



The Fourth Kingdom



If you have been following these newsletters since we first came to the United Kingdom of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, then you know that one of our great joys has been that our home in the Scottish Highlands has provided us with a base to explore the British Islands and Europe. Through these newsletters you will have seen much of Scotland and England, as well as bits of Wales. Finally, this autumn, we visited the fourth kingdom of the UK, Northern Island. Upon arrival, it became immediately apparent why Ireland is referred to as the Emerald Isle. There are so many amazing shades of green, probably because of all the rain. It rained on us multiple times every day, producing more rainbows in our five day stay than I would normally expect to see in a year.



We arrived by ferry from Cairnryn in southern Scotland into Larne, north of Belfast, and immediately began a trek along the Causeway Coastal Route that follows the north coast. The road is twisty and curvy and has some very unique scenes along the way.



Are those sheep or boulders along the side of the road?
Definitely sheep.



There were a number of unique buildings (both new and abandoned) along the way, and also quite a few churches (both new and in ruins) that we passed.





And the walking trail to get there has some incredible views as well



Then we arrived at the number one destination in Northern Ireland: The Giant's Causeway. This amazing collection of rock columns left over from cooling volcanic lava eons ago, is one of the most visited spots in the country.



Further along the coastal route is the ruin of Dunluce Castle, built in the 16th century.



And even further along is Downhill Demesne, the 18th century mansion and gardens of the eccentric Earl Bishop. The garden is entered through the gothic Bishop's Gate.



A hike through the garden leads to the ruins of the mansion, perched on a plain above the coast. From the front it looks like a manor house.



From the back it looks like a castle.



There are intricate stone carvings on many of the walls. The Mausoleum stands alone on a hill overlooking the mansion ruins.



The most unique structure on the estate, however, is the Mussenden Temple, built to resemble the Temple of Vesta in Italy. It once housed the bishop's extensive library, and it sits right at the edge of the cliff, overlooking the sea. A fire was kept constantly burning in the basement of the building to keep it warm enough for use at any time and to keep the moisture of the sea from affecting the books.



Our explorations then took us to the city with two names: Derry/Londonderry. Which name you use depends on which side of the Catholic/Protestant or Nationalist/Unionist debate you fall on. Visitors like us, are urged to call it by both names: Derry-Londonderry, so as not to offend anyone when we don't know their political or religious persuasion.

You probably recall that there was a time, not all that many years ago, when the two sides fought openly in the streets. That period of fighting and bloodshed, referred to in the UK as "The Troubles" only came to an end with the Good Friday Agreement signed in 1998. But there are signs that the argument still lies close beneath the surface of Northern Ireland.

When you walk into shops in the city, you can instantly tell on which side of the argument the owners stand. Some shops have the typical tourist t-shirts proclaiming that you have been to Derry and have memorial souvenirs commemorating the officers of the Provisional Irish Government, who were executed by the English after the uprising in 1916. Other shops sell t-shirts saying that you have been to Londonderry and speak of the long historical tie of Ulster, Northern Ireland to England and the Government in London.



Derry-Londonderry was historically a walled city and the walls still stand today, making it the only walled city in Europe with the walls still completely intact. In fact, the walls, built in 1613, were never breached. They stood firm through a siege in 1649 when Royalist supporters of King Charles tried to take the city from the Parliamentarian Army and again in 1689 when the army of overthrown King James II tried to take the city from supporters of the newly crowned king of England, William of Orange. The walls were again used by British troops during The Troubles in the 1970s-1990s to try to quell the violence between the two sides. The sheer thickness of the walls is one of the reasons they were never breached, in many places they are wider than the streets of the old city, as can be seen in this picture.



Commerce in and out of the old city went through a series of well fortified gates, such as the Ferryquay Gate and the Bishop's Gate.



The Castle Gate and the Magazine Gate.



The Shipquay Gate, which allowed access to the river, allowing supplies in even during seige. And the smallest of the gates, the Butcher's Gate, which was used by the city's butchers. It proved to be the weakest link in the city walls, and was very nearly blown to bits during the bombardment of the second siege, but the troops manning it still held firm.



There were eight bastions containing cannon located around the walls. And historic cannon are still stationed in those locations.





This one overlooks St Eugene's Cathedral, outside the walls



This cannon overlooks the amazing Guild Hall, just outside the walls, which is an amazingly ornate structure with wonderful stained glass.



Watch Towers were located at various points along the wall. This one is attached the extra tall "Church Wall" which was added to keep cannonballs from reaching the cathedral just inside the walls.



