

2011 - IRELAND

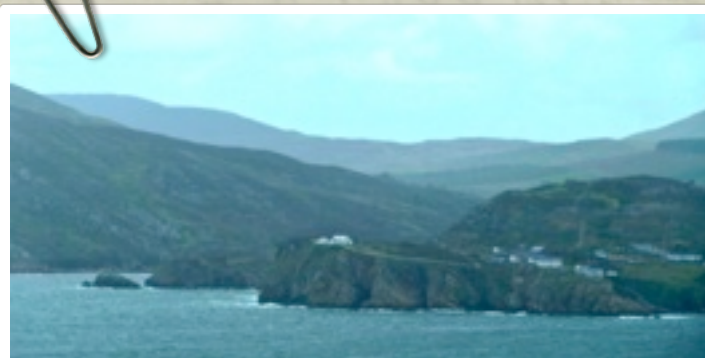
28 May 2011

Fanad Peninsula (On Lough Swilly)

Regional roads in this area are very narrow and do not have any central dividing line - we found them more demanding than the C roads in Scotland

THE B&B

Finding a B&B for the night can take forever - not something we are enjoying. We refer to guide books and look on the internet but it can still be hit or miss. So far the places we have chosen have been surprisingly good. Yesterday we arrived at a swank castle in lovely grounds recommended by our guide book but found there was a wedding in progress. The only room available was \$170 (well above our budget) so we moved on. We then headed for a B&B in the centre of Derry. Its location was a bit dodgy and it had no car parking space so we passed it by. We realised later that it was very close to the old city walls - a major feature of Londonderry. We prefer more rural areas and ended up at an old manor house with an illustrious history, large bedroom and only \$70 for the night. Fabulous. Today we started to search for a place early only to find another wedding at one, poor TV reception at another (crucial for Sig to watch the European Champions final) and a hotel that was also having a wedding reception. It seems that long "Bank" weekends are a perfect time for weddings. Eventually, after traveling much further than we originally planned, we came across a striking place with an excellent restaurant and a room overlooking the water. The price was a little over our budget - \$110, but at least I was able to watch the cup final in bed.



Coastal towns and farms perch high on cliffs on the other side



Distant view across the Lough



Interesting road sign

What's with the Bally name?
We have passed through so many Ballys in Northern Ireland - Ballygally, Ballycastle, Ballymoney, Ballyvoy and Ballybogy to name a few. Evidently Bally translates as village - but Bogy Village - wot tha?





The wonderful green of the hillsides



Windswept seaside

DRIVING THE FANAD PENINSULA

We crossed over the border (without realising) and planned a scenic drive featuring “*some of the Irish Republic’s finest seascapes*”. There were certainly lots of panoramic views over rolling farmland and higher heathland. The C roads were even narrower than we experienced in Scotland so we were glad there were very few cars to squeeze by. The roads here tend to be edged by hedges which are higher than the English variety. We are also lower so it might just be a relative thing.

The guidebook stated - “*stride or ride along near-deserted beaches, explore heather lined coastal paths, enjoy fishing, golf or water sports or simply sit in a restaurant by the water and eat locally caught fish in one of the pretty resort towns that dot the coast*”. We would have loved to take a walk on the beach but the cold wind and drizzle made us stay in our warm car. We did however jump on our neglected bikes at Romelton and ride a short distance along the river but the impending rain soon put a stop to that adventure. We even tried to get a taste of local fish and some hot chocolate at Portsalon only to be thwarted yet again by another wedding reception!!

At Ballymastocker Bay we stopped and had lunch in the car overlooking the sea. There were many fish breeding cages in the water. We even spied some standing stones in a paddock but nothing like the massive ones we saw in Scotland.

On our approach to Fanad Head we were impressed with the sight of long stretches of white sandy beaches. Pity about the bleak weather. But what spoilt everything for us was the large number of holiday parks dotting the landscape - row upon row of mobile homes (pity we do not have a good photo to illustrate our point). We were told that this area attracts huge crowds during summer. We can imagine it now.

There is quite a bit of residential building going on. But again and again, we saw the same house in multiples - houses that individually were quite attractive but being replicated over and over did not appeal to us at all.

Irish countryside houses appear to be a little brighter colored than the Scottish equivalent - fewer natural rock homes, still lots of white rendered ones but many more brightly painted homes.



We thought Gaelic made things difficult in Scotland (particularly on dual road signs) but we found the Irish equivalent even more difficult. We turned on the radio to listen to the news and for a full 5 minutes of listened intently to try to understand what was happening we giggled so much we turned it off. Incomprehensible.

