

Our Third Day In Ireland – Monday October 17th, 2005



We awoke early once again, which would be our norm the entire stay. The huge flock of crows, or [murder of crows](#), which roosted in the trees on the hill above us were sending up quite a din as they readied to fly out for the day. The cows and sheep were grazing just outside the living room window.

Tom said that the window was like their television, a source of entertainment and

diversion. We noticed that the cows were crowding around a fenced off area in the meadow. We didn't pay too much attention to this. They were just being cows. We had coffee, got dressed, and set out for the day.



Based on the booklet Tom had picked up the previous day, we had decided to visit several locations, the first of which was Slane Hill, where Slaine Padraic ([the hill of Slaine](#)) is located. From there, we planned to visit [Old Mellifont Abbey](#), [Monasterboice](#), [Proleek Dolmen](#), and [Saint Brigids Holy Shrine](#), each one of the visits quite successful. We had wanted to visit Cuchulain's Stone, but we ran out of day. But first, we wanted to visit an old cemetery that we had noticed the day before on our way to Newgrange.



The cemetery is located just east of R-162, on the left side of R-163, the road which connects Kells and Slane. We parked as snug as possible to the left side of the road, and got out of the car. We walked through the gate and up the hill. In the air we detected a peculiar odor, mouldering and musty, like a compost heap that was overripe.



There were many old lichen covered headstones, once elaborate, now barely readable, along with newer burials. I felt the need to keep looking over my shoulder, as if someone was watching me, or that an animal was hot on my heels. The boots I wore seemed to absorb the odor and spirit of the ground.

We spent about fifteen minutes at this cemetery, and took dozens of photos, and then it was time to leave, journeying to our next stop.



The road to Slane was not bad, neither overly windy nor narrow. We took N-2 north out of Slane to find the hill, which we were able to find without much trouble, given the fact that we drove past it several times. At the top of a steep road, we parked and got out of the car. There was one other car parked, but we couldn't see anyone. As we walked up the hill, I wasn't sure what we would be finding. There are ruins at the top of the hill of a monastery and a church both of which were founded by Saint Patrick in 465 C.E., and governed by Saint

Erc, one the first Catholic bishops of Ireland. This is the hill where St. Patrick supposedly lit the

Paschal (Easter) Fire in defiance of King Laoghaire and his Druids some six hundred years ago. I say supposedly because there is a bit of controversy regarding whether it was actually at Slane, Newgrange, or Knowth. All three mounds can be seen from the Hill of Tara, and according to Professor George Eogan, the world's leading expert on Newgrange, Knowth and Dowth, who spent over forty years excavating at Knowth, there is a great possibility that the fire was lit at Knowth.

Upon further research, I found that according to mythology and history, this is where [Slaine](#), King of the Fir Bolg and God of health, was buried. I suppose I haven't spent enough time studying Irish and Celtic Mythology. As we drew nearer to the buildings, two people appeared. They walked past us to their car, nodding their heads in hello. Now we were by ourselves, and would not have to share this experience with anyone or anything other than the memories and perhaps secrets, that this hill held. There is also a cemetery which is still in use by the local population, and even though this one had recent burials, the overwhelming impression of death was less pervasive than the one we had visited earlier. The buildings are old, some of the oldest I have ever seen. There is a tree that is growing out of one of the graves. It is called a [monkey puzzle tree](#). I can't find that it had any particular quality associated with it. Here is another [link](#) which may be more informative. This particular monkey puzzle tree can be seen in the photo.



Tom and I walked through the buildings, around the buildings, through the cemetery, gazed at the valleys in the distance. Plants with delicate purple and yellow flowers grow from the stones which all of the buildings are constructed from. Ferns grow there as well, and also in the stones on the fences. The floors in the interior of the buildings are covered with granite. However, in the rear most room, as I walked through, I looked down, and there was a white quartz crystal. It had very small vugs of Opaline. I wondered how it had gotten there. We felt quite at ease. There

was a slight breeze blowing. We wandered past old graves, trying to decipher what was inscribed on the headstones. Most were indiscernible. People long gone, ancestors to us both. We spent about an hour, then it was time to head out.

