

Our First Day In Ireland Saturday October 15th, 2005

I had already set my watch ahead eight hours for Ireland time, and we were scheduled to land at 8:45 AM. About an hour before landing, the attendants served us a light refreshment of croissants filled with ham and cheese. We were also given juice and coffee or tea. The snack before landing appears to me to be a distraction, to help keep ones mind off of the actual landing. Whatever the case, the snack was pretty good. We landed well ahead of schedule. During the flight, we had been given special immigration forms and told to fill them out and hand them to customs official. After landing, we got in a long line awaiting our turn to give the immigration officer the form and have our passports stamped. A fellow passenger noticed that the officer was taking the form from the people in front of us, and asked us where she could get one. We told her to ask the immigration officer. She did so, but he told her he didn't need the document today. So, Tom put our forms in his pocket. When it was our turn at the window, all the officer did was ask us how long we would be in Ireland and stamp our passports. It was interesting in that none of our luggage was checked (to our knowledge), we weren't asked to declare anything (cigarettes, etc.), and the form was not required.



So, it was a dazed and tired Tom and Susan who went in search of luggage and the rental car counter.



We wandered about for a few minutes, found our luggage, then asked a young man where the Budget rental car desk was. He pointed to an area behind us. At the counter, we gave the clerk our name, she pulled up our reservation, took our payment information, and then gave us directions to the lot where we were to pick up our car. It was a relatively short walk down a sloped sidewalk. I waited outside the kiosk while Tom picked up the car keys. The car was a dark blue Nissan Almera. I took photos of the car to document any

damages. We noticed that the left side of the car had extensive scrapes and scratches, but it didn't dawn on us why. We put the luggage in the trunk, and with directions and map in hand, got into the car. I had initially reserved an automatic, but when we sat in the car, discovered that it was a standard shift. Oh boy!



Double whammy.

With the steering wheel on the right side of the vehicle, and having to drive on the left side of the roads, we both knew that this was going to be interesting, if not downright scary! It helped that we were greeted by a crow who sat atop a sign and squawked his hello's to us. With the car finally started, we looked for the way out to the main road, and actually found a sign which said "Way Out". Once on the round about, we found signs to M-1, which we would take to



the next road and north to Nobber. We were both very excited to be in Ireland, and knew that we had quite an adventure ahead of us! We didn't want to stop on the way to the cottage. It felt very odd to be sitting where I was in the car, but I was determined to make the best of it. Tom looked comfortable, so I figured that he was going to be alright with the driving. After all, he had done this before.



So, here we were, on our way to [McKeevers Mill](#). I had looked at the map many times while in flight, planning our route. The directions we had from the property instructed us to take N-2 north to Ardee then east on N-52 to the side road which led to the property. Instead, I had decided that we would take N-3 to R-162 to N-52, then a short hop east to our cottage, which was just off of N-52. We would be saving a few kilometers. Boy, was I wrong. But, even though the driving was frightening, the reward of seeing the landscapes was more than we

could ever have possibly dreamed. And boy, were those landscapes whooshing by! We drove into the town of Navan, ended up on a round-about, and missed R-162 completely. The traffic forced us into the city center. Driving on the opposite side of the road was confusing for Tom, and he by habit ended up driving on the right side of the road into traffic. The car jerked and swerved, and we ended up being directed into a parking garage by a Gardai. Tom had to make a u-turn out of the garage, driving down a one-way street, back onto the main road, where we found ourselves on N-3 once more.



We drove north, frantically searching for N-52 to Ardee, but instead ended up in [Kells](#), where N-52 was under construction. We stopped for directions several times, although no one was really able to help us get to where we wanted. One of the young men directing traffic let us through into the construction zone, where we were promptly asked to turn around and leave. Another young man told us that he wasn't part of the town council, since he was from a different district, and really didn't know the area. Somehow we ended up on N-163, which took us across a two way bridge only wide

enough for one car, past N-52, and into [Nobber](#), where we stopped at a small store to ask for directions. The clerk seemed to know where we wanted to go, "a lovely road, with a canopy of trees which is just beautiful", which actually turned out to be something more like a cart trail. We tried that, but when we saw a tractor heading towards us, we turned around, heading back to find N-52. Tom decided that we were going to drive to Ardee and begin there, trying to retrace our



steps. We drove toward Ardee, watching for signs to the property on the way. After awhile, it was obvious that we had gone too far, and Tom made a u-turn. Back down the road we went, searching for the sign to the cottage. It seemed like forever as we drove. The traffic was not too bad on this road, so we were able to keep a watch out for the sign. Even being lost was not so terrible. We were able to see the beauty of the plant life around us. This journey was going to be great, and it would be difficult to return to the states!



