

## A good start to our Ireland journey by Tim Allen

It was now real. Enough people had said 'Yes' to make this worth pursuing. We knew that some would not be able to go with us, no matter how much they wanted, but we knew that others would be able to.

I found the travel agent I wanted to work with, and the plans began to formalize. It would be a ten-day, nine-night tour on the West Coast and it would include many of Ireland's best places (there are numerous choices). We thought our high number of travelers would be about forty people but our realistic number was twenty-thirty.

E-mail communication was the norm, but occasional calls were made. With about six months to go, we had a tentative list of travelers, and soon the money was being collected. We ended up with five of the original lacrosse team players, seven sets of parents, two siblings, and a boyfriend. His name was O'Brien – we were confident that he could hold his own, particularly in Ireland!

Three friends of mine were interested in joining our trip and the field was set. A perfect size for the trip – twenty-five people on a 50-seat bus. Plenty of room for everyone.

We were flying from several places in the USA – Boston, Burlington, Philadelphia, Newark, New York City. But we'd all be landing in the same place on July 25 – Shannon.

It almost worked out perfectly. Except for rain that delayed a connector flight from Burlington, Vermont, we all made it to Ireland on time. As people arrived, we waited in the second floor cafeteria at Shannon (many of you can picture that, I'm sure). We had twenty-one people collected together in less time than I had anticipated. Somebody left a coat on a

plane, but only my luggage was missing. Not enough to worry about. Let's get going.

I'll admit as we left Shannon, it was a very interesting feeling that came over me. Here was a group of people that in effect had followed me to Ireland, and I really began to focus on making this trip work for all of them. I mean Ireland would work its magic, it always does, but there would be logistical issues, decisions to make along the way, communication issues, changes in itinerary, weather to deal with. I'm not the most focused guy in the world, and I needed to be focused now.

But they are all my friends, and it couldn't go wrong.

We headed straight to Thoor Ballylee, the summer home of W. B. Yeats. This is Mary's favorite place in Ireland – a combo platter of love of literature, off the beaten track, nobody goes there, our own secret little place. Our bus driver said he hadn't been there in ten years.

We had a great low-key start here. People are tired but this is a nice beginning activity. Then we drove through Coole Park to see the Autograph Tree. Yeats is starting us off well.

Next we went to Rathbaun Farm – something I wasn't sure about but that worked great. What we needed today was low-key, no-effort-required stuff. Everybody is exhausted after only two (or less) hours sleep. At Rathbaun Farm, we enjoyed meeting the sheep, learning about them, and watching the border collies herd them. This was followed by their world-renowned scones and the best tea I've ever had. Does it just taste better in Ireland or was that tea great?

Our first two stops were perfect.

Two cultures of Ireland – the complexity of literature and the simplicity of the farming life.

Time to go to Galway. We drove the short distance to Galway and found the Park House Hotel, a great little spot just a block from Eyre Square.

Resting, napping, relaxing, shopping, walking around became the order of the day. We met at 7:00 for the fine dinner at the hotel, and then the 'going-out' crowd got to work. Rick led the 'restaurant search' committee looking for the perfect place for tomorrow night's dinner. I led the 'let's find a good pub and some Irish music' crowd.

After touring the night life area of Galway, we selected a pub that seemed to have a traditional flavor to it. Of course it was full to the brim, and, while we searched for some floor space not too far from the seisiun musicians, I wondered whether we'd find our 'restaurant search' committee buddies. It didn't seem likely as we were camped in the back of a pub and there are so many pubs to choose from.

Of course as soon as I had ruled it out, I heard Rick's resonant voice. The 'restaurant search' committee had chosen the same pub as us and had found us. How did you find us, I asked? Rick, a smart man, said they were trying to figure out which pub Tim Allen would choose, and this one was their best guess. Wow.

Am I that predictable, or was Ireland working its magic already?

We got closer to the musicians, my friends and I, and the music provided a nice backdrop to the feeling I was having. This group of people was in Ireland together and we were at an Irish seisiun in Galway.

Time to pinch myself. I did.

*The articles on this page and the next are by several of the students who studies in Irelnad.*

## **A visit to Sligo and Innisfree create memories by Jessica Leary**

Late last semester, just before finals, I received an e-mail from Dr. Laura McNeil that gave me an opportunity I never thought would be possible. This e-mail offered me an opportunity to study in Ireland. Of course, I gladly accepted!