Our next stop was at Old Mellifont Abbey, which is located about five kilometers away. Tom decided that we would take N-2 to a side road which would take us to the Abbey. It didn't take long to drive there, and when we arrived at the visitors center, it was closed. Wonderful! No one but us to share with, no tour guide to listen to. And, as always, the landscapes were breathtaking, absolutely stunning, the air sweet and invigorating. At one point, as I walked by myself, I could have sworn that I heard the whisper of a woman's voice. Old Mellifont Abbey was founded by [Saint Malachy](#) in 1142 C.E.,



and was Ireland's first Cistercian Monastery. These were the same Cistercian Monks who attempted to destroy the kerbstones at Knowth. There is a building which once housed a [lavabo](#), where the monks washed before both eating their meals and celebrating the [Holy Eucharist](#). We spent about an hour walking through the ruins, then it was off to our next stop, Monasterboice. We followed one of the maps we had, turning down the second road on the right, which wasn't a road as we knew roads, but

rather a one car road. This road was lined with parked cars for as far as we could see. Great! Tom tried several times to go around the cars, but to no avail, as there seemed to be a car coming towards us each time. We hadn't come across another person for most of the morning, and now we were going to have to visit Monasterboice with a crowd of people.



But these were not visitors to the cemetery, these were mourners, come to pay their final respects to someone who had just recently passed. The grounds vacated quickly, save for Tom, myself, and the groundskeeper, who was busily shoveling rocks and dirt onto the coffin. Monasterboice (in Irish, Mainistir Bhuite, or Buite's



monastery) was founded by [Saint Buite](#). There are ruins of two churches, a monastery, a one hundred and ten foot round tower (the tallest of many built as a defense during the Viking raids), and some of the finest Celtic Crosses in Ireland, which are representative of several centuries. It is interesting to note that the [iconography](#) on many of the crosses appears to be a blend of Old Irish Pagan and Christianity. There is much debate on this subject. Regardless of the origins, we simply appreciated having had the opportunity to see so many of the crosses.

After visiting Monasterboice, we drove north to visit the Proleek Dolmen. We stopped for lunch in [Dunleer](#), a small village located near Dundalk. We found a small pub called The Grove, where lunch was served cafeteria style. We ordered Cod Coujons, which were served with two large scoops of mash (potatoes) a deep fried whole potato, chips (french fries), and two types of vegetables. The dish was very similar to fish sticks, only this had huge pieces of freshly caught cod, not minced pieces of fish. The servings were so huge that the food barely fit on the plates. We each ate as much as we could,



then had the server pack the rest into take away containers. We did have dessert. I had the Sherry Trifle, and Tom had the Jelly and Ice Cream, which was actually a gelatin dish. They were both very tasty.



After eating, we went to the Bank of Ireland to exchange some



of the euro travelers cheques we had brought with us. We had purchased them in order to avoid being charged exchange fees. However, we ended up being charged anyway, \$2.25 per hundred euros! On our way to the car, we noticed a shop called Pat's Gift Shop. We decided to take a look inside and see if there might be something we could buy for the family. The store was lined with shelves filled with bric a brac. Tom picked out several newspapers. I asked the owner to open the glass doors to a jewelry case, and chose three earring and necklace sets for Stephanie, Maggie, and

Rachel. Then, I noticed that Tom was admiring a statuette of two dancers. We told the owner that we would take it. We also purchased four feadogs, or Irish whistles. Finished, we set off in search of the Proleek Dolmen.

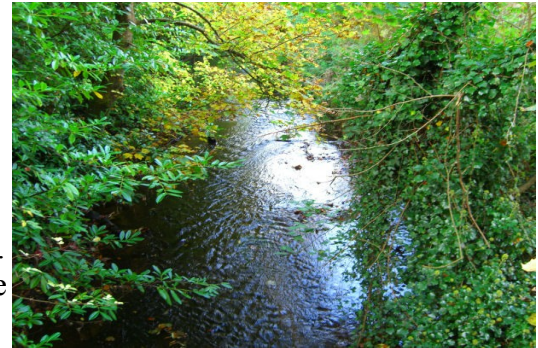
We drove west a few kilometers to M-1, then headed north toward [Dundalk](#), where we connected to N-1. From there we drove past Dundalk to R-174. We saw a sign which said “Proleek Dolmen this way”, which was down a very narrow road. We drove several kilometers, then came to a main road. There were no more sign posts. We turned left onto the road, and drove until we found a fueling station. We both went in and asked the clerk where the standing stone was. He wasn't from the area but thought it might be behind the hotel just down the road, which we both found amusing. I mentioned to Tom that I found it interesting that many of the locals didn't really know where these old sites were located. While we were at the fueling station, we purchased two bricks of [peat](#) and some wood kindling for the small stove at the cottage.



We headed back down the road, but instead of pulling into the hotel, we drove past, down the very narrow road once again, all the way to R-174, made a u-turn, and headed back toward the hotel, all the while searching for a sign to the Dolmen. We ended up on the main road once more, finally pulling into the hotel parking area.

