots of picture stops, but little else. Also, the climb wasn't huge so we decided to bite off a 47 mile day. We were ultimately successful.

We left Glenbeigh at 8 AM; it was chilly, but not miserably so. We rode for about two hours until almost reaching the 20-mile mark. We were both hungry and couldn't find an open bakery on a Sunday so went to the local grocery store. It hadn't been until this point that I learned grocery stores carried lots of healthy, tasty food. Who knew!?! I supposed that if I

were that hungry and hit a 7-11 at home, I could probably find equally healthy options there, too. I'd just never been to a 7-11 seeking healthy food. We grabbed yogurts and I supplemented with a limp sausage from under a heat lamp. I splurged for some real orange juice (or as real as you can get in a prepackaged container). There was nowhere to sit so we procured permission to sit on their floor out of the cold. That was the same place that Shawna found and introduced me to the culinary delight of Nutella biscuits—a life-changing moment. Yum!



Grocery store

We set out again with plans to continue to Annascaul where we knew we could find a place for the night and decide if we would push on to Dingle. I really wanted to reach Dingle that evening so I could taste Murphy's brown bread ice cream and see Dick Mack's Pub, voted the 17th best pub in Europe. The ride provided us with beautiful green views of seemingly endless sheep fields. We were still enamored with all the baby lambs and seeing them on rolling green hills surrounded by ancient stone fences overlooking the ocean was definitely a sight to behold.

At one point, I saw a rocky beach and wanted to get a picture. When we stopped, I realized there was a gate blocking a set of stairs down to the beach. A lock hung on the gate, but it wasn't locked. Hmmmm. I took its unlocked state as an invitation to walk down to the beach and peer-pressured Shawna into joining me as I walked through the high grass on the side of the gate and down to the water. It was a beautiful, somewhat secluded, rocky shoreline from which we could see where we'd biked the day before. I checked the water and determined it was cold. Shawna said she'd swim it in a wetsuit, but I'd need a dry suit and even then would think twice. We took pictures with each of us standing (Shawna jumping) on a huge rock. I'd not been able to get onto said rock until Shawna guilted me into continuing to try. She was right and I was able to do it. The sun was out and the temperature warm so I stripped down to my cycling shorts and jersey. As we walked through the wind, I held my tights and shirt so they could fly in the wind. Hopefully, the stink would fly right out of them.



Queen fo the rock



Shawna showing off her advanced jumping skills



Beach cruisers



Airing out my dirty laundry

The next amazing site was Inch Beach. It was a white sand beach about three miles long that had been featured in several Hollywood films. Being a Sunday, there were lots of cars and families enjoying the views. Even with the large (by Irish standards) crowd, there was plenty of room for everyone. I saw a mother and son making sand castles and couldn't help but take a picture of them. It was such a loving moment between parent and child.

We rode with intentions to stop in Annascaul, but it came and went and we were still comfortable in our saddles climbing hills so pushed to Dingle—not many miles, but a lot of ascents. Finally around 2:30 PM, we rode into the cute town of Dingle. Even before finding a place to stay, we patronized Murphy's for their iconic brown bread ice cream. It was, quite surprisingly, delicious! When we entered the store, we were greeted by Shawn, an American and the store owner. He generously comped our ice creams after seeing how ridiculously delighted we were to be there. We had a lovely talk with him and learned he was from New York before emigrating to Ireland and opening his own store. It was so successful that he continued opening them. By the time we arrived, there were two storefronts in Dingle and I had seen them in other major towns as well.

Shawna and I then rode to our home for the night—Grapevine Hostel—stopping along the way at a grocery store so I could buy some Irish soda bread. I'd had a hankering for it since arriving in Ireland, yet hadn't bought any. I was hungry so just went for it—a whole loaf! Yes, I shared with Shawna and, yes, there were plenty of leftovers for the ride tomorrow. Perhaps eating more often throughout the day would tide me over so I wouldn't be so famished before every meal.

After such a comfortable stay at Black Sheep Hostel in Killarney, I was somewhat disappointed with our new hostel. It was fine, but there were no privacy curtains and the four others with whom we'd be sharing a room had messes of clothes and luggage everywhere. Shawna and I decided to blow an extra €5 each to switch to a private room with two twin beds. It was a good decision; we were much more comfortable. Still hungry, we each showered and set out at 4:30 PM already set on buying dinner at Dick Mack's famous pub. They didn't have food service and we couldn't see the novelty of the bar. I was disappointed so we carried on to another pub. We

walked up and down the Main Street and finally settled on a bar for her veggie burger and my, yet again, fish and chips with hard cider. We spent the entire dinner creating what we deemed to be a grand plan for the next day; it would involve a three-hour morning boat tour after which we'd ride as far as we could. Much of this required knowing that there would be a place for us to sleep the next night. It seemed we spent more time planning and prepping than actually riding, but that was definitely part of the experience.



Family memories



Shawn—brown bread ice cream inventor

Crew Post

We finished the Ring of Kerry and started Sleah Head Drive (aka “The Ring of Dingle”). It was a full day of amazing sites, but there were no museums, memorials, or hikes along the way. Twice, we stopped to walk down to beaches, but we mostly just rode. We covered a lot of miles with a few hard hills, but listening to “The Ship of Brides” by Jojo Moyes kept me alert as did all the laughing we did. We rounded out the afternoon with an Irish favorite, Murphy’s ice cream... brown bread flavor is the best!



Dingle

Dingle to Listowel

Conor Pass—The 7% Suck



Distance: 57.2 mi/92.1 km
Ascent/Descent: +2534'/-2457' +772m/-749m
Average Moving Speed: 8.2 mph/13.2 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 10:36/7:01
Accommodation: AirB&B with Damien
Weather: Gorgeous
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vKv2d1W1A46>



It was going to be another long day so we were up early. Fortunately, the hostel offered continental breakfast so I enjoyed tea and cereal and took a sandwich to go. Shawna took a sandwich, too, and they proved to be really helpful as the day progressed.

We were ready for what was to come. There were options for how we could continue northward and we chose to take the most difficult path... on purpose. It was on the EV1 and Doug and others had said how impressive the views were while riding up to the pass. Because we knew we were in for a daunting four miles first thing in the morning, we took it in stride and just laughed about it; there really was no other option since the decision had been made.



It says “TURN BACK NOW”



Yes, it says 7.4% and is increasing



Even Shawna walked



Looking back at Dingle

I described it as brutal and the description was no exaggeration. The climb to Conor Pass boasted a 7.1% grade and fell into the Cat 2 cycling level category. Cat 1 is the absolute most difficult climb. We started and were able to cycle uphill for a surprisingly long time. I was really impressed with us because we passed two signs warning of the hill’s difficulty for cars and caution for driving during severe weather. Every caution sign also displayed a gradient marker and every increase in elevation was met with increased steepness. In the end, I walked about one-third to one-half of the four miles and Shawna humored me by walking it, too. I felt badly because I knew she could have ridden most of it. At one point, we saw an unencumbered cyclist flying up the hill and Shawna yelled “Show off!” We said we should thermal-image his bike to make sure there was no pedal assist. I, the better person, yelled “Woo-hoo. You’re Ironman ready.” Despite our definite physical hardship, we laughed maniacally, constantly reminding ourselves that we’d chosen this “suck”! It hadn’t been Priest’s Leap, but Conor Pass earned our respect.

We reached the top in about an hour-and-a-half, a relief since we were prepared for it to take a full three hours. We “whoop-whooped” and posed for way too many pictures including the “I died” picture with both of us laying beside our bikes. The Irish name of the pass was An Chonair and it was the highest mountain crossing on the Wild Atlantic Way. We’d just made it from sea level to the pass in one fell swoop!



Made it!



John and his Westiepoo, Rosie



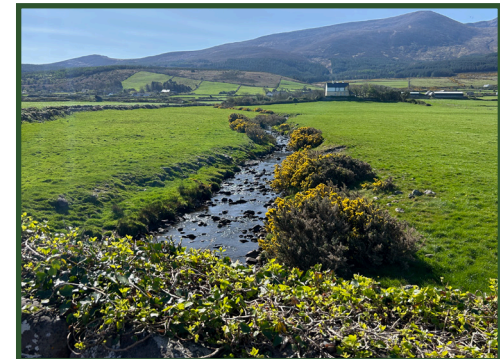
The pre-famine community

We needed time to rest and fortunately, I found the perfect excuse. John and his Westiepool, Rosie, were working at the top selling hand painted rocks. We thought the artistic sheep were darling, but there was no way we were adding rocks to our bike packs. Instead, we loved on Rosie and talked for quite a while with John.

He told us about the dilapidated town below poised right next to a lovely lake. It had been an active community until the famine. He confirmed what I'd learned at the famine museum the previous week—despite living on the shores of two lakes, the people were not allowed to fish in them because landowners would not allow it—the fish in the lake officially belonged to the owner. Whether the story was true in this specific locale was questionable, but he was telling the story I knew was true in at least some areas on this island. I asked how famine could occur with so many cows. He explained that villages such as the one below generally had one cow for the entire community that would provide milk. Once starvation kicked in and the cow became the only remaining meal, there was nothing left.

It was time for the fun part—going down. I should have thought to put on a jacket. Despite the chill from Sapphire's speed, the scenery was riveting so I refused to stop. Upon arriving at the bottom, I was so emotionally fulfilled. We'd worked hard to get to the top, watching as Dingle and her surrounding ocean faded into the background. Coming down fast and seeing the beaches on the other side made the climb totally worth it.

We continued on the EV1 that took us on a little jaunt down to a beach where we never set foot. But, just seeing the sheep and lambs in their green pastures with the brown of the sand and blue of the ocean was bucolic. It created such a sense of peace. We also saw a church façade decorated with ivy. Every time I saw those old buildings with new life growing on them brought me joy.



Our next stop was Blennerville Windmill. We arrived at a locked gate and I was so disappointed. I'd really wanted to see it. As I was expressing my disappointment, a local woman walked by and said the entrance was around the corner. I was elated. Shawna and I rode our bikes there and disrobed from our helmets, sunglasses, and cycling gloves. We took our time so glad to have a minute to relax and an opportunity to see something old and really cool. We'd already ridden 30 miles and had 20 to go; the break was definitely needed. I tried to open the door and, darn it, it was locked! What a let-down! We re-dressed, rode across the bridge, and cycled briefly on a greenway so we could see the windmill from the other side. It was just too far away for a good picture. I was bummed.

The good news was that we were only two miles from Tralee where we would be picking up lunch. We found the first pub advertising food and ducked in. The guy working there welcomed us and even let us park our bikes inside the bar. I had him make me an Irish coffee. I'd been wanting one ever since arriving in Ireland, but it was a bit of a problem. Drinking coffee at night kept me awake. Drinking whiskey early in the day just didn't seem right. I figured the additional 20 miles demanded something strong (coffee) and the whiskey wouldn't affect me enough to leave me drunk riding. I was right on both counts and jammed it on the bike later that afternoon. And, perhaps the liquor helped take my mind off the discomfort of constant spinning.

Interestingly, the guy working at the bar was not a bartender and had no idea what an Irish coffee was. He looked it up online, and told me he didn't have any cream. I was fine with just milk. He did a great job and I eventually poured it over ice so I could down it quickly before leaving... I needed the shot of caffeine. He didn't charge me for the drink; he said he wasn't even sure if he'd made the right thing. I assured him it was great, but seeing as I hadn't had Irish coffee in Ireland in 35 years, I wouldn't know any better. This "getting comped" thing was pretty awesome—traveling with a beaut like Shawna was paying off! Shawna and I split a hamburger and chicken burger and both ate every French fry on our plates.

We continued to our final destination, Listowel, traveling faster than I'd ridden since Rosslare Harbour. I finished one book, "Saxons, Vikings, and Celts," which I did not enjoy and continued with "The Ship of Brides" which I was enjoying. Wonderfully, we were finally on mostly flat ground, well... flat for Ireland. There was still a whole lot of shifting going on.

Instead of going directly to the AirB&B we'd booked just an hour-and-a-half earlier, we stopped at a store to pick up dinner. It would be salad and tropical juice for me; I was craving fruits and vegetables. We then rode back the quarter mile to our AirB&B. The pictures had been nice and I was amazed with the advertised indoor pool, but what we saw upon arriving was certainly not what I was expecting. We had to climb yet another 10%-or-so grade walking our bikes before reaching a huge gated entrance. We input the given code at a grand entry gate and it opened as if we were approaching a palace. We were! It was such a remarkable site that I told Shawna we'd have to wait a minute; I needed to check my AirB&B receipt. I worried that instead of the US\$113 I thought I'd spent that I'd actually spent US\$1113. Nope, just a hundred bucks. The owner, Damien, met us at the door and gave us a tour of his home.



It reminded me of Hearst Castle in Central California. There was the conservatory with a gigantic telescope, a music room with a grand piano, gold-gilded furniture throughout, and, the pièce de résistance was an indoor swimming pool, sauna, and hot tub.

Shawna and I dumped our gear in our large, well-adorned room and I went outside for a self-tour of the grounds. I saw a fountain, statues, a basketball and pickleball court, hammocks, and a gazebo. As I walked around in awe, I called Mike, Ryan, and Winter while sending them pictures of what I was seeing. I felt like a queen! Well... a queen who had to return to her room to wash her underwear in a Scrubba before hitting the pool wearing a jog bra and granny panties.

Damien, whose claim to fame (other than being an anesthesiologist) was traveling to every UN-recognized country on the globe, had said we could eat our dinner by the pool so Shawna and I pulled up loungers. I ate and journaled until getting a call from Mike. It seemed a good time to slip into the hot tub. While talking with him, Shawna and I witnessed one of those memorable red-pink sunsets. What a wonderful way to end a physically challenging day.



Crew Post

We climbed and climbed up and over Conor Pass, an average gradient of 7.1% over a four mile stretch. It was one of those “But, did you die?” kind of things. We laughed most of the way while telling ourselves how stupid we were. Well... we may be stupid, but we climbed (on bikes and feet) Conor Pass and you didn't. We tried to see Blennerville Windmill, but it was closed so I had an Irish coffee instead. After a 50+ mile ride, it was time to relax. We were WOW'd by our AirB&B—a mansion—and ate our gas station dinners on loungers beside the indoor pool before taking a little soak in the hot tub.



Listowel to Doolin

Cliffs of Mohar—Check!



Distance: 60.8 mi/97.9 km
Ascent/Descent: +3062'/-3124' +933m/-952m
Average Moving Speed: 7.2 mph/11.6 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 13:04/8:25
Accommodation: Aille River Tourist Hostel
Weather: Warm and clear with wind
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/v26MdXB2KEO>



I was sad to leave what I'd started referring to as the Listowel Mansion. Heated bidet, warm shower with both shampoo and conditioner, comfortable bed, and, ohhhh, that hot tub! I was in the lap of luxury if I just weren't re-wearing the same stinky clothes I'd worn the day before and creaking my body out of bed to get in the saddle. By this time, Shawna had learned that I had a quirky way of getting onto Sapphire. I was neither strong enough nor flexible enough, probably both, to mount her like a normal person. Instead, I had two choices. I could stand on a curb to gain extra height on one side or, my most used strategy, lift my leg with my hand, swing it over her top tube, and hope the toe made it over. Too often, it did not and I'd need to repeat the process two or three times. Shawna laughed at my infirmity every time; she had no respect for the elderly.

We had 13 miles to reach the Tarbert-Killimer ferry and rode quickly, surprisingly clocking the distance in an hour-and-a-half (embarrassingly slow by triathlon standards). When we first saw the ferry, I was sure we weren't going to make it so I put on the gas. As we came closer, we saw a line of cars so knew we'd made it and only later learned the ferry left once an hour; we were lucky with our perfect timing.

The ferry took 20 minutes to cross the 2.5 miles from County Kerry to County Clare. By choice, we were skipping County Limerick. With apologies to those from the county, Limerick just didn't appeal to us. I'd learned to not like big cities and there was really nothing that I was dying to see there. Also, many people had told us to take the ferry because they didn't have much good to say about Limerick—implying it was a rather rough-and-tumble town.

During that 20 minute ride, Shawna took advantage of the scenery on the open upper deck while I hid in the relative warmth planning what we would see along our day's path. As soon as we reached Killimer and debarked, I decided I was hungry. The bad news was that with one measley exception there was absolutely nothing between there and 23 miles along the remote road we would be traveling. Right at the ferry dock was an unimpressive souvenir shop, our sole option. It would be coffee and a microwaved scone for breakfast.

We rode and rode while I continued listening to "The Ship of Brides" and added a book to my repertoire—"Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger." No light reading for this girl! If I was going to suffer on the bike, my mind had to suffer, too. Up and down. We were on an L-road, one of those local jobbers that didn't follow the rules of acceptable gradients. Fortunately, it wasn't riddled with potholes and worn asphalt and the rolling hill gradients usually were low enough that we could gain enough speed on the downhill to make it up the other side. There were some occasions requiring walking that final bit. The benefit of being in rural Ireland was the serenity of it all. Pastures upon pastures separated by ancient stone walls harboring sheep, lambs, cows, and horses in the morning sun. There were occasional houses and hundreds of years-old crumbling stone buildings adorning our way.

I was excited to experience The Music Makers of West Clare Museum in Milltown Malbay. I envisioned lots of old instruments, little buttons all over that I could push and hear Irish ditties, placards of lyrics telling Irish history that varied from solemn to humorous. I was ready for this thing! Shawna described our experience best in a post she sent our crew later that night:

"I forgot to mention the best 'must miss' spot of our adventure so far. We visited a music museum. The worker helped us put the bikes inside and then we asked to buy a ticket and he was surprised we wanted to go in. That should have been a sign it was going to be bad. We watched very boring videos that the employee couldn't remember how to work. The final cherry on the top was the employee's breath. We had been cycling for days and we didn't smell that ripe. The only real instruments in the museum were concertinas, which look like small box accordions."



Yes, he was an interesting man and, yes, the videos gave me the time I needed to book our hostel for the night. And, she was right, besides the concertina collection, there was a single Victorla. I'd like to say that was €5 and 45 minutes of my life I will never get back, but that's not correct. Shawna and I will be laughing about it for a very long time and we have the video of her torturing me by playing a concertina to prove it.



We rode on until I saw a parking lot full of cars near the shore. It looked just like a parking lot on any California beach on a weekend afternoon. I gave the "We're stopping for a picture here" sign to Shawna and turned in. It was a fabulous decision and clear why so many people were enjoying their afternoon at this place and other areas along the coastline. We could see additional parking lots down the coast with beaches of people enjoying the sun. Ours did not have a beach; it sat on a bluff, lumps of green grasses pushing right to the edge of black sheer walls falling into the Atlantic. I walked along the edge and kept walking. There was a section near the end that looked like a great picture point, but when I arrived, I realized it was possible to advance further by scrambling down rocks. I know what you're thinking—and no, I didn't slip on the moss and fall to my death (though I was surprised I didn't). Instead, I sat on a rock and pondered life. It was wonderfully relaxing to be amidst such beauty, such solitude; no one was in sight except distant surfers. I kept hoping



Shawna would find me so she could enjoy it, too, but she never came. I assumed she'd found something even more incredible. The only interruption to my silence was a boy of about ten. He and his friends had been stick/sword fighting on the grasses above when my crawling over the side must have made him curious. All I could envision was this boy slipping on moss and falling the dozens of feet into the water crashing against the rocks below. I asked him if his parents knew where he was and he indicated they didn't and they wouldn't care. I assured him that his parents would indeed care and that he should leave immediately. He kept scrambling around the rocks and I kept getting more and more insistent that he not be there without his parents' permission until he finally left. To this day, I'm not sure if I was more worried about his safety (which I most certainly was) or my desire to enjoy the place by myself. I was, however, well aware that I'd been the idiot adult who had set such a bad example.

It was then that I remembered I'd been wanting for weeks to download the song "Ireland" by Garth Brooks. This was the perfect time; listening to it filled me with joy. I eventually decided I had to return to reality, still questioning where Shawna had gone. Arriving back at our bikes, there she was... just standing. I'd asked her how long she'd been waiting and she said she hadn't left the area where we'd left out bikes. What?!? When this beauty called like a siren from the depths? Because, she answered, she thought I'd told her to stay and watch the bikes. I felt and still feel terrible! I'd had this amazing experience while she'd just wasted 20-or-so minutes standing in one place. I was a horrible friend.

We'd read that Dough Castle in Lahinch and was worth seeing so wanted to stop. We couldn't reach it, though, because it was on a golf course. I was sad we couldn't get closer, but how cool was that to have real ruins of a castle as a course hazard! The surrounding mowed green turf made the castle wow the senses.

The path we'd chosen by accident climbed up and over a mountain instead of going around it. That whole "it'll be a lot fewer miles and it's not that much more climbing" was a myth we'd told ourselves. It was a slow slog, but I was getting stronger and could ride much of the way. I used Kevin, an old homeowner standing outside his stone house, as an excuse to stop and catch my breath. We



Dough Castle in Lahinch



In business 100 years despite the name



Kevin... who lives on a hill



"For Let" ads

spoke for a while and he smiled the entire time. I think there hadn't been another human on that road for decades. Who in their right mind would climb it?

Shawna was told her rental bike was limited to use on the Ring of Kerry so she contacted the owner of the bike shop to tell him she wanted to continue north. He never responded so she continued. Her goal all along had been to see the Cliffs of Mohar. You may recall that she'd chosen not to come on this adventure because her Irish experience a few months prior had been horrible in terms of weather. When she and her kids arrived at the cliffs, they saw nothing but fog and about flew over the side in the intense wind. Shawna was excited to see what the cliffs really looked like. This was her day. And, this was my day. The Cliffs of Mohar were a bucket list item for me. She rode ahead and had plenty of time to begin her discovery on this clear day with light winds. I was so happy for her.

I finished slogging up the hill and then coasted down the other side before parking next to Shawna's rental. I had one thing on my mind—ice cream. Who knew that I'd reach this UNESCO World Heritage Site and think—hmmm, it can wait. While enjoying every last lick as well as the chocolate straw perched upon it, I walked up the hill to the edge of the cliffs to finally witness their raw, powerful majesty. The day wasn't perfectly clear, but it didn't matter. They were formidable and truly a work of God.

The area included several walking trails of which Shawna strolled every last one. I just took in a few, instead of spending time savoring ice cream and visiting the viewing tower. Someone pointed out whales near the cliffs and we all "oohed" and "awed." I never saw



Cliffs of Mohar



Proof I was there

"Shall we make our tower on the cliff top,
With the porthole window facing the sea,
Hear the wild birdsongs by sea.
See the tube-nosed fulmar with speculums outstretched
Gliding on an invisible thermal wind heaven up high,
Then the black wing-tipped great gannets sweep by,
These white birds hunt from the sky, turn with speed,
Elongated body and wings tucked in, dive with precision,
Into the sardine shoal from high, slipstream trails
Into the deep, their aquatic skills find sardine sensation...

Harpers and buskers entertain the crowd and like their
ancestors
Playing sweet bardic melodies...

So when the burning red sun sets over the Ocean,
illuminating
A brilliant chiaroscuro sky, we will walk the Thomond
Wall there you and I."

—James Walsh
(The Irish poet I met at our AirB&B in Kinvara)

them do any tricks like Shamu so think it was really just a rock over which waves were flowing. It made a good story anyway. Within the tower were several pictures including “For Let” ads—newspaper ads from yesteryear inviting guests to rent cliff cottages for the summer. I’d learned while walking along the cliff that buskers (musicians) used to play their instruments along the shoreline for passersby and could imagine fun-filled summers with families walking along the same path I trampled this day.

I found Shawna briefly so we could take a selfie then returned to the visitor’s center just before they closed. There was just enough time to watch the “4D Experience with the Cliffs,” a view of the cliffs as seen from a bird’s perspective. It was disappointing I couldn’t have more time in the museum...damn ice cream!



Doolin scenery



Our night’s accommodation



Gus O’Connor’s renowned steak club



Gorgeous horse

As evening approached, Shawna and I saddled up and rushed to Doolin arriving at the hostel just before 7 PM. It was cute on the outside, but our teeny room was... well... teeny. Yes, it was en-suite with a toilet and sink, but our private shower was in another section of the hostel. I decided to make Shawna suffer by foregoing a shower relying on baby wipes to cleanse my reeking body instead.

After her shower (proving she was the better person), we walked to dinner. The horses we saw along the way and throughout Ireland were simply gorgeous—so tall and healthy. Dinner was at Gus O'Connor's Pub which we'd heard had the best steak we would ever eat. The only steak on the menu was a steak sandwich so we both ordered one. It was not the best steak either of us would ever eat, but it sure filled the spot in our hungry bellies. This riding every day certainly created an appetite! The cider was good and I journaled while lots of tourists in the pub enjoyed live music.



Shawna left earlier than me because we'd heard the sunset from the beach would be spectacular. Walking the two mile roundtrip didn't appeal to me so I did a half-assed effort and walked just part of the way. I surely missed the best sunset I'd ever see, but I was okay with that. Shawna watched it from the pier and assured me it was worth the walk.

It had been an exciting day.

Crew Post

I was able to cross off one of my bucket list items today. Shawna and I saw the Cliffs of Mohar; it was grand and spectacular beneath a shining sun.



The substandard view of the sunset

Doolin to Kinvara

The Barren Burren



Distance: 42.8 mi/368.9 km
Ascent/Descent: +2320'/-2339' +707m/-713m
Average Moving Speed: 5.4 mph/8.7 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 13:22/7:53
Accommodation: AirB&B hosted by Christopher
Weather: Gorgeous—shorts and t-shirt
Video Overview: None



Breakfast in Lisdoonvarna

I'd hoped to sleep late because we had a short day and I'd been sleeping so poorly. Nope, didn't happen. I was up early despite another horrible night's sleep so started to work on my journal that I'd not finished the day before. My being awake awakened Shawna so it made sense for us to get up and on the road. As we checked out, our hostel proprietor suggested we take the coastal route to our next stop, Kinvara, because it was so beautiful. We assured him we'd seen a lot of beautiful lately and showed him our plan. When he saw we were heading directly east, he raised his eyebrows and commented that we were going straight into the Burren. He made it sound daunting. Living dangerously, we went east.



We climbed out of Doolin with breakfast planned in Lisdoonvarna just six miles ahead. When we arrived in Lisdoonvarna, though, we were unable to find any open restaurants. It was strange, like a ghost town with all it's doors locked. There were also signs outside reading: "No public access." It seemed strange because parents were dropping their kids off at school and I wondered where they would go if they wanted morning coffee with a friend after leaving the rugrats with their wardens.



The shepherd

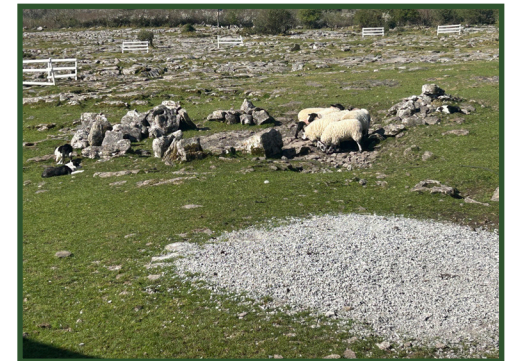
Not finding anything and knowing we had to pick up food there because there were no options where we'd be traveling, we picked up sandwiches for lunch and I bought a chocolate croissant and mocha for breakfast. I was bummed we couldn't find a coffee shop where we could sit and enjoy the world; Shawna suggested we eat in the adjacent park. It ended up working great because the sun was already out and eating grocery food in the park meant we were back on our bikes pretty quickly. We needed the extra time because we had lots more climbing in the six miles before the day's big event.



Getting started



I was frantic we'd miss our scheduled sheep dog demonstration so took full advantage of my coffee for propulsion. Despite the hurry, when a dog and her dad saw us walking our bikes (yes... again, uphill), they came over to greet us. I was smothered with dog kisses. Even with the puppy stop, we still made it to Caherconnel Stone Fort and Sheepdog Demonstrations with five minutes to hit the bathroom.



Success

For the demonstration, one of the shepherds took us down to the pasture where the sheep were hanging out minding their own business. He introduced us to his four dogs who were all trained in both sheep- and cattle-herding. Some were old hats at telling stock animals what to do and others, like Jill, were new to the pack. We heard Jill's name a lot. "No, Jill, come back." "Jill, go to the right." "Jill, lay down." "Jill, lay down." And, a bit louder, "Jill, lay down!" It was neat to see how the dogs behaved at different points in their training.