While in Ireland, we attended lectures on four different areas of Irish culture: Early Irish History; Modern Irish History, Archaeology, and Irish Literature. It is one thing to take these courses but it's a whole other thing to study them in Ireland. The grass really has a thousand different shades of green, the people really are as nice as can be, and the pubs

are a lot of fun!

In our course on literature we studied the works of one of Ireland's greatest poets, W.B. Yeats. Throughout his life Yeats came back to Innisfree Lake and wrote beautiful poetry about the area. While we stayed in Sligo, we frequently took boat tours of the lake at Innisfree, which we could also overlook from our college dormitory windows.

The captain of the boat showed us many of the locations that inspired Yeats' writing. It was amazing to realize that we were seeing with our own eyes some of the places he depicted in his many of his most

famous poems. Indeed, I acquired a new appreciation of Yeats' work as a result of our visits around Innisfree. The lake was so beautiful I can understand how Yeats—and others—would be inspired to write about it. We later traveled to Yeats' grave at Drumcliff. I was honored to have the chance to pay my respects to one of Ireland's greatest poets.

I am very grateful that I was given the opportunity to travel and study in Ireland. I believe this was one of those formative experiences that I'll remember for the rest of my life. I hope to someday return to Ireland, to re-visit the things I saw and learned there, and to learn even more about the people

## **The Sligo Seven show how Americans have fun By Ben Masse**

This summer's study abroad experience in Sligo exposed Elms college students to lectures on Irish history and literature. However, what I found fascinating about my experience was that the intellectual discussions continued outside the classroom. We played Gaelic sports and learned a little about Irish music and dance. In fact, some of the liveliest discussions of Ireland and its culture occurred in the pubs, often with the participation of our professors. While the traditional classroom is a worthy approach to education, listening to local Irish people discuss their own country and its history provided an entirely new dimension to my understanding of Ireland, something that would not have been possible without an extended stay in a town such as Sligo.

During the course of two weeks, I got to know many locals, and the best place to meet Irish people is in the pubs. The first time we went into Sligo town, our Elms College group, the "Sligo Seven," attended a karaoke night at "Stables," one of the local pubs. When we first arrived, around 7 pm, there were about ten or twenty people already in the pub, none of whom were taking part in the singing. We ordered our pints of Guinness and settled in. Before long we began to rock the stage and belt out the most American songs we could, such as "American Pie" and "Sweet Caroline" which were applauded and seemingly admired by the locals. By the time the pub closed, around 2.00 am, the place was jam-packed with customers and entertainment.

The next week, we decided to return to this same pub around the same time for another night of karaoke. However, this time, we were met with an already jam-packed pub. Over a pint, our Modern Irish History professor, Professor John (otherwise known as "Kramer"), suggested that the place had become crowded so early because, being a small community, word got around Sligo that some Americans were in town and knew how to have a good time. The quality of both lectures and the accommodation at the Innisfree Convention Center was excellent, but I'll always remember how the people of Sligo made us feel welcome, and gave us a deeper and richer appreciation of Irish culture and society than we might have had otherwise.

## Serious study and fun in Ireland by Melissa Fijal

Saint Angela's College offered four sections of study on our trip to Sligo: Literature, Archaeology, Early Irish history, and my favorite, Modern Irish history. The latter class was exciting and the professor was extremely interested in the subject matter. We discussed the 1916 Easter Rising, the political parties of Ireland, the conflict in Northern Ireland, the development of the Republic of Ireland, and the emergence of the Celtic Tiger economy. Throughout the two weeks we were able to cover so much and I walked

away with a lot of new information that has and will continue to help me with my Irish Studies minor. While in Sligo I also had the opportunity to go surfing. Jeremiah Lynch, Director of the Celtic Studies Program at St. Angela's College, organized many activities to balance the classroom aspect with the many things Ireland has to offer. We traveled to Strandhill Beach and had a two hour surfing lesson. By the end of the two hours, everyone was successful in staying up at least once and had experienced something completely new. I am very happy I was able to go surfing and I hope to try it again one day!



Photos: The Sligo Seven



## A piece of Ireland's archeological experience by Justina Thengumthuil

For someone who had no prior knowledge of the history, especially the prehistory, of Ireland, it came as a great surprise to me that this island is a major site for archaeological research. As I learned more about some of the archaeological monuments, I could not but be intrigued by the legends associated with these sites.

