

Tripper- Ireland- The West July 22- Aug. 4, 2018

Participants

George Ellis & Dianne Olsen – Leaders

Tom and Muffin Williams, Nancy and Michael Kirk, Mark and Marjorie Clarkson, Susan Lowery, Roy Zagieboylo, Art Lindeman, Sue Perin, Bob McCullough, Nancy Glorio, Marilyn Chastek, Joan Short, Cia and Alex Reis, Dick McDonnell, Beverly Ketel, Holland Duell, Steven Clare

Many of us first met on the shuttle bus that took us from Dublin to Ennis. The journey was unremarkable except for the rest stop at the Barack Obama Plaza on the highway. We could even get our pictures taken with cardboard images of the former President and First Lady!



We arrived in Ennis in County Clare just in time to catch the last day of the music festival, or Fleadh. Irish music was being performed by young and old in various places all over town, including the garden of our hotel, the Old Ground. We met up with our BAC leaders, George Ellis and Dianne Olsen and had a wonderful social and dinner where we met the rest of the travelers. Tony Boyd from Iron Donkey was also there getting us set up with our rental bikes and gear. There were 22 of us from all over the U.S. plus Steve Clare, who is from Australia and had just completed the Ireland Southwest Peninsula trip with George and Dianne and a few others who were doing the back-to-back trips.



Our first day of riding took us on quiet back roads from Ennis to the small town of Lisdoonvarna and Sheedy's Inn, where we stayed for 2 nights. We got our first taste of the Irish mist along the way which meant the view at the Cliffs of Moher would be



non-existent, so most of us went there another time either by bike or taxi. . However, many riders stopped along the way in Kilfenora at the Burren Heritage Center and at the ruins of the Kilfenora Cathedral. The roads were quiet and narrow and took us through the beautiful but wild countryside and past many, many rock walls. The Burren is an area noted for its limestone landscapes scraped by the glaciers. On Day 2, Tony planned a loop ride that took us down along the Burren coast to the town of Ballyvaughan, where many of us enjoyed a seaside lunch under sunny skies. The second half of the loop took us into

the higher lands of the Burren Plateau with options to stop at Ailwee Cave and the Poulnabrone Dolmen, an ancient burial site built with huge flat stones. In the evening, we had time to visit pubs in town and in nearby Doolin that were featuring traditional Irish music.

On Wednesday, July 25, we were on the road again heading from Lisdoonvarna to Kinvarra in County Galway. The route took us past the ruin of the Noughaval Church and provided a lunch stop at the Burren Perfumery. The Perfumery offered



delicious entrees and fabulous desserts in a nice outdoor café., which was perfect for this day of fine weather. They also had a store with many unique perfumes, soaps and creams made with local flowers and plants. Most of the riding was on very quiet country roads with so little traffic that grass was often growing down the middle. Hills were gentle for the most part except for one hill with a 17 percent grade that the majority of riders had to take on foot. All that counts is that we get to the top, right? Shortly before we arrived at our destination, we had the option of exploring the extensive ruins of the Kilmachduagh Monastery. We enjoyed a delicious dinner on the waterfront at the Pier Head Restaurant. It was a great day with the wind at our backs..

After one night at the lovely Kinvarra Guesthouse, we were off again, this time to Galway. This was a short, direct route, which was for the best since we were trying to beat the heavy rain that was moving into the area. We were successful and had plenty of time to enjoy the wonderful assortments of shops, pubs and restaurants in Galway. We stayed at Jury's Hotel that was close to all that Galway had to offer. Several of us opted to go see Trad on the Prom that evening, a wonderful production similar to Riverdance, featuring top Irish musicians, singers and dancers.

On Friday, July 27, we headed from Galway to Rossaveal to catch the ferry to Inishmore, the largest of the Aran Islands. We expected rain and got it, but since we were on the ferry at the time, most of us stayed dry. After grabbing lunch in Kilronan, we headed out to explore the many points of interest on the island, including the sweater market, seal colony, Black Fort and more. We arrived at the lovely Kilmurvey House, checked in and were off to explore Dun Angeus, the oldest stone fort in Europe. We had Kilmurvey



House to ourselves so we were able to relax and enjoy the comfortable sitting rooms and had a wonderful dinner and breakfast there. In the morning, there was time to explore the island a little more before catching the ferry back to Rossaveal.