Our shepherd told us that sheep were still in Ireland because they were used to put mutton on the table. Unlike in the past, there was no longer a use for wool in the country. They still sheared the sheep (surely for the health of the sheep—I'd heard those coats could weigh 30 pounds!). Then, they exported the wool for use as insulation and carpeting. He next showed us the different types of sheep the dogs had been herding and told us about some of the painted coloring they wore on their backs. I'd assumed they just were a sign of ownership, but it was more than that. During mating season, the boys get a color. Once they've done their duty, the girls get a color showing they'd been victim to that duty. I wondered whose job it was to keep track of the activity.

Following the presentations and lectures of which both were well worth the €20 we'd paid, it was time to cuddle. Our shepherd would sneak behind the mammas to find the little guys hiding then grab a handle of hair on each lamb's back and pick them straight up like a suitcase. He'd bring two at a time over to the eagerly awaiting crowd and hand them out. Then, another two. I was beyond excited! I couldn't wait to have one of those fluffy darlings in my arms. It was finally my turn and after demanding Shawna take pictures of me, I just wrapped him close to my heart and hugged. I let Shawna hold him for awhile while I reciprocated with picture-taking of her cuddly moment. Knowing my capacity to love animals, she returned the sweetie back to my embrace. I was in heaven! He was so soft, not that itchy feeling I always had when touched by wool, just warmth and pure joy. If that wasn't enough, our shepherd said we could pet the border collies, too. In return, we had to part with the lambs. As soon as he let the lambs back in the pen, they ran to their moms where mom and baby ran off together (presumably so that guy wouldn't be grabbing the little 'un by the scruff of the neck again).

The working dogs were as you'd expect—squirrely. Three wanted to run more than they wanted 20 strangers groping them. But there was the old lady (okay, 8 years old) who immediately walked over, lay down, rolled on her side, and basically said: "I performed for you now it's your turn to tip me by rubbing my belly." She received ample belly rubs and as everyone else returned to their cars, I had my private moment to find her happy spot behind her ears and give her hugs.

Shawna and I had also paid for a tour of the Caherconnell UNESCO Global Geopark Geosite, the stone fort also on the Connell family's lawn. Our guide, Ian, was fantastic—incredibly knowledgeable including with all my inane questions. He was so good, in fact, that when he demurred to the other Irish tour guide that just happened to be in our group, there was little more the other guide could add. I figured they were both professors of history in their spare time.



From a distance



Interior of the settlement



Our guide

The site dated to 3000 BC as evidenced by found artifacts including stone tools and pottery shards, but current archeological work showed full time habitation as old as 600 AD. This knowledge came from a find of two graves and a fire pit. The graves were of a woman and child who were interestingly buried in about two-square-feet of a tall stone enclosure. They were buried in fetal positions, just as was the case in graves I'd visited in Peru.

In another section of the fort that dated to 1000 AD, archeologists found a stone structure for food storage. Between then and 1300, the stone fort was continually inhabited. The pit was still visible; the conical stone building that would have covered it was not. Questionably, there were three people buried in the pit around 1525 AD long after the site was longer in use. Other areas of the fort included an internal home with a previously thatched roof followed later by two other homes. It was presumed about 25 people lived in the fort.



Wall types

These forts were built as a means of showing status and this one showed an especially high status community because of culturally significant artifacts including a hair comb, glass beads, leather and textile working tools, and arrowheads. Archeologists even found a writing pen so someone living there had known how to read and write. What that person wrote was unknown. They also found items made of iron and bronze including numerous ornamental dress pins and metal arrow heads.

The wider area, the Burren, was replete with 200-300 stone forts like this, all of which were built in a circular fashion. Once we knew what we were looking for, we started seeing them all over. Ian had explained that the Burren was a perfect place for settlement because it sat at a crossroads on both popular north-south and east-west axes. Artifacts including colored glass beads, amber, and an ornamental ring found in the fort proved that international trade was common by the 1600s, a later habitation of the same fort.

The people who'd inhabited the region seemed to like calling it home, but when Edmund Ludlow visited in 1651 on behalf of Cromwell he reporte:

“After two days march... we entered the Barony of Burren, of which it is said, that it is a country where there is not enough water to drown a man, wood enough to hang one, nor earth enough to bury him...”

This seemed true in the Burren; hence, we named it “The Barren Burren.” The views reminded Shawna and me of the Mojave Desert that we called home; both areas were grey and felt drab. Close-up, the rock formations were fascinating, but were rather depressing from a distance. Enough grasses grew between the rocks to keep livestock thriving, but that was about it.

About a half-mile away was the Poul nabrone dolmen—a uniquely designed tomb made with a large, locally-found, glacially-deposited limestone rock suspended by two similarly large stones. Poul nabrone was also a UNESCO Geopark, this one dating to 5800 years ago. The Burren boasted approximately 90 megaliths ranging from 4000 BC portal tombs to the burial tombs we saw here. Tombs of this type were common throughout Western Europe. Of those buried in the Poul nabrone tomb, their teeth were worn from eating coarsely-ground grains and one skeleton had the tip of an arrowhead lodged in his leg indicating it was not always a peaceful place to live. Interesting, too, was that the bodies were not originally placed in the dolmen; they'd been buried elsewhere and later moved to the structure. I loved learning this history; Shawna... not so much. I stopped to read every single word on every last placard and then talked about it incessantly once we returned to our bikes. I was lucky she didn't fall asleep mid-spin.

Before we'd left the Connell property, I'd shown our planned route to Ian and asked if there was anything else we should see along our planned path. He suggested we alter our course to see the largest and most famous dolmen, Cahercommaun. It was on our way



Poulnabrone Dolmen



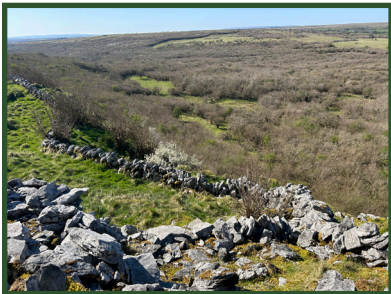
The Barren Burren

there that I lost Shawna. I realized I'd made a wrong turn so turned around. She said something like "bike" when she passed me going the wrong direction so I figured she was saying we'd taken the wrong bike route. When she passed me, I pointed in the correct direction, not knowing she'd passed me before I pointed. I went one way; she went the other with plans to get up that next hill with the speed she's already gained. She waited for me at the top of said hill and I never appeared. I waited for her at the top of the hill we were supposed to have taken and she never came. I started yelling "caw-caw [pause] caw-caw" (our signal for attracting attention) and I received no obnoxious tropical bird noises in return. I wasn't sure if she'd continued going forward or returned the way I went and failed to see me turn. So, I walked down the steep hill (I wasn't forcing Sapphire to suffer climbing that hill again!) and kept caw-cawing in both directions. All the sudden a man in a nearby house came out and yelled to me asking if I were being "attacked." I assured him I was just trying to find my friend and apologized for ruining his slumber. Shortly after my admonishment, Shawna came around the bend—"reunited and it feels so good."

Shawna humored me by agreeing to go to Cahercommaun and I think enjoyed the mile uphill walk (finally not a ride) to the stone fort grounds. I suspected she enjoyed hiking more than biking. We were really impressed with what we saw and walked all over including all the way to the end where there was a huge cairn. Shawna left a few minutes before I was about to leave. Then, I saw it—there was a tall structure in the background behind a stone wall. I later learned that we had only been seeing the larger community surrounding the fort. I'd been told by Ian that we would see three concentric circles connected by wagon-wheel-type spokes. Shawna and I hadn't identified anything resembling that description. That was because we hadn't been at the main fort.

She was gone and I began climbing over an ancient wall. That was when the actual fort came into focus. I knew it was what we'd been looking for all along because it was protected by a fence and walkway. My eyes grew to the size of a cartoon character and I rushed over. The three concentric circles were clearly visible and the spokes, though faint, were there, too. I followed the walkway which came to an end at a wall. No signs threatened beheading of anyone continuing up and over the wall and I noticed the grass had been compacted. I wouldn't be the first person to climb onto the inner wall. I soon realized that with all the deer droppings up there, those indentations were surely from deer, but I pretended humans were welcome and was so glad I did. The inner circle came into complete focus. There were sections awaiting excavation, but it was clearly a special and important place. I postulated it'd been the inner sanctum of the family of the most powerful man in the area. Very cool was the fact it sat on a cliff. This was an excellent way to defend the fort, but also provided a darn good view for the big guy on campus. Feeling guilty about leaving Shawna for so long... again... I made my way down only to find her napping on green Irish grass in the shade. She hadn't had it so bad after all.

Back on the bikes we planned to stop at a perfumery for an afternoon meal and I'd even preemptively taken an allergy pill. But, when we made a wrong turn, we decided the new path was in our best interest. It was fewer miles and had less climbing and still took us to our final destination—Kinvara. It was on one of those dreaded "L" roads, but they seemed to be getting easier as I traveled north. Or, possibly, I was getting better at maneuvering them. Neither was likely, but I could dream.



Cahercommaun

We made it to Kinvara around 5:45 PM and reserved our AirB&B right then. It was 2.4 miles away (5.6 miles roundtrip) so I asked the host if we could be late. We were so glad when he agreed and we ended up in a restaurant with a review stating “Best fish and chips ever!” After the previous night’s build-up to our not-the-best-in-the-world steak, I wasn’t convinced and not sure if fish or a burger had more protein so I had the burger with bacon. Plus, I was worried I’d get fish-and-chips’d-out if I kept having them every night. I loved my bacon burger and even lived like royalty by upgrading to garlic fries. Sadly, they didn’t offer cider. Shawna gave me some of her fish and I deemed it “simply good.” She deemed it “really good.” I took that as a “not-the-best-anywhere” fish and chips evaluation. Disappointing.



Dunguaire Castle



Glynsk Cottage (AirB&B hosted by Christopher)



Flat... for once



Kinvara



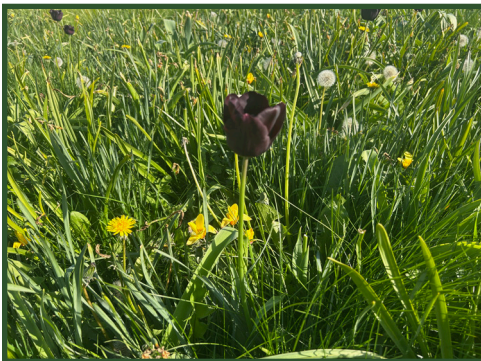
My puppy fix

Kinvara to Galway

Galway Girls



Proof I wore my helmet every day



Spring tulip

Distance: 21.7 mi/34.9 km
Ascent/Descent: +567'/-562' +173m/-171m
Average Moving Speed: 8.9 mph/14.3 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 2:55/2:27
Accommodation: AirB&B hosted by Paddy
Weather: Gorgeous—shorts and t-shirt
Video Overview: None

I finally slept well (the sleeping pills may have helped) and actually awoke before Shawna. I took my iPad to the kitchen breakfast table and started writing while enjoying coffee and yogurt with granola. The father of our AirB&B host, James, came by and we talked about his garden and poetry. It was fun to read his poems that were about the places we'd visited over the last week. His wife suggested we leave after 9:30 AM to avoid traffic and since we were in no hurry, we didn't leave until about 10. While still in the driveway, I hit the curb and fell over. Fortunately, it was onto the grass; unfortunately, James and Shawna saw it. I could ride 50 hard miles, but couldn't get out of a driveway without falling. Shawna asked if I was okay and when I answered in the affirmative, it all became a big laugh. I wished she would have taken a picture to record the event. This was only my second fall of the trip so I thought I was doing pretty darn well.

Our trip from Kinvara to Galway would be about 20 miles and have an ascent of about 500'. We passed a few interesting buildings, but mostly just rode arriving in Galway about 1 PM. Entering town was overstimulation and worrisome because of all the cars. With a few missteps, we found our way through town, walking the bikes through the tremendously busy Latin Quarter. It was such a neat place. Shawna had decided we'd walk around there later in the day so I tried not to pay too much attention. Upon reaching our night's accommodation, we each took showers and laundered our clothes in a washing machine. I wasn't sure where I'd be next so figured I'd better be ready if I didn't want to have to pull out the Scrubba again. We hung our clothes on the outside clothesline praying they would dry. The washer did a great job, but seemed to not spin much water out of the clothes so they were dripping all over. Shawna questioned if I'd put the clothes in the dishwasher and I actually had to check; they were soaking wet. We wrung the clothes, hung them in the delightful sun on the clothesline, and started out to see the town at 3 PM.

Having not eaten since breakfast, an early dinner was paramount on my important-things-to-do list. My AirB&B recommended The Cellar just around the corner. I was two days behind on my journal so wrote madly while eating lasagna. Well aware of my inability to remember anything, I was worried I wouldn't be able to catch up if I didn't get back on schedule. Shawna just enjoyed her quiet time.

Our first stop on the after-linner walk was at Lynch Castle. It was of interest even though we didn't go in because it was where the Galway mayor, Lynch, took matters of justice into his own hands. When his son was sentenced to die for murder, no executioner was willing to kill the mayor's kid. As a strong man with unwavering morals, he did it himself by hanging his son from one of the fourth floor windows of his mansion. This act was the impetus for the term "lynching." We kept walking and made it to the museum, but it was already closed. Next, was a quick picture of the Spanish Arch and then to O'Connor's "Famous Pub" (self-proclaimed). Its claim to fame was that Ed Sheeran recorded the video for his song "Galway Girl" in that pub. It was closed so we couldn't see it, either. We watched the video later in the day and recognized the building in the last scene. And, I learned that he wrote the song based on another man's story; I'd always assumed he'd written it about his wife.

O'Connor's was right next to the beach where we'd walked the Salthill Promenade. It was such beautiful weather and seemed every resident of the city had come outside to enjoy the weather. Children and adults played in the water. People swam and we saw a woman on a paddleboard. Couples laid on blankets on the





Famine Memorial



O'Connor's Pub



Shawna in her happy place... a pub

grass and a group of young men were cooking hot dogs over an open stove. This was also my first time smelling marijuana in the country. That smell was not something I'd missed from home. I hated that driving anywhere near the Vegas Strip filled your car with that Mary Jane smell.

On our way back to the Latin Quarter, we stopped at a memorial to the famine. It had two purposes: (1) remember one poor child who'd died, and (2) encourage all people to fight against world hunger. There was even a Top 10 list of worst famines. Ireland was number ten and China appeared as both number one and number two.

We had two remaining stops. Our host suggested a bar where we'd hear music. I bought a pint of cider and we watched and listened for over an hour. I loved it, but was busy on my phone most of the time planning my route and hotel plans for the next day. Shawna loved it even more. She sang along, swayed to the music, and shone with the hugest grin.

When the music stopped, we had one final thing to do—splurge at Murphy's for brown bread ice cream. I quickly chose my flavors—brown bread and brown bread mixed in a yummy waffle cone. That was exactly what I needed to round out a perfect day and night.



Tyrone Manor House



Classic Galway

Galway to Clifden

An Amazing Day on My Own



Until next time, Friend



A foggy morning

Distance: 61.1 mi/98.5 km
Ascent/Descent: +2036'/-1922' +621m/586m
Average Moving Speed: 9.1 mph/ 14.7 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 11:52/6:44
Accommodation: AirB&B—Abbeyglenn Castle Hotel
Weather: Gorgeous ALL day
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/v1vjPk8e4Y6>

I would be solo again. Shawna and I had spent nine days together and completed the Ring of Kerry, Sleat Head Drive, and made it to Galway. We'd experienced Killarney and Burren National Parks and seen UNESCO sites including the Cliffs of Moher and Cahercommaun. We'd eaten lots of fish and chips and heard Irish ditties in pubs. I'd tried Irish coffee and she'd tried hard cider. We'd met wonderful people and seen incredible sites. It was a good go. And, it was over. I was glad to be solo, but only because I knew we would have many more adventures like these in the future just like we'd had in the past (i.e., hiking the Patagonia "O").

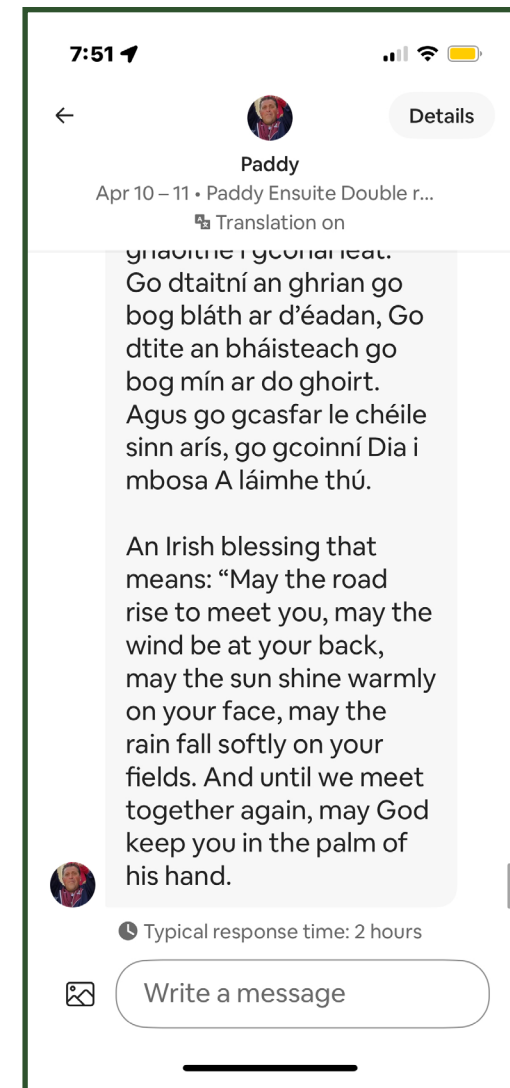
Her plan was to drop off her bike where she'd rented it in Killarney and proceed to Cork for the night. The next day, she'd get the gift of gab at the Blarney Stone. I loved Blarney and

was so glad she was getting go, especially since the weather was so nice. I'd done it when I was in college and also when my children were young. That could explain why my husband thinks I expend more than my allotted words on a daily basis. From Blarney, she wasn't sure where she'd go; she'd probably head home. Because of this, she agreed to rid me of some of the gear I really didn't need. I had been so worried about being cold before reaching Ireland, but that hadn't been my experience. Had I continued to sleep in my tent, the fleece pants and jacket would likely have proven useful. Sleeping indoors negated their need. They weren't heavy, but were bulky. By passing them off, I was able to put all of my gear in panniers. Before this, I would always have to remove items from my back rack just to get into the panniers. I was so excited to be ridding myself of a step.

I was still eating breakfast when Shawna left so I told her I'd meet her at the bus station to see her off. What I didn't know was that there were many bus stations servicing national routes. I figured there would be one central hub. I rode to where Google told me there was a coach station. She wasn't there. The man at the ticket counter said I was at the wrong station and sent me to another one just a block away. She wasn't there either and there was no one to ask. By that time, her bus was about to leave. Even if I knew where she was, I couldn't get there in time. I was sad to not get a good goodbye picture, but goodbyes weren't one of my strengths anyway.

With Shawna gone, it was time for me to blow out of Galway and onto my next adventure. Starting continued to be a difficult task—was that left turn from that corner or that other corner? Which direction should I be facing? Would it be a good idea to ride all the way up that hill only to find I'd been going the wrong direction?

I made the mistake of asking one of the bus employees which way I should go. I knew I had to cross the river and thought I knew the general direction I should head. He told me which path to take so getting started would be really easy. It was easy... but it was wrong. I realized after a mile that I was going the wrong direction and had to ride back that mile only to start again from the same place with a different plan. It took a full 3.5 miles and almost an hour to cover what should have been a half-mile in ten minutes. At least I had all day. But... it was a long, 56-mile day. I remembered the number easily because 56 miles was the bike distance in a half-Ironman, a distance I'd often traveled; I could do this.





After leaving Oughterard



Made it to Conamara



Daisy and Dad



Green pastures

There were a few times I had to walk Sapphire up hills, but most of the hills were easy to summit because they were at reasonable gradients unlike the routes over the previous three weeks. It was such an ego booster to be riding Sapphire instead of always walking beside it.

I'd barely left Galway when I started stripping. Off came the down coat. The weather was perfect. The sun was out and a calm breeze left the temperature in the comfortable range. It was so pleasant to ride when the weather was this beautiful. I stopped after about 25 miles and stripped all the way to my cycling shorts and t-shirt. It was freeing.

About that time, I needed a break and was wanting food. The breakfast cereal just wasn't doing it for me anymore. I was worried because I knew there were very few stops on the day's route where I could get food so figured I'd better not miss the chance when one came available. That chance came at Oughterard when a local recommended a coffee shop. The tea and scones at The Book Shop wouldn't be earning any awards, but the employees and guests alike were enough to make it a perfect morning stop. I spoke for awhile with the owner and his wife who'd bike toured in Italy just a few years prior. He was so happy to see me making the trip and became nostalgic. I hoped that seeing me would encourage the two of them to consider another tour. I also spoke with a man who had a dog that I learned was a retired racing greyhound. Daisy was gorgeous and her dad told me she'd won several awards. She was incredibly sweet and I was so glad she finally had a chance to live on her terms.

The scenery started changing as I moved forward. Galway was all about being on the water and having a large population. After leaving Oughterard, I started seeing lots of rocks... like really big rocks and like a whole lot of them. It felt as if I was returning to the Burren, just a little less brown. Then, rivers started flowing and lakes appeared. I saw people fishing and sheep were gobbling away at grasses on the edges of the road. Two lambs were curled together right next to the road. The car sounds didn't bother them, but as soon as I rode by, they deserted their perch. I giggled to see they were afraid of poor old me.

The scenery continued to change and I started seeing hints of Northern Utah and the foothills of the Rockies. My picture taking sped up with all the new sights I just couldn't pass. When I rode down into the valley that was Clifden, I was blown away by the stunning appearance. Seeing the boats in the water with foliage everywhere was idyllic.

I rode into town; it was so darn cute! And, I'd arrived much earlier than I'd thought I might. It was only 4:30! I'd been struggling with some of my gears again so stopped at the first bike shop I saw. The mechanic, Stuey was great, teaching me about my bike so I could make wise choices about how to proceed. He fiddled with the cassette and was able to make the squeaking stop and replaced Sapphire's chain. I was out of there in 30 minutes. I next picked up dinner at the SuperValu supermarket—Irish soda bread, ham and sausage, and a vegetable tray—and proceeded to my night's stay.

The AirB&B was a castle! Seriously, a castle! It had gorgeous grounds and the interior had old-world charm. I unpacked, took a quick shower, and rushed downstairs for the included 6:30 Prosecco tasting and history lesson. I sat at the bar for the presentation and the bartender asked if I was a vagabond. I answered that I supposed I was. The next morning, I saw the big tour group and many were wearing shirts that said "Vagabond Tours." I guess I wasn't much of a vagabond after all. I met Brian, the castle's owner, and enjoyed his talk about the history of Clifden and of the castle. The Vagabonds were there to party through Ireland. There was lots of drinking and singing along when a performer took stage later in the night.

After the talk, I ate my SuperValu food in my comfortable room, talked with Mike and Ryan by phone, and journaled. It was a completely fulfilling day.

Crew Post

I sent Shawna packing... literally since she relieved me of more of my gear. While she headed to Blarney to get the gift of gab, I left Galway for Connemara. A few mishaps getting out of the city (I really dislike riding in and through cities) and I was on the open road with incredible scenery on both sides. The terrain is completely different than it was in the south and southwest. It feels more like Utah and the foothills of the Rockies. Tonight I'm sleeping in a castle!



Abbeyglen Castle Hotel

Approaching Clifden





Clifden to Derrynasliggaun

Connemara National Park



Breakfast at Abbeyglen



Leaving Clifden

Distance: 29.4 mi/47.3 km
Ascent/Descent: +2856'/-2801' +871m/-854m
Average Moving Speed: 5 mph/ 8 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 9:43/5:55
Accommodation: Otter Hostel
Weather: Overcast with light rains
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vXOnAKWgP5v>

The hype of the castle didn't end with Prosecco. My measly €80 included breakfast. I expected coffee, yogurt, and preservative-infused granola and was very pleasantly surprised to see an entire breakfast spread including fresh fruit. But, wait! They brought a menu... with no prices! I could have a full Irish breakfast, California's popular avocado toast, kippers (whatever they were), salmon, and more. I went crazy and ordered the full Irish breakfast from which I was able to make two sandwiches to eat later in the day. Bonus!

My morning ride was short, just 10 miles, with the entire day remaining short so I could spend most of the day in Connemara National Park. It would start raining in the afternoon so my number one activity was to climb Upper Diamond Hill before then. The hike was and I made it while skies were still clear. The views from the top granted a 360° view of

Connemara National Park

The park was established in 1980. From the Twelve Ben Mountains that I'd witnessed riding into Clifden to the heather, bogs, grasslands, and woodlands, it was known for its great diversity. Its history dated to 4000 BCE with the existence of a court tomb and chronologically spans through the construction of Kylemore Abbey with its Victorian walled gardens.

The Twelve Bens were a popular hiking spot, many challenging themselves to hike all twelve peaks including Benbaun, at 2392' the highest point in County Galway, in a single day. The 12.5 mile hike was listed as rigorous, ambitious, and extremely challenging. If only I'd had time, equipment, and a good weather report... ahhh, to dream. A lesser arduous option was hiking the Diamond Hill Upper ("strenuous") or Lower ("moderate") Trails.

The most iconic fauna in the area and a symbol for the region was the Connemara pony, a good-natured breed that began when a Celtic pony met a Spanish horse.

Connemara from the ocean to the mountains and back to the lake of Kylemore Abbey. It was truly spectacular and could have only been improved with summer's green grass under a bright sun. The hike included a lot of climbing, but it was certainly not a strenuous beast as I'd been warned—it was no Kilimanjaro summit push or slow slog up Thorong La. I supposed my standards might have varied a bit from the norm.

Following the hike, I went to the visitor center for an education on bogs. To be honest, I really didn't know what a bog was. Yeah, it had something to do with mushy dirt and was a great place for bugs and ferns to grow. That was the extent of my brilliant knowledge. Following my Connemara National Park Visitor Center visit, though, I knew there were different types of bogs and the most common in Ireland (as I understood it) was blanket bog.

Bogs form over thousands of years and are great sources of fuel. To access the fuel, farmers remove the topsoil and then use a tool to scoop out log-sized chunks of peat. After letting the log dry in the sun (yes, I giggled because I knew sun was a scarce commodity in Ireland), it's ready for use as a log under the mantle. Sadly, though, peat is a non-renewable resource on a human timeline. It takes thousands of years to form, yet we can cut it out of the ground lickety-split. Most of the world's blanket bogs formed in Ireland and most of those are now gone. The country is putting forth effort to restore some of what was lost as well as keep existing peat bogs in the best state possible.



Atop Upper Diamond Hill



Twelve Bens



Overlooking Kylemore Abbey



Coming down from Upper Diamond Hill

I watched a video about the park, not terribly impressive, then returned to the visitor center to do what I did best—ask questions. There were two wonderful women working there, one Irish and one from the US who spent about 45 minutes helping me plan my route for the rest of my trip. They told me what I should see and gave me maps so I could navigate to their recommended must-stops. I was truly grateful. They also confirmed what I'd been learning... the best way to figure out what to see was to ask locals. This was becoming much more important as I traveled north because there weren't as many must-see things on my



A bog

maps. The Norman Way, Ring of Kerry, Dingle Peninsula, Cliffs of Mohar, and Killarney National Park were all non-brainers when it came to what to see and do in Ireland. Other than the Wild Atlantic Way, the northern counties didn't seem to have many humdingers. I left the care of these incredible women with notes all over the county maps they provided; I was eager to continue north. What I wasn't eager about was what I knew was coming... rain. Lots of rain. Ten predicted days of rain, predicted to be all day every day.



Peat logs

The rain started as I was leaving the visitor center and continued as I rode the about-four miles to Kylemore Abbey and Gardens. The Abbey's architecture and grounds were spectacular and in the sun it would be jaw-dropping. I'd really hoped to get a picture of the Abbey reflected in the lake; it just wasn't happening on that day.



Leaving the national park

I first visited the “miniature” neo-gothic church Mr. Henry built for his wife right after she died. It was a tragedy for him to lose his 45-year-old wife and mother of their nine children. They'd been on a holiday in Egypt in 1847 where she contracted dysentery from the Nile River. She died 16 days later. To show his love for her, he had an architect design a “cathedral in miniature” in her honor. The structure experienced water damage over the centuries and was in the process of restoration. A hiccup occurred during the process when they learned the main roof was home to a large colony of Natterer's bats. The crew rethought their efforts and were able to keep the blood suckers undisturbed. There was much rejoicing. The cathedral was still in use daily by the Benedictine nuns who lived at the abbey and it was also used for community activities including concerts. I suspected it was used more for the harpist-type concerts; I couldn't really picture Lady Gaga performing there.

