

2011 - IRELAND

25 June 2011



Connemara National Park

The largest mammal in the Connemara National Park is a domestic animal - the famous Connemara pony.

CAMPING SITES

We rate caravan parks by their showers - the size of the cubicle, whether we have to pay extra, how hot the water is, how long the shower time is, and, for Heather, if it's got a hair dryer. So far, we have not come across one site that we consider to be 10 out of 10. Most are 6-7. If the shower facilities are really bad we use the shower in the van. It's a little cramped, but at least the water is hot and the room is warm when we get out.

On the whole we have not had too many problems finding caravan parks in Ireland. Many parks are actually holiday parks. They have permanent vans onsite and take none, or only a limited number of "tourers" such as ourselves. Most times we have only had the company of a few other vans. We have seen lots of tents though - either young couples, bikers (motor or cycle) or walkers. It's been fascinating to watch people set them up in the rain. Brrrrrr.

Although we are set up to free camp we have not done so because we are unsure about the legality of wild camping here. Unlike Scotland, we have not found a place hidden away from public view at the appropriate time. Besides, we like to hook up to electricity for the hot water and to charge the camera. Internet access is always a bonus.



Misty campsite - there are, apparently, mountains in the background

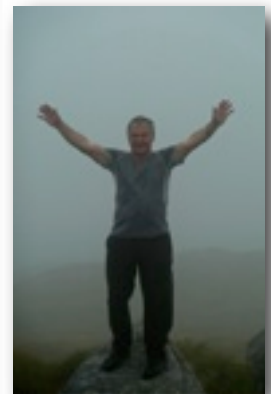


The view from inside

There is an epitaph in Doolough to local people who died in the great Irish famine. A large group from Louisburg walked over the high Doolough Pass in freezing conditions hoping to get food for their families from relief commissioners who were staying (and dining) in Delphi House. They were made to wait one day and then were turned away. Around 400 people died on the trek back.



Wet walk on the wild side



Love this weather

WEATHER

Like most of the locals here in Ireland, we have come to expect inclement weather. When the sun is out people comment how nice the weather is but when it is overcast or rainy they tell us it was lovely YESTERDAY. The brochures tell us that an attraction or drive is best viewed on a sunny day which is no solace for us. Obviously people accept the conditions and make the best of it. Today, for example, we decided to take a walk in the Connemara National Park. It was misty and drizzly so we could not make out the mountains that we walked around but we passed lots of people, soaked through like us, walking along the slopes. We were surprised when we got back to the car park - there were many campervans, all the owners were obviously walking too.

CONNEMARA NATIONAL PARK

The visitor center here tells about the fascinating history of bogs and the more sobering story of turf (peat) removal in Ireland. Ireland only has 1.5% of the bog that it had 500 years ago. Once turf is cut and removed the land seldom recovers. It takes hundreds, probably thousands, of years to reform. Turf had many uses in years

gone by. Today it is used primarily in slow combustion stoves and as garden mulch. We saw a lot of turf farming on our travels today.