Tom asked a man who was driving out of the parking lot where we could find

the Dolmen, and he pointed toward the back of the hotel, saying it was about a half mile walk through the golf course. As we were parking the car, Tom almost hit a tree backing up. I screamed, he asked me not to do that, and naturally I became upset. So, we set out on our “half mile” walk to the dolmen, me in a fairly lousy mood, and Tom racing to keep up with me.



The walk was a bit more than a half mile, more like a mile and a half. I picked up a good sized stick, just in case we came upon an animal. After all, we were walking on a very isolated fenced-in path, which was crowded around on both sides by tall shrubs and trees, with a lot of animal droppings at the

edges. The walk was long enough that by the time we were within sight of the Gallery Grave, I had calmed down. This was pretty impressive. What lay before us were the remains of what was once a [wedge tomb](#). This particular Gallery Grave is unique, in that it still has most of its



roof intact. We rounded a corner, and before our eyes was one of the largest portal tombs in existence, with the cap stone alone weighing between thirty and forty tons and standing more than three meters. The giant roof stone measures 3.8 meters by 3.2 meters and is supported on two portal stones, each about 2.3 meters high. It is enormous!



We stood in amazement. I asked Tom if he would stand beside it so that I could take a photo. He stood inside of it! Under that huge capstone! He said that since it had been standing as it was for more than five thousand years, it probably wouldn't fall while he was under it. Tom took my photo, but I was only able to stand beside the dolmen, not wanting to be underneath something that immense.



The cap stone on the Proleek Dolmen is called the “Giants Load”, and according to local legend was carried to this point by a giant from Scotland named Parrah Boug MacShagean, who is believed to be buried nearby. Portal tombs, or dolmens, were burial places and remain the most splendid and striking reminders of Ireland's first farmers. Built of three or more great upright stones, with a huge capstones weighing up to seventy tons, the portal tombs are largely confined to the north.

It was time to leave, so we set to walking the path for a mile and a half back to the car. Along the way, just behind the hotel, we discovered a beautiful garden with roses, apple trees, and all sorts of beautiful flora.



Around a corner we saw what must be the most stunning Japanese Maple either one of us have ever seen! We got into the car, ready for the last place on our list. We were going to visit Saint Brigids Holy Shrine next. I was very excited, as I had long been intrigued by Brigid and her association with the ancient Celtic Goddess Brid.



Her shrine is located just a few kilometers outside of [Kilcurry](#)



on another small rural road. We parked in the car park area. There was no one else around. At the top of a hill rising before us stood the shrine, with three very old statues of Saint Brigid gazing down upon

us. Evening was settling in, and the wind was beginning to blow gently. We walked along the path, looking up toward the shrine. This filled us with awe, to see a place dedicated to the one who was, in this world, Brid incarnate.



At the base of the shrine is a memorial which reads “**Jubilee Year 2000 Prayer To Saint Brigid: O Glorious Saint Brigid, Mary Of The Gael And Mother Of The Irish Race, Obtain For Us From Almighty God A Plentitude Of Graces So That We May Walk Faithfully In The Paths Of Christian Perfection During Life, And Thus Secure A Holy And Happy Death, With Life Everlasting Through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen. Saint Brigid, Patroness Of Ireland, Pray For Us.**” Just reading this, one can see the connection between Brid, the Mother Goddess of the Celts, and Saint Brigid. We walked up the steps to the shrine



itself, and stood there for some time. I ran my hands along the arm of one of the statues. There was a profound sense of peacefulness here. The shrine is surrounded by beautiful morning glories and shrubs, and the ground around is covered with trefoils, better known as shamrocks. There are hawthorne trees growing behind and beside the shrine.



Tom took photos while I simply stood in silence. As we walked back to the car we noticed that along the way there were many prayers



and requests for healing tied to one of the fences. The fence is hedged in by hawthorne trees. On a slope not far from the

shrine, there is a large Saint Brigid's Cross high up on a pole, the very same type of cross which hangs over our front door, and has for years. There is a visitors center, but it was closed, the same as all the other sites we had visited, except for Newgrange. The grounds are lovely, green and well kept, and it was a pleasure visiting there. As with all but one of the places we visited this day, we were by ourselves, and able to spend as much time wandering as we might need. We decided that the day had lasted long enough, and started back down the road towards the car. We drove along a river until we came to N-52, which brought us back to the cottage. We had leftovers for dinner, some from Drogheda and some from the pub in Dunleer. And they were very tasty! After showering, we watched the news, talked for awhile, and then went upstairs and slept a deep, refreshing sleep. Tomorrow would bring it's own unique adventures.

