

2011 - IRELAND

26 June 2011



Cong

Cong's population doubles with the arrival of the first tourist bus in the morning.

LEAVING CONNEMARA

The name Connemara is Irish for "Inlets of the Sea". The coastal roads bear this out as they wind around small bays and coves. Yesterday we followed a number of these coast hugging roads and came across a succession of sleepy waterside hamlets. I kept wondering if people reside here full time and what jobs they do, or if their rather posh recently-built houses (farms notwithstanding) were used primarily for holiday letting.

Today we decided to take the "Sky Road" west from Connemara's capital, Clifden. This road sited in by the guidebooks for its "rugged, stunningly beautiful coastal scenery". Despite predictions that the weather would "improve" the rain actually increased in intensity. Undaunted (and warm and dry in the van) we drove slowly around and thoroughly enjoyed our drive. The road was very winding but there was more than enough room for two cars to pass. It was a very casual morning.

After our drive we were very interested in visiting the Connemara Heritage and History Centre but it was closed. It's a pity because we would have liked to take a peek around the restored property with working demonstrations. Plus we had time to kill. We drove on.



Two of the twelve bens of Connemara



A bull's view



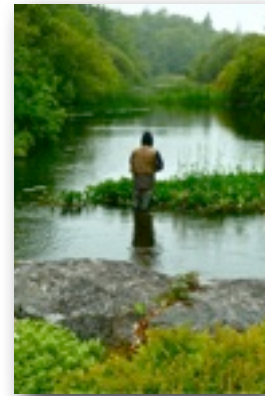
Connemara ponies

Cong has 10 large limestone caves. One of these caves apparently has a white trout, thought to be a woman who turned into a fish to be with her drowned lover. Was her lover a fish?





Bike riders are a hardy lot



Fly fishing is all the rage



CONG

The road through Connemara's "Twelve Bens" (12 hills) was simply glorious. We saw the foothills of some of these bens yesterday (tops shrouded in mist) but today, despite the rain, we could see right up to their tops. The hills are as high as Scottish ones and would certainly take the same amount of effort to climb. The muted colors of greens and browns layered in all directions against a sky of grey on grey, was particularly memorable. Our photos don't do the view the justice it deserved. We marveled at the bike riders braving the elements. We thought of Gary and Cheryl - would they join them in this weather?

We read up about Cong before we arrived. Cong's major claim to fame was that the film "A Quiet Man" was shot there. It was a 1953 movie starring

John Wayne and Maureen O'Hara - obviously a big deal round here. We were informed that the film is shown at the caravan park every night hail, rain or shine. There was the requisite monastic ruins with ancient cemetery and old shady trees and gardens. What really impressed me was how well kept the town itself looked. It appears to have stood still over time. Something that stood out for Heather though, was the many kilometers of bike track around the town and the gardens of the nearby Ashford Castle. We decided to book in to the local caravan site and jump on our bikes when the rain stopped. It didn't.

We are hoping the rain will clear for us to go riding early tomorrow morning. After that we have to hare across the whole of the island of Ireland to be near Dublin for our van drop-off and our flight home.



