

2011 - IRELAND

27 May 2011



Causeway Scenic Route

BED AND BREAKFAST

We've had 3 days bed and breakfasting now. Not going to Iceland was disappointing but this is an experience we would probably not have had (Northern Ireland). The 3 places we have stayed at have all been great. The first one at Ballygally (what a name!), was fabulous. Heather, curtesy of a caring husband, had the window view out to the tower and the sea. It was a wonderful sight during the evening. The second, near The Giant's Causeway, was large and well setup and had a good view of the ocean. Tonight's, just outside of Londonderry, is a real find considering that we had to travel a long way to find it. The place has been in hands of the current family since 1852. It is an old manor house -- large rooms, nicely comfortable. This aspect of our trip is letting us get an inside view of Irish establishments. It is also interesting seeing what is served for breakfast. The first 2 days have shown that their breakfast fare is fairly familiar to us -- except for the black and white pudding and the whisky in the porridge!

Having a car instead of a motorhome has been interesting. On the plus side, we can now go down any road. On the minus side we don't have as good a view of the countryside (it is so much lower), and, before we have finished, we will probably have a comprehensive map of all the public toilets in Northern Ireland.

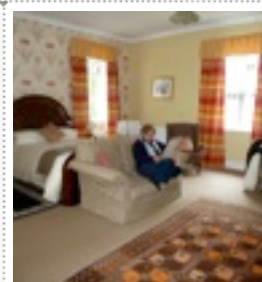
There is evidence that man has occupied the Dunluce crags for over 1500 years. The current castle dates from only the late 16th century.



Irish coastline with Dunluce Castle camouflaged in foreground



Classic view of Irish houses



Our room for the night

Most people have heard of Londonderry - Sein Fenn, bombings, political extremism.

The locals simply call it Derry.





Dunluce Castle



Dunluce guard

DUNLUCE CASTLE

We decided not to go back and re-visit the Giant's Causeway and instead drove towards Londonderry. Dunluce Castle sat proudly on its rocky outcrop as we drove up towards it - we were excited by the prospect of fully exploring its grounds. The present structure dates back to the late 16th century. Over time there has been an endless revolving door of owners. The castle was very impressive and its history was also interesting. The surrounding area, where a large village once stood, has been the subject of extensive archeological digs over recent years. Within the castle walls we were able to make out the ruins of an opulent palace built by the Earl of Antrim where he and his family resided - a strange place to build a beautiful house with huge bay windows but all hidden behind tall outer walls. "Safe and secure" takes on a whole new meaning. We spent time watching the excellent multimedia shows in the visitor centre and education room and roamed around the ruins for over an hour.



HEZLETT HOUSE

Built in 1691 Hezlett House is one of the oldest thatched cottages left standing in Northern Ireland. Originally built as a rectory the house was bought by Issac Hezlett in 1776 and continued to be the Hezlett family home for the next 200 years. We were somewhat surprised about how large the house was and the fact that it had survived this long. There are not many original untouched thatched houses in Ireland, we are told.

DOWNHILL MANSION AND GROUNDS

It's amazing how a rich and powerful bishop can afford to spend so much money on a luxurious palace and associated buildings. The history of the Downhill Palace is intertwined with the life and times of the Earl Bishop of Derry who built this mansion in 1783. He died in 1803 and the estate passed on to Henry Bruce. It remained in the Bruce family till 1946 when it fell into disrepair and was acquired and preserved in its present form by the National Trust. It underscored to us how, inevitably, power and influence wane.

We probably would not have visited this area of Northern Ireland if we had gone to Iceland because we were intent on exploring the southern and western coasts over the 4 weeks that we had planned to spend in this island.





Dunluce Castle



Hezlett House



Downhill Palace



Downhill Palace