My next stop was the abbey itself. It's now called an abbey because it served as a convent where nuns lived within the castle walls. They'd since moved to surrounding buildings and on the day I was there some of the rooms were structured like a modern museum



Kylemore Abbey: Another UNESCO Geopark

The 1860s neo-gothic Kylemore Abbey was built by Mitchell Henry as a romantic gift for his wife, Margaret. My Mike needed to step up his game! Mirrored in Pollacapall Lough (the lake), the Abbey was said to be the most photographed building in Ireland. Following World War I, the building was purchased and continues ownership by Benedictine nuns who have used it for a boarding school, training center, and employment opportunity for local community members.

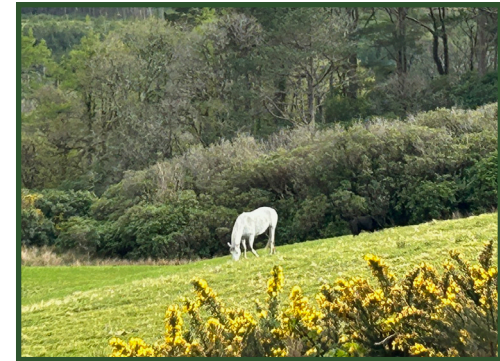


while others maintained period looks from the time of the Henry family. I preferred the latter. The castle was truly a home for the ridiculously wealthy during the Victorian age. Everything sparkled gold and smelled of wealth and privilege.

I was really short on time because I had to check-in to my hostel before 7 PM and was still eight miles away. But, I couldn't not see Kylemore Gardens. I took the shuttle to the gardens that were about a quarter-mile from the living quarters. The Henry family likely took horse-drawn carriages to get there so by avoiding the walk I was just following in their proverbial footsteps. That gave me 15 minutes to walk the grounds and listen to audio descriptions about the area. There were gardens within gardens. It started with formal flowers and moved to greenhouses and other finery. Then, there was a stream and woodland. There were also an herbaceous border so the elite wouldn't need to see the kitchen and herb garden. The entire garden was contained within a high wall monitored by a head gardener and his many peons. On this day, the area was overseen by a biodiversity officer who ensured the gardens and all Kylemore grounds maintained their natural state. This included needing to remove invasive species from the estate (like those pesky rhododendrons).

I rushed through the gardens and just before catching the shuttle back to the main part of the estate saw mom and baby Connemara ponies. Kylemore Abbey maintains its own herd of the ponies in their exclusive paddock and pasture. The Henry family sure had it good! Well... until Mom ~~died of the shits~~ tragically passed. I rode quickly to reach my hostel before the doors locked. This meant, unfortunately, that I couldn't stop to pick up dinner anywhere (even if there had been anywhere to buy food). I turned on tunes and kicked it into gear only stopping a few times for obligatory pictures. I made good time during those eight miles and reached the hostel with minutes to spare. Unfortunately, no one was at the desk. They'd left a note and key for room 16, but there was no room 16. With a little help, I finally spoke with an employee who showed me to my room (which, in fact, did not have a number on it). When I asked her where I could buy dinner, she said the closest place was too far for me to ride my bike at night. I enacted my best "poor little me" face and told her I had a loaf of bread and that would be fine. The dearie felt for the woman who was probably older than her grandma and told me about some ham and cheese I just might find in the fridge. After a shower, those fridge foods came in handy while I journaled.

Then, it was bedtime where I would share a bunk room with two men including a hiker, Lucas from the German military who was traveling by car, and Ryan from Dublin who was touring by motorcycle. Three people, three different modes of transport. We were vagabonds.



Connemara pony



Ireland's only fjord

Crew Post

It was a full day in Connemara National Park. I hiked Upper Diamond Hill, read every placard in the park, asked lots of questions of the ladies at the visitor's center, and saw Kylemore Abbey/Cathedral/Gardens/Pastures. I'm staying at a newly opened hostel on the shores of Ireland's only fjord.



Kylemore Abbey

Derrynasliggaun to Mulranny

Onward to Mayo



Sticks stuck on their coats
(they wouldn't let me remove them)



Distance: 51.9 mi/x km
Ascent/Descent: +2677'/-2579' +816m/-786m
Average Moving Speed: 7.8 mph/ 12.6 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 9:10/6:38
Accommodation: Mary's of Mulranny
Weather: Hard rain on and off with some sun
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vxOQ54me1MO>

I slept through the night and was ecstatic! Perhaps my Inspire was beginning to work? A benefit was that even though I'd not been able to finish journaling and planning this day's route until midnight, I was still rested when awakening around 7 AM. Breakfast wasn't until 9 so I had time to review my maps and get ready before heading to the dining room. I filled up on cereals and took a butter and jam sandwich (my options were limited) for a later snack. This was a good thing because I didn't have time to stop for food all day.

On my way out, I did one of those slow bike fall-downs right in front of my roommate from Belfast. We'd chatted quite a bit because he'd just completed a big supported hiking challenge that others in our hostel had also completed the day before. It was the Twelve



Killary Fjord

Bens Challenge of 7,500' in 18 miles in just one day. Whoa! I didn't think I'd ever beat 6,500' of hiking in a day (albeit at altitude on Mt. Whitney). I was seriously impressed. I also met another Ironman at breakfast who'd completed the challenge the day before.

Leaving the hostel meant riding around the Killary Fjord. I'd known that a fjord meant a finger-like water inlet, but didn't know that what made it so unique was its depth. Most inlets can't handle large sea-faring vessels. Norway's fjords can welcome cruise ships. That explained it. While no cruise ships were in the Killary Fjord on this day, it was neat to see bigger ships in the water. I was taking the long way around (granted, there weren't other options) and the scenery was beautiful. It was also sunny despite threatening rain for the last week. What a great way to start a day!

That sun didn't last long. Throughout the day the weather wavered between sunny and lovely and rainy and not lovely. When it wasn't lovely, the rain came down hard and the wind whipped. Even 0% grades required lower gears and an aero position. Lest you think the only challenge was the rain, it was not. As always, there were some big climbs including a few that I had to walk. I just put on a book, "Good and Mad," and kept spinning when I could and walking when I couldn't. The main climb was super rough, but the views from the top made it worthwhile. Fortunately, it wasn't until the way down that the rain started again.

My first stop was the Delphi Lodge. I really wanted it to be a museum, but it was not. Apparently, others thought it should be, too, because there were signs saying only residents and those with reservations were welcome inside. I accidentally didn't see that sign and proceeded to



Along the route

Doolough Tragedy

It was in 1849 during the Great Irish Famine when citizens had to be inspected to determine if they were still eligible for government relief. The result was the Doolough Tragedy. Two inspectors were to review the people in Louisburgh. For an unknown reason, instead of checking on the several hundred people near their homes, they ventured 12 miles south to spend the night in the Delphi Lodge. Their charges were informed that they were to present themselves at 7 AM the following morning if they wished to continue receiving aid. Destitute, starving people attempted to walk through the night in inclement weather. At least 7 bodies lay on the shores of Doolough Lake the next morning with a possibility of over 20 fatalities. An annual "Famine Walk" continues to commemorate the event.



Delphi Lodge



Doolough Lake

the building. It was such a serene setting and difficult to believe it was the epicenter of a terrible tragedy.

I had to wonder if those men were just lazy and wanted to get to the popular hunting and fishing lodge so forewent their governmental responsibility. Why would they have been so heartless? Were they ignorant of the dreadful states of those needing their attention? I also wondered what type of food and portion-sizes they served that night at The Delphi Lodge and how comfortable I would feel to eat in that building today.

I continued on with my next stop being in Westport, the about 25-mile mark. Visiting Westford House was one of the stops recommended by the women at the national park visitor's center the day before. They'd also suggested several archeological sites containing various tomb-types. I saw a sign to visit one, but the 0.5 kilometer distance uphill just didn't appeal to me at the time. I'd seen another archeological marker, but the artifact was behind a fence and I couldn't see anything from the fence. So, it was

Westford House and by fluke, I arrived right at 2 PM, the time of the last tour of the day. I paid my €15 for a great docent presentation of the first floor. Her knowledge was truly commendable.

One of the most interesting parts of the castle's history was that it sat on the site of one of Grace O'Malley's castles, a badass pirate queen. Her dungeons were said to still exist in the basement, but recent research questioned the supposition believing the area may have only been used for storage and food cooling. The remaining mansion was built in 1731 by Colonel John Browne, a descendent of

O'Malley, and remained in the family until 2017. When I visited, the structure was in a bad state. They had removed many of the inner walls to enable the interior stone walls to dry. There was an intense mold smell. Despite this, some rooms had period decorations and the remaining walls were covered with portraits and pictures telling of past residents.

I downed that butter and jam sandwich while mounting Sapphire and continued on to Newport where I planned to assess my options for the night. I wanted to continue to ride even knowing I had 11 miles to the next town and it was likely to rain again. I searched for reasonably priced places and wasn't happy with what I found. I chose to break into the \$100 gift Barbara (my neighbor and crew member) gave me before I left. Knowing how cheap I was, she'd directed me to treat myself with the money. It was a good day to treat myself, my 57th birthday, so I broke down and shelled out the extra cash needed to stay in the next town.

Ryan had put it in my head that I might be able to completely circumnavigate Ireland so I was thinking bigger miles might make that possible. I turned on a book, lowered myself into aero to take on the headwind, laced the hood of my raincoat over my shower-cap-laden helmet, and pulled on my Rubbermaid dish gloves. I talked with Mike, Ryan, and Winter to help pass the time and made it to Mulranny just in time for a shower and Scrubba clothes washing before the last food order call at the pub. I had my first chicken goujons (chicken fingers) while working on my journal and listening to two great singers in a pub full of Irish partiers. What a great way to end a wonderful day!



Westford House



Crew Post

The weather didn't always cooperate, but it was still a great day. The scenery seems to be so different in each county and today I entered Mayo. I made a few stops. The first was at Delphi Lodge, the site of the Doolough Tragedy where (probably) over 20 starving people died during the Irish famine when they had to walk 12 miles through the night in a storm to be inspected to determine if they were worthy of continuing to receive government aid. Sounds like they were. My second stop was at a mansion that sat on the site of a former castle of Grace O'Malley, the pirate queen. Tonight I'm in Mulranny with incredible ocean scenery out my window. Thank you, Barbara—I used your special treat to go the distance for my birthday.



Grace O'Malley



On the way to Caherdaniel several days before

Mulranny to Ballycastle

Fourth National Park



My morning view



Leaving Mulranny

Distance: 53.6 mi/86.3 km
Ascent/Descent: +2586'/-2492' +788/-760 m
Average Moving Speed: 8.1 mph/ 13 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 8:50/6:35
Accommodation: AirB&B hosted by Emmanuel
Weather: Intermittent light rains with clouds and sun
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/v8qkrG1VX36>

I slept almost all the way through the night and was up before my normally required eight hours of sleep. The extra time gave me about an hour to relax in the morning, but my body was tired and getting moving still felt like a chore. I eventually roused myself and decided I'd take a shorter day the day following this one.

I could tell I was getting stronger in my legs so when the first quarter-mile of rotations seemed ridiculously difficult, I got off Sapphire to give her a scolding. Ends up, my back brake was hitting the tire so it really wasn't her fault or my weakness. I had some issues with this a couple of times throughout the day. I just had to be careful to not fall into a pattern of assuming that the brake was rubbing every time things got hard.

I had 50 miles to go and five stops to make. I'd visited three national parks already—Killarney, The Burren, and Connemara. In 11 miles I would experience my fourth. Formerly called Ballycroy National Park, its new name was Wild Nephin National Park (much to the dismay of the citizens of Ballycroy). When I asked if I could bring my bike inside to keep it from the heaviest rains, the man at the counter was not too happy about it. He told me three times that he and the museum could not be responsible for it. I wasn't too concerned since it seemed I was the only person in the museum on this fiercely rainy day and he didn't seem interested in taking Sapphire for a spin.

I may have been the only person there for many reasons. I was traveling off-season, it was a rainy Monday, it's situated in the middle of nowhere, and, in my perhaps not-so-humble opinion, it didn't have much to offer. Its biggest draw was probably its Dark Sky designation. They were very proud of this and most of the placards along the visitor center walking trail (Tóchar Daithí Bán) focused on the Dark Sky designation. It also provided about a third of the content in the museum. The Mayo Dark Sky earned gold tier status from the international Dark Sky gods meaning it was one of the best places in the world to stargaze. [Shouldn't the middle of the Pacific be a better example?] One of the ways they maintained this status was by educating locals about how to limit artificial light through use of lights only as needed and choosing light fixtures that did not throw ambient light. Seeing I was there during the day, it didn't matter much to me.

The other focus of the museum was bogs. Though the polar opposite of deserts, the park rather reminded me of our desert parks in the USA. The park was a place people could go for complete solitude. Edward Abbey would have loved this place. It was hectare-after-hectare of nothing but bogs. You could hike for days not seeing anything except bogs. And, Mr. Obvious, hiking in bogs wasn't all that easy. The surfaces were very soft, squishy, sticky, and wet. There were long-distance trails in the park, but I had the impression the term "trail" was used relatively flexibly.



Bog types



The only food for 53.6 miles

Since visiting Connemara National Park my bog education was continuing and the Wild Nephin visitor's center was just the place for my next lesson. I thought bogs were always wet, but learned that (at least with these blanket bogs) it wasn't the case. Yes, there were pools of water in sections, but these were surrounded by tufts of grasses and other flora. The distinguishing factors of bogs include that they are rain-fed, accumulate peat often raising ground level over time, and store massive amounts of carbon (even more than foliage in a rain forest). They're pretty darn awesome for the environment. They're also really good, like sand in the desert, at hiding really old things. In fact, many of the very old Irish structures built with wood used wood reclaimed from bogs. At one time, Ireland was covered in trees. Though they were mostly gone when humans started inhabiting the land, both ancient and modern peoples were able to dig them up and use them for construction.

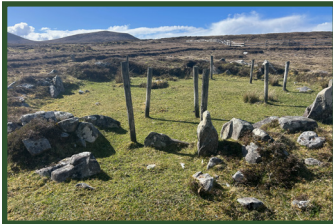
As I finished my placard-based lesson, the man at the front desk redeemed himself with a big smile and asked about my trip. He'd seemed rather not-nice about the whole bike thing. Now, my friend was super sweet. He told me that Wild Nephin National Park had a sister park, Yosemite. I wasn't quite sure what made them sisters, but since Yosemite was my favorite US national park we were both proud of having something in common. He insisted on taking my picture with the Yosemite sign and Dark Sky astronauts.

It was an 18-mile trek to my next stop, but the fairly harsh wind was mostly at my back. I figured this was because my buddy at the park had said: "May the wind always be at your back" (a common Irish epithet) and so it was. But, that darn bike was still making a noise so I popped off to check it out. While getting off, I did my typical I'm-an-old-lady-and-can't-get-my-leg-over-the-top-tube thing. At least I could justify it now that I was 57 instead of 56 as I'd been two days before. As I tried to maneuver that leg over the bar, the whole bike fell on me. Seriously? This was just one more fall that happened when I was stopped or barely moving. Different from the other falls, though, this one involved falling off the edge of the road and down into a bog. It was a good thing that those blanket bogs weren't always pools of water because I remained dry and was able to climb back up the hill, stand Sapphire back on her wheels, and all-but-gracefully remount my steed.

I made it to Bangor Erris, the only real town on the day's route, where I could procure provisions—food and caffeine. I downed part of a mocha and some chicken nuggets even before reaching the pay till. Then, I sat down in the seating area I hadn't known they had and sent a message to my evening's AirB&B host asking where I'd be able to buy dinner later in the day. Guess what? This grocery store was the only place within 25 miles where you could buy food. Thank goodness I asked when I did. I went back and ate a chocolate croissant while the deli clerk made me a sub sandwich plus I added a few chocolate bars to round out my dinner. I paid for everything (including the empty croissant bag), stowed the sandwich and chocolates in a pannier, and was finally ready to move on... fed, caffeinated, and stocked for the night.



Belderigg



Cliffs



That next stop was about what could be found under those ancient bogs. Fortunately, the caffeine did its job so I was up for the challenge. I'd learned of an archeological find in a small town named Belderigg. Grandpa was digging up peat one day and found what looked like artifacts of human settlement. This happened a few more times and he figured it was time to call in the big guns to see if his land were covering something of significance. It ended up that it was and, fortunately, he and his neighbors decided to forego using the land for digging up peat and whatever else they were using it for and, instead, let archeologists check it out. When the finds were found and uncovered, Grandpa agreed to make the land available for public viewing... at no cost. I could take a two-hour paid tour if I'd had time, but I was also free to visit the ancient civilization at no cost.

Excavations of the Belderigg site occurring between 1971 and 1982 identified an ancient farm on the site as well as a less-ancient, but still super-duper old, second farm. They were 5,500 and 3,000 years old respectively. There was even a community of hunter/gatherers who'd lived there 1,000 even before those first farmers. These findings were extremely insightful because they showed evidence of ploughing, ridges where wheat and barley had been planted, and saddle querns (rocks used for grinding food into flour or meal like a rolling pin) shedding light on farming techniques from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages. They also learned that the people used manure as fertilizer, they drank milk, and their diet was primarily land-based even though they lived near the sea.

On I rode and, oh, it was good. I'd started the day in Mulranny with gorgeous ocean views, stopping regularly to admire the view and take pictures. I'd then cut through the peninsula finally making it to the northern side where I met the Atlantic again. On this side, it was even more spectacular with cliffs resembling those of Kerry and Mohar. Watching the waves break against the cliffs and spill out over lower cliffs were mesmerizing. It felt like watching a campfire or lava lamp; I couldn't tear my eyes away. There was a hole in one of the walls in which water would go in and then moments later would spill out of a shelf just above it. The phenomenon created a roaring waterfall. Just, wow!

I also, as had been the case since arriving in Ireland, adored seeing mama sheep with their babies. I'd heard once that there were more sheep in Australia than people and was sure that had to be the case here, too. Being spring, there were so many little ones. When I would ride up, the older sheep would usually walk away. The babies would run to Mom and often start nursing. When they weren't busy worrying

about me, several lambs would run after each other like playing a game of tag. So. Darn. Cute! I also noticed a lot of sheep laying on the side of the road. I thought this might be because bogs created little slopes next to the road. Between the slopes and the pavement, that little section was probably warmer than elsewhere. They didn't even bat eyelashes when cars drove by, but for me they would move away. I was bummed because I wanted pictures.

My final stop ended up being a bust. Doug had suggested I visit Céide Fields for two good reasons. First, it was one of the most extensive sites for Neolithic archeology dating back 6,000 years, but it also contained a variety of structures including tombs, dwellings, and stone-walled fields that had been hiding all those years under the bog. Second, Céide Fields had an indoor museum. The day's weather forecast prepared me for all-day rain so this stop would have provided me with a much needed break. Sadly, though, I arrived too late and even though they were open for another half-hour, they weren't allowing new people in. I was so bummed! I walked around the property to get a glimpse of the stone structures, but everything was fenced and locked. I did learn, however, that the Belderigg site was an extension of this area. At least I'd seen a small part of it.

The cliffs never ceased to amaze as I traveled the final few miles to the outskirts of Ballycastle's metropolis (she says tongue-in-cheek). When Google Maps told me my AirB&B was on the left, there was no question which one it was. The home and historic outbuildings were right off the freeway with neighbors living no closer than miles away. Emmanuel and Carmel met me at the door and Emmanuel showed me around the bottom floor including my room. The two were in the process of renovating a very, very old structure so things like potable water and flushing toilet paper were issues. Nonetheless, I was in seventh heaven! They had extra pears, a washer AND dryer, a warm shower, and a comfortable room where I could rest all evening. I ate, cleaned clothes, worked on my plans and accommodations for the next two days, drank camomile, and journaled until 11 PM. I was zonkered!

Crew Post

My body is tired, but I still had a long day planned. I'll take it easier tomorrow. I visited my fourth Irish national park, cool archeology (yes, Shawna, it was cool), and saw amazing cliffs, incredible ocean views, and cute-as-buttons lambs.



Along the way between Mulranny and Ballycastle

Ballycastle to Ballina

Knee Niggles



Shoreline



Between Downpatrick Head and
Moyne Abbey

Distance: 32.3 mi/52 km
Ascent/Descent: +1265'/-1396' +386/-426m
Average Moving Speed: 6.7 mph/ 10.8 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 6:46/4:49
Accommodation: Heyday Hostel
Weather: Gorgeous
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vXvL51YkK1O>

I allowed myself time to rest in the morning. It was so warm in the room and I'd planned the shorter day so I could take my time in the morning. I caught up on my journal (finally!) and GoodReads reviews and slowly packed to leave. My hosts had to leave by 10:30 AM and I made the deadline by getting my bike out of hock from the ancient barn just in time. I was eastbound.

When at the Otter Hostel, one of my roommates made two recommendations: (1) visit Downpatrick Head and (2) stay at the Heyday Hostel in Ballina. I planned to do both on this day. Downpatrick Head is a big rock in the sense that the Grand Canyon is a big hole in the ground. That rock is named Dún Briste (meaning "Broken Fort") Sea Stack, a 150' tall free-standing rock over 260' off-shore. Interestingly, the sea stack was connected to the mainland

via a sea arch until a violent storm (some say hurricane) broke the connection in 1393. A 1980 land survey on top of the stack showed evidence of medieval human structures including stone buildings and a gate to separate livestock. It sure would have been a lovely place to live if you could handle Atlantic wind from three sides and you weren't there in 1393.

Downpatrick Head now served as a bird sanctuary including species like puffins, but I didn't see any of the cuties. The landmass from which the rock was separated had a long, interesting history. Remnants of a church still stood at its point, a church said to have been founded by St. Patrick in the 5th century. In fact, Downpatrick translates to "Fort Patrick." Behind the church are more recent remnants of a World War II observation station and next to it written in large white stone is "EIRE 64." Northern Ireland, part of the United Kingdom, was involved in WWII while the Republic of Ireland maintained neutral. This confused many because of the similar names and being on the same island. To keep pilots from accidentally bombing the neutral territory, they wrote "Eire" (Irish for "Ireland") large enough so pilots could see them. Eighty of these earthen signs were built at the time and each had a number to help with navigation and rescue efforts. Downpatrick Head was coastal marker 64.



The area also serves as the center of many legendary tales. In one such iteration, a defiant pagan chieftain refused to convert to Christianity so St. Patrick tapped his staff on the ground at Downpatrick crumbling the section between Downpatrick Head and Dún Briste. I can't imagine that helped win any converts.

What I saw was breathtaking! The raw intensity of sea waves crashing into Dún Briste's base was so striking, so powerful. Time and again waves would form and bounce against the tall walls forming white ocean spray dozens of feet high. I couldn't keep my eyes from it. I walked around Downpatrick Head, found a place right on the edge of the cliff, shuffled to the edge very carefully, sat, and stared in wonder. Waves came from all directions and bounced into one another creating large sprays. I took lots of pictures then moved to another point on the edge to repeat the process. Speaking of the edge... signs everywhere warned that we were in a very dangerous place. It'd be a great place to commit murder or suicide; one leap and you'd be a goner for sure. ChatGPT told me there were no official records of suicides taking place there, but online forums begged to differ. ChatGPT also suggested I contact a help line for asking about suicides in the first place.

I spent about an hour at Downpatrick Head, mostly marveling in wonder and taking pictures that could never do it justice. It was definitely worth the seven mile out-of-the-way roundtrip ride. That said, the mileage was starting to be a problem. I'd felt a niggle in my left knee the day before contributing to my desire to shorten this day. The morning off hadn't done the trick; my left knee continued to niggle—increasing in volume and starting to get the right knee in on the action. I was fine when spinning, but any climbing was bothersome. Those 6% grades were no longer a good idea and I was back to walking my bike at some of the 4%'ers. It was so sad after I'd been doing so well with mileage recently. I'd gained a lot of confidence and was proud of each daily accomplishment. Now, I'd have to take time off to heal and go short for a few days. If I didn't, I'd be facing consequences I'd regret... not the least of which would be not being able to run and train for Ironman Wisconsin upon my return home. It seemed strange to be using this adventure as a training regimen for a future event; but, this was how I lived my life... flitting from one amazing opportunity to another. I'd decided to live life fully and was doing just that. In addition to the knee(s), my right shifter continued to misbehave. There was a bike shop in Ballina I knew Sapphire would need to visit. It would be a fourth attempt to fix the problem.

My next stop was Moyne Abbey, again requiring I veer off the path to Ballina (my day's goal). And, again, the side trip was worth it. I'd told my AirB&B hosts of my day's plans before leaving and they'd agreed Downpatrick and Moyne were great choices. They warned me that I would see a sign at the Abbey discouraging me from entering. There is an easeway on some farmer's land that all must pass to reach the Abbey. He didn't seem to be much of a fan of his land being used for people to go worship God or maybe he just didn't like tourists trampling through his fields so as a deterrent, he put up lots of signs: "No bikes," "No dogs," "You're entering property with dangerous equipment, continue at your own risk!" He'd also posted a sign my hosts had warned me about: "Beware of bull." Had they not told me to ignore the sign and that he didn't have the legal right to keep people from using the easeway, I probably

would have turned around. But their warning and the thought that I would have pushed my knees this extra distance for no reason, gave me the courage to climb over the ancient stairs alongside the stone gate. I did walk within a field of cows with their babies, but the bulls were in an entirely different pasture and were separated from me with both a fence and stream. The two of them looked perfectly content hanging out in the sun watching me minding my own business as I walked by.

I was so glad I ignored the harsh warnings; the Abbey was in great condition and visitors could walk in most areas (unfortunately, not to the top of the bell tower). I went in every room and especially loved the cloisters. What most struck me was how similar this building was to the Abbey I'd seen several cities before. It was as if they'd replicated the blueprint. That would make sense, paying just one architect would sure save the Catholic Church some cash (aka Incan lives).

I stayed for about 45 minutes before leaving for Ballina. I realized I was famished and was desperate for food. I'd learned a new food



fact the day before which came in handy for just this morning—Irish post offices were also convenience stores just like American gas stations. I pulled into the first post office I saw and all the food was calling my name. Though I'd never chosen food under a heat lamp at home, the pre-made chicken wrap seemed to be exactly what I needed... that, and a pint of milk. I woofed those items down so fast that I had a stomachache for hours afterward. And, as if that wasn't enough, I bought chocolate digestives and ate a few. The thought was they would provide sustenance when I was hungry like I'd been earlier in the day. The reality was that they wouldn't fit in my bento bag so I was better off snacking on them in my room at night.

I was close to Ballina, pedaling slowly on an uphill so as to not further hurt my knees when I accidentally veered from the road into the grass. Yep, I fell again. A slow fall not causing any damage except to my ego.

I rolled into Ballina at 5 PM and went first to the bike shop. They confirmed that the shifter was toast and that they'd need to keep Sapphire in the hospital overnight. He thought a part he had in stock would work as a replacement. Sapphire drug my gear to the hostel around the corner then I escorted her back, weight-free for her sleepover. The owner said to come back in the morning. He didn't ask my name, didn't give any paper confirming he had my bike, simply said nothing. I had the foresight to ask his name, but trust was the name of the game in Ireland.

I went back to the Heyday Hostel, checked in with a wonderful man and received a tour of the impeccable facilities and found my room. I'd be sharing a dorm for four with just one other gal. Bonus! And, since I knew I'd be taking a pajama day the following day, I paid for a second night. Bonus of bonuses: he said I could keep my bunk both nights without having to stow my gear. AND... the hostel didn't close during the day so I could sleep, watch movies, and stare into space for the entire next day.

The hostel manager sent me to Dillon's Pub for dinner where, you guessed it, I ordered fish and chips and cider and wrote in my journal. I only had one more chore for the day. I still craved that dark chocolate hazelnut Ritter Sport. I stopped by the grocery store across the street before returning to the hostel. They were closed. It would be chocolate digestives before bed and I was even too tired to watch one 27-minute episode of "Derry Girls." I was bound and determined to finish the series (just three episodes left) before reaching Northern Ireland.

Crew Post

My body told me I have to take a break. I have niggles in both knees so will be spending two nights in Ballina's hostel. I'll do two short days after that and hopefully be back in business.

I saw the most amazing site today—Dún Briste Sea Stack off Downpatrick Head. Wait until you see the pictures!!! To round things out, I also visited a defunct abbey. The owner of the easement to reach the church said to be careful of the bull. I live dangerously, but wore my helmet just in case. No bulls were in the enclosure so it was all bull anyway.



