

2011 - IRELAND

19 June 2011



Very few people in the world get sun burned in Ireland - expect a man from Ormeau, Queensland.

Ring of Kerry

RASH DECISION

We pride ourselves on planning carefully. Today, for example, we were going to spend time in Killarney and then prepare for our trip around the Ring of Kerry by reading up on all the literature and restocking our water and other necessities. However things don't always go to plan. When Heather woke up she checked the internet and realised that there was only a 20% chance that it would rain today but an 80% chance it would rain tomorrow. Amusing isn't it -- it rains so much here that the percentage possibility of rain is a primary factor on the weather report. Anyway, we both decided that it was probably a good idea to travel around the Ring of Kerry TODAY. So running late as hell we had a quick bite to eat and tore off for the ring (being advised to drive in an anti clockwise direction because of the danger of buses forcing you off the road and making you tumble over the side of the cliff.) Little water, little petrol, little cash and little idea of what was in store.

THE RING OF KERRY

Going in an anti-clockwise direction meant we travelled along the northern coast of the Kerry peninsular. We were not impressed. The road did not hug the coast. It run through untidy countryside interspersed with uninspiring villages - nothing like the scenery we had seen on Sheep's Head and Beara. But then, at around 10 o'clock,, the sun came out, the



Siggy with his sea bird

Skellig Michael

Little Skellig



Puffin



Little Skellig in distance

clouds disappeared and the hand of St Patrick reached down onto the Ring of Kerry to make our day the most memorable for a long time.

THE SKELLIGS

After the disappointment of the first leg of our journey we arrived at Portmagee. Perfect timing, because the boat to Skellig Michael was about to depart. For 40 euro each, we hopped on, and after an exhilarating 45 minute ride over a rather turbulent sea, we came to a magnificent island - Little Skellig. It was a stark rocky outcrop that currently hosts 65,000 gannets. We slowed and bounced around on the water enthralled by the cacophony of bird sound and almost "tasted" the rancid smell of guano (bird poo). The guano stained the black rocks and masses of birds swooped and glided overhead. There were also a couple of seals lazing on the lower rocks.

SKELLIG MICHAEL

A little further on Skellig Michael loomed out of the water. It was a beautiful sight. It too appeared to rear up out of the sea, but, unlike the totally barren Little Skellig, it

had a beautiful coat of green moss and grass clinging to its vast rocky surfaces. Skellig Michael is Ireland's Machu Picchu. The place beggars belief. Not only was every nook and cranny filled with nesting sea birds (including the absolutely gorgeous puffin) there are a series of steps that lead up to the very top of the island - some 700 feet high. These steps, laid centuries ago, are made from dry rock and are perched terrifyingly on the steep slope. At the top was a stone church and 6 domed stone living quarters - all still in amazingly sound condition. It was here that a guide told us about the "known" history of this unique island (no documented history remains) - about hermit monks, monasteries, mass pilgrimages during the 17th and 18th centuries, and the more recent lives of lighthouse keepers. My camera started to overheat from the number of photos I took. Meanwhile Heather courteously offered to look after my coat and other gear and not to climb (her knees were giving her grief and

she suffers from vertigo). Mind you, with all the bird life literally underfoot, there was plenty to occupy her time.

The ride home was through rough sea and the sun continued to shine brightly as the gannets dived for fish around us. We thought this was enough reward for setting out in such a hurry this morning. But there was more

THE RING OF KERRY

The middle part of our drive was also absolutely glorious. The road up to, and over the Kerry mountains, was rough and narrow in parts (signed as a goat track). The view at the top would vie with the best I have ever seen. The wonderful sunny weather was a real bonus. I even got sunburnt and we enjoyed an ice-cream on the mountain lookout. We are camped now in a cove at the foot of this lookout. It is a beautiful site and the weather is still so good that we only closed our door at about 8.30 pm. Tomorrow we will complete the ring. We are told this is where we will find the more narrow roads and the beautiful scenery. We shall see!

Very steep steps on Skellig Michael



Very steep steps on Skellig Michael



View across the water on Ring of Kerry



Ancient ring fort