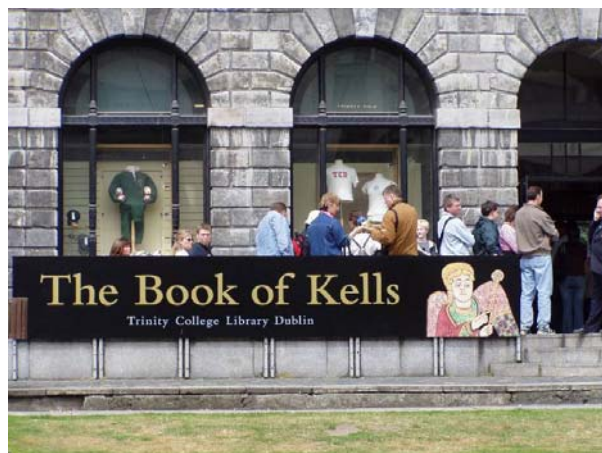


Ireland report (July 2-12, 2005)

We took the cheap Ryan Air from Edinburgh to Dublin, arriving near midnight. Dublin is quite expensive so we stayed at a B&B about 20 minutes walk from the city center. The first day we walked down the length of the O'Connell Street from the north where many monuments of national heroes can be seen. It also has the famous Post Office where the declaration of Ireland's independence was made in 1916. You can still see the bullet holes on the wall. This is the famous Post Office Building.



Dublin has a nice Liffey river going through the city center. It is quite picturesque and of course, flanked by many bars. Being a colonial city under the British for over 700 years it does not have grandiose buildings. The Trinity College was quite good but it was originally only for the British. The main attraction of this College is the Book of Kells-- probably the oldest books in existence in the world. Consider that during the Dark age of the Continental Europe, it was the monks in the peripheral islands that kept the books for the later generations by religiously copying them down. The display is a must-see for the tour of Dublin. The Library also collects thousands of old books



Another attraction in Dublin is the Kilmainham jail. It is Ireland's Green Island (of Taiwan) where the political prisoners were jailed or executed. Of course some of these political prisoners became the national leaders after the independence. The guided tour is excellent and you learn a lot of Irish history in an hour.

From Dublin, the next day we ( two of us ) rented a car and drove to Kilkenny through the Wicklow mountains in the rain. It was no fun-- that I had to drive on the left side of the road on a stick-shift car, in an unfamiliar country, with narrow and often unmarked roads. Fortunately outside of Dublin, there were few cars until we entered small towns. Yes, small towns with narrow streets, and to drive on the left. At the first small town, we heard a loud noise-- the first collision. Lucky us-- no damage, it was just the rear-view mirror, folded back upon the collision.

We visited the scenic old Monastery of Glendalough and then went on to the old medieval city of Kilkenny. It is very charming, with its cathedral and many old churches, and narrow streets and bunches of excellent restaurants. The cathedral has a lovely garden.



It is too bad that we did not have much time here. The driving took much more than we had planned. The next day we visited Kells Priory-- it is a ruin now and near where the Books of Kells were kept when the monks left the island of Iona, off the coast of Scotland, around 6 AD. We then visited the Rock of Casher, and then went on to Kinsale. This town is the send-off point for many Irishes. Consider that at one time Ireland had a population of about 8 millions. The potato famine of 1840's killed at least one million people and another million or more emigrated to US, Canada and Australia. Ireland has more expatriates than its own citizen. We did not like Kinsale much even though it was highly touted in the guidebook.

The next day our original plan was to do the Ring of Kerry-- a 180 km circular loop driving tour. Two days of constant driving were nerve wrecking for the driver and the navigator. So we decided to do a small portion of the loop only. We spent some time at the Muckross House-- again it used to belong to the big boss from England. We also drove along Killarney-Kenmare part to see the mountains and the valleys. It was a relaxing day.

Next morning our destination was Dingle. It was only a short drive from Killarney and we were glad to find that the B&B-- the Emlagh House, was a great place. Just stay there if you ever go to Dingle. Dingle Peninsula lies in the westernmost part of Europe. It has a history of a few thousand years. It is magical and a must for visiting Ireland. The lambs are everywhere and they decided if you have the right to drive on the road,

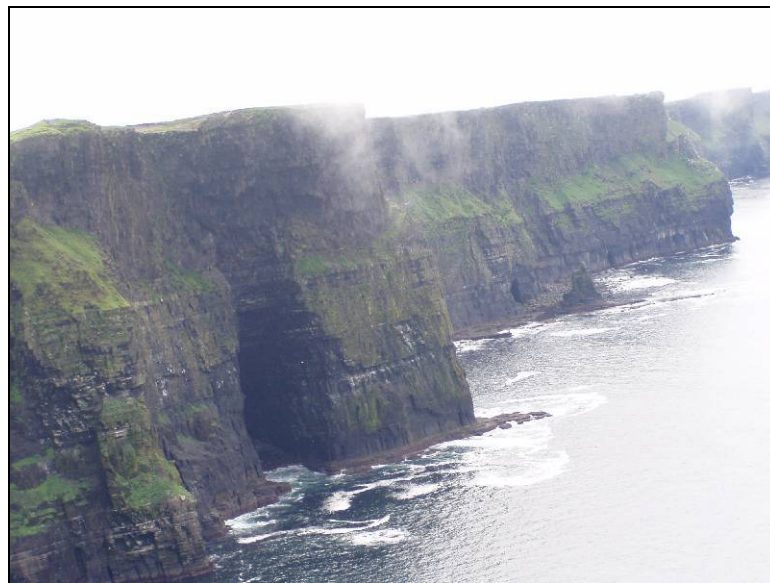


You can see the beehive huts and lush green mountains and the misty Ring of Kerry at the distance in the next three pictures.





Again it was bad planning to schedule only one day in Dingle. We had another long day of driving to see the Cliff of Moher and the Burren in county Clare. This is the wild west of Ireland but the landscape is interesting. At Cliff of Moher you can see busloads (we saw 20 of them when we were there) of tourists watching and taking pictures.



But the one we like most is the Burren. It is the Utah of Ireland. The ground here is made of sheets of rocks.



The famous Portal Dolmen, the eroded tomb from ancient time, looks elegant. All you can see today are the giant rocks that made up the chamber for the dead.



We then spent the night at Galway which is just across the Burren from the Galway bay. The city is not that interesting, regrettably. We skipped the last day of touring Connemara county-- did not get to see the mountain of the Patrick, because the driving of the previous day was too tiring. We ended up seeing the whole city drinking on a Sunday afternoon. I meant every bar in sight is overflowed to the street and everyone has a glass of beer with them. It indeed fits the image of the Irish. They do enjoy their pints.