Cliffs at Dún Briste

Ballina

A Day Off, Kind of



Waterfall on the Belleek Castle demesne



Muredach's Cathedral from across the river

Walking Distance: 9.6 mi/15.5 km

Accommodation: Heyday Hostel

Weather: Overcast and cool

Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/v26Md7jn13O>

It was nice to sleep in again, but I was sure sick of those plastic-covered mattresses. Perimenopausal night sweats wrapped in plastic made for a miserable, sticky experience. And, it made for stinky clothes—a real problem when you were having a PJ day the next day and you wouldn't be able to do laundry for several days. C'est la vie when you're vagabonding it.

ChatGPT planned my day and the hostel manager, Fergal, approved it. I was off to St. Muredach's Cathedral just across the bridge from my hostel. I'd learned there was a pool nearby so stopped there on my way to the cathedral. Yes, they could loan me goggles and a cap. No, they wouldn't be open at any time that would work for me. I knew I should go for a swim because that would help my knees; it just wasn't going to happen. My knees were still bothering me so even though I would walk almost ten miles by the end of the day, I was careful to avoid stairs and anything else that might add extra weight or pressure. I had to get that knee pain under control; a worsening condition could result in my trip

ending prematurely. I was adamantly averse to that possibility. I had a goal... to get at least to Belfast. Anything short and I would feel like I'd failed. Shawna said that some my my miles were "junk miles" a common term for triathletes who put in more miles than needed to produce a competitive benefit. There's a point after which those miles stop providing benefit and actually start causing muscular damage. A long tour like this one definitely put me in that zone. She was right about some junk miles, but I had a goal and I was still seeing amazing things along my journey. I wanted to finish, but I also wanted to be ready to start Ironman Wisconsin training upon my return in May. Basically, this adventure was training for my next. I couldn't afford to push my body too hard. It would be easier, shorter miles as much as I could manage—both physically and mentally. The latter was the hardest because I knew I was strong enough to hit the high-mile days and I was seriously motivated to go far. Strong enough and healthy enough neither are nor are not mutually exclusive.

So, I couldn't swim, but I could still see Ballina on foot. Off to St. Muredach's Cathedral, a 19th century church along the River Moy. I always had a problem sight-seeing at churches. I never wanted to just go in and take pictures and make a quick exit. Whether there was truth to it or not, it felt a bit like sacrilege, a bit disrespectful to the parishioners who were there praying. I always snuck around hiding my camera while taking pictures regardless of my guilt. This time I saw there were three open confessionals and figured that I probably belonged in one even though I wasn't Catholic. I took my pictures, said a little prayer in the back row, something like: "Sorry, God, for taking the pictures and would you please cure my knees?," and got ready to leave. Then I noticed three women and one man sitting in adjacent pews chanting. It was so melodic, entrancing. I stood for awhile and then left, feeling a little more like I'd had a religious experience by watching them... so was forgiven.

A man (not one of the angels in the pew) had noticed me in the church and I recognized him once I was outside. A little old guy with a walker. We shared hellos and then had a full conversation. Father Peter was assigned to St. Muredach's Cathedral when still working and before that was a padre in the military. He told jokes from during his time as a military chaplain, commented on Trump (something I was hearing a lot in Ireland), and told me how parishioners were in disagreement about whether services should be in Latin or the language of the people. We eventually parted and went our own ways. Later in the day, I saw him again at the store. He wanted to buy me some chocolate. Should I have been worried a stranger wanted to buy a naive girl candy? Absolutely not... he was as innocuous as a koala bear.



Muredach's Cathedral cemetery



Muredach's Cathedral interior



Father Peter

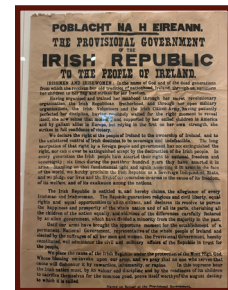
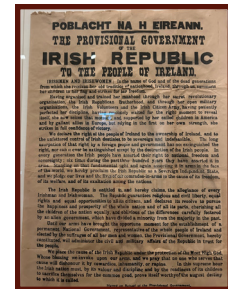
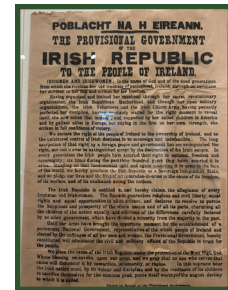
It was time for me to check in with Michael, the bike mechanic. I was so happy when he told me the shifter he had in stock worked with Sapphire. I felt like I'd cut off her gangrenous hand and replaced it with a bigger, stronger, faster prosthetic. I hoped she and I would both be happy with the upgrade. I'd needed a lot of my own upgrades over my years; it was her turn. I rode Sapphire the 0.1 mile back to the hostel and the new limb worked great. I went on faith that she'd be good for another 1,000 or so miles.

The most important chore done, there was no way I was spending my planned pajama rest day in Ballina actually resting. There were things to see—I was in Ireland! On to number two on ChatGPT's list—the Jackie

Clarke Collection. Good thing I wrote down the name down because I kept accidentally substituting it with Jackie Chan. Wrong country. I had no idea what the museum was, but between ChatGPT and Fergal, it seemed the right stop to make.

Jackie Clarke was some important guy in Ballina, but was mostly remembered for the gift of his historical resources to the community. Beginning at about age eight, he started saving newspaper articles and other (mostly paper-based) paraphernalia important during the time. He kept maps, posters, cartoons, books, and more. He did this throughout Ireland's Troubles so his collection offered tremendously rich chronological insights into the Ireland/Northern Ireland conflict. He had resources about the Irish Republican Army, Irish Republican Brotherhood, Sinn Féin, and others. I loved seeing the document that officially informed the Irish they were free; they were the Republic of Ireland.

It was time for a break. Fergal recommended a place for a snack. They didn't have scones, but agreed to let me buy one next door and eat it with the tea I purchased there. It gave me time to talk with another Irish man who also asked me about Trump. One of his friends had given him a hat that said "TRUMP" so he removed the thread for the "T" and "P" so it read: "RUM." He was happier with that. Once he left, I went back online checking to see what was next on my agenda—the Belleek Castle Hotel. I learned there was a 2 PM guided tour—YES! But, it was 1:30 and 1.7 miles away. I booked it, adding more sweat to my PJs, and made it about 15 minutes late. It ended up that no one had come for the tour so the guide gave me a private tour. BONUS! I should be late more often (just don't tell my friends I said that—I'm always late; hence, being late to this tour).



Traveling box given to the girls in the Assisted Emigration Scheme

Carol was an amazing guide, but at first she was more like a personal tutor. We talked history from the Great Famine to the present and she was gracious in answering my many questions. What I especially appreciated was her ability to help me see history from a different perspective. For instance, I'd learn quite a bit about the famine by this point and had some pretty firm judgements regarding land barons. She helped me see that not all wealthy landowners were horrible, selfish people. In the case of this castle, the owners were quite compassionate, helping their tenant farmers as much as possible. Carol told me that many farmers set these "big houses" (sounds very USA Southern Plantation, right?) on fire because they were so angry about the disparities between the exceptional wealth in one building and the poverty in the rest of the region. The Belleek Castle remained intact because while there may have been animosity (she didn't mention this), the people acknowledged the family's goodwill during the time. I'd also had a terrible view of workhouses after having learned of their horrendous, overcrowded, and dilapidated states resulting in untold deaths. She told of their original purposes and that they served those purposes well. It was when they became overrun with too many destitute people in need that they couldn't keep up and conditions deteriorated. That was when the workhouses became cesspools of hunger, disease, and death. I'd fallen into the trap of seeing the bad in people instead of the good. She realigned my thinking to see the assistance good people tried to offer.

"Eat life before life eats you."
—Carol quoted someone

Following my lesson, she took me on a tour of the place. It was built in 1825 as the residential home of the Knox-Gore family who inhabited it for over a century. Interestingly, the house wore many hats during its lifetime. After it was home to the rich and famous, it came into decline and by the mid-20th century been converted to a sanatorium for tuberculosis patients. Apparently, repurposing these homes for public health needs was not uncommon. In the 20th century, it was used to quarter soldiers during the Irish War of Independence and perhaps during World War I. Marshall Doran purchased the deteriorating building in the 1960s, restored it, and repurposed it again into the hotel, wedding venue, and museum it was when I visited. His eclectic tastes resulted in architectural changes such as the addition of a bar made from the reclaimed wood from remnants of ships as well as ceilings from other structures. It reminded me of Randolph Hearst's fascination with replacing ceilings in his American castle. Hearst replaced his ceilings with architectural wonders transported from other locations or auction houses and placed them above the heads of his many powerful, rich, and famous visitors. Doran was also quite the collector and the museum/castle/hotel was impressive and wide-ranging. But, it was no Hearst Castle.

Carole took me to one room recreated to look like the bedroom of the Pirate Queen Grace O'Malley that included O'Malley's actual bed. The castle also had an entire section dedicated to artistic pieces of whale bone and ivory, what I learned was called scrimshaw. There was an entire room filled with geological treasures including petrified wood and ammonites. Carol showed me an ammonite that was cross cut and explained that the designs of the first submarines used these cross-sections to inform how it might be possible to breath underwater. She even handed me a baby tooth from a wooly mammoth. That thing was HUGE and it was unimaginable how big of a mouth it may have filled. Finally, we went to the military weapons room and she even let me touch stuff. She gave me gloves



Belleek Castle entrance



Belleek Castle demesne



Where Carol gave me history lessons



Belleek Castle shipwreck bar



Ivory?



Ammonite



Grace O'Malley's bed



Baby tooth from a woolly mammoth



Look at me—a swordman!

and we play-acted sword fighting against invisible balloons using a really cool knife-sword that had a built-in wrist protector. We held chainmail and even an executioner's sword. This sword was special with engraving; it was used only for beheading gentlemen. What lucky guys, eh? It was huge and flat on the end without a point. Who needed a tip anyway to chop off a head? I was so grateful for all I'd learned from and seen with Carol so wrote her a thank you note on one of my postcards. I was having to be stingy with those things; I only had a few left.

The rest of the day was dedicated to shopping, eating grocery store items in the hostel, journaling, and planning/prepping for the following day. Maybe an episode of "Derry Girls" for my relaxing PJ day?

Crew Post

So much for a relaxing PJ day. I was in Ireland and wanted to see Ballina so just did—a church, a museum, a castle/hotel/museum, and a bike shop. Sapphire has a new shifter for the back rings and I'm looking forward to testing them out (but not too excited to test them on hills). The knees didn't improve much today with the just-under 10-miles of walking.



Belleek Castle

Ballina to Sligo

Skipping Stuff



The Heyday Hostel



Distance: 39.1 mi/62.9 km
Ascent/Descent: +1520'/-1487' +463/-453m
Average Moving Speed: 7.7 mph/ 12.4 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 6:33/5:03
Accommodation: AirB&B hosted by Roisin
Weather: Sun in the morning; overcast in the afternoon
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vMq5werEL8O>

I could not fall asleep in the night so kept re-reading the same passages of the book I most certainly wasn't enjoying: "Irish History for Dummies." And, get this, I was awake at 7:30 AM. How does that happen. And, even more perplexing, it took me until after 10 to actually leave the hostel. It was definitely a case of the procrastinations. I even wasted time visiting several stores before finding one with headphones to replace mine that broke the day before. Then, as soon as I started, I made a wrong turn, had to ride in a circle over several bridges, and was finally on my way.

I also knew from early in the day that my knees hadn't miraculously improved overnight or as a result of my half-assed PJ day... okay... whole-assed. The stairs in the hostel confirmed the continued niggles and standing up after sitting made me look exactly like I was—old. I knew I'd have to take it slow and then on the first 3% grade, I actually found myself walking. I just couldn't take a chance of further injuring the knees. But, what's a girl to do with an overuse injury when there were still many miles to cover? The answer for the day was to spin as much as possible, avoid mashing (my go-to method for sprints and hills), and walk whenever I couldn't straight-out spin. I chose at the very last minute to switch my day's plan to all "N" roads because I knew their grades were a lot lower. This worked well for most of the day.

My goal was to get to Bundoran because I had a willing WarmShowers host. But, it was 61 miles from Ballina. I would have made the miles a few days prior, but I wasn't so sure on this day. I considered breaking the ride into two days and as soon as I was sure I'd made the right choices, monkey wrenches entered my mind. The final monkey wrench was the rain. It was supposed to have been raining all week, yet it'd just been overcast at times. The next day, though, showed a 99% chance of rain accruing over an inch of precipitation. I knew 1" was a lot; it gave me flashbacks to Waterford. My decision was made—40 miles on this day and 20 on the rainy day. That would put me in Sligo for the night... a new county for me.

I rode, stopping about every hour or whenever I saw a food store. I was still on a mission to find my coveted dark chocolate hazelnut Ritter Sports; alas, it was one more day without luck. The stops, though, gave me time to breathe off the bike for awhile. I also wasn't really happy

with my new headphones—spending €4 on them should have been my first clue they were substandard. C'est la vie.

I never found a cafe or bakery for tea and a scone so spent lunch eating a sandwich I'd made the night before using my leftover chicken and eggs and drinking directly from the OJ container I'd also not finished the day before. I ate it straddling the bike. Real comfortable and great for digestion, right?

There was only one place I wanted to stop on this route—Queen Maeve's Tomb. A big pile of rocks said to be the burial lot for Queen Maeve who could be found standing up under



Clouds rolling in on the cows



County Sligo

all those stones. Research debunked the myth, but it still made a great story and was the site of an ancient civilization including other tombs nearby. I reached the turn off for the tomb around 2:30 PM and asked myself how badly I wanted to see it. It would add 4-5 biking miles to the trip and several additional hiking miles. And, the clouds were becoming gloomier, the air cooler. No, I wouldn't do it. My knees couldn't handle the extra mileage. As soon as I turned away from the turn, I felt guilty. What was my purpose being in Ireland if I was going to skip all the sights I came to see. But, Shawna was right; seeing the tomb just added junk miles. I tried to justify missing it by blaming it on my knees (which was a legitimate concern), but the wise choice would have been to not walk almost ten miles the day before and let them rest instead. Anyhoo, I missed the turn and knew I'd never see the place where a woman was not buried standing up. Instead, I visited a SuperValu to buy dinner—a salad, baguette, cider, and, of course, chocolate. Buying dinner at the grocery store would save me money, but it would also save me time. I could eat in my room instead of going to a pub which always took longer. I really liked the pubs—especially those with music—and I loved journaling in them, but I really just needed to rest with elevated legs. I could definitely see why J.K. Rowlings wrote most of the Harry Potter series in pubs, those things were pretty awesome



Knocknarea

I'd planned to take the "N" roads all the way to my AirB&B, but at one point the "N" road looked like it was becoming an "M" ("motorway," like interstates in the USA). I really didn't belong on "M's" for both my safety and the sake of the fast-moving cars. The alternative, of course, was an "L" road. It was in great shape, but with a profile of high-gradient ups followed by low gradient downs, ad nauseam. Walk up, spin down. Walk up, spin down.



Benbulbin (aka "Table Rock")

After several wrong turns, I finally made it to the home of my AirB&B hosts. A mom, dad, and 4-year-old active boy greeted me warmly and were so gracious. Mom, Roisin (which I learned meant "little rose"), let me wash my clothes in their machine and dad, Donal (like Donald without the "d") helped me carry my gear to the third floor bedroom. And, miracle of miracles, they even had a thumper/vibrator/thingamajig I could use to stimulate my knee parts. It was exactly what I needed and they were so nice to boot!



Cozy home for the night

Crew Post

I'm feeling guilty because for the first time I skipped something—Queen Maeve's Tomb. I'd always been willing to go the extra mile (literally) to see whatever needed seeing along my daily route. Today, I skipped it. I'm really worried about my knees and didn't want to push them the extra 4-5 bike miles plus an additional about 2-mile hike to the tomb. It was an almost 40 mile day, but tomorrow will only be about 20 miles in torrential rains. The good news is that I'll have a WarmShowers host.

Bonus: Including the walking I did on the days I didn't ride and all the riding and walking I did on the days I did ride, I've reached 1,007 miles.



Irish sheep near Caherdaniel

Sligo to Bundoran

Whose Idea Was This Anyway?



Saying goodbye to Roisin



Desperately needed hot tea

Distance: 36.7 mi/59.1 km
Ascent/Descent: +1843'/-1781' +562/-543m
Average Moving Speed: 6.8 mph/ 10.99 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 10:49/6:19
Accommodation: WarmShowers with Victor
Weather: Rainy and cold
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vevW5Bw2Py6>

My AirB&B hosts were so kind. My clean clothes were in the dryer when I went downstairs and anything I wanted was at my disposal. All I wanted, though, was to head out. My knees were doing well after the vibrator. It was raining and I was worried the rain would get worse so wanted to make progress while I could. I threw on all my layers, said goodbye to Roisin, and saddled my girl. It was cold and wet and windy. I had 30 miles to go in that weather and there was little to see along the way. This was probably good because stopping in the rain was not my idea of a good time.

To break things up and get some oomph, I'd decided to stop at the first town, Grange. It was 11 miles to that pot of hot tea and scone with cream and jam. I was so glad to arrive if for

no other reason than to know I'd completed a third of my day's journey. I spent the time reconsidering my path for the day (I'd made many wrong turns already) and texting back-and-forth with Doug to find the shortest, least climb to get to Bundoran without missing what I definitely shouldn't miss.

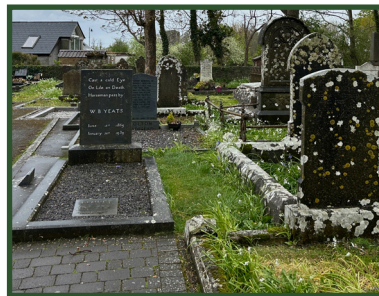
I had been using a bastardized combination of the GPX track Doug had helped me develop the day before with Google Maps bike routes when I made one of those wrong turns. It ended up being a good thing because I'd inadvertently been following the Yeats' Path in honor of the poet W.B. Yeats. When I saw a sign that said I'd reached his grave, I had to stop. I'd known it was somewhere in the area, but my planned route surely would have missed it.

I entered the church grounds and there was a woman working next to a big sign asking for donations. I couldn't just pass it by so stopped for a chat. Tracy could have been a Yeats scholar with her wealth of knowledge. I'd not done my homework and not known anything about him. She made sure that by the time I left, I had a new appreciation of the poet. Tracy told me of how one of his first poems was about Knocknarea, the supposed tomb of Queen Maeve, and his last was about Benbulbin, the table-top mountain just north of Drumcliffe Church, his burial place. She said it beautifully—"this land bookended his life." He'd wanted to be buried in Drumcliffe, but died when in France while recuperating from illness. It took many years for his body to return to its final resting place because war interfered. I also learned that he'd felt responsible for the deaths at the Easter Rising because his work incited the nationalism leading up to it.

After visiting the grave, I went inside the church. I loved that it was a traditional building with a modern, lived-in feel. The churches and cathedrals were used in this country, used with the intention of learning about and spreading God's goodwill. It continued to be refreshing after my experiences in Spain.



W.B. Yeats Memorial



Yeats' grave



Drumcliffe Church



I had one stop left, the one I'd actually planned, and couldn't wait to get there because it would mean I was closer to getting out of the cold rain. After my failure to stop and see the Queen Maeve tomb the day before, I didn't want to cheat myself by missing something awesome. That awesome something was the viewpoint for Castle Classiebawn and the view from one side of Mullaghmore Peninsula. I started climbing the hill to the viewpoint and was wow'd when I looked to my left. Castle Classiebawn was so imposing, standing like a sentry on a huge grassy hill. It was formidable and made it clear who held the wealth and power in this community. Unfortunately, the castle was not open to the public because it was a private holding. I decided to continue on to the actual viewpoint and was so glad I did. I wasn't sure if the view of the castle was any better, but the stunning cliffs and rocks below were incredible. I watched them for awhile pining for a clear, dry, warm day. I could have sat there for an hour on a better day just taking in the scenery. The cold sent me packing. By this time, I'd switched from my Rubbermaid dish gloves to actual gloves and they were already saturated. I decided they were still warmer than the rubber gloves, but they sure were a pain to take on and off for pictures. I missed all those sunny days I'd been so lucky to have over the previous weeks.

My next stop was the other side of the peninsula where I could get a stellar view of Mullaghmore Beach. I'd seen a sliver of it and decided that would have to do so skipped the probably stellar option. I needed to get to Bundoran. My hands were becoming more difficult to move as the quarter-miles ticked by and I didn't want to have to tell people I lost my fingers to frostbite in Ireland when I hadn't lost them in the Himalaya. That would be embarrassing!

Seeing the sign for Bundoran made me so happy. My WarmShowers homestay was with Victor from Brazil. He'd been so good to me over the last few weeks, making me feel welcome and being so flexible with my uncertain and constantly changing schedule. I'd hoped to arrive earlier in the day, but it just wasn't possible. I'd left early (just after 8 AM), but was still proactively walking the hills. Plus, I was often in my easiest gears going downhill because of the intense headwinds. Unfortunately, Victor had to leave for work before I arrived, but (and this was so sweet and helpful) he sent me a little video showing where I could find the keys and how to find his apartment. The only bad news was that he



Gatehouse to Classiebawn Castle



Classiebawn Castle on a bad day



Mullaghmore Peninsula

lived on the second floor. I bumped Sapphire all the way up for her night indoors. I'm sure she was grateful. I let myself in, let him know I'd finally made it, made up my bed by laying my sleeping sheet and sleeping bag on the floor mattress he'd laid out for me, and headed out for food. I walked to the supermarket about 3/4 miles away because I'd given up on my just-new headphones and, of course, needed a sweet treat. I bought the headphones and tried them out before leaving the store. They didn't work and I was glad I'd checked them right away. The clerk refunded my money. Then, I saw it—a bakery. Having eaten nothing other than a morning scone, I went a little crazy at the bakery counter and rounded it out when I found hazelnut Ritter Sports. They weren't dark chocolate, but would do.

It was time for real food so I found a pub that served food (the first few did not) and enjoyed cider, a burger, and fries while journaling. Afterward, I returned to Victor's home, now warmed by the space heater I'd left on to warm my clothes, and luxuriated in having a place to myself for awhile. He'd said he wouldn't arrive home from work until 1 AM. I would (hopefully) be in deep slumber by then.

Crew Post

It was cold, rainy, and wet all day. This was what I'd expected in Ireland and was truly miserable. Tomorrow's prediction is more rain, albeit a bit lighter. I've been incredibly lucky up to now so rather than complaining, I've been doing that IMSG video chuckle instead. It helps.

I visited W.B. Yeats' grave and the famous Classiebawn Castle off the amazing shores of Mullaghmore. I'm in a WarmShowers homestay for the night. Unfortunately, my host is at work so I haven't yet met Victor from Brazil.

There aren't many pictures today because my hands were too cold and wet to keep taking off my gloves.



The stairs Sapphire climbed



Victor's home with my laundry strewn about

Bundoran to Donegal Town

A WarmShowers Morning



Bundoran



Distance: 24.6 mi/39.6 km
Ascent/Descent: +1058'/-1028' +323m/-313m
Average Moving Speed: 6.5 mph/ 10.5 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 6:11/3:47
Accommodation: WarmShowers with Victor
Weather: Constant rain and chilly
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vxOQ5QKy7MO>

I didn't even hear Victor come in and was sad when I was ready to leave just after 8 AM and hadn't been able to thank him. Just as I was about to put on my helmet, he came out with a huge smile and hug and invited me for breakfast. I was really happy we'd have the opportunity to talk. I'd read an article about WarmShowers that said it was never intended to simply be a free place to stay when touring; it was meant to be a means of finding like-minded souls with whom you could make cultural connections. Our time together was just that. And to add to the festivities, Victor's girlfriend Eleanor from Northern Ireland joined us just after omelets and cappuccinos.

Victor was Brazilian with a recently-earned civil engineering degree. He wanted to learn English before starting work so was basically taking a post-college gap year (maybe a little longer than a year). He found that Ireland was an incredible place with excellent surfing (one of the many sports he loved including, obviously, cycling). Since moving to Ireland, he'd taken two major cycling tours. One was most of the EuroVelo 1 from Scotland south and on to Morocco. As part of that tour, he and his mom (my age) biked the Camino. She didn't quite finish because she broke her arm in Burgos. He was anxious to get her treatment and situated back at home and later returned to Spain to finish the Camino.



Eleanor and Victor

His other trip was across Europe from France to Bulgaria. He spent part of his time on this trip with another touring cyclist who'd traveled from Alaska to Tierra del Fuego and written and published a book much like this journal. The friend was a professional photographer and his pictures captured a true sense of the places he visited. I saw pictures from Peru and remembered exactly what I'd seen and the people I'd met at that specific location. He had pictures of the Grand Canyon that brought me back to two months prior when I'd been there training for this journey. Pictures from Chile were just as I remembered Patagonia. Looking through the photojournals was like a walk down memory lane. The book was written in both English and French, but it didn't matter because my €3 reading glasses were already packed in a pannier and I couldn't read a word.

Victor had some helpful suggestions for my continued trip, mostly around the immediate area. He talked about the caves just near his home that I'd visit on my way to the more popular Fairy Bridge and Wishing Chair. Eleanor was an absolute treasure trove of information. Having lived in Ireland and Northern Ireland her entire life, she knew the north. Like all others who had anything to say about the north, she assured me I should absolutely NOT miss the northern coast of Northern Ireland. The EV1 routed me through the center of Northern Ireland with almost a straight line between Londonderry and Belfast. I worried the northern route would add a lot more climbing and several more days to my trip. She told me, though, that the climbing would be much less than what I would have just north of Bundoran and suggested I skip the coastal loop between Donegal Town and Letterkenny. She said Northern Ireland won in the awe-factor between the two. Plus, I'd seen so much coastal beauty that I didn't mind skipping a bit if it would enable me to spend more time learning history, seeing archeological treasures, and communicating with Irish people. I made my decision. I would skip Slieve League (the impressive cliffs three times the height of the Cliffs of Moher and said to be even more impressive). The cliffs weren't on the Irish EV1 and would add two riding days; I wasn't eager to go that far out of the way. I would also miss Glenveagh National Park which would have been my fifth national park in Ireland. I figured this was okay because much of the park was meant for hikers and without a backpack, I didn't think I'd enjoy it much. Nonetheless, I'd wanted to take a guided tour of Glenveagh Castle. I liked those old fancy houses. Another missed opportunity... the the benefits outweighed the costs.

The remaining question was when I would leave Donegal Town for Derry—Londonderry. Eleanor said the Donegal Waterbus Tour was terrific and the tour operators had a lot of crack. What? I pictured each guest receiving a dime bag filled with a chunk of white rock as they stepped foot on the boat. I learned that no, crack did not mean “crack” (aka, a cocaine substitute) in Ireland; it meant jokes and a good time. I later spent dinner looking into the tour and found there would only be one ferry the next day, Easter, and it wouldn’t conclude until 3 PM. That meant it would be unwise to plan to travel any further than 20 miles the following day. I couldn’t find a reasonably-priced place to stay within that distance and I really was eager to get to Derry. That was where I’d learn so much about the Republic vs. Northern Ireland history of conflict and peace. All of this is to say that I spent about a third of the day planning what to do, a third doing it, and a third writing about it.

It was noon and I’d spent all morning enjoying their company and making plans. You’d think I would have rushed out of town, but Victor and Eleanor had planned my entire morning (now afternoon) of can’t-misses around Bundoran. Everything was on the coastal loop and that loop encapsulated everything I’d come to view as Irish—rolling green fields, beaches (these with surfers), magical rock formations. My first stop took me down a long stairway to the beach. I noticed five teenage boys (one—just past noon with a beer in hand) wearing wetsuits covered with parkas. I’d told them I’d heard there were caves nearby and asked if they knew where they were. They did and with the tide in its current state I would also need a wetsuit to see them. Just no. I did see two caves from a distance, but knew it wasn’t a good idea to tread on the surrounding slippery rock while wearing my cycling shoe covers. Everything I’d seen already impressed me; the caves would have just been icing on the cake.

I rode a bit farther and reached the Fairy Bridges (aka cliffs with blow holes). You could walk around these blow holes which I’d learned had ended in death for some eager beaver picture takers. The tides were strong enough to create the blow effect, but they were pretty darn impressive even without the spray from wave water. Truth be told, I did slip several times because of all the recent rain and resulting mud, justification for owning a shirt reading: “But did you die?”



