

2011 - IRELAND

4 June 2011



BLACKSTAIRS MOUNTAINS

We set off quite early in the morning and headed to Kilkenny where one of Heather's ancestors came from. John Cleary (2 x great grandfather) sailed for Australia around 1845. His death certificate said he was born in County Kilkenny. Heather is not sure of the circumstances but this was around the time of the "potato famine, a time when hundreds of thousands of Irish left for the Americas, Canada and Australia. We wanted to hurry on a little so took the major roads but quickly decided to get off these and travel at a more leisurely pace. We found ourselves traversing the Blackstairs Mountains - a scenic drive through classic mountain scenery. The weather was warming up and our spirits were upbeat. We stopped at various locations just to take in the air and enjoy the moment. The only disadvantage was that whenever we drove through the country side on B roads the hedges always seem to be taller than our car. This meant we only caught glimpse of things when we zoomed by gaps in the hedge. I must admit it really irked us.

BAGENALSTOWN

We read about a canal that started at Begenalstown and decided to head there before going to Kilkenny. The sun was beating down when we arrived. We had been making fun of the locals who strip down when the sun shines but we felt quite warm today. So, clad in only our short sleeve shirts, we rode our bikes along the canal for quite a distance.

Kilkenny

"the best way to enjoy this part of the country is to take in the scenery and discover the peaceful little villages"



There are many unmarked graves in Ireland - a poignant reminder of the anonymity of starvation



Enjoying Kilkenny in the sun



Strange name for an Irish Bank - maybe that's why the Irish have a financial crisis

It was so good to get back on the bikes but we realised how unfit we had become.

KILKENNY

We found a park on the outskirts of the town and had a light lunch in the car. Then we hopped on our bikes again and rode in to town. The streets were narrow and very congested but our bikes made our trip very efficient. We were able to travel through the main shopping district with heavy crowds of people - being a Saturday - and visited many of the sights Kilkenny is famous for. We really liked the Black Abbey (named after the Black monks). It had coffins hewn out of one piece of rock in the church yard. The other churches we saw today in Kilkenny and nearby were very clean looking - not covered in black soot like lots of others we have seen in Scotland and Ireland. Maybe there is not as much pollution here? We also admired the Kilkenny Castle from a distance but did not venture inside (seen too many castles lately). We then rode along the River Nore beside the castle garden walls and headed back to the car.

THOMASTOWN AND INISTIOGE

Most places we drove through were lovely but Inistioge was our pick. We relaxed and enjoyed the river while we licked our ice creams in this old town.

NEW ROSS

Our final stop for the day was New Ross, to visit the "Famine Ship". This is a replica of one of the ships that carried millions of starving Irish people to the "new worlds". We read that the centre had an interactive data base documenting over 2 million of the immigrants' details. Much to Heather's disappointment, the visitor centre was closed for renovations and the data base only covered immigration to America anyway. Nevertheless we had a great time in the ship itself listening to actors telling stories about the potato famine and the sad story of immigration from Ireland during that time - a time Heather believes her ancestor lived through. Martha Wilson, the woman John Cleary eventually married in Warnambool, may also have gone to Australia under these same circumstances.



Lowest class potato famine immigrant



First class potato famine immigrant



Captain of the immigrant ship



The very clean looking Black Cathedral



Crowds in Kilkenny