It was only a few kilometers down the road that we saw the sign to the cottage, down a winding road hardly wide enough for one car, even though it was intended for two cars, with a speed limit of eighty kilometers per hour! Around one corner we met another car, and Tom had pull hard to the left, sending my side of the car into the brambles and scrub. There were very few buildings along the way. Just up the road, we spotted the mill and pulled through the gates and into the drive. We



both got out of the car and walked around a bit. There was no one to be seen, only cattle and sheep grazing close by on the adjacent meadows and hills, and dozens of crows flying overhead. We decided to drive up the road a bit to see if we could find the McKeevers house. We drove north a few hundred yards, and pulled into the first road on the left that we came across.

Another few hundred yards and we saw an old gate barely wide enough to drive the car through. I asked Tom if he thought we could make it through, and he said, "Of course" and we did. We drove up what was nothing more than a sheep trail, at the end of which was an old, large multi-storied brick farm house. We were greeted by three dogs who immediately began circling the car, barking and wagging their tails. We waited for a few minutes, then a woman came out of the house. It was Carola McKeever.



She told us that she would drive through the meadow to the cottage and meet us there. We drove back to the Mill, and waited for her. It was only a few minutes before she appeared. She got out of her car, climbed down the slope, and heartily shook our hands. She then proceeded to the cottage to open the door for us, talking the whole time. Mrs. McKeever gave us a short tour of our cottage, instructions on how to use the central heating and shower, gave us the key, and showed us the peat bricks and starters for the stove in the main sitting room. We told her that we wanted to get a bite to eat and buy

some groceries, and she told us that she would be sending us to Ardee, and to go to Brian Muldoons, a small pub which was situated in [Ardee](#), just up N-52 about 16 kilometers. She also told us that there were a couple of small grocery stores where we could purchase household items and food. Saying



goodbye, she left and we were on our own. Tom carried the luggage into the cottage, and upstairs into our bedroom. Following Tom up the wooden spiral staircase, I began



unpacking our clothing into the armoire and the toiletries onto the shelves in the bathroom. What a delightful place to be while we explored this part of Ireland. There was no one else staying in any of the other cottages as yet. You could hear the River Dee from the windows, along with the sheep bleating, the cows mooing, and the crows squawking overhead. The view was, simply put, captivating. A wonderful variety of trees and shrubs grew in the meadows that surrounded the cottage. And the birds. So many different types of birds, all busy eating the berries off of the trees and shrubs which dotted the landscape surrounding the cottage. There was a large [Hawthorne](#) tree just outside the window of the dining area. After we unpacked most of our belongings, we decided it was time to head to Ardee.



Tom was still trying to adjust to driving on the left side of the road, all the while sitting on the right side of the car and shifting gears with his left hand. As cars sped towards us in the opposite lane, Tom hugged the side of the road closest to me. Each time, we would either almost go into the ditch next to the road, or come within inches of old stone walls. Now we knew why there was so much damage to the left side of the car. I panicked many times for the first day or so,

feeling as if I would soon be a part of the landscape. More than once I raised my voice in alarm, which only served to distress Tom that much more. He even asked me if I wanted to drive, to which I replied “Absolutely not!” It would take several more outings before Tom became at least a bit more comfortable with the driving situation, and I became comfortable once again as his passenger. Although I must say that Tom really did do a great job since we never got into an accident, nor did he even put a scratch on the car.



We arrived safely in Ardee, and slowly drove through the town looking for the pub. I spotted it, and fortunately for us it was on the left side of the street, which was great, since that meant that Tom wouldn't have to fight traffic to park. Muldoons Pub is brightly painted, as most public buildings are, very warm and inviting. We walked into the pub and asked one of the servers where we could sit. We were told, “Anywhere you wish”, so we chose a seat underneath the stained glass windows. Our server brought us menus, and asked what we would like to drink. We

ordered tea for me, coffee for Tom, and water for both of us. There were quite a few other patrons, mostly families, having either lunch or just some tea. For food, Tom ordered a hamburger with chips (french fries), and I had a gammon (ham) steak with mashed potatoes and veggies. Toms burger was oddly spiced, more like a meatloaf than a burger, so he ate very little. My gammon was really very good, but I didn't finish it, since Tom wasn't eating his food. We drank our beverages and watched the people around us. I was rather



curious about the Irish. I had never really known anyone from Ireland, even though most of my ancestors were from there. Everyone seemed to be sincerely kind. Most had smiles on their faces. We asked our server, a charming young Irish girl, to take our photo. She was a little nervous handling our camera, so all three of the shots were out of focus. She apologized, and we assured her that it was all in fun, and not to worry about it. She asked where we were from, and we told her California. She mentioned that she would like to visit there some day. If she only knew the pace of life in the states! We were finished, so we paid for our meal and left. It was time to buy some groceries.