Making my wish



Bundoran beach



Fairy Bridges

I'd asked Eleanor the story behind Fairy Bridges and she responded: "marketing." When I read the placard in front of the formation, it wasn't as blunt. Nonetheless, Fairy Bridges attracted a lot of foreign tourists. Also at that sight was the Wishing Chair. I'd seen a rom-com movie before I left the USA in which a woman sat in a wishing chair and asked to marry the man of her dreams. I was sure it wasn't this wishing chair; there were no trees nor a lake behind it as in the movie, but I wouldn't dare pass a wishing chair without giving it a try. I'll let you know how it went the day before I die.

It was continuing to rain (though not as violently as the day before) and I was wearing all my rain gear as well as a few extra layers for warmth. I put my head down, started the book I was enjoying—"Salem Falls"—and rode to the last town that would have food before reaching my AirB&B. By accident, I opened my email and saw a message from AirB&B saying my evening's accommodation was



Laghey Parish Church of Ireland



Rory Gallagher statue in Ballyshannon



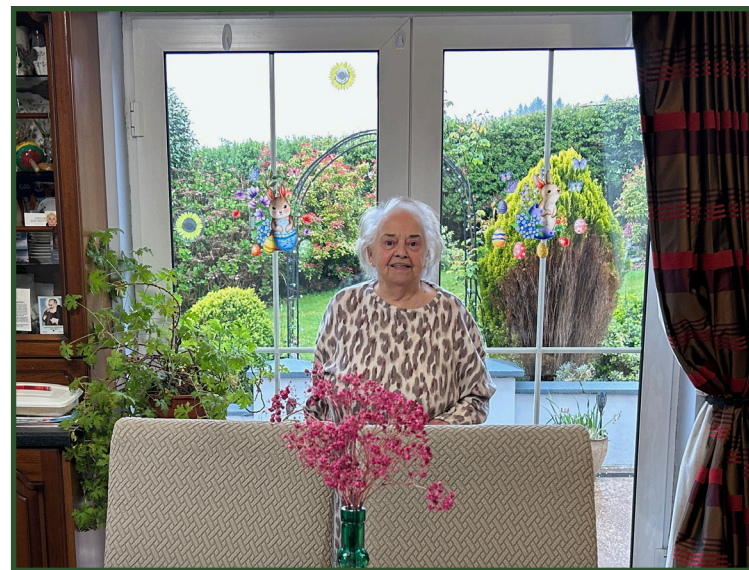
Birds poking tires with dead fish?

cancelled. I also received a message from the host saying she'd overbooked my room and would I like to stay in her daughter's house down the street. It was late afternoon and I was cold, wet, and tired so told her I would. When I finally found a gas station just a few miles from her daughter's house, I stopped for chicken nuggets and a drink. Because of the screw-up, AirB&B would be refunding my money and giving me up to a \$25 credit to find another room that night. I did, it didn't cost me any more. Plus, it was only about 0.1 miles from my first booking. Hallelujah! I knew I'd have a warm bed for the night and was quite relieved. I bought a salad, chicken breasts, KinderBueno tart, and cider and used my handy-dandy bungee cord to attach the meal to Sapphire's back rack. It was three miles to my home for the night.

My host wasn't home so her just-under-90-year-old mother welcomed me. She was absolutely delighted to have someone to talk with while my chicken baked and I legitimately enjoyed her company. It was finally time to go to my room, make decisions about the next day's plans, eat dinner, chat with my family, and journal. I was exhausted and fell asleep several times at my keyboard.



My AirB&B



My AirB&B Hostess and Elvis lover

Crew Post

I had a wonderful morning talking with my WarmShowers host and his girlfriend who both gave me great ideas about what to see in Bundoran (where we were) and on my route to Belfast. I walked on the Fairy Bridges and sat in the Wishing Chair, loving every bit of the scenery despite continued rain. I ended the day in an AirB&B having a delightful conversation with a 90-year-old woman about her trip to Vegas to celebrate Elvis' 50th something. Exhausted!



Fairy Bridges

Donegal Town to Derry

Northern Ireland on Easter



The view from my home sweet home



Just a little breakfast spread

Distance: 56.6 mi/91.1 km
Ascent/Descent: +2237'/-2173' +682m/-662m
Average Moving Speed: 7.1 mph/ 11.4 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 12:42/8:00
Accommodation: Serendipity B&B
Weather: Cold with intermittent light showers
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vDqg2rJGPG6>

How is it that I could awaken early and not leave until 8:30 AM? I just had two panniers to organize and to brush my teeth and hair. Then, again, the getting dressed always took a bit of time. The top wasn't bad—cycling shirt, OmniHeat shirt, coat, buff, and raincoat maybe adding warm or Rubbermaid gloves. It was those bottoms that caused the true struggle. Triathlon cycling shorts, cycling shorts, leggings. That part wasn't horrible unless I needed to go to the bathroom with all those tight layers. The next was the culprit—those darned waterproof shoe covers that weren't even all that awesome. I'd have to pull them over the shoes like thick compression socks, then put on my shoes (yes, in this order), and then pull with Herculean strength to get the covers over the sides of each shoe before attaching the Velcro straps at the bottom. Only then could I add the rain pants and the Velcro straps



A GIGANTIC horse that didn't like Sapphire

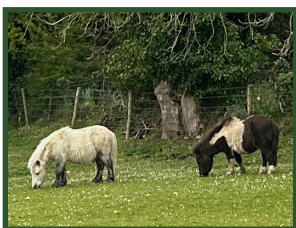
holding the rain pants in place and out of Sapphire's cassette. It was an ordeal every day when rain was in the forecast. Today was one of those days and all the layers were warranted. The 47°F morning had a "feels like" 42°F temperature with a 74% chance of precipitation

All dressed, I went out to the shed to prep and gather Sapphire. She was always so compliant; she'd behaved well in her stable all alone. What a good girl! When I returned for one more bathroom stop and to pick up the chicken I'd stowed in the fridge the night before, Hugh (Dad) asked me to stay for breakfast. Knowing it would be a long, hard day, I gracefully tried to bow out until I noticed he'd set the table as I did for my AirB&B guests. He'd pulled out the good plates, made the coffee, set out five cereal options, fresh orange juice, a block of butter, and more. I knew it would make me sad if my guests didn't eat the breakfasts I'd prepared so I went ahead and sat down. We had a nice

conversation about football (aka American soccer). He'd been a coach and referee before cancer interrupted their lives a few years prior. Now, he cared for the AirB&B guests and was a staunch football supporter from the sidelines. He told me one of his brothers had died from cancer and the other from an aneurysm. Those were some seriously sucky genes that I hoped he hadn't passed on to the sons he adored.

Hugh told me that GAA, a name I'd seen on nearly every soccer field, meant Gaelic Athletic Association and in addition to soccer, it served as a community center for other activities like dance lessons and concerts. Each GAA facility was associated with a parish area though there was no other church/GAA connection. He told how these GAA community centers created fun competition between parishes. I loved the idea. It reminded me of when I visited the Soviet Union (yes, the USSR back in the 1980s) and they had community centers like these. The Soviet centers included preschools because all adults in the socialist regime was required to work. Moms needed somewhere to stow their children. The centers also offered afterschool activities to teach, entertain, and keep older children busy until the parent-citizens returned from work. It was really a great idea. Child care was such a problem in the USA, especially for those with lesser financial means. I was glad to see something similar in Ireland.

After coffee and cereal, I started to Derry—Londonderry. I'd been told that part of the compromise between a divided Ireland was that the city would keep both names. It was just too many syllables for me so I'd been referring to it as Derry when I was speaking in an Irish Republic context and Londonderry when contextualizing with a Northern Irish focus. I'd asked Eleanor (Victor's girlfriend) the day before how to refer to the two territories. I'd been saying "the Republic" and "the North." She said the most common vernacular was "Ireland" and "Northern Ireland." I wondered how those in Northern Ireland felt about it, but she was from Northern Ireland so figured she knew a lot more than me and I'd stick with what she said.



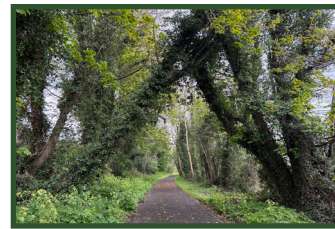
It was very cloudy with “mist” in the air that we would call rain in the Mojave Desert. And, every leg rotation was feeling tough. I stopped several times to check my brakes and then to check if I had a flat tire. Nope, I was just super weak. To protect my ego, I noticed I’d been climbing and looked at the trees and realized I’d also had a headwind. Certainly I’d be flying if the wind were at my back, right?

I stopped a few times for pictures in the first 2 1/2 hours, less than 20 miles. Taking pictures, though, was a pain in the arse because of the whole glove business. So, I just soldiered through the 2-4% climbs and mist as I crippled on to reach Ballybofey as soon as possible. It would be my first accomplishment for the day and there would also be a bathroom, relief in a porcelain bowl. Eleanor had also informed me Ballybofey was a cute town and I thought it would be a wonderful place to find a bakery for tea (my second caffeine fix for the day) and a scone. Yes, it was a cute town and big enough for a bakery. Did I say it was also Easter Sunday. Nothing was open so I ended up at a grocery store that fortunately had a coffee machine and place to sit indoors. I prayed that coffee would do its job for the next 27 miles; I’d been averaging 5.7 mph/9.2 km/h for the last 3 1/2 hours by the time I’d finished my coffee.

I got redressed after second breakfast and hit the wet “N” road with its wide shoulder, plugged in the book “Kite Runner” by Khalid Hosseini into my ear, huddled into an aero position (glad I was on a road bike with aero bars), and tried to zone out.

I’d been told the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland would not be obvious. I’d expected a customs agent asking to stamp my passport. Nope. You are riding your bike and the speed limit is 100 km/h. Then, you’re riding your bike and the speed limit is 60 mph. There you have it—you’re in the United Kingdom. Shortly after entering, I turned onto a greenway that followed the River Foyle, the river that runs through the middle of Derry-Londonderry. The greenway was beautiful, wooded on each side with intermittent views of the river and town across the river. I was so impressed. Then, I turned onto the city streets.





Along the greenway



It looked exactly like in the shows “Say Nothing” and “Derry Girls” with row houses and hills. More importantly, though, was the rampant evidence of conflict. I never saw a Union Jack, but did see plenty of Irish flags and flags saying “Irish Republic.” On one of the first walls I saw was a gigantic poster reading: “Republican Prisoners Still Exist.” A few buildings later, I read “IRA”; someone had tried to wash it off. Northern Ireland felt different, even from similar-sized towns like Galway and Waterford. Honestly, I didn’t feel as safe as I had in Ireland and would definitely be chaining Sapphire if I had to leave her out in public.



My B&B (not an AirB&B this time) was 0.5 miles from the town center and a hop, skip, and jump from a major cathedral. I wasn’t excited about the climb to the B&B, but the location was pretty impressive. I missed AirB&Bs when I checked in; it just didn’t feel welcoming and warm. Maybe that was the location, not the brand. The view out my window was spectacular, but I was on the third floor and my private bathroom was on the second floor. Maybe I would drink a lot of alcohol before bed to keep me from my typical two-bathroom-stops per night. Maybe extra cider just sounded good, period.



My knees were fine when walking and sitting, but those stairs... oh, those stairs. I asked if there were any rooms available on a lower floor—there weren’t. I was turning into that old lady that needed a walker and elevator. What I really needed now, though, was a muscle thumper. The receptionist told me I could buy one as well as replacement headphones at a place called Argos. It sounded a bit like Amazon. You ordered what you wanted then walked over and picked it up from the warehouse. I liked that a lot; I could get anything! The bad news was that I couldn’t confirm my credit card because it couldn’t text me at my USA number. Arghh! My knees were mad; I’d try to appease them by walking over the next day and seeing if they could help in person.

I had learned a little something that I didn't like. The Airalo eSIM I'd purchased for my phone worked in Ireland... not in Northern Ireland. I'd be completely reliant on WiFi for the next few days. I'd really counted on my cell service during this trip because I needed it for Google Maps, booking websites, and town information throughout each day. Crapola!

I also needed real food and was told the pub across the street had food. It didn't. They recommended I walk down the big hill (that I would have to walk back up) and might find some open bars with food or restaurants nearer the river. I did and didn't I already tell you? It was Easter! Almost nothing was open. There were several Chinese food joints and some fast food places. Ultimately, I found a real restaurant, the Spaghetti Junction. It would have to do and ended up being perfect for lasagna, cider, and journaling. I figured I'd like it because there was a poster reading "You are now entering the Spaghetti Junction" with a picture of the "Derry Girls" just below.

Crew Post

I made it to Northern Ireland! The border is invisible, but you know you've crossed it when the signs change from kilometers to miles, you start seeing Irish Republic flags everywhere, and graffiti says things like "Republican Prisoners Still Exist" and "IRA."



St. Eunan's Catholic Church in Raphoe



The road to the water



Benbulbin formation

Derry-Londonderry

A City with a Long, Turbulent History



St. Eugene's Cathedral



Walking Distance: 7.1 mi/11.4 km
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 9:40/2:01
Accommodation: Serendipity B&B
Weather: Cloudy with intermittent rain
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vE6J5YNrZxO>

After a filling continental breakfast at the B&B, I set out on ChatGPT's itinerary. Before I hit circle "A" on Google Maps, I stopped for a quick looksie in St. Eugene's Cathedral next door. I'd taken loads of pictures of it the night before—so imposing lit for Easter celebration (perhaps they lit it every night) and melodic with the ringing of church bells. And, I really liked what was written on their welcome sign: "Welcome to St. Eugene's Cathedral where we share in the life of Jesus, firm in hope, knowing that God is faithful. Whether you are a parishioner or visitor we invite you to share in the life of our faith community. 'I rejoiced when I heard them say let us go to God's house.' Ps 122:1" This wasn't Spain.

Still with its Easter decor, there was a baptismal font surrounded with flowers. The church had undergone lots of renovation in the last few decades resulting in stunningly clear stained glass. I'm sure the pictures from weddings would be wow'ing.

My upcoming tour had me walking near and on the historic Derry Walls and seeing some of the many incredibly touching murals on buildings surrounding the wall. The walls were impressive enough, but Derry's history didn't start there. Archeological findings tell of human habitation for millennia. By 3500 BCE, there were permanent dwellings where cows, sheep, and pigs were already common. Metal working started appearing during the Bronze Age and specialized trades and trade existed in the area in 2500 BC. Roadways for use by wheeled carts date to 500 BCE, the Iron Age.

I arrived a few minutes late (surprise!) for my Martin McCrossan City Walking Tour and rather wish I'd been later. I saw some cool stuff, but my guide spoke so quickly and with such a strong accent that I understood close to nothing. It was a tragedy for this history buff. I didn't even ask a single question—unheard of from me (see what I did there?). He took us onto the wall and we were all surprised with how wide it was at the top. Cars could drive on it! In one section, he pointed to the street below and had us look at the red, white, and blue painted stripes on the sidewalks indicating the section was represented by those who were pro-British. While there was no clear distinction between Ireland and Northern Ireland when I crossed the border, there were very clear distinctions here. And, I was sad. I just couldn't understand why people were fighting over religion; aren't we all meant to love one another? And, in-fighting within Catholics and Protestants just didn't make any sense to me at all—don't they all worship the same God and accept Jesus as their Savior? Jesus is probably still rolling his eyes over Derry-Londonderry.

Some others in the group learned all about the history of the wall and the British role in building it. Because of the “language barrier,” I only learned that plantation (a common term I'd been hearing) didn't mean slaves tilling a field of cotton, but the British planting a colony in Ireland. In retrospect, maybe those weren't so different after all. I learned there were several parts of the city. One was inside the wall, one was Waterside, and one was Bogside (named because they'd reclaimed bog land to enlarge the city).

We passed lots of gates, arrow/gun cut-outs, lookout towers, and cannons. I guess with Normans and Vikings regularly invading, the walls weren't such a bad idea. This place was a fortress with a church in the middle—St. Columb's Cathedral. There was also a Church of England inside the walls that is remembered for the unprecedented Protestant service to which the pastor invited Catholic priests who came and participated in the service. Many of the murals we saw from the walls supported this effort to create and



Martin McCrossan City Walking Tour

maintain peace. One of the murals had a butterfly at the top. I understood that the butterfly was painted in dreary colors when there was fighting in the city and it was repainted with vibrant colors when the community was at peace. We also saw the Peace Bridge.

Following the tour that I didn't understand, I went to Guildhall, the center of government for the city. My favorite part of it was outside. There were these little fountains straight out of the ground where pigeons cooled themselves and washed their feathers; it was so cute! So much for bird baths; they were getting bird showers... cleaning their pits by raising their wings for a little pressure wash. Inside was not what I expected of a government building. First, anyone could just walk in and out; no metal detectors, strip searches, nothing. For a region that had experienced such violence over time, this was incredible. Second, being from a country where church and state ne'er shall meet, it surprised me to see something resembling a church inside a government building. There was a massive lit pipe organ on one side of the room and wall of stained glass windows on the other with what looked like a choir area. There wasn't an altar or any other religious imagery. Perhaps it had been an area for religious ceremony in the past and all the pesky religious stuff was removed to promote peace. I never learned the truth. We were able to walk into the council chambers like Americans can walk into the senate chambers in the US Capitol. In addition to the governmental paraphernalia, there was an exhibition about Nobel Prize winner John Hume said to be the architect of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

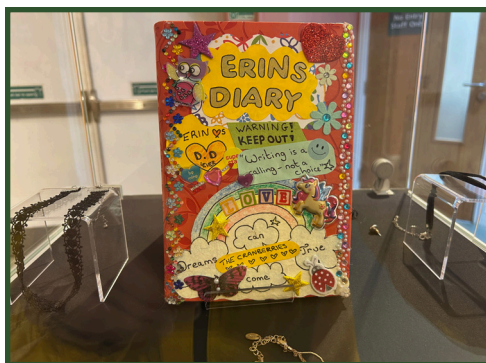
There was also a video about the second Bloody Sunday Inquiry. Irish citizens originally went to jail following a court case in 1977 stating their responsibility for inciting the riot. A follow-up inquiry was requested in 1998 and ended in 2010 with the British prime minister apologizing on behalf of the British government. It was a great win and the sentiment was the beginning to what was (at the time I was there) a peaceful Northern Ireland.

ChatGPT had me visit the Tower Museum next. I was a bit museumed-out until I saw the first exhibition—"The Derry Girls." I hated to admit it because I knew it made me shallow, but this was the best time I had all day. I loved "The Derry Girls" and finished the last 22 minutes of the final episode lying in bed the night before. I ruefully failed the museum's test about the show, but loved all the exhibits—

especially the videos by Lisa McGee and learning that they were actually based on her life growing up in Derry. The exhibit had costumes, set pieces, and lots of video snippets from the show. It was a crack!



Guildhall



Derry Girls Mueseum

I tried hard to get the same pleasure from the “History of Derry” exhibit, but it just didn’t take. My time at the Tower Museum improved when I reached the top of the tower (yes, I took the elevator to rest the knees) and had a 360° view of the town. It was raining, but this was Ireland... well... Northern Ireland. From the 5th floor tower view, patrons walked down stairs visiting three more museum sections all of which were about finding and recovering a ship from the Spanish Armada, La Trinidad Valencera. All the while, I couldn’t get “no one expects the Spanish Inquisition” from my mind.

It was time to eat so ChatGPT sent me to Craft Village. It was so darn cute, but almost everything was closed. What was it with this town? I’m from Vegas where nothing ever closes. I was near the Siege Museum so went to check it out. Closed. Seriously? It wasn’t until later in the day that I learned it was a bank holiday. Okay, I’d forgive Jesus for the date of his resurrection ruining my trip.

My stomach couldn’t afford to visit another museum before eating so I stopped at a pub that said it had Guinness steak pie. I assumed this was some sort of Guinness stew covered with mashed potatoes and wasn’t far off. It was a flaky crust with delicious stew on top and mashed potatoes on the side. I had this with a pot of tea and journaled until I was ready for the next stop on my itinerary.

After a few mishaps meaning I’d miss the Bogside History Tour and St. Columb’s Cathedral (I’d seen a lot of cathedrals in the last month anyway), I saw the Peace Bridge (eager to cross it on my bike the following morning) on my route to Argos to pick up my new muscle thumper and Apple headphones. The Argos was inside another store similar to Wal*Mart so I looked and finally found my dark chocolate hazelnut Ritter Sports. Nirvana in a little square package. I bought two. And, I remembered a critical piece of information: the day after holidays is the day to buy cheap candy. A Cadbury Maltese Egg for 87 pence? Yes, please.

A Primer of the Spanish Armada

In a 1558 attempt to beat up the English for political and religious (yes, again!) reasons, the Spanish sent an armada of ships to do a little ass-whooping. Elizabeth and her cute little, fast ships fought back and sent the Spaniards packing. As they retreated, a succession of storms reared their backsides. One of the ships, the , did well for a bit and even rescued sailors from other ships. Then, she hit the rugged northern shores of Ireland and sunk.

Modern Northern Irish divers regularly search for wrecks in an area known for kicking ships when they're already on their last bow. A placard in the museum described what the divers were doing: "Archeology under water is the same as archeology on land—only wetter." Yep. The divers found one ship carrying lots of gold and then they found the Valencera's cannon. They were able to salvage a lot from the wreck including the cannon that was sitting in the museum. How totally cool! Makes me want to pull out my wet-suit... let's make that a drysuit.

I picked up my Argos order and checked it before I left. The woman at the counter was so nice replacing the headphones because I'd ordered USB-C instead of a lightening cable adaptor. I looked forward to the day when all connectors were the same and even more to the day when cords were no longer needed. When were we going to learn to harness energy from sound waves? The things you think about...

A woman heard me mention I was riding my bike around Ireland and stopped to chat. Chelsea and her significant other would be leaving on a two week trip to New Jersey followed by some time in Central America and then a year in Southeast Asia. They were backpacking and planning to use a lot of public transportation. We enjoyed talking and I gave her Bishwo's (my Nepali guide) contact information so she'd have a guide for the Annapurna Circuit. I mentioned being interested in Japan's 88 Temples Pilgrimage and she said she'd hoped to do that the following April. Perhaps we would meet on the trail. It was a great opportunity to connect with a fellow adventurer and we wished each other well on our respective journeys.

Back at the hotel, I Scrubba'd some clothes, FaceTimed with Mike and Ryan (it still worked on WiFi even though I didn't have cell service), journaled, and worked on my upcoming cycling routes. I needed to know where to go and what to do for the next several days. I was in for a special treat and it looked like the weather might even cooperate.

Crew Post

I spent the day in Derry-Londonderry learning about it's rich, long, turbulent history. Humans first inhabited the area in 3500 BCE and they've had a whole lotta conflicts since then. It's so nice to see that there's at least a brief respite in the fighting right now. There's so much talk of peace, yet some areas are full of Irish flags and others have red, white, and blue stripes on the sidewalks. It seems like there's still a lot of compromising and healing to do.

I'm rather embarrassed with myself and feeling pretty darn shallow—my favorite exhibition of the entire day was "The Derry Girls."



Londonderry to Bushmills

Ireland's Northernmost Coast

~Céad Mile Fáilte~
a Hundred Thousand Welcomes



Binevenagh

Distance: 60.8 mi/97.9 km
Ascent/Descent: +2246'/-2188' +685m/-667m
Average Moving Speed: 6.6 mph/ 10.6 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 11:22/9:11
Accommodation: Finn McCool Giant's Causeway Hostel
Weather: Chilly with intermittent sun and clouds
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vKv2dnKdxo6>

I was glad my clothes were dry in the morning because I wasn't sure how I'd dry them on the back of Sapphire with the predicted rain. I knew I had a few nice hours in the morning, but that blast from the sky would be arriving all too soon. I loaded myself with every waterproof layer including my Arabian Nights shoe covers and headed out the door. I kept waiting for those raindrops. And waiting. 11 AM came and nothing. 1 PM came and nothing. It wasn't until 7:30 PM that light sprinkles appeared. I had no idea why I was getting so lucky and supposed I'd just thank climate change.

I downed another continental breakfast at the B&B and may have snuck a turkey and cheese croissant sandwich and apple turnover. I felt a bit guilty, but they sure came in handy later in the day when I didn't have time to stop for lunch.



Peace Bridge



Along the greenway



I'd seen the Peace Bridge the day before and wanted to walk on it so was glad my route went that way. I was so happy to be on it; it was as if I could feel peace and acceptance while riding across. I took lots of pictures and even had a man take a picture of me on the bridge. It felt like such an honor to be there. I never learned what the two pointy white things stood for, but the bridge's S-shape was a symbol of people coming together in an area where previous strife existed.

I still had a long way to go, over 50 miles, but the climbs wouldn't be bad. The first 25 miles, in fact, were pretty darn quick. I rode most of the day on greenways. While they weren't all pretty and well-paved, the gradients sure were nice. And, in some cases the scenery was downright gorgeous! The area around Derry-Londonderry had great cycling infrastructure. I'd definitely do run and bike training on those greenways if I lived nearby. The greenways were part of the Causeway Coastal Route and contributed to Northern Ireland's commitment to maintaining natural beauty. I rode by Binevenagh at the start of the day and Giant's Causeway at the end. Each was considered an "Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty," Northern Ireland's name for protected areas (rather like national parks in other countries). And, they truly were lovely. The scenery looked like it came right out of a movie which is why it was used as the setting for "Game of Thrones."

On my route for the day, I'd added two bike shops. My left shifter was misbehaving and I wanted a check-up before continuing northward. Northern Ireland's north coast was a bustling thoroughfare for tour busses, but not bikes. It was a fantastic place to ride, but bike shops didn't just appear willy-nilly. After realizing I'd missed the second shop, I decided to just wing it and hope a fairy would magically mend the shifter. One must have because I had no more problems with the big ring for the rest of the trip. Missing the shops may have been a blessing in disguise because it kept me en route so I didn't waste time that I might have ultimately needed in the end if I were to go for a full circumnavigation of Ireland.

That sounded good until another snafu wasted time. I'd stopped for food at a large Dunn's store because the other Dunn's stores I'd encountered had great grocery options. I needed to pick up food, but this Dunn's did not carry it. This was disappointing because I'd



Binevenagh geography



Horse and colt



Portrush Whiterocks Beach

have to stop somewhere else and would likely not find a salad at a convenience store. So, I continued on my way. 1.5 miles uphill, I realized I'd left my coat at the store. By this time in the trip, nothing was redundant in my gear bag. I'd pared down every piece of gear to absolute essentials. Losing anything would really hurt and be potentially dangerous. Losing that coat was absolutely not an option so I turned around and rode 1.5 miles downhill, picked up the coat that someone had nicely placed in an obvious place for me to find, and climbed back up those 1.5 miles. Tragedy averted; muscle fatigue not.

The hills in the area were really neat with cool shapes. I kept taking pictures of them from different angles then deleting them all because... really... how many pictures do you need of a single hill? I also really liked the names of the towns. My favorite was Downhill. And, get this... the town had lots of downhills and... yep, uphill. They should have called it uphill so I wouldn't have set my hopes so high. I stopped in Downhill to see two things. First was Downhill Demesne, a castle built in 1775 surrounded by carpets of green grasses. Second was the accompanying temple overlooking yet another cliff.



Downhill Beach

This area just felt different. It was as if I'd moved to a new fairyland different from the fairylands I'd visited in previous Irish counties. It seemed to be greener or maybe my disposition was just becoming greener. Maybe the month on the road coincided with changing weather and spring had sprung. It really didn't matter. The landscape was soothing and I felt so comfortable traveling through it.

Everyone in Ireland must have felt the same way because the beaches I saw were packed with people enjoying the pleasant day. I decided to ride down to Benone Strand, a popular destination for locals and tourists alike. I rode to the bottom of the road and onto what looked like hard sand. It wasn't hard and Sapphire rolled onto her side. Just another embarrassing fall; this time replete with rogue sand on the outside of everything I owned, including me. I was on the beach!

The scene was idyllic with families frolicking and even a woman mounted on her horse walking along the shoreline. After climbing from the beach back to the road, I noticed a special treat I'd missed before—waterfalls. They were gorgeous and... well.. their surroundings were perplexing. In the USA, a US\$10 million home would sit to the side of these waterfalls. Here, there were mobile homes right at their base. My brain just couldn't merge the two images into a single landscape.

I passed more beaches and saw more families out-and-about in the sunshine. I rode down to one beach where children played in a rocky stream that led directly into the ocean. Dogs chased balls and I envisioned myself taking off my shoes and socks and walking through the stream, waves, and sand. It sounded incredible. Sand remaining in my socks for days did not sound as appealing so I lived vicariously through joyful canines.

