

2011 - IRELAND

23 June 2011



The Burren

Visitors to The Burren are asked not to erect their own stone monuments - it could look like a giant Leggo competition!

THE CLIFFS OF MOHER

After a sleep-in and an extended chat with the Dutch motorhomers next door, we set off later than we planned to view the Cliffs of Moher. This is one of the most popular tourist sites in Ireland. These limestone cliffs plunge some 300 meters into the sea for a stretch of 8 kms. It was warm coat time again, so when we got to the car park we rugged up. The car park was filling up and the buses were starting to arrive. This was Dingle all over again but we realised crowds would be inevitable in a place like this.

We climbed the well laid out steps and paths leading to the best vantage points, and snapped lots of photos. It was hard to capture the relative size and height of the cliffs and therefore the photos do not do them justice. At one point, where the tourist promenade finished and a rough track along the very edge carries on, there was a memorial to the people who have met their deaths here! Despite the warning not to continue, I joined a few more idiots and continued on the path for a short distance. I saw the sheer drop and almost froze. The strong wind menaced - as did Heather's urgent voice - so I took one photo and climbed back again. After leaving the cliffs we headed north along the coast and were treated to some narrow roadways right on the edge of some more cliff country. Great scenery.



Absolutely stunning scenery



Tour bus central



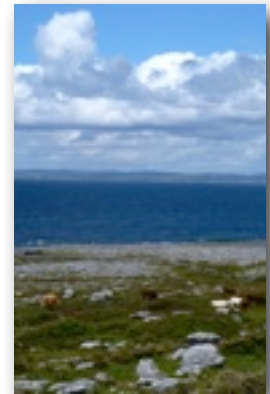
Watch your step or die



The Visitor Experience Centre is cleverly designed to blend into the side of the hill. The interactive exhibitions were superb.



This was someone's actual back yard - a natural rock garden?



Rock hopping cattle

THE BURREN

After we finished viewing the cliffs we decided to get away from the busy tourist areas and headed up the roads less traveled - namely where buses dare not go. The aim was to explore The Burren, a massive plateau that covers almost the whole of northwest County Clare. In Irish it translates to "The Stony District". The Burren is covered with huge grey flagstones (called clints) that are broken with deep fissures (called grikes). Rain over the centuries has drained along these fissures and formed many underground caves and rivers. Although it looked to us as though the land is totally barren it is supposed to be actually very rich in plant life. It does look strange though - cattle "grazing" in amongst acres and acres of rock; outbuildings and fences made exclusively from rock; the newer houses with feature rock walls; the older ones are no doubt rock under the white paint; and the backyards of houses were actual "rock gardens". This is rock heaven. On the mountain slopes, where there was not a blade of grass to speak of, we saw rock fences going straight up and over the the top. Not sure why anyone would need fences in this area anyway?

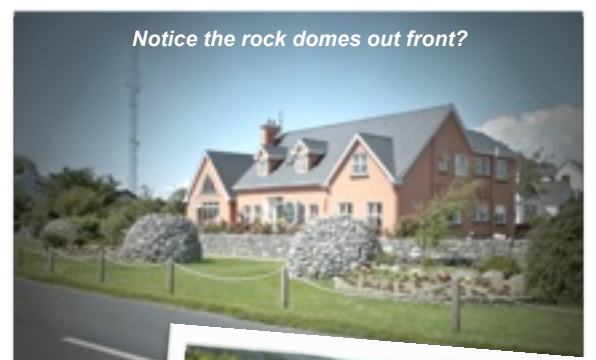
Further along the coast we came upon a really quaint village - Ballyvaughan. The weather had improved, so we rode our bikes around this gorgeous place. The buildings were gaily painted and flower baskets adorned many buildings. The town had a "Ditto Estate" but this one was quite agreeable to the eyes - a number of traditional Irish thatched houses available for holiday rent.

KILMACDUAGH

Not surprising to say, this area abounds in old stone forts and megalithic tombs. We considered we had seen enough of these so we pushed on through the middle of the Burren. Then we happened upon the monastic site of Kilmacduagh. Despite this being one of the best preserved examples of its type in Ireland, there were amazed at how few people were here. The narrow road has obviously protected it from the approach of the millions. The well preserved 34m high round tower was immediately visible from the road. It was clearly on a lean - 2 feet in fact. All around it were the ruins of a number of churches and monastic buildings. I climbed all over them taking photos while Heather spent time in the cemetery reading headstones - the oldest 1798.



Cromwell's surveyer described The Burren as "yielding neither water enough to drown a man in, nor tree to hang him in, nor soil enough to bury him in".



Cape Canaveral or Leaning Tower of Kilmacduagh?

No shortage of building material