

2011 - IRELAND

10 June 2011



Bru Na Boinne (Newgrange & Knowth)

Newgrange and Knowth are just 2 of a much larger cluster of burial mounds in this area - most were lost to later civilisations

IRELAND'S ANSWER TO THE PYRAMIDS

It amazes us that we had never heard about this Irish wonder. Here on the River Boyne, on huge shale ridges, stone age people built earthen grave sites. This all happened over 5000 years ago - that's 500 years before the pyramids of Giza and over 1000 years before Stonehenge!

We were told not to miss visiting these particular sites. We now understand why - the immense size of the rocks used, the distance they were carted, the physical amount of dirt deposited to create the mounds, plus the carvings on the rocks still visible after all those thousands of years. It is amazing stuff.

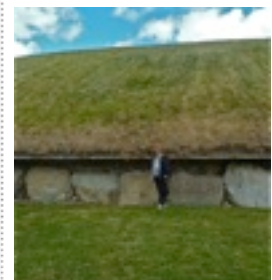
We arrived at the visitor centre where buses take controlled numbers of tourists on guided tours to each site. We were told to allow a few hours - and we needed every minute of this time. There was lots to see and comprehend. The guide took us through 5000 years of settlement history and explained that excavation occurred between 1967 and 1998. There are other mounds (large and small) that have yet to be touched. What quickly struck us was the substantial investment in labour that the ancients used to build the monuments. The rocks found at the



One of the smaller earthen burial mounds at Knowth



5000 year old inscriptions



Knowth's largest mound

Our bus was stopped by cows crossing the road - these onlookers tried to work out what the fuss was about.





Knowth



More than just a rock

site came from areas more than 70kms away - giant grey wacky rocks (used as cap stones, lintels and edge blocks), white quartz stones (used in external wall covering) and stones rounded by the river (also used in the walls). Every one of the larger rocks, weighing over 2-5 tons, had to be moved here and then positioned. No mean feat. It must have been a long term community effort because it's been estimated a burial mound, like Newgrange, would have taken 80 years to erect (more than 2 - 3 lifetimes in that era). We were allowed to enter one burial corridor and were shown a real life simulation of how the end burial chamber would look at the equinox when the sun shone directly into it. Magic stuff.

The photos we took of the burial mounds do not do them justice because it was difficult to get a relative size of the place. The amount of dirt on top of the site has, for example, been estimated at over 250,000 tons. The rock structure, making up the central tomb, was over 6 meters high yet it has never collapsed and has remained dry for over 5000 years. This was despite forts and embattlements being built on the top in later years.

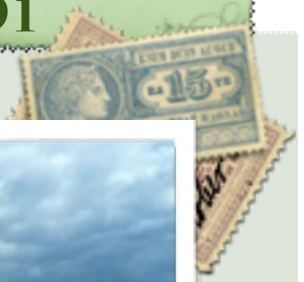
TRIM

We decided not to take the major highways back to home but instead directed the GPS to take us on roads less traveled. We zig zagged our way via little villages and then, out of the blue, we came across the imposing sight of a ruined castle in Trim. We checked our Lonely Planet guidebook and were found that Trim Castle was Ireland's largest Anglo Norman fortification.

The castle was built in 1173, destroyed and then rebuilt in 1200 only to be almost destroyed again by, the usual suspect - that dastardly Cromwell. We strolled around the grounds admiring its sheer size. The central keep still remains relatively intact but the surrounding walls have not fared as well. Its little wonder that the castle was used as a setting for the movie *Braveheart* starring Mel Gibson. There was not enough time for us to venture inside to find out more about this place first hand so it was off to home along the narrow country hedge lined lanes.



Examples of rock art at Bru Na Boinne



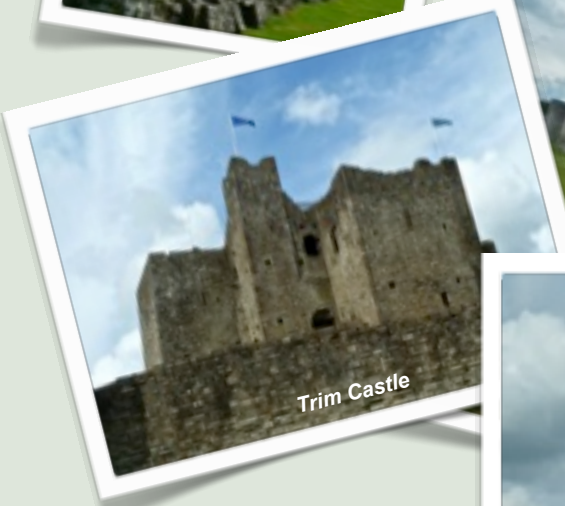
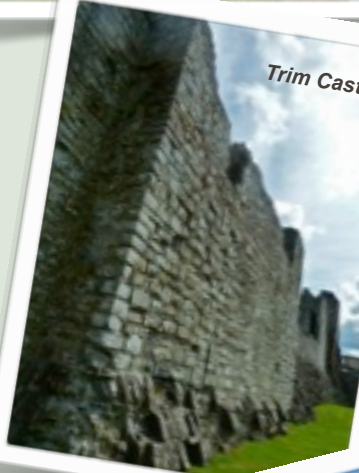
Knowth



One side of Newgrange's white faced mound



Trim Castle



Trim Castle



Trim Castle