I'd planned to stop at Dunluce Castle without any idea what treasure I had in store. And, unfortunately, those dreams I hadn't dreamed were crushed when I arrived—it was closed! The castle was one of the more intact I'd seen and was huge. I really, really wanted to go in and walk around. A free night of room and board in jail was appealing, but I decided not to chance it. Deportation wasn't really what I was going for. Though I couldn't see it well, I saw enough for it to spawn a memory—I'd been there before. When my parents had taken



Downhill House in
Downhill Demesne



Dunluce Castle

our entire family on a cruise of the British Isles, we'd visited Dunluce Castle as part of an excursion to Giant's Causeway. I remembered it fondly. It'd been sunny and my children, then about four and six, rolled down the kelly green hillsides laughing uproariously. Good times, good times! Thanks, Mom and Dad!

The sun was just beginning to think about setting and I had a decision to make. I wanted to visit Giant's Causeway because that's what you do when you visit County Antrim. But, I'd seen it before as just mentioned. And, it was late. I consulted my map and learned that it was literally less than a mile from my hostel. How did I score that!?! I could visit the causeway before bedding down for the night. I knew if I went there in the morning, I'd spend loads of time at the cost of missing exploring areas I'd not seen farther along my route. Going at night would give me a unique sunset perspective plus an earlier morning start. I had to do it.

Seeing Giant's Causeway the first time was so eye-opening. I'd never seen that volcanically-produced hexagonal rock structure (called basalt columns) before and was dumbfounded. How did that happen? The family and I had walked all over the rocks and our perplexity motivated us to take picture-after-picture. After returning from that experience several decades prior, I started noticing the same phenomenon elsewhere. First, Devil's Postpile as I hiked the John Muir Trail and then other locations around the USA as well as in other countries. It was much more common than I'd originally thought. One thing I'd remembered about Giant's Causeway, though, was the size of each of the hexagons. I'd remembered them as being huge and when I saw them on this day, they didn't seem quite so big. I supposed this may have been because my children were so little as they tromped around and their little feet and bodies disproportioned the rock sizes in my memory. The rocks still seemed slightly bigger than those of other basalt column formations I'd seen, but not with such massive disparity.

I again climbed all over the rocks and took tons of pictures. A rock scrambler at heart, playing on rocks was my kind of fun. I was right that if I'd gone in the morning, I probably would have spent hours climbing around and sitting ruminating as I watched the waves. It was an area that definitely earned its UNESCO designation.

I could have ridden from the top of the bluff above the causeway, but chose instead to walk so I wouldn't have to push Sapphire back up the monstrosity of a hill. What I hadn't realized was how long the walk actually was. It was terribly steep, but so long that it may have been wise to ride. It was perhaps 0.5-1 mile each way and was nearly fully dark when Sapphire and I reunited. I turned on her headlamp and rode the quick downhill to Finn McCool's Hostel. I couldn't believe its proximity to the UNESCO site. That hostel was probably making a killing in cash!

Despite the fantastic location, the hostel wasn't as impressive as one might expect? The bunks were like berths in an 18th century transport ship and there was no warm water. I made due since I didn't have a choice. My roommate was Rachel, a woman who held the Guinness Book of World Records for most rolls in a kayak (something like 1000). That was her claim-to-fame from her younger days and now she travels the world meeting with other ocean kayakers to see the world's most beautiful coasts. What a life!

Crew Post

It was an absolutely amazing day! Rain was supposed to start between 11 and 1 and didn't start until 7:30 PM. I saw almost everything on my list of must-sees along the Causeway Coast that I covered today. The scenery is stunning and it's obviously why "Game of Thrones" was set here. I had just enough time to visit Giant's Causeway so it will save me some time tomorrow. I am sooo happy I chose to take the coastal route!



Giant's Causeway



Bushmills to Galboly

“Game of Thrones”



Causeway Coastal Route



Distance: 45.2 mi/72.4 km
Ascent/Descent: +2928’/-3089’ +893m/-942m
Average Moving Speed: 5.9 mph/ 9.5 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 11:24/7:43
Accommodation: The Shed Galboly
Weather: Sunny and warm
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vWqBdmwm7YO>

After 35 days trekking, it hit me. Sapphire and I were far from wind resistant. Shawna had mentioned my rain coat being a sail and I was okay with that. The skinny panniers I’d had in the front weren’t that bad, but when I said goodbye to one during the “I don’t want to camp anymore” phase and mailing, I didn’t miss it. I’d had the brilliant idea to put my sleeping bag and sheet in that space and it worked because I seldom needed them. They fit, but stuck out a little and the more I kept at it over the days, the more the panniers seemed to stick out. It hit me, I was driving a Mack truck into the wind. I had the space on the back rack, but it would mean it would be harder to get items in and out of it. I’d tried it the day before and it seemed to work okay. Then, I thought, what if I got rid of the other front pannier making me truly aero in the front. Seeing as I had nine hours on the bike to consider it, I developed

a plan. I would move the emergency gear in that front pannier and shove it into one of the back panniers. Then, I'd just stow the front pannier and stick all my warm clothes on top of the sleeping bag on the rack... just like I'd done at the start of this whirlwind. Instead of breakfast (not included at Finn McCool's Hostel), I rearranged and shoved until I could close the two back panniers. I was finally aero! Getting things in-and-out of the panniers might have been a pain in the arse, but I would have plenty of energy to deal with it since I wouldn't be pushing so much wind up coastal hills. I couldn't believe that this late in the game I was still finding ways to streamline gear. I also wished I'd had bigger back panniers like Shawna had so everything would have fit without the need for constant rearranging and shoving. My bottom was large enough that there was plenty of resistance in that area and larger back panniers wouldn't be likely to add much drag. I'd give it a try on my next tour.

I was glad I'd seen Giant's Causeway the night before. Although I'd not had time to complete my previous day's journal, it saved me a lot of time for this day. Plus, the sun would be shining. All. Day. Long. That just made everything better. The mileage would be lower than the last few days (supposedly), but there would be significantly more climbing. Perhaps the decreased wind resistance on flats and downhills would make up for the tougher climbs.

My first stop was at Dunseverick Castle. I'd read it wasn't as impressive as Dunluce Castle, but it wasn't even in the same league. Seeing the erect walls amidst the cliffs and valleys with the azure Atlantic in the back was a scene I wouldn't mind waking up to every day, but there wasn't much of a castle left. Dunluce had been so intact that it was strange that Dunseverick had faced this fate. Of course, it was absolutely picture-worthy like just about everything else I was seeing along the Causeway Coast. I'd read somewhere that I should also see Dunseverick Falls, but forgot to look for them.

I passed a lot of rugged cliffs and huge white beaches and even saw White Park Bay on my way to where I really wanted to go—Carrick-a-Rede where I'd find a rope bridge. Who wouldn't want to cross a rope bridge, right?! The bridge connected the mainland by an about 25-yard rope bridge to the island; cliff edges on both sides. The island was a hotspot for netting salmon so an industry developed to fish from the island. Locals would cross the bridge, lower boats into the water, capture the salmon with nets suspended between the boats and shore, haul the catch back to the island, carry the fish across the rope bridge and up (a long way up) to the top of the cliff from where the fish were transported. This meant the fisher-people were carrying huge weights of fish in large baskets across what was a much more precarious bridge than this one that was held together with metal bolts and surely inspected regularly for safety. A picture on a

A quote from a Kentucky man, Charles Leonard Thomassan, in 1851 after visiting Carrick-a-Rede

“For the boiling breakers are ever dashing themselves madly between the rocks hundreds of feet beneath, and the rope bridge is thrown about by the winds like a fabric of thread. Few trust themselves upon this airy fabrication but Mr. Wilson and I for the honor of old Kentucky braved all the terrors and passed to and from the rock.”



Carrick-a-Rede

placard showed someone crossing the bridge in 1900. There was a bridge on which to walk and a single rope with which to break any fall. That's was not at all what existed with today's industrialized strength infrastructure. I was happy people were experiencing this as a major thrill, but knew the United Kingdom had nothing on Chile and Nepal when it came to precariously dangerous bridges. Nevertheless, people were impressed. I heard several kids telling their parents how fun it was and one woman walked so gingerly; she was petrified. This was just another day for me.

Oh, did I tell you I tried a Biscoff ice cream sundae for the first time? I didn't know such a concoction existed. It may have been pre-lunch, but it was an experience and I couldn't miss one of those. Then, I was off to Ballycastle for second lunch.



Balleycastle

There were so many people in Ballycastle out on this warm (by British standards), clear day—families playing ball, moms pushing babies in prams, children on swings, cyclists passing me at triple my speed, lover’s laying on grass and staring at the sky, and people sitting outdoors at cafes sipping wine and watching the world go by. My fingers danced over the keyboard while eating... wait for it... fish and chips. I added a pot of tea to add caffeine for those upcoming hills. And wouldn’t you know it—one of those hills was just around the corner. When I decided it was time to walk to preserve my knees, I slowed, fell into the grass on the side of the road, and did this acrobatic parkour roll. I only wish Shawna would have been there to catch it on video or laugh with me as I rose uninjured.

It was quite a few miles before my next stop and included a lot of climbing. A good book, “The Passengers” by the same author of “The Family Experiment” that I’d finished earlier on the trip kept me walking up hills and rolling down them. I needed to make a green stop



Uprooted trees



Glenariff Bay

and did it near an RV park (they were everywhere in this part of the country!). I’d been noticing lots of trees on their sides with their roots pulled completely from the ground. I’d seen this in other parts of the island as well and was told they were uprooted during a recent storm. Their roots were so shallow that trees just toppled over. I learned Storm Éowyn occurred in January 2025 and 90 mph wind gusts uprooted thousands of trees—the worst storm to hit Ireland in several decades. It was sad to see such large, healthy trees literally pushed up from the roots.

All day the scenery looked like it belonged on a big screen in Hollywood and that was exactly what it was. This was the area where many of the “Game of Thrones” scenes were filmed. It seemed that everywhere you looked was amazing. With the water on my left and huge hills garnished with green between the grey and black rock façades on my right, I felt like I was riding through a fairy tale. I might as well have been flying on a unicorn.

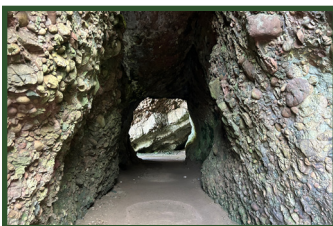
Before I’d left the hostel in the morning, I’d seen a pamphlet identifying different film locations from the “Game of Thrones” series. I didn’t



realize they were such a high ticket item to visit and was not surprised that the places on the pamphlet were almost the same as the ones ChatGPT had recommended I visit that day.



My next stop was one of these “Game of Thrones” locales—Cushendun Caves. I rode up and saw a big sign saying the area was for residents and guests only. I figured I’d just be a temporary guest, ignored the polite request to go away, and rode right through to where Google Maps said I would find the treasure. I was elated with the splendid scene. It was small, a little beach area, but the rock formations were incredible. There was also what looked like a huge cave that I would have loved to walk in, but it had an additional warning sign so I decided to just accept the fate that came with following directions this time. As I was leaving, another man who’d also passed the “you’re not supposed to be here” sign asked me if this was the “Game of Thrones” area and asked me to take a picture of him there. I hoped he wouldn’t post in online lest he be arrested or criticized endlessly on Twitter. I hoped he wouldn’t mention who took the picture. I certainly wasn’t publicly putting my face where it didn’t belong.



I really regretted missing the next stop, but I simply didn’t have time. Seeing Glenariff Forest Park was supposed to be spectacular and the bike ride to it sounded like it belonged on every cyclist’s bucket list. It would have added 22 miles and 755’ to my day. I was so disappointed I even considered changing my flight so I could stay in Ireland an extra day. I just couldn’t see and do everything, but this and Siege League were definitely two misses I’d regret forever.



Because I’d missed Glenariff Forest, I definitely wasn’t going to miss the last thing on the day’s agenda. It added a lot of climbing, but I could walk the climb instead of riding it. Called “The Hidden Village of Galboly,” I had no idea what it was. But, since it was so secret according to its name, I figured I wasn’t supposed to know. I’m going to tell you, but shhh. It’s an old village of stone buildings on top of a hill overlooking the Straits of Moyle/North Sea. The backdrop was of towering hills covered with green grasses, yellow flowers, and small trees punctuated with valleys slicing into those hills. Grasses served as grazing land for sheep and little lambs frolicked together until they heard or saw me and became camera-shy. Perhaps not camera-shy, maybe just scared of the freaky thing in funny glasses with an obnoxious yellow jacket. It was a steep walk to the village and back, but well worth it.

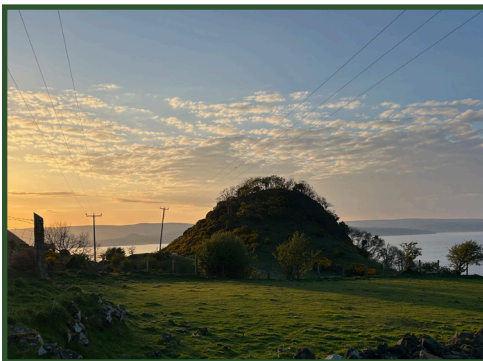


I’d told my hostel host I would arrive before 9 PM and was hitting it close. Sunset was 8:44 PM and I barely made it. Being that late, however, meant I was able to watch the sun go down. It was behind me so I kept stopping the bike, turning around, and taking more pictures. The view was to die for!

It ended up that I could have arrived any time as I was the only guest in the hostel and even the host wasn't there. She'd left a key for me in the front lockbox and I had free roam of the entire facility. It was blessedly nice. I strewn my gear everywhere and relaxed in the comfortable main room while eating salad, some noodle mix, and chocolate and sipping chamomile tea. What a perfect way to end a perfect day!

Crew Post

Sorry, Shawna, you missed it. I've decided this is the most beautiful part of the Emerald Isle. For some reason, this seems even better than the Copper Coast, Ring of Kerry, and Dingle. Gina, I can't imagine you'd have to doctor any of your photos from this place—it's perfect as it is. I spent the day seeing a lot of the locations where "Game of Thrones" was filmed and they definitely got it right. For a fantasy series, the scenery here is truly fantastic.



From the Hidden Village of Galboly to my hostel

Galboly to Belfast

Good Irish People



Saying goodbye to The Shed



Across from the hostel

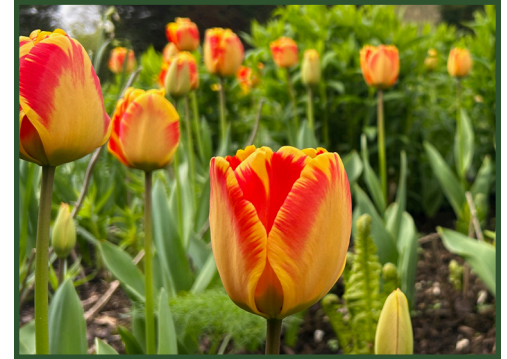
Distance: 46.3 mi/74.5 km
Ascent/Descent: +1757'/-1767' +536m/-539m
Average Moving Speed: 6.2 mph/ 10 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 12:04/7:29
Accommodation: Botanical Backpackers
Weather: Cloudy and chilly
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/v1OwK5rrYXO>

The night was a dream. Though I struggled to fall asleep and awoke far too early, it was heavenly to have an entire place to myself. I could go to the bathroom in the middle of the night without worrying anyone would see my rotund bottom when I was just wearing a shirt and underwear. I could leave my gear everywhere. I could move freely everywhere I wanted when I wanted. I could leave messes knowing full well I would clean them when I got around to it. This mess, unfortunately, meant leaving a puddle under Sapphire's water bottle informing me it had a leak. I dried it in the morning, but was very sorry it left a water stain on the hostel's new floor. I'd assumed it was a surface that was water resistant like linoleum. It's wasn't. If you're reading this Shed Galboly owners, I'm deeply sorry.

During the short morning ride, I thought about the crew Messenger thread from the previous night where I'd written: "For some reason, this seems even better than the Copper Coast, Ring of Kerry, and Dingle." In response, Doug wrote: "You need to go to the hidden Ring of Kerry not the tourist route. On Dingle it's Sleah Head. In West Cork it's Mizen Head, Sheep's Head and Beara that are the best. It was frustrating for me that you skipped those areas because I believe you missed some of the best bits. At that point, I think your main aim was to avoid hills and get to Killarney to hook up with Shawna, but maybe next time! But I agree the coast of NI is beautiful." I took these as criticisms (which I'm sure they weren't meant to be) and it hurt so I spent an hour in my head defending myself. Here's what I wanted to respond, but didn't: "Shawna and I did Sleah Head together and I'm not terribly sorry I missed those other places. Yes, they would have been nice, but in the month+ I've been in Ireland, I've seen a massive amount. I don't regret spending the time doing what I did. Everyday was a choice about how to spend limited time exploring this incredible country. Yes, there are things I regret not seeing, but those are the more famous spots like Glenduff Forest Park and Slieve League. And, I was here to ride, but toward the goal of experiencing as much of Ireland as I could. I do hills at home to train so I can do things like hauling gear up Irish hills. I'm not afraid of climbs, but the grades of the routes on the EV1 were unlike anything I'd ever experienced and it meant it took me a long time to get between those destinations I really wanted to visit. The road surfaces were a problem, too, because I felt they were, at times, unsafe. Poor roads mean extra stress on my knees and nether bits. At the speeds I reach downhill, a pothole can mean another concussion. Furthermore, I was doing plenty of climbing even avoiding the 'L' roads and many of the 'R' roads. I ride major highways (four-lane roads) comfortably at home so 'N' roads are not frightening to me, especially given the leeway of Irish drivers unlike those in the US. Thus far, I averaged 41 miles and 2060' daily. There is nothing shabby about that. To put it in perspective, that would be 5,627' over the length of a full Ironman. Even pros would say that was a tough course, particularly if some of those 5,627' included 6+% grades. I'm okay with my choices." I didn't post it, but, oh, how I wanted to.

It was only seven miles to Glenduff Castle and walled gardens. I'd hoped to take a tour of the castle, but learned those tours were few and far between; the next one was in a month. This was because its inhabitants, Lord and Lady Antrim, only led tours when they felt like it and were in town (as in "not at their London home"). I didn't know there were still lords and ladies and had fun saying I was having tea and a "scawn" at Lord and Lady Antrim's house... in an Irish accent, obviously. I would have to suffer with limiting myself to the open-to-the-public parts of their property.

The only open part when I arrived was the Tea House so I took advantage of the time to enjoy breakfast while journaling. The only other part of the grounds open before I needed to leave was the walled gardens. They were well worth the £10 entry fee I paid. I was assaulted with a burst of colors the moment I entered. It was the end of the Glenduff Castle Tulip Festival and I had the coincidental luck to be there! It felt like Holland with all the different varieties and colors. There were tulips that looked like frayed jeans on top and lots of multicolored varieties. Row upon row. Even if the tulips hadn't been in bloom, I would have been impressed.



Glenarm Castle and Walled Gardens

The manicured landscaping just made me smile. Every turn took me to a new section with its own character and each section was partitioned by tall hedgerows. Mr. Miyagi would have been impressed. There were also statues and fountains. Gardeners worked hard keeping the flower beds looking top notch. Then, I saw it—their secret weapon. They had a lawn mowing Roomba! That had to be cheating!

On my way out, I had a nice conversation with a Northern Irish couple while petting their dog. They were perhaps in their 70s and said they had a rail pass so they could go anywhere in Northern Ireland for free. [I later learned these passes were free for any residents of a certain age.] They would take their dog on the train every week and go somewhere different. I thought that was such a wonderful way to enjoy retirement. They said that one time a conductor told them they'd missed their stop. When they said they hadn't and that they were heading to Larne, he responded: "No one goes to Larne." They did. Like me, they wanted to see everything.

From there, I went south... to Larne. True, there wasn't much to see there, but it ended up being one of those surprise encounters that totally made my day. The elevation profile for the day was this—flat, two gigantic hills, flat. Those hills were in Larne and just south of it. And, they weren't just any hills. Not quite San Francisco's Lombard Street with its 27% grade, but, yes, 17%. No kidding. I felt like I was back on an "L" road on the EV1 near Cork. It was bad. I walked Sapphire uphill and even stopped several times to take a breather. I came to a point where a man, again in about his 70s, was working outside and we had a little chat. He told me there was a quicker way to get to Belfast and an easier way to get to Carrickfergus. We discussed the different routes and in the end he said I should stay on this road. This more difficult route was the much more visually appealing. If he only had one opportunity to cover this area, he would take this high road.

While we were chatting, the recycling collectors came so it became an extended goodbye during which I asked if there were any bathrooms ahead. He said there weren't and offered to let me use his. Why, yes, in fact I would like that. We strolled to his house and it was a real beauty with huge windows overlooking Larne. I could see why the couple and their dog I'd met in Glenarm had come. From this super-duper high point, Larne was very pretty. Jack's backyard was overflowing with deep green grass where he permitted sheep to graze—thus transforming the scene into one suited for counting sheep before bed. The sheep belonged to a friend who wanted a good place for them to graze. Jack offered his backyard; in return, his grass was naturally mowed. Seemed like a good deal. We went to the yard and all the moms and babies started running toward us. Then, they realized I was there and snack time wasn't likely. Jack said they were not very talented at telling time so every time he came out, they assumed it was time for tasty pellets. He tried to get them to come to me, but they were too skittish. Jack pointed out that most



Jack



of the babies were black. He said that Sheffield lambs are born all black and as they age they start to whiten. The babies were all about three months old and some of them were starting to change. It really was time for me to go. No more procrastinating. I took Jack's advice and continued on the 10+% graded hills. The result? #ToughClimb #WorthIt #MeetTheIrish #UnbelievableViews. As a bonus, I was able to thoroughly enjoy the descents given the better pavement and newly aero design. It was freeing.



Carrickfergus Castle was unfortunately closed by the time I arrived around 4:30 PM. I wasn't sure I missed much until I made the mistake of asking my new best friend, ChatGPT. Her report was disheartening. It sounded like something I would have loved—lots of museum-y stuff and placards to read. I settled for walking around the castle and taking pictures. I walked to the end of the pier to see if I was missing anything and learned that I was. It didn't have anything to do with the castle or nautical ambiance; it had to do with crabs. There was a young couple with a squirrely boy of about 5-years-old. The man was fiddling with a long string, perhaps 35', hanging over the side. Of course, I had to inquire. They were crab fishing. They would lower a net into the water that was baited with tuna fish from a can. They'd leave it on the bottom for awhile then pull it up. They did it several times without luck and then like magic on their last try, caught two zingers. They were edible, but the man was committed to catch and release. I was so lucky about this because I couldn't fathom how he'd return them to the ocean and this would be my chance to learn. Would it be a baseball pitch with a big round up or a football kick through the goal line. Neither. It turns out that crabs will always head back to the water. We were on a pier about 25' above the water so I couldn't imagine they'd have any inkling of which way to go. I was sorely mistaken. They both turned to the water and took a falling leap into the depths below. Quite the resilient creatures.



It was getting late and I still had 12 miles to go. I stopped by the corner grocery store to pick up dinner before leaving Carrickfergus, attached it to Sapphire's back rack with my trusty bungee cords and continued south. It was 6 PM on a weeknight and the roads were busy. I was close to Belfast by automobile standards, but was pretty nervous for awhile until I saw an opening for a pedestrian/bike path. Hallelujah! Even better, that path went almost all the way to my accommodation for the night—Botanical Backpackers near the botanical gardens. The path was incredibly busy with dog walkers, families walking together, runners (especially women for some reason), children on bikes and scooters, and cyclists. It was neat to see so much physical activity. It made me wonder if it was always this busy or the sun from the day before aligning with this day's dry spell brought everyone out of the woodwork.



I arrived at the hostel around 8 PM. I didn't like these late arrivals—it meant I wouldn't be getting to bed at a reasonable hour. The host, Erica, was absolutely delightful and helped me plan my next day. She asked if I wanted to share a room with three other ladies or have my own room. I was confused. Why wouldn't I want my own room? Apparently when asked the other ladies, they all chose to make new friends while I chose to be the lone wolf. I thanked Erica for her kindness and in return booked a second night. I drug all my gear to the fourth floor (sad the bathroom was on the second floor) and unpacked, took a shower, pulled out the salad, beef stew, and cider I'd purchased in Carrickfergus, and ate while typing.

Crew Post

It was another incredible day with no rain, just overcast. I spent hours on Lord and Lady Antrim's castle grounds enjoying tea and a "scawn" then frolicking through their walled gardens. I tiptoed through tons of tulips as I'd arrived just at the end of the annual tulip festival. Best of all, I met loads of super nice people throughout the day. There was a couple in their 70s that had a free train pass so took their dog to a different place each week. Then, Jack let me use his bathroom and taught me about black lambs. To round it out, a small family taught me about crab fishing and I watched as the two crabs he caught scurried to the edge of a 25' cement pier and plunged themselves back into the depths. Quite a day! I'm now in Belfast.



Carrick-a-Rede

Belfast

Bombs and Walls



My AirB&B



Botanical Gardens

Walking Distance: 7.1 mi/11.4 km
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 7:00/1:56
Accommodation: Botanical Backpackers Hostel
Weather: Cloudy and cool
Video Overview: None

Sleep came after midnight and I was up before 6 AM. I tried to get back to sleep, but it wasn't happening. It was probably stress—I had to figure out how to get from Belfast to Rosslare Harbour before my plane left in five days. I didn't think it possible, but when I saw the price to re-book my flight was almost US\$600, I decided to try to make it happen. It would mean 60 miles a day for the next four days with all but one in the 2000'+ ascent range. I wasn't letting myself think about that.

After that stressor, I started planning my day. First things first—take that black taxi ride Shawna raved about. Unfortunately, the first one wasn't until 11 AM. I had breakfast and kept planning. Then at around 10 AM, I started nodding off. Seriously!?! Couldn't my body just have slept for another three hours! This meant that upon entering the cab, I was tired and everyone who knew me knew I always fell asleep in cars. That was a major reason I had the Inspire; I sometimes even fell asleep while driving. (I'll let you know next time I'm on the road.)

My driver, Bran, picked me up at the hostel which was super convenient. He did a brief history starting with the 1100s before spending the rest of the time on The Troubles (1960s-1998) and even more recent history. I was glad I'd watched "Say Nothing" and "Derry Girls" before coming so I had some context, but the history is so long and complex that I still struggled to follow much of it. We stopped periodically to look at murals ubiquitous throughout Belfast and he explained the catalysts for all the images. He took me to the Wall of Separation and I was dumbfounded to see it still existed. He pointed out that the houses facing the wall on the Catholic side were all covered with metal mesh because people still throw objects at those windows from the other side of the wall. Many of those houses also displayed Irish Republic flags. Bran said they could get away with it this week because it could represent the Easter Rebellion since this was the week following Easter. If they continued to fly, it was likely there would be consequences. We next drove by the Europa Hotel, the leader in the Guinness Book of World Records for being bombed the most times, over 30. The hotel continued housing mostly journalists, politicians, and celebrities despite the danger because it was centrally located and the hotel became a symbol of resilience. It even offered "bomb meals," meals available so guests could still eat while kitchens were under repair. I asked why people kept going to the Europa instead of using other hotels.

Apparently, hotels tend to be pretty scarce in war zones. Duh!

Honestly, I was falling asleep, not because I was bored; I was just plain tired. I pulled out the magic bullet I save for the marathon of Ironman races—a 200mg caffeine tablet. I keep them on hand for emergencies like when I have four miles to go to get over Thorong La Pass and my body isn't capable of doing it and when I need to learn the history of Belfast within the next two hour period. I needed to hear this history because it was the right thing to do so I downed the drug. That was probably why when writing in my journal at 9 PM (ten hours later) I was still awake.



Protection at the Wall of Separation



Memorial on Shankill Road





The hanging room

The cab ride was interesting, but not at all what I'd been hoping for. Shawna and her sons had had such an amazing experience. She said the personal experiences of her driver had been extremely touching. He'd told them about what it was like to grow up in a war zone. My driver said a few things about when he was young, but only when I asked. I was saddened when he told me of his family's plight. Mom was Catholic and Dad was Protestant. Dad died prematurely of a heart attack and Mom was left with five young children. Because she was no longer considered okay to live in the area with the Protestants now that her husband wasn't running interference, they all had to leave. Bran said he'd seen explosions and people die, but seemed to not want to say more—certainly understandable. He did a good job explaining the struggles and an excellent job of treating both sides of the conflict without bias. The company I'd chosen was known for this and for employing both Catholic and Protestant drivers. I figured that a more biased driver may have spoken more about personal experiences.