There happened to be a grocers, O'Gormans, directly across from the pub. We walked quickly across the street, dodging traffic the entire time, and into the shop. This was the first place that we noticed someone who was very similar in looks to Tom's sister Celeste. We often saw similarities between many people in Ireland and people we knew from the states. We bought fruit and cookies,

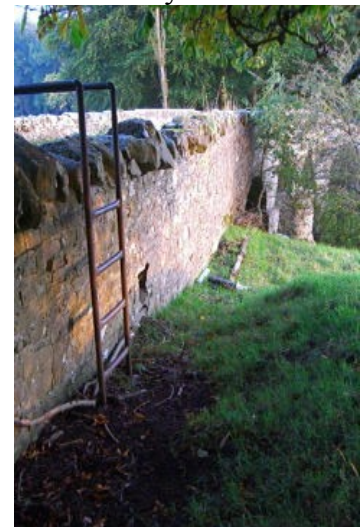
wine and pastries, and the balance of toiletries which we hadn't brought with us. So, with most of the items we thought we would need for a few days in hand, we carried it all back across the street, once more dodging traffic, and put everything into the trunk of the car. The landscapes were



brehtaking everywhere we traveled. Just driving along the road to the cottage we were able to see really old buildings, probably more than five or six hundred years old. There was one on the side of the road to the cottage that was being either renovated or demolished, we never could really tell. It sat at the edge of the road, like an ancient being, waiting for the passage of time.



After shopping, we drove back to our cottage. We unloaded our purchases from the car, and I put them away. It was still early, and we had time to walk around the property. It was absolutely beautiful! The meadowlands were fifty different shades of green, the grass still dripping with morning dew. The River Dee flowed gently by, bringing a lulling melody to our



ears. The water was pure and fresh, with cress growing atop. We walked to the end of the eastern meadow, climbed an old metal ladder which was bolted to the stone wall, walked over the bridge and down the narrow lane. There was a field of either cabbage or kale growing on the cottage side of the lane, and lush meadowland and trees everywhere else. Sheep and cows grazed in the meadows, with crows stalking on the ground next to the sheep. There were many different varieties of mushrooms growing in the meadows. The grass in the meadows was cropped low by the cows and sheep. As I looked around, reality began to set in. We were actually in Ireland! The cherished desire I had always had was finally being fulfilled. I made a vow not to take for granted this blessing, and to make the most of every moment. This felt so right, so much like we were home. I wanted to touch the soil with my hands, but didn't for fear that I would melt into it, or perhaps even die. It was as if I had awakened from some

strange life into a dream.



We walked about for more than an hour taking photos and familiarizing ourselves with the surroundings. There was another old stone wall along the drive, and it was probably older than the mill itself. Just about halfway along the wall, a tree had sprouted from between the stones. And the tree was huge. We could only assume that the tree must have sprouted not long after the wall was built. There were also two interesting looking circular objects embedded in the wall which we suspect

were from the grist mill. We are not certain how old the mill itself is, but it appears to be at least two to three hundred years old. We believe that the McKeever family has owned it for many years. The mill was converted about ten years ago into four separate apartments, or cottages, three two bedroom and one three bedroom. Our cottage was so well done that we immediately felt welcome and at home. Burning the peat in the stove was comforting, and drinking our tea in the mornings and evenings so very enjoyable.



When we returned to the cottage from our walk, I decided to do a more thorough look around to see if we needed anything else. There was only one roll of toilet paper and one of paper towels. I looked for a tea kettle, and found an electric one which would heat the water to boiling for both coffee and tea. We needed dish soap and a few other items, so, back to Ardee we went. This time, it was just a bit easier for Tom to drive, but still a little alarming with the rock walls and brush swooshing by. We shopped at another grocers, Lanney's Supervalue. The sun was beginning to set by the time we left Ardee. The drive was nice, not too many cars on the roads.

Down the narrow country lane to the cottage we went. As we approached the cottage, we saw a four wheel vehicle heading our way through the meadow. It was Mr. McKeever, come to read the meters before we had been there too long. He couldn't quite read the meter, and got a "torch" out of the hallway closet. He got down on his knees on the kitchen floor and peered into a cabinet. He noted the reading on a piece of paper which he left on the counter, wished us a good stay, and then left into the night. For Tom and I, it was time to retire. We had been up for over twenty-four hours, so it was the shower for both of us, a glass of wine, and into bed. We were excited, but very sleepy, so we did not find it difficult falling asleep. We weren't sure yet what we were going to see in our one weeks stay. We knew for sure that tomorrow we would visit Newgrange and Knowth, both of which date earlier than 3200 B.C.E. We also planned to visit The Hill of Tara on one of the days. We weren't expecting more wonder to come into our lives, which it did indeed. It was certainly going to be exciting to walk on terra firma that had been such a big part of my ancestors lives, and part of who I am today.