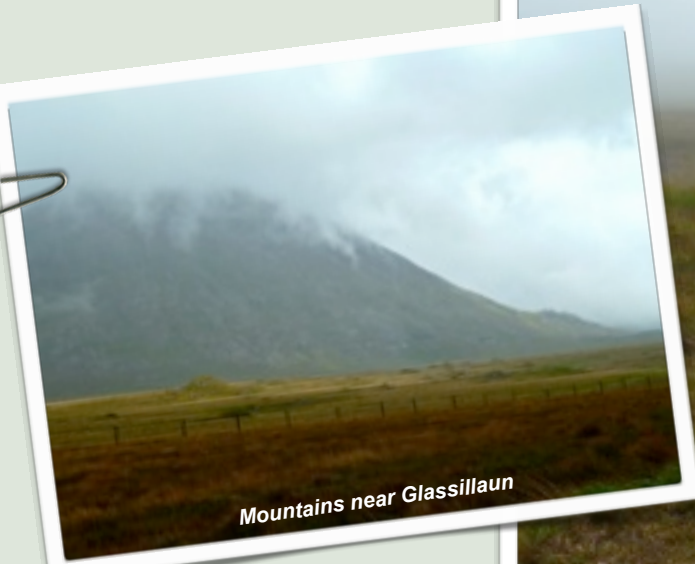
THE TWELVE BENS OF CONNEMARA

The misty conditions meant that we could not see the Twelve Bens mountainous terrain we traveled around during our afternoon drive. It had a certain charm about it, but we would have preferred clear skies. The coastline around Tully Cross and Renvyle was typically serene and the lakes beside the National Park were magnificent. It reminded us of Scotland - it rained there too! We stopped a few times to enjoy the view and watched a number of fly fishermen do their thing. Their wet lines glistening silver in the wind as they threw S's in the air. The changing afternoon light on the misty slopes meant the high mountains were gradually revealed only to be lost again in the next swirl of wind. The sheep just lay there in their warm blankets and kept chewing - the old ewes looking like hags with their black faces, piercing dark eyes, gap teeth and eerie goat-like horns. Arrhh this is Ireland. Only 3 sleeps to go before we are back to the "warmth" of winter back home.

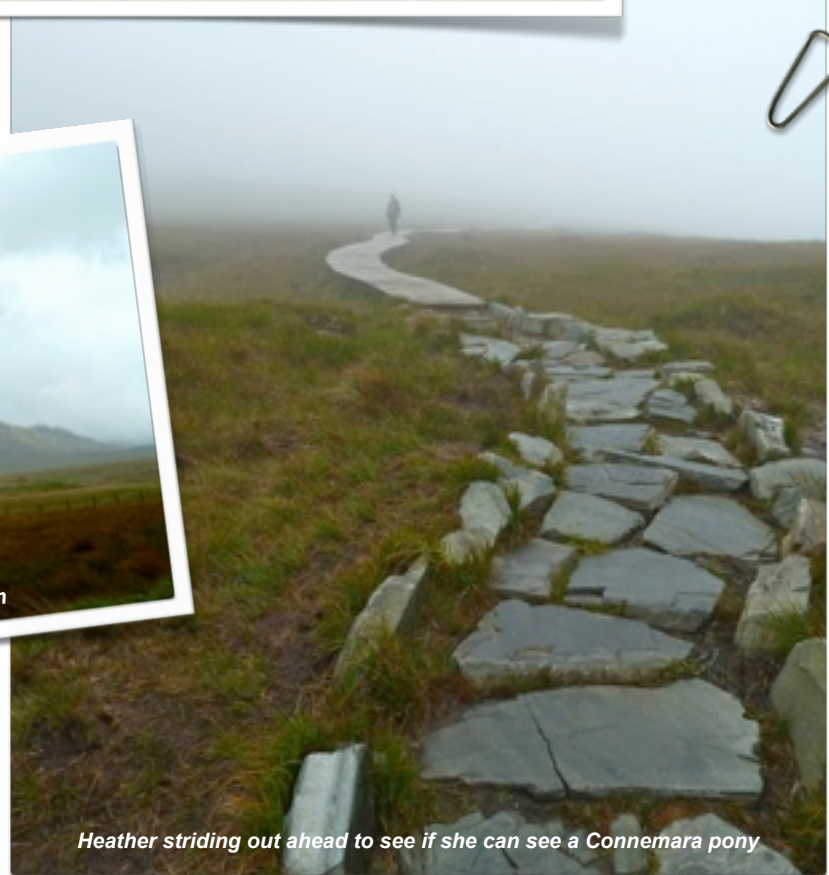


Remains of human presence can be seen in Connemara. Megalithic tombs over 4000 years old, a well tapped to supply water to Kylemore Castle around 1870 which is still in use today and there are many ruined buildings, drainage systems and old walls. Nowak DNA can be found at the top of the Blue Walk.

Lough Fee



Mountains near Glassillaun



Heather striding out ahead to see if she can see a Connemara pony