One fact we learned was that the places explored involved a lot of hiking. For a girl who was not in shape, this trip covered my workout for the next two years. As much as I would like to brag to everyone about us

hiking up several mountains in Ireland, hiking these hills was quite a shock to our systems. The peaks of these hills were at a very high elevation, which caused my ears to pop on several occasions.

One of the sites we explored was Carrowkeel, in Sligo. The Carrowkeel complex holds fourteen cairns, believed to be constructed between 3000 and 2000 BCE; however they were continuously used until 1500 BCE. Each cairn had its own qualities, but generally they are built from limestone and hold small chambers. Here, these monuments

were used as a place of worship to various gods. If you're lucky, you might find a small smooth white stone, used as an offering, within these tiny chambers, just as one of my fellow students, Ben Massé, he did. Fearing bad luck, however, we forced Ben to return it to the cairn in which he had found it. Besides exploring some amazing archaeological sites, one thing that always took our breath away was the view from the tops of these hills. It doesn't matter how many cameras you have, or what pictures you take. They don't do justice to these incredible landscapes.

## Special events hosted over the years brings audiences

In the last several issues of this newsletter I have summarized some of the history of the Center through the events and programs. In a recent edition I focused on the importance of the Irish language classes offered through the Elms College. In the last issue I wrote about our programs for children.

In this issue I will write about some of “special” events. The entertainment, concerts and music events regularly draw the largest number of attendees. And well they should, because they are crowd pleasers.

The longest running event we have had is Christmas with an Irish Touch, which we began in 1999. Every year Our Lady’s Chapel is full to capacity, where the priests at the liturgy have included Bishop Joseph Maguire, Fathers Francis Sullivan, James McCurry, Mark Stelzer, John McDonagh and Msgr. Christopher Connelly. We have hosted the entertainment in several locations on the campus: Berchmans Rotunda, Alumnae Library Theater, and the Dooley Campus Center Dining Hall. The other event that has become popular over the last several years is the Irish Tea Party in March. Hosted by emcee Mary Franz, attendees have the opportunity to hear some of the popular Irish music and songs, while seeing our local talent on parade. Both Christmas and the

Tea Party showcase the children from Celtic Adventures for Kids.

Over the years we have sponsored concerts with local musicians: Bo Fitzgerald, either with the Yankcelts or with his smaller group of friends; and Spencil Hill (Desmond and Sean Burke with Naka Ishii.)

Other concerts have included: the Poor Clares, Teresa Kane, Cathy Ryan and her band, the CitySingers of Hartford and Deirdre Reilly and the Nashville Show band in a dinner/dance. This event celebrated County Cork with an address given by Cork native Mae O’Driscoll who highlighted some of the history of her county.

For several years we conducted a fundraiser in the fall for the Billy Riordan Memorial Trust. In 2003 a group of Irish musicians who had performed at the Big E in the Young Building offered a program at the Elms: Aine Ui Laoithe, Eilin NiChearna and Mazz O’Flaherty. They were joined by Sean Leahy, Assad Rahan, and Fred White. The next two years, local musicians provided the music for the same cause: Tim Donoghue, Bill Dempsey, and Bo Fitzgerald. One year, two other singers, Kathleen Grady and Al DiPietro were added to the line-up. Maureen Ziskowski has often brought her dancers from the McDermott Academy of Irish

Dance. One year Suzanne Strempek Shea read from her book and Fran Ryan presented a fashion show.

In addition to our own monthly sessions with musicians of the area, one year we hosted a session by Comnaltas Ceoltiri Eireiann. Some of the local musicians who regularly play at the Elms sessions and as headliners often have provided background music before or during an event.

Some of the musicians who have been faithful over the years include: Tim Donoghue, Bill Dempsey, the late Ed Casey, Kevin Sullivan, and Ralph Len.

For five years we hosted a special event—a member brunch in June. Some years we welcomed a speaker: Congressman Richard Neal, Irish Consul, Boston, Isolde Moylan and Dr. James Mullen (Elms president at the time). In 2003 we enjoyed music with Teresa Kane, and the following year, Bo Fitzgerald and Friends. (That year we moved to the Wherehouse? in Holyoke because the Elms dining room was undergoing renovation.)

Another special event featured the Belmullet of County Mayo. Local Irish immigrants from the area shared their recollections of their home in Ireland with stories and pictures.

How many did you attend?



**Local musicians perform at the Elms.**