Bran dropped me at the Crumlin Road Gaol ("gaol" was pronounced like "jail"). It was used between the 1840s and 1996 incarcerating men, women (including many suffragettes), and children. Political prisoners were housed with criminals. Interestingly, they didn't need to separate the two types of prisoners, but they did need to separate those from the loyalist and republican parties during The Troubles. When possible, prisoners were all in solitary confinement and were even hooded when moved within the jail so they would have little human contact. This stopped when the jail became so overcrowded that there were up to three inmates in single cells. Hygiene was obviously a huge problem and each of the four sections of the jail had an infirmary. Punitive was the order of each day. Prisoners were given mindless tasks like turning "the crank" thousands of times daily. This was the origin of the phrase "doing time on the crank." Other punishments included being whipped with a cat-o'-nine-tails. There was also a matron in charge of women and children who I suspected was probably quite the hard-ass. The most emotional part of the jail for me was the executioner chamber (aka "the Drop" or "the Hanging Room"). Prisoners would have a double sized room with two guards to watch them at all times. No suicides allowed before being killed. Next to the two-room cell was a third room with a bathroom and flush toilet. Chamber pots were used elsewhere until hygienic problems began to interfere. In the bathroom was, strangely, a bookshelf. When a dead man was walking, the book shelf would slide to the side revealing a hangman's noose. We were able



The flogging rack

to walk into the room and stand on a glass floor beneath which was where bodies met their final end. Standing just below the noose was frightening even knowing I wasn't on the executioner's dance card for the day.

Following that cheerful experience, I took a city train to the Ulster Folk Museum in Cultra, a town outside Belfast. It was like a little Colonial Williamsburg, an early 20th-century town. They built it by finding good examples of Ulster's period buildings, disassembled them brick-by-brick, and rebuilt them in this village. I had a measly 45 minutes to spend in a living museum that required at least three hours so used my time as efficiently as possible. Erica, the host at Botanic Backpackers Hostel where I was staying, had raved about the place and given me strict instructions of what I should definitely see when there. I started with the printer who gave me a traditional recipe for Irish soda bread (yum!) that he'd printed in-house. Erica said I should go upstairs to see examples of newspapers from the Titanic era. They were neat, but I'd used these when teaching social studies methods as a visiting professor. What impressed me even more was the reading room. I'd seen libraries in old homes before, but never realized that some wealthy community members would open their libraries to others in the community creating a lending library of sorts. Printed books were extraordinarily expensive so normal people couldn't afford them. They'd go over to Lord Johnson's mansion and hang out in his reading room for a while catching up on a good book. Interesting.

The printer told me to visit the bank where I learned that bank owners from big cities would hire bank managers for their rural branches. The banks would come with nice homes in which the manager and his family would live. They moved a lot, maybe every five years, because the bank owners didn't want managers getting too chummy with the town folk.

Erica also said I was not to miss the flue in the bakery. I was bummed I arrived after the last Irish soda bread made it into someone else's stomach, but being there so late meant I could interrogate the baker all by myself. He told me people in the olden days used to have machines equivocal to modern juicers and bread makers. Something you'd buy, use once, and store forever with great intentions to pull it out again. In his house, he had a marmalade maker, crank knife sharpener, and small device used to squeeze water from wet laundry while ironing it and making it stiff (like for a cleric's collar).



Reading room



Kitchen flue



Banker's house



Carpenter's whiskey
barrell



Candy shop

I had to visit the bike shop and the cobbler was next door, but neither had actors/docents in attendance. I met the carpenter who was decorating the top of a whiskey barrel for a friend. Finally, I'd assured Erica I'd visit the candy store. It was full of sweets like in "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory." The only thing missing was a malt-making machine. She told me they had both period-specific and modern candies in bulk because the current generation of kids wanted the new stuff. I left with two bags: one of rhubarb hard candies and the other of lime hard candies with a soft chocolate center. And, I even liked both types!

I took the train back into town, picked up dinner at a grocery store, and walked through the Botanical Gardens on my way back to the hostel. More tulips. Yes... it was beautiful. It sat on the university campus and reminded me of the University of Oregon where I received my doctorate. I could picture myself out there reading theory under a big tree or laying on the grass studying for an upcoming exam. School could be bliss.

Crew Post

I had a busy day in Belfast with a black taxi tour, a visit to Crumlin Road Gaol ("gaol" means "jail"), time at a village where they imitated early 20th century Ulster (like Colonial Williamsburg), and walk through more tulip-littered botanical gardens. Now it's time for "junk miles" and the big push. I have four days to cover 243 miles. Doug made me a great GPX file and I've spent hours trying to figure out how to allocate my legs each day. None of the plans are realistic so I'm going to wing it. Four tough riding days ahead with no plans to see anything other than Irish scenery and the Wicklow Mountains (they are included in that route, right, Doug?). Don't expect to hear from me.



From the bike shop



Botanical Gardens

Belfast to Dundalk

“Ireland, I Am Coming Home!” —Garth



Dundalk



Castletown River

Distance: 68.4 mi/110.1 km
Ascent/Descent: +2971'/-3024' +906m/-922m
Average Moving Speed: 7.6 mph/ 11.6 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 11:00/9:18
Accommodation: AirB&B hosted by Orlando
Weather: Raining in the morning then cloudy with interspersed sunshine
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vPv4ZdyreR6>

The northern Irish coast was absolutely stunning, but I still preferred the Republic of Ireland over the United Kingdom. It felt much friendlier in the south. I felt safer and each town was so happy to post “Recipient of the Tidy Town Award.” It was a slower, calmer, more relaxed pace with a focus on relationships. I just hadn’t had this same experience with the people of Northern Ireland. Don’t get me wrong; they were a lot of wonderful people—I just had a greater affinity with those south of the border.

I was out of the hostel as early as could be. Prepping my gear and swallowing down a cup of tea took me until 8:30 AM. Erica helped me plan my route out of town where my watch was able to pick up the GPX file Doug prepared for me to get to Rosslare Harbour. I was so grateful for his generosity!

The route was perfect—flat and a lot of it on a greenway or separated path beside a highway. At one point, I saw a large swan sitting on a nest and then a second swan nearby making sure she was safe. I knew swans weren't the kindest birds, but they sure were nice to look at! I took lots of pictures of the path because it was so pretty with a stream on the left bookended with trees and brush for its entire length. There were intermittent bridges, some of brick, and the path was busy with dog walkers, runners, and cyclists. I was loving seeing all these Northern Irishers getting outside on such a nice day. It reminded me of Seattle where despite dreary days, they are a very physically active community. Incidentally, Ireland and Seattle straddle the same latitude line explaining why they have such similar climates.



I had a conversation with one of the other guests at the hostel in the morning and only one other conversation during the day. I was on a mission! I had three biking days followed by a day in Dublin to pack my bike before heading home. I only stopped to use the bathroom, buy food, and put on or take off layers. On one of those occasions, I met a woman with four dogs and we chatted about nothing in particular for 5-10 minutes. When I made it to the destination where I'd planned to spend the night (and already paid), I still wanted to continue. It would cost me 100 euros of lost accommodations, but the added distance would save me money in the end by not having to change my flight. That happened in Newry. I picked up a WiFi signal and tried several AirB&B's 13 miles south of my location before finding one that would let me book for that night (it was already 4 PM). I picked up a Bavarian pretzel and mango/passion fruit purée, but couldn't find any decent protein so I went next door to KFC. When Mike saw the charge on our credit card, he was quite surprised. I'd never go to a KFC in the USA because few American fast food restaurants source free range animals. And, I definitely hadn't wanted to go to an American restaurant while abroad. But, tough times... I needed the protein if I were to complete this Mission Impossible. During the time I was buying all this food, I received a message from Doug. He'd updated the route saving me distance and decreasing the ascent. I immediately uploaded it to my watch. Back on the road.

I finished listening to one book, “The Minders,” and the other books I’d hoped to read hadn’t downloaded since my cell service only worked in the Republic. If that wasn’t enough of a tragedy, none of my music apps were working properly either. I am not kidding—I sang “99 miles to go, to go, 99 miles to go, I take one down, roll it around, 98 miles to go on the ground” all the way to zero. It could have been a sad time, but the beauty of the countryside kept me enjoying the journey.

I was so happy when I made it to the Irish border. In addition to reclaiming cell service (YES!), I just felt happier and like I was fáilte (Gaelic for “welcome”). The weird thing was that the only way I knew I’d crossed the border was a sign that read “Speed Limits Kilometers Per Hour” followed by a second reading: “Welcome to County Louth” followed by a third reading: “You are visiting Ireland’s European Destination of Excellence 2008, Carlingford & the Cooley Peninsula.” No “Fáilte to Eire!” Or “You’ve crossed the border.” Or, “We missed you—welcome home!”

I reached Dundalk right at sunset, 8:45 PM and was welcomed by Orlando to his AirB&B. He’d warned me it would be a loud night. Orlando was a former professional soccer player for Honduras and there was a big Santiago-Madrid game that night. He’d invited a group of friends for barbecue and the game and warned me there would be a lot of commotion downstairs. I assured him I was fine with it. What was my alternative? Knocking on a church door and asking if the priest would let me roll my sleeping bag on one of the pews?

I spent the evening journalling and working to find an easier, quicker route to Rosslare Harbour. The one Doug had sent was awesome, but I just wouldn’t be able to complete it in time. I’d have to sacrifice the Wicklow Mountains; they would join Siege League and Glenariff Forest Park for my unplanned next visit. I was doing what Shawna called “junk miles,” but I didn’t care. I wanted to be able to say I’d completely circumnavigated Ireland and these three junk mile days would give me that badge of honor. I was on a mission!

Crew Post

Doug planned a perfect route for me. I didn’t see anything special, but I made the miles I needed and it looks good for me being able to circumnavigate the island before my flight on Wednesday. Despite not stopping to see world renowned landmarks, I’m still loving the scenery. Doug’s path put me on a lot of greenways making the ride comfortable and the scenery lovely. I’m glad to be back in the Republic of Ireland; I like the feel better than Northern Ireland.



Along the Greenway

Dundalk to Powerscourt

Two Surprises



Bellingham Castle



Dunleer

Distance: 73.1 mi/118 km
Ascent/Descent: +2824'/-2388' +861m/-728m
Average Moving Speed: 6.9 mph/ 11.1 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 13:49/10:35
Accommodation: AirB&B with Birdie
Weather: Intermittent cloudy and sunny
Video Overview: None

I was early leaving the home of the pro soccer player so only bid farewell to their cute Pomeranian, Casper. I was a bit frustrated, though, because ChatGPT and I were having a bit of a squabble. I really wanted to use a GPX file for my route and she couldn't seem to make one in a format I could download to my Garmin. This meant I would have to rely solely on the routing Google Maps bike option offered. Living in the early 21st century was so hard!

It is not exaggerating to say I was falling asleep on the bike. Several times I caught myself about to swerve into the grass (thankfully, not the road) when my eyes abruptly opened and panic jolted me awake. I needed caffeine and figured I'd probably need an intravenous drip of it all day. I pictured myself concocting some device like one of those beer hats with straws for my helmet. Could work.



My constant virtual companion, Doug



Fields of gold



Dublin City Hall



Greenway south of Dublin

I stopped for coffee, downed it as quickly as humanly possible so I could keep rolling, and remounted Sapphire. The caffeine worked marginally until a surprise jarred me wide awake to the point of bright and bushy tailed. Doug was coming! He messaged to tell me he would meet me in some town somewhere. I had no idea where I was and so just kept riding. He messaged me about an hour later worried he'd not seen me and that I'd taken another route. Nope. I was just that slow. He continued riding north from Dublin and we eventually met. It was a downhill and I knew we'd have plenty of time to chat on the uphill so I took advantage of gravity and took off. In no time at all, we started uphill and he took the lead. It felt like a burden had been lifted from me because I didn't need to worry about where I was going. I could just fall in behind him and he would take care of all the stops and turns.

His plan, in addition to companionship, was to provide a wind buffer to ease my ride. When he noticed I wasn't drafting, I explained that I wasn't good at it because triathletes aren't allowed to draft in races. Many group rides don't even allow triathlon bikes or even road bikes with aero bars (like Sapphire) because pelotons in which riders are in aero can be dangerous. Plus, I always trained alone so never had to learn to draft. Then, there was the other thing. Breaking the wind means there's wind to break. It wasn't a particularly windy day (it was quite nice, in fact) and I rode too slow for any real benefit from drafting. Doug quickly learned that when I said I was slow that I really meant it; I simply couldn't keep up with him. Honestly, on my tri bike unburdened with luggage I'm not sure I could ride that slow without falling over unless I was on a steep hill... which I wasn't. Doug sent this message to me a few days later: "I hope I can say this now because you're done and I hope you don't see this as an insult because it is entirely a compliment. I was amazed at how slowly you ride—and still get there!! Your tenacity to keep going while progressing slowly is amazing. I think I should learn from that. If I'm not doing 20 km per hour on level ground, I feel I'm not making progress. I am starting to slow down with age so I get frustrated when I'm a bit slower. But you are a perfect example of how you can cycle all around Ireland without the need to cycle so fast. Super job!" I swelled with pride. A few days later, he added: "It was an honour to be able to assist where I could but I'm sure you would have done this without any help from me."

Unfortunately, the route Doug and I were cycling together was along a busy road so we couldn't talk even if he could have balanced well enough to match my speed. This was a real bummer because I'd really wanted to spend time chatting. I just didn't have time to sit down for tea and a scone if I were to make it to Rosslare Harbour the next day. At one point I needed a bathroom stop and to top off my caffeine beer helmet so we chatted for a few minutes at a gas station.



The lead dog

He seemed quite surprised by me, claiming that I looked fresh. He'd expected me to look haggard, maybe sporting a beard and smelling like a homeless person. I may not have grown much facial hair, but my legs and pits were looking pretty granola after having left my razor back at The Shed in Galboly—poetic justice since I'd left the water mark on their floor. And he was simply upwind so didn't catch the smell.

Doug led me to the beginning of Dublin where I was able to take over on my own. He'd had a previous engagement so couldn't escort me through town. I was fine with that because (1) I hadn't even imagined he would ride with me on this day, and (2) I felt guilty. He wasn't getting in a ride; he was cradling a baby.

This was my second time in Dublin and the second time I wasn't able to visit anything worthwhile. It was about being alert and not missing turns. I still hated riding in big cities with all the chances to make wrong turns adding extra mileage. But, there were a lot of people and, fortunately, good bike lanes. These lane were great for me, but I supposed their real purpose was to keep bicycle delivery riders out of traffic. I'd take it.

I made it through Dublin, and the next leg would get me as far south of Dublin as possible. The farther I went, the less I'd have to cover the next day. Around 4:00 PM, I knew I needed to reserve a room for the night and was fortunate to find an AirB&B that was still accepting reservations. I sent Doug my updated route and he was curious why I was heading in the new direction. I thought my AirB&B was on the route he'd prepared. Nope, I was heading through the Wicklow Mountains... exactly the location he'd planned for me to avoid because of the added climbing and mileage. I'd been sad I wouldn't be able to cycle through them; they'd offer yet another unique experience on the Emerald Isle. Now, I was doing it anyway and would be grateful for my mistake in hindsight.

I don't think I ever actually made it to the mountains, but know I was at least in the foothills when I saw a ski area. I had no idea Ireland had a ski area and definitely no idea that I'd climbed high enough to see it. Evergreen trees appeared along with small waterfalls and shades of green rivaling those of Killarney. I rode up-and-up-and-up and the scenery improved as I did. I made it to my AirB&B after dark and was sorry I wouldn't be able to ride the probably-only-one-mile backward to see the local waterfall. If it wasn't on the route; it wasn't happening.

I checked in with my host who I learned was deaf and learned did not want anything mentioned about their hearing in reviews. I worried this might be a safety issue for them (and, yet, I wrote it right here so now everybody knows!). I showered and journaled until sleep came.



A short trail ride

Crew Post

Today included 72 very slow, productive miles with two surprises. First, Doug met me on my way toward Dublin and we rode together for 10-16 miles. Second, I accidentally ended up at an AirB&B in the foothills of the Wicklow Mountains. I'm so happy I was able to see them.



Foothills of the Wicklow Mountains

Powerscourt to Rosslare Harbour

I Did It!



Leaving Powerscourt



Distance: 88 mi/142 km
Ascent/Descent: +3759'/-4453' +1146m/-1357m
Average Moving Speed: 7.8 mph/ 12,6 km/h
Time Traveling/Moving Time: 14:15/11:15
Accommodation: AirB&B with Rachel
Weather: Intermittent cloudy and sunny
Video Overview: <https://www.relive.com/view/vMq5wg4MA8O>

I was up and out as soon as possible. It was probably the first time during the entire trip that I was on the bike before 8 AM. I knew there was a lot of ground to cover and much of that ground would be at pretty big gradients. Those gradients started right away and I was walking Sapphire shortly after our day started. It was up then down, repeat... all morning long. I turned on some tunes and got into the rhythm of walking up, racing down. Now that all my gear was streamlined, I was able to take advantage of aerodynamics. I would pull forward into my aero bars, put my butt in the air and if the surface made it suitable, scream down what felt like mountains. My knees were doing fine, but my shoulder was in pain. I attributed the healing to the thumper and the pain to poor positioning when in aero.

I stopped quite a few times, but never for long. I would put on and take off layers, check my phone for directions, take a picture, or stop for food or the bathroom. I didn't spend much time off the bike. There was, however, one exception. Given the miles I'd been pushing myself to cover, I was really hungry. Also, this was my last day on the road so I really wanted tea and a scone. My typical modus operandi was to get comfortable with my iPad in a café while slowly eating a scone with jam and cream and sipping tea with milk. I splurged with the tea and scone, but couldn't justify splurging on time. Instead, I cooled the tea by adding a lot of milk. That way, I could down it more quickly. I scarfed down both the mixed fruit and savory scones I'd ordered while delving through all my photos from the past few days, deleting some and cropping and straightening others. Now that this chore was done, I'd be able to make a Relive video that night.

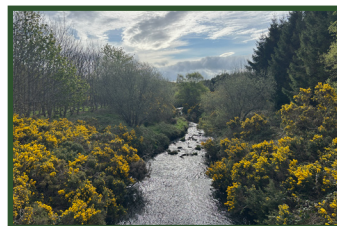
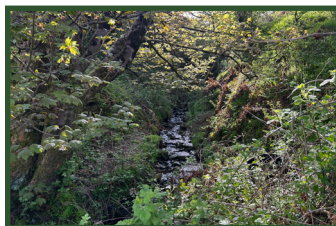
When stopping for dinner, I picked food off the convenience store shelves and started eating immediately, even before purchasing. I knew this wasn't the right thing to do, but felt it necessary if I wanted to reach Rosslare Harbour before midnight. I also spent time reading: "The SlowAF Running Club" followed by "Outlive."

It became dark and I finally reached my AirB&B where it took an hour for the shower water to heat (literally) and the shower nozzle was hanging instead of suspended above my head. I decided to just rinse myself with some soap. I didn't want to wait the entire hour and then struggle through knots in my wet hair. Besides, I was beyond caring at this point. I baked up my final shepherd's pie and laundered clothes before heading off to sleep. It had been 88 miles, no easy task.



Crew Post

I did it!



Rosslare Harbour to Dublin

One Last Day



My starting and ending point



Goodbye sign at ferry

Biking Distance: 7.4 mi/11.3 km
Walking Distance: 4.7 mi/7.6 km
Accommodation: Abbey Court Hostel
Weather: Gorgeous!

I hoped all this not falling asleep at a reasonable hour was just due to way too much caffeine, but adrenaline was the most likely culprit given that 200+ mile push over 3 days and a total lack of down time over the last 41.

I was up early to catch my 7:15 AM train. The about three mile ride to the station took me right by Maureen's B&B where I'd stayed on my first night in Ireland. I'd emailed her the day before to see if I could stay with her again, but told her I only had a €50 note and knew she only accepted cash. She got back to me and said she would be delighted to host me again, but by the time I heard back, I'd already booked an AirB&B. I knew I'd be arriving really late and didn't want to take a chance that I couldn't find a place to lay my head at the last minute. It would have been really special to stay in the same place with a woman who had welcomed me so warmly, helped me plan my first days along the Norman way, and introduced me to Irish breakfasts. I coincidentally passed Maureen's home on my way to the train station so figured I'd stop to say hello. We shared a huge hug and little chat before I departed for Dublin.



Sapphire's seat on the train



Train scene



Near Connolly Station

I was much better at managing the train now than my first time. I knew where to go, how to load my bike, and where to sit. Or, so I thought. I later learned we had assigned seats and the conductor was really cool about recognizing my incompetence for what it was. I moved. The conductor also informed me my ticket was for the following day but let that pass, too. I must have looked pretty pathetic, but maybe he was just Irish so was super nice.

I had plans to catch up on the several days I'd missed writing in my journal, but promptly fell asleep instead. My seat-mate awakened me as she was exiting the train at Connolly Station and the conductor and another employee helped me take my bike from its traveling rack. When he dropped it on its side because it was so heavy, I hoped he felt justified for all the leeway he gave me; he knew what burden I'd been carrying.

I rode the almost five miles to Duff Cycles from the station, amazed at how much more comfortable I felt than when I'd arrived. I'd been frantic, unsure of what I was doing, and stressed about making it onto the train. It's was highly likely I would not have caught my train had Doug not been there to hold my hand.

I exited the station into a gorgeous, sunny Dublin day and stripped down to cycling shorts and a jersey. That always made everything feel so much lighter. There were absolutely no problems reaching Duff Cycles and the team there was amazingly helpful. I didn't



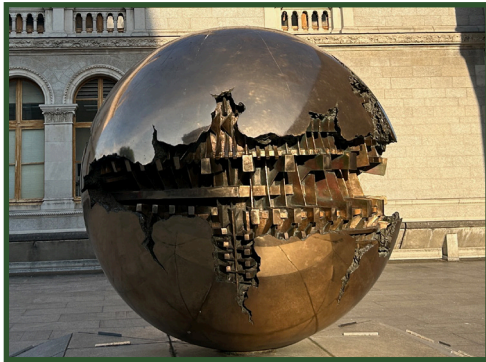
My beautiful girl deserved a rest



Duff Cycles staff



Bedford Tower at Dublin Castle



The Sphere



Palace Bar

want them to help because I hated to take advantage of their time, but it sure was nice when I was struggling with some aspects of the packing. It took just over an hour to pack everything. I told the owner, Calvin, that I wanted to leave a tip and he asked me twice if I was sure. Oh, yes, I was. They'd been wonderful since even before the trip. I'd witnessed the hardship Shawna faced with her bike shops in Galway and Killarney and knew how lucky I was. This was stellar service. I also bought a gift card for Doug. This way, I could support the bike shop and show even the slightest bit of appreciation to Doug for his unrelenting generosity and support during the last more-than-a-month.

I'd offered to take Doug for dinner on this day so we could celebrate OUR accomplishment, but he was unavailable. Since I'd hoped to meet with my niece, Jamie, when I first arrived in Dublin and was unable to make it happen, I tried again. Fortunately, this time she was available. She asked me to meet her at the Spire, a tall silver spire that I hadn't know existed, and walked me to a pub where we chatted over snacks and drinks. Jamie had just completed her first year as a student at Trinity College and loved it. I was so glad to see her happy, learning a lot, and so well adjusted to Ireland and college life. I reminisced about my year-long experience abroad at Queen Mary College in London and was so happy to see her having such a unique and positive experience. She'd traveled all over Europe—a trip to Paris, skiing in Andorra, and was just about to leave for Portugal to spend time at a friend's house. What a fortunate young woman! She was so talented, kind, and intelligent; it was an privilege to spend time with her.

Jamie walked me to Dublin Castle so I wouldn't become lost along the route and I paid my fee to take the last tour of the day. I had no idea what I would be seeing, but ChatGPT recommended I see it so I obeyed the command. It ended up that parts of the castle were below street level. I knew that in really old places like the Middle East, structures were sometimes lost to time, buried by sand over thousands of years. What I didn't quite understand was how a city continuously inhabited since the Vikings arrived in 841 CE could have layers hidden beneath it, or how a castle could be built where the original city once was. But it was... so there.

We saw the excavated walls and moat and were told they found lots of human skulls in the moat during the uncovering. Our guide explained that one method of deterring attack was to kill everyone, possibly including their families if they got out of line. Our guide told us the king's men then took the severed heads, placed them on spires hanging from the castle walls and left them until they rotted and the skulls fell into the moat. Can you imagine the smell? The bugs? I definitely would not have wanted to work

for that king (though job prospects may have been limited at the time). Within the vicinity of the olden-days castle was a modern complex serving as the center for governmental affairs. For example, the tax department had offices there. Visitors stepped into the former throne room where representatives (e.g., viceroys, lords) of English monarchs ruled the area and where they passed judgments on then-British citizens. There were also big portrait galleries. I'm sure there was much more to see, but I almost fell several times because I was literally falling asleep while standing.

The castle grounds also had a huge, ornate church built for the ruler. Most interestingly, there was a large stained glass window above the altar and the British administration that had the church built placed its Royal Arms above the image of Christ. Priorities.

From Dublin Castle, I walked to Trinity College where I'd be able to see the Book of Kells. What a beautiful university! It reminded me of the University of Oregon again. Students were laying around on the grass enjoying time with friends. The semester was over, the weather sunny, the temperature perfect. It seemed like hanging out with friends on the quad was exactly what everyone was supposed to do.

The buildings had such collegiate character, like Royal Holloway where a friend had gone to school while I was studying at the more modern Queen Mary College. I could see why Jamie loved it. And, visiting the Long Room, part of the university's library, reinforced the university's elite nature.

The Book of Kells was held in the Old Library. The college only displays two facing pages at any time and visitors were forbidden from taking pictures. Unfortunately, the pages displayed on the day I was there had few illustrations on them. After seeing the book, the self-guided tour continued into the Long Room, basically a long room with books. As I understood it, the Long Room used to be the entire library. The books within the room were incredibly valuable, many first editions. Following the burning of Notre Dame a few years earlier, university personnel realized they needed to find better ways to protect their holdings. The decision was to take all the books off the shelves and place them where the library could guarantee their safety. Since they had to take all the books down



Dublin Castle's medieval stone steps



Viking foundations of Dublin Castle



Chapel Royal at Dublin Castle



Trinity College





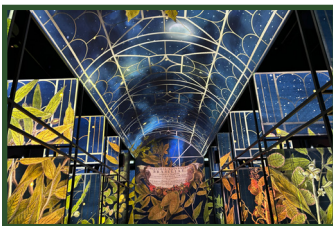
Breast star of the Most Illustrious Order of Saint Patrick



Brian Boru harp



Book of Kells Experience



anyway, they decided to clean them as part of the process. Exhibits in the Long Room showed how scientists cleaned the books. The books resulted in stunning pieces of art. In the back of the room, there was also a suspended light orb designed using NASA images to display Earth. It pulled at my heartstrings. And, there was the Brian Boru harp dating from the 14th or 15th century.

The next part of my €25 self-guided tour was an exhibit called, uniquely, the “Book of Kells Experience.” It made me think of Meow Wolf’s Area 15 in Las Vegas with its lights and video. I loved it and wished Mike had been there to enjoy it with me.

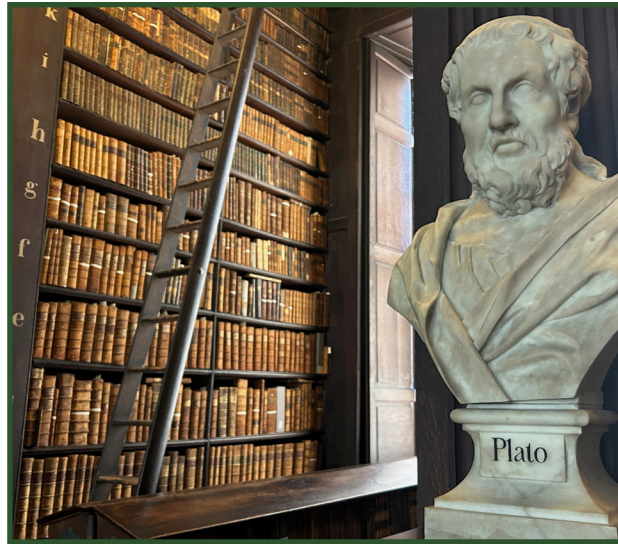
I was beyond exhausted so made a quick supermarket visit then made my way to Abbey Court Hostel where I’d booked a bed in a 4-bunk all female dorm with en-suite bathroom. I showered, made dinner (salad and shepherd’s pie), and journaled until I could no longer keep my eyes open.