Tony offered several route options for getting from Rossaveal to Carna and the Carna Bay Hotel so we could pick and choose our mileage. All routes offered fine views of the Twelve Bens, the mountains that dominate the Connemara region.

On Sunday, July 29th, we left Carna and headed for the town of Clifden, which is noted for music and entertainment. The route took us into Roundstone, a beautiful fishing village with a craft

center featuring handmade Irish musical instruments. We passed 2 beaches and had the option to stop at the Alcock and Brown Monument, honoring these first transatlantic aviators. Foyles Hotel was our home for 2 nights and staff there served us one of the best dinners of the trip. We especially fell in love with the Killary mussels, but more about that later. We were really glad to arrive in Clifden since we had ridden 7 days straight and were looking forward having a break. So, on Monday, some people rode up Sky Road and beyond, some walked, some shopped and some just rested, but we all found some way to enjoy the day. Music was offered in many of the pubs in the evening and some people opted to go the “Trad in the West” music and dance performance.

The other wonderful thing about Clifden is that there was a laundry service next to the hotel so we could have clean clothes again! Only \$10 per bag and they delivered to the hotel. Sweet!

On Tuesday, July 31, our run of good weather came to an end. We woke up to rain and 25-30 mph winds. The good news was the wind was at our backs...mostly. Many people opted for the shortcuts offered by Tony to avoid head winds. Points of interest along the way included Ballynahinch Castle, Connemara National Park and the Kylemore Abbey, a fabulous gothic home that now serves as an abbey for the Benedictine nuns. And these nuns make great chocolate that is for sale in the gift shop. Yum! We all arrived safe, sound and wet at the Leenane Hotel where we enjoyed another wonderful 3 course dinner



and 2 night of lodging. I'm sure no one lost weight on this trip! The meals were fabulous.



Leenane is a very small town located on the Killary Fjord, Ireland's only fjord. The fjord is especially noted for the mussels and salmon raised there on aquaculture farms. On Wednesday, August 1, we had heavy rains and wind, so only 5 people opted to do the loop ride to Cong, the village where the John Wayne/Maureen O'Hara movie, the Quiet Man, was filmed. Three group members opted to take a boat tour of the fjord and some went to the Sheep and Wool Visitors Center in town. And still

others chose just to read and relax at the comfortable hotel. We were glad that this was an optional day for riding.

On Thursday, August 2, we headed off in the mist to our final destination, Westport, in County Mayo, where we would spend 2 nights. Once again, Tony offered several route options, one including a climb through the Partry Mountains. The routes also featured nice lake (lough) views. But one thing the routes all had in common was sheep! We often found them in the roads and they kept us guessing as to which way they would run. Usually they would watch us for a while before scampering off into the grass. Sometimes they would run ahead of the bikes, making us feel like shepherds on wheels! We were on our own for dinner that night which gave people the chance to explore the busy town of Westport or just hang out in the Quay (pronounced "key") section of town along the bay where our hotel was. We stayed at the Westport Coast Hotel that offered a beautiful pool and spa onsite. Friday, August 2 was an optional riding day. Some did the loop ride Tony provided which included stops at the Murrisk Abbey, the National Famine Monument and the option to climb Croagh Patrick. Many visitors do a pilgrimage to climb this, Ireland's most holy mountain, named in honor of St. Patrick who was said to have spent 40 days and nights there. The day ended with another amazing dinner at the hotel where we enjoyed the company of all the friends we had made over the course of the trip. Tony was thanked and we gave George and Dianne kudos for putting together this wonderful trip. The next morning, we had our last meal together and said goodbye. All but 2 people took the shuttle back to Dublin.



Submitted by Marilyn Chastek