Crew Post

I made it to Dublin, packed my bike, had lunch with Jamie (niece), visited Dublin Castle, and saw the Book of Kells. I wasn’t letting exhaustion keep me from last minute sightseeing! I leave for home tomorrow morning.



Abbey Court—my last night in Ireland



Plato amidst the stacks



Long Room at the Old Library

Dublin to Las Vegas

Home

I happily flew home, returning to a land of normalcy, filled with gratitude for the gift I'd been given.

Crew Post

I'm home. Thank you all for your support!



Heading to the airport from Duff Cycles



From Shawna's viewpoint

Appendices



Shawna doing “The Shawna” on Valentia Island

Shawna's Facebook Post

And accompanying video: <https://youtu.be/GhWfG2FV6Oc>

“I had planned to go to Ireland with my friend for six weeks in March, but I visited in December and really didn’t like it. It was brutally cold, windy, and foggy the entire time, which made the sights pretty disappointing. I spoke with some tour guides, and they said that’s pretty much how it is all year. My friend wanted to camp, so that would’ve meant being soaking wet and cold all night. No thanks. She went solo. I watched her posts about not being able to camp and shipping her gear back. She was having a hard time with directions, and the roads weren’t as rideable as she thought. I was concerned for her safety. She’s so stubborn that she was going to do it anyway, but I felt partially guilty for not going with her.

I contemplated going as late as a Tuesday night. By Friday morning, I had an airline ticket. I spent Friday canceling and notifying people about my plans, packed on Saturday, and headed out the door on Sunday. It was fast and furious.

Instead of bringing my own bike, I rented a one-way bike—meaning I could pick it up in one city and return it in another. But when I arrived to pick it up, things started falling apart. The shop owner had been unwell and was in the hospital. There was no record of my rental, and the bikes weren’t even at the shop—they were an hour away. That meant waiting another day to get the bike, and possibly another day if it didn’t fit. Meanwhile, my friend was waiting for me to start the most iconic loop in Ireland. The bus to meet her left before the bike was ready, so I had to choose: stay and get the bike, or take the bus and hope to find something in the city she was in. I hopped on the bus.

I ended up renting a bike meant to do the “Ring of Kerry,” a 100-mile scenic ride through County Kerry. I originally rented it for three days, but the shop and I talked about extending it to four. Three days in, we had completed the Ring—Kerry Cliffs were my favorite.

Then it was decision time. I texted the bike shop owner and, since I was having a great time, we decided to keep going to the Dingle Peninsula. I wasn't hearing back from the shop anymore, but I figured it was six weeks before peak season, so as long as I returned the bike and paid, it'd be fine.

We saw the iconic Cliffs of Moher. My adult kids were so jealous because when we went together before, we couldn't see anything and were wading through water on the trail. This time, it was gorgeous.

The scenery changed dramatically in every section we rode through—coastal cliffs, mountains, lunar-like rocks, vivid wildflowers, pine forests. And the weather? Impeccable. It never rained while I was there. Temps were in the 60s during the day, 40s at night. Locals kept telling us it was an extreme stroke of luck to have it that dry.

By the time I arrived, my friend had figured out the difference between roads. “L” roads were choppy and constantly up and down—I affectionately called them “Loser” roads. “N” roads (N for Nice!) were newer and flatter, though they had more cars.

We visited a music museum, and the clerk asked if we were serious about buying a ticket. We should've taken the hint—it was awful. But we got our five euros' worth in jokes for days. There's this video in triathlon circles of a Spanish guy laughing hysterically about the St. George Ironman—you can barely understand him, but it's hilarious. Every time we hit a hard hill, one of us would start laughing like that, and it just snowballed.

We saw a sheep herding demonstration—those Border Collies were insanely fast and super cute. We supposedly had the best steaks on the island. It wasn't the best steak I've ever had, but the fish and chips were killer. We even saw whales surfacing near the Cliffs of Moher—very cool! There was a bar with jerseys covering the entire ceiling—definitely a sight to see. Galway had this section of houses that reminded me of Amsterdam. While in Galway, we went to the pub where Ed Sheeran supposedly wrote “Galway Girl” (the last song in the video). Turns out it's mostly fiction—not about his wife. We hit as many pubs with live music as we could. My friend really wanted me to experience original Irish music, but we didn't come across any. Still, we went to one pub with instruments I'd never seen, like the tin whistle and the mandolin. At another, the guy sang fun songs, including “Brown Eyed Girl”—which I sang along to, despite not having brown eyes.

After having my contraband bike a week longer than planned—and still hearing nothing from the shop—I decided to return it in Galway. The farther north I went, the fewer transportation options I had. Some buses don't allow bikes, and I didn't want to get stranded. I also didn't have permission to take the bike any farther. By then, my friend had proven herself cautious and capable, so I

felt comfortable letting her continue the journey up to Belfast solo.

I took two buses and made a five-hour journey to return the bike. I had no idea if the guy was going to be mad—I was ready for anything. Turns out, he was actually relieved and excited to see me. He'd been worried about my safety. (He said they decided to start collecting renter info because of me so they could contact people in the future.) He was two days away from turning in my license and reporting me missing. I explained I'd tried reaching out, and he apologized—apparently, his boss never checks his phone. Not super helpful in case of a mechanical issue...

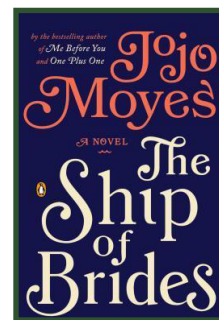
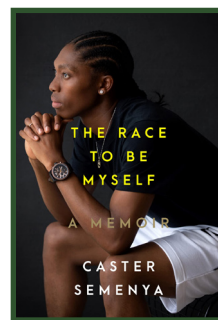
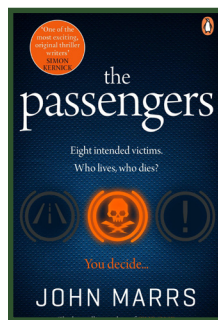
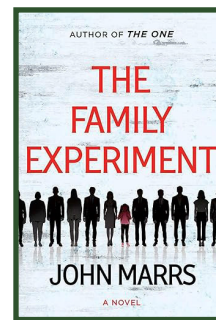
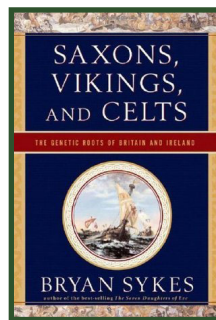
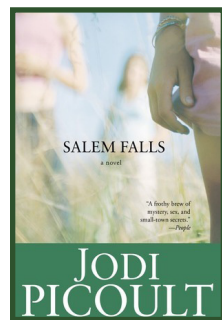
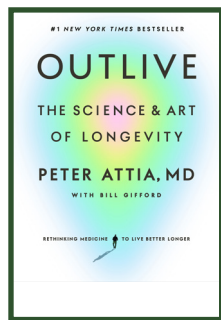
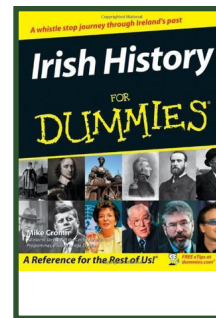
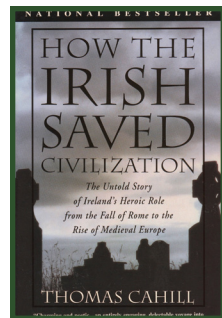
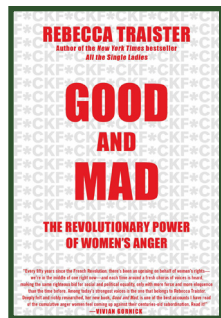
At that point, I'd checked off everything I wanted to see in Ireland—between this trip and my visit in January—except Cork. I really wanted to visit Blarney Castle, explore the gardens, and kiss the Blarney Stone. I didn't realize you had to go upside down to do it! I kind of wish that had stayed a surprise, but my friend told me days beforehand. Normally, it's a busy place, but I was the first person in line. I made a beeline for the castle, got the first smooch of the day, and had the place to myself. The gardens were massive and beautiful. It took over three hours to really take it all in. Within minutes of finishing my tour, I found bus routes back to Dublin for my flight home. I was genuinely impressed with the public transportation system in Europe.

The most amusing part? Having red hair and being Irish, people expected a lot more from me. When I was alone, people assumed I was a local and would ask me for directions or historical facts. I seriously considered faking an Irish accent just to see if I could pull it off.

I'm really glad Ireland got a second chance with me. It was absolutely stunning, and I'll carry these memories for the rest of my life. The first song selected is "Linger" by The Cranberries. The Cranberries are an Irish band formed in Limerick in 1989. Their late lead singer and guitarist, Dolores O'Riordan, remains deeply beloved.

The second song, "The Rocky Road to Dublin," tells the story of a man's journey from Galway to Dublin—fitting, as all roads (and flights) in Ireland seem to lead back to Dublin.

The third song is "Galway Girl," as previously mentioned, by Ed Sheeran."



Book Reviews

Despite barely turning a page during my journey, I read (or almost finished) 14 books.

“Hunger: A Tale of Courage” by Donna Jo Napoli

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

This is a nice to-listen-to book about people during the Irish famine. I enjoyed learning about the famine and the British reaction, but found the book very unrealistic. I can’t imagine one girl of British descent helping another of Irish descent during this time.

“How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland’s Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe” by Thomas Cahill

☆ ☆ ☆

If you like this period in history, this is probably a great book. If not, I found it to be a bore.would only read it if I had to.

“The Passengers” by John Marra

☆ ☆ ☆ ☆

In a not too distant future, there are level five cars. These are cars that can take complete control and you can just relax inside them. Exactly the car I want to own in the future. When they are hacked, though, there can be serious consequences. Marrs uses this sci-fi premise to weave a fascinating, heart-pumping story. I hope Netflix picks up this one, too.

“Salem Falls” by Jodi Picoult

☆ ☆ ☆

“Salem Falls” was a unique contemporary twist on witch trials and was a bit predictable. It would be a fun read in a classroom setting to discuss the parallels between the book and the actual Salem witch trials. It was a fun read; it just lacked substance and left several questions unanswered.

"The Family Experiment" by John Marrs

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Marrs has written another book that gives a futuristic glimpse into current social issues. He keeps us engaged through mystery and offers a rich new stylistic vision. There is enough of today in the setting that the story could be plausible. Including the game/reality show overlay with the communication between show followers and adding in intermittent news flashes was brilliant.

This would be great for a book club or high school or college sociology class.

"Good and Mad: The Revolutionary Power of Women's Anger" by Rebecca Traister

★ ★ ★

Well-written and researched, Traister provides an account of contemporary feminism along with its political ramifications. It reads like a white paper, providing rich data to support modern feminist claims and details the roles anger play in the expression of those beliefs.

"Saxons, Vikings, and Celts: The Genetic Roots of Britain and Ireland" by Bryan Stykes

★ ★ ★

Make no mistake... this book has nothing to do with the Saxons, Vikings, or Celts. I'd hoped to read a history of these groups in the context of the British Isles; this book is not that... at all. It is a report of research into the genetic history of these people groups. It reads a bit like a dissertation with its clear scientific methodology, results, and conclusions. If you're interested in archeological

"The Ship of Brides" by JoJo Moyes

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

This book tells of a previously forgotten history, that of Australian women who married British men while the men were stationed in Australia during World War II and their plight to be reunited with their husbands. Moyes is truly a master of bringing history to life with her historical fiction.

"Kite Runner" by Khaled Housseini

★ ★ ★ ★

I really didn't see the hype for the first quarter of this book. It seemed a real bore, and I didn't know where it was going. Then, I got it. It was about two worlds in which boys grew up. It was about immigration and fitting in to new places. It was about forgiveness and self realization. It was about redemption.

“The Slow AF Run Club” by Martinus Evans

☆☆☆☆

Yes! It’s true that while there are some books starting to appear about running in diverse body types, there still aren’t many. Thank you, Evans, for making this one available!

Considering the possibility of being an athlete as a bigger or any type different person (as you note) is hard. Those of us in these sub-optimal-seeming bodies are afraid to start for so many reasons, most of which are realistic. I was told by a doctor that I could maybe be a run-and-done one-time marathoner in this body. Over a decade later, I’m a ten time Ironman finisher and much, much more. We have to believe in ourselves more than everyone else believes in us and we need to support each other through the process.

I especially appreciated your words on runners who aren’t just the F-word. I’d thought a lot about transgender, intersex, and other LGBTQ+ issues in sport, but not “running while black.” As a 57-year old, flabby, female WASP, I’d never thought about what all my non-white running peers need to do to keep safe while running and positive while competing. No wonder the numbers are so unbalanced.

“The Race to Be Myself: A Memoir” by Caster Semenya

☆☆☆☆

This is such an important book in the early 21st century. As LGBTQ+ issues become mainstream, Semenya’s life as a woman in an intersex body is informative. It truly saddened me that as the boys were playing outside and she, as a girl, had to stay home to care for them and the rest of her family, everyone was fine with her being a girl. She could launder their shirts and only practice soccer when her female chores were complete. Once her hard work and athletic strengths and prowess moved her into the spotlight, no one wanted her to be a girl anymore. It’s okay to be a girl if it means caring for everyone else, but not if it means being a powerhouse.

I am glad I don’t need to make the difficult decisions the sports world faces as the complexity of gender continues to grow in competition and am glad this book brings to light some of the related considerations.

“The Minders” by John Marrs

☆☆☆

After reading “The Family Experiment” and “The Passengers,” I was hooked on John Marrs so picked up ”The Minders.” I never really accepted the premise of the book as a possibility; it was ridiculous to consider that human DNA would be the safest means of maintaining confidentiality of classified secrets. Also, the characters were a bit far-fetched. Seriously... a serial killer? That said, I can’t wait for his next book. Marrs’ has certainly been improving his craft over time.

“Outlive: The Science and Art of Longevity” by Peter Attia

★ ★ ★ ★

As a layperson, my response to this book is “duh!” The idea of preventative medicine being an entire new approach to patient treatment is sad. Both the medical and lay fields have been teaching about prevention for decades and the mass of research available to support preventative approaches has been incredibly helpful, especially in regard to women’s bodies.

Attia’s point, though, is that Medicine 3.0 (the preventative, proactive approach) is still not common in practice. I’m fortunate to have a doctor committed to long-term wellness and I’m grateful routine testing is adding markers to identify potential future ailments. But, as long as we live in a world where skilled doctors are limited in number, testing technologies are too expensive to test for everything, and too many people can’t access preemptive healthcare, I don’t see quick movement from Medicine 2.0 to Medicine 3.0. We need those —corders ubiquitous in the sci-fi movies and a population willing to make self-change for their own benefit. That said, those in the medical and insurance fields should heed Attia’s words. There are preventative tests and we should use

“Irish History for Dummies” by Mike Cronin

★ ★ ★

Written in encyclopedic format, this book truly is for dummies. The reading level is at about a fourth grade level and it reads more like a collection of expository essays than an actual book. I wish Cronin had written a story of the history, bringing it to life. This chunky approach simply makes it a bore to read. That said, the history is sound and there’s a lot of it in the book.

If you’re writing a report for class or looking for an encyclopedia of Irish history, this book will definitely be your best friend.

EuroVelo Article

Published article available at <https://en.eurovelo.com/news>

“Let Me Speak with Your Manager”: An American Rides Ireland’s EV1 by Christy G. Keeler, Ph.D.

I’d decided to bike in Ireland and found the EuroVelo 1 route. I only needed to fill in the logistics including where to find cheap places to sleep (other than with gracious WarmShowers hosts who’d already replied) and, oh yeah, figure out how to ride in the rain. Being from Las Vegas which lies dead in the middle of the Mojave Desert meant my experience with water was... well... nonexistent.

My hunt for advice began on a FaceBook page for those cycling in Ireland and I quickly received one response to my ignorant questions that became pure gold. It was from some guy named Doug Corrie who claimed to be manager of the EV1 Ireland route (whatever that meant). I asked if he and I could meet via FaceTime because I had tons of questions. This was my first bike tour longer than two days. He was game. Doug and I met virtually and he was great about answering my endless questions. That was nice. I guessed that was what EV managers were paid to do, right? Then, he started responding to my emailed queries (e.g., what road surfaces to expect). His responses were detailed and included information I didn’t even know I needed such as names of major grocery stores in Ireland and explaining the differences between “L,” “R,” “N,” and “M” roads. That guy had been so nice; what a great service those EV managers provided. I thought he was done. Besides, I was finally ready and knew everything I could possibly need to know for my tour.

I exited the plane in Dublin, took a cab to Duffs Cycles where I could safely store my bike bag, and started putting Sapphire, my trusty steed, together. All the while, my watch was ticking. I had a train to catch and a GPX file on my watch to get me there, but hadn't quite figured out how I would get cash, buy some last minute items, and still make it on time. That was when Doug magically appeared. He'd called the cycle shop to ask if I'd arrived and told them he was on his way. What!?! Could this be real? Doug arrived, walked me to a bank and the stores I needed, and then escorted me by bike to the train station and even helped place my bike in that weird bike rack before wishing me well on my way. This was not what I had been expecting and it was such a relief to have someone hold my hand through every step of the process so I could finally get my real tour party started. Doug left me on the train and asked me to keep him informed of my progress.

I'd been on lots of distance hiking adventures—el Camino de Santiago; Annapurna Circuit Annapurna Basecamp, and Everest Basecamp; Ausangate, Lares, and Salkantay; Patagonia “O”; ... you get the idea. I had a group of friends and family at home that regularly served on my “crew.” This meant they read my daily updates where I whined about how hard everything was then encouraged me to keep going. They were also there for me when I needed good vibes, help, and advice. Doug asked if he could join that team.

As my nightly reports rolled in, my team encouraged me; Doug jumped right in on the Messenger action. His encouragement, though, was different. He knew the trail. He knew the culture. He knew Ireland. He understood that when I complained about climbing that I meant I was dying on Cat 3 climbs littered with potholes. He knew I was on a road bike with a small cassette that when loaded weighed 75 pounds not including me and my excess fat stores. He had context when I said I was looking forlornly at 6-14% grades illuminated by my night light. He knew I should absolutely not miss seeing the Ring of Kerry and that going out of my way to see some unknown castle might not be in the best interest of my quads. And, he knew when I should follow the EV1 absolutely and when it might be okay for me to veer a little off-trail.

As I started to get my mojo, I became a bit gutsy. You know how it is. “I want to see that over there.” So, you do. “I can't fathom another climb today.” So, you reroute. “It's time for a pint!” So, you find a place to lay your buzzed head for the night. Doug kept right on reading my nightly updates, chiming in every other now and then.

Over a week into the tour, I admitted I wasn't committed to every turn of the official EV route. There were sections of the country that really interested me including some that were off-route and some sections just weren't calling my name. It was time for me to get creative with Google Maps and Garmin Connect. I would come up with a perfect route and shoot it over to Doug for a looksie. He would give me a go-code or maybe one of those virtual smirks meaning “You don't have any idea what you're getting yourself into, do you?” But, much to my surprise, those smirks came in the form of replacement GPX files. He would kindly suggest I consider

the alternative route he created as opposed to the one I'd made that left me on a road under construction or one riddled with 6-way roundabouts. Sure enough, his plans were far superior. I'd simply download them to my watch and smile through every cold, windy, wet turn. [Seriously, Ireland was not that wet, cold, or windy. Let's not talk about the hills.]

As I reached the north, I decided to replace the official EV1: Northern Ireland route with the Causeway Coastal Route and loved it. That brought me to Belfast with several days before my return flight to Vegas. I'd started my tour in Rosslare Harbour where the ferry touches base with Ireland's southeastern-most point. With a few days to spare, I could make a run from Belfast back to Rosslare Harbour allowing a lifetime of pontification about how incredible I was to have circumnavigated the entire Emerald Isle. Who wouldn't want to brag about that? I was all in.

This meant I had to ride through Dublin and, surprise of all surprises, I received a message from Doug that morning saying he would ride with me into the city. I wouldn't have to worry about those turns, those busy roads, and where to find the hidey-holes leading to secret greenways. I would just follow in his draft. We met, rode, and chatted over snacks and caffeine. He escorted me to where he knew I would be safe and sent me back on my way with his blessing.

And what did Ireland's manager request in return? Feedback. He wanted to know what he could do to improve the route and website. I mentioned a terrible section of road one day and he rode it himself a few days later to see how to improve the map for future cyclists. I mentioned that a ferry didn't arrive when it was supposed to so he updated the website for future travelers. I told him that everyone should enjoy a scoop of Murphy's brown bread ice cream in Dingle and I said which museums were probably worth excluding on the website unless cyclists needed good stories about bad museums. He took it all to heart. He asked me to share my pictures and videos for the website and welcomed feedback when I found typos or could recommend changes on the stage descriptor pages (which were incredibly useful so I read them religiously).

Who was this guy? Out of nowhere, Doug responded to a FaceBook post and became my route planner, safety manager, tour guide, and friend. This EuroVelo route business was pretty awesome. So, I'm all in for my next tour. My only request: "Let me speak to your manager."

Caveat:

I know that Ireland's EV1 is not the well-traveled route of, say, the EV 8 or EV 15. I can't imagine managers on those routes having time to personalize experiences like that Doug showered on me. But, I could see some ways it could happen. Perhaps cycling or triathlon clubs or the WarmShowers community could volunteer to take on some of these responsibilities. \

Maybe one group could be responsible for welcoming new riders in their hometown and helping with logistics related to bike boxes and maneuvering to the starting block.

Maybe cities could have a go-to person assigned in case a rider has questions or needs help when riding through.

If there's someone who may be out of riding commission for a bit, maybe they could be assigned GPX duty for when last minute changes might be requested.

And, maybe a cycling group in a finishing town might be willing to coordinate their weekly ride with when a finisher is coming in so they can ride and celebrate together. Of course, a round of pints would be expected.

Doug made me feel so welcome; I hope others enjoying EuroVelo routes receive even a fraction of the gifts Doug gave me.

Ireland Gear

Plane: passport, slippers, change of clothes, bike bag with AirTag, tool for pedal removal

Navigation: iPhone, laminated maps, guidebook, Garmin watch with downloaded GPX files, GPX files on inReach

General: small shoulder bag, carabiners, small Swiss army knife, water bottle, money belt (money, passport/ID, debit card X 2, credit card,), pack cover, pen, SPF chapstick X 3, hand sanitizer, headlamp, pee rag, bandana, headphones, reading glasses, poo bag (wet wipes in clean bag, dirty bag with bring soda), swim goggles, thank you postcards

First Aid Kit (in waterproof bag):

- General: InReach, AirTag, zip ties, survival bracelet, waterproof matches, tampon X 2, replacement headlamp battery, mattress patch, tin foil, rubber bands, Velcro, survival bivvy, cotton balls, duct tape, water filter, medical form/vaccination and drug information/copies of important papers inc. insurance card/\$200 in waterproof sleeve, Krazy glue
- Wound care: second skin, gauze pads, alcohol wipes, bandaids, safety pins, medical tape, medical gloves, steri-strips, non-occlusive patch, extra Neosporin, triangle bandage X 2, Tegaderm, sterile safety pins
- Pharmacy: Neosporin, Aspirin, anti-diarrheal, Tums, Advil, anti-itch steroid, allergy meds, bag balm, sleeping pills, caffeine pills, antibiotic pills, NyQuil, DayQuil, BASE salts, Desitin, chlorine tablets, thick needle and floss, Tylenol PM, Tylenol, athlete's foot powder, Benadryl, Bonine, Zofran, Sudafed, Klonopin, activated charcoal, ginger chews, Covid test

Toiletries: (in dry-bag with clip) prescription medications, wet wipes (dry), toothbrush, toothpaste, shampoo/conditioner/body soap (RedBudSuds in mesh bag), extra hair conditioner, medium microfiber towel, brush, hair scrunchies, razor

Clothes: dirty/clean clothes bag, waterproof gloves (light for inside dish gloves, heavy for outside dish gloves*), hiking pants, short-sleeved shirt X 1, rain gear (jacket, pants, shoe covers, shower cap X 8—used 2), down coat, buff, balaclava*, fleece jacket*, fleece pants*, underwear X 4, bras X 3, socks X 3, tri shorts X 3, bike shorts X 1, cycling jersey X 2, insulated leggings, insulated long-

sleeved shirt, sleeping leggings, long-sleeved shirt (black for sleeping), sleeping socks, small handkerchiefs X 5, Scrubba (with leaf laundry detergent)

Cooking: camp cup*, camp spork, ziplock bags (large and small), titanium pot*, stove with base*, Top Ramen X 2

Sleeping: stuff sack for air mattress*, mattress cover*, and tent (footprint, cover, poles, stakes)*, -10° sleeping bag and stuff sack,* sleeping bag sheet, pillow, Inspire remote, light sleeping bag (purchased in-country)

Feet: trail runners with sole inserts—\$100 bill hidden in-between, down booties*

Technology: waterproof technology bag, USB battery pack (Anker), iPad, charging cords (Garmin, inReach, iPhone, iPad, headlamps), wall charger (US)*, wall charger (Europe)

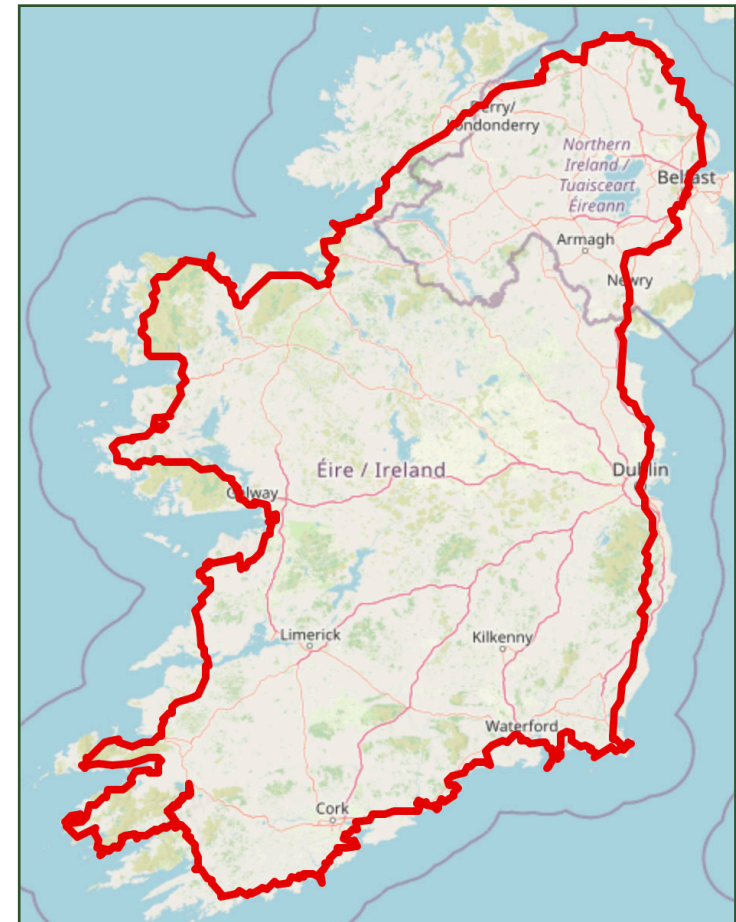
Bike: bike with AirTag, helmet, pedals (and removal tool), rear rack, rear rack paneers (with AirTag X 1), front headlamp and connector, taillight and connector, bento bag (with BASE salts, Tums, Advil, Her Chamois Butt'r), Lezyne pump, seat bag with tools (tire tool, hex multitool, tube patches, tubes X 2, patch kit, rag), cycling gloves, front water bottle with straw and connector, bike lock (with connector), aerobars, side mirror*, bungee cords (purchased in-country), front panniers with connectors (didn't use at end)

* Mailed to Dublin, sent home with Shawna, or not needed

Ireland EV1 Stages



EV1—Ireland/Northern Ireland (official)



My actual route (collected Garmin tracks)



Almost there—my last night on the road

Useful Resources

Doug Corrie, EuroVelo Route Manager

T: [+353 86 8571008](tel:+353868571008) W: cyclingireland.ie W: euroveloireland.ie

Duff Cycles (Calvin): www.duffcycles.com | duffcycles@gmail.com | (01) 8420233; Omni Park Shopping Centre, Whitehall, Dublin, Ireland

Irish Supermarkets: Centra, Spar, Londis

Post offices also serve as the equivalent of convenience stores in the USA

EV1 Ireland: <https://euroveloireland.ie>

Wild Atlantic Way: https://www.discoverireland.ie/wild-atlantic-way/map?signature-point=sceilg_mhichil__skellig_michael_&direction=north



Newborns with Mom