St. Columb's Cathedral, is named after the same saint that we in Scotland call St. Columba. The cathedral is Anglican, and was built in 1633 with funds raised in London.



Other churches within the walls are St. Augustine's which sits on the site where St. Columba built an abbey in about 543 AD, before leaving to establish yet another abbey on the island of Iona, in Scotland.



And this Presbyterian church was funded by Queen Mary of England in 1690, in recognition of how the

followers had supported her and her husband, William of Orange, in the War of the Two Kings.



Within the city walls, new and old architecture meld together to create some interesting buildings.



Two of the more interesting structures outside of the walls are the remains of the prison, where English troops kept prisoners captured during the Irish rebellions.



And the Peace Bridge, built in 2011, after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. It connects the predominantly Unionist east bank of the river with the largely Nationalist west bank.



We then visited the Ulster-American Folk Park, which follows the path of immigrant families from crofting villages in the north of Ireland to the big Irish cities, and then onto ships bound for America, landing at the big port cities on the eastern seaboard and thence to building a new life on farms in the east and mid-west. There were lots of interesting re-constructed buildings and shops. This blacksmith's shop was quite interesting, and a bit scary, since all those sparks were going on under a thatched roof that would be very susceptible to fire.



The old village shops had all kinds of interesting displays of old wares.



And the printer showed how the early newspapers were produced.



The homes the immigrants built in America were a far cry from the tiny crofts they had in Ireland.



On one day we crossed the border into the Republic of Ireland and explored Donegal.



Our first stop was Grianan of Aileach, a Neolithic hill-fort dating back to about 1700 BC.



Then we traveled on up the Inishowen Peninsula to the northern most part of the island of Ireland. We stopped at Dunree Fort. This defensive position, overlooking the waters of Lough Swilly, has long been a defensive position. From here in 1798, the British defeated a French fleet bringing aid to one of the Irish rebellions. It was used in the Napoleonic Wars as a defensive post, and again in the first world war. After the Republic of Ireland gained independence, it was passed into Irish hands in 1938.



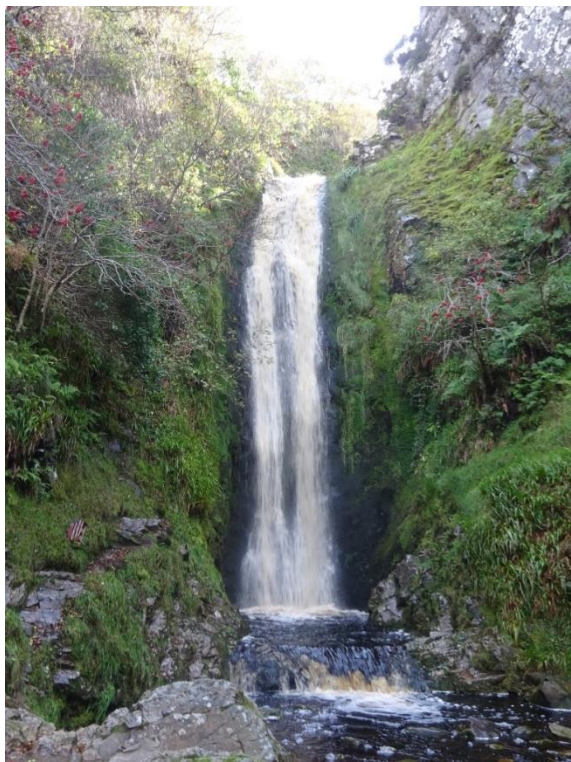
A number of watching posts can be found overlooking the harbor.



We then traveled up through Mamore Gap and stopped at the shrine dedicated to St. Eignes' Holy Well. Every year there is a pilgrimage from the coast to the shrine which is quite a trek up this hill.



Then on to Glenevin Waterfall.



The northern most point is Malin Head. It's more recent claim to fame is that it was used as a filming site in the final Star Wars movie.



This watch tower has been used in the Napoleonic wars and both world wars as a watch post.



On our final day, on the drive back to the ferry at Larne, we went cross-country and stopped to visit the 50 foot tall Round Tower at Antrim. Irish Round Towers are early mediaeval stone towers originally used as bell towers, although some may have been used for additional purposes. The one at Antrim has an additional legend, which if I understand correctly, involved throwing suspected witches from the top of the tower. If you were a witch, you were able to fly to the nearby witch's stone and save yourself. If not, you fell to your death. But at least you weren't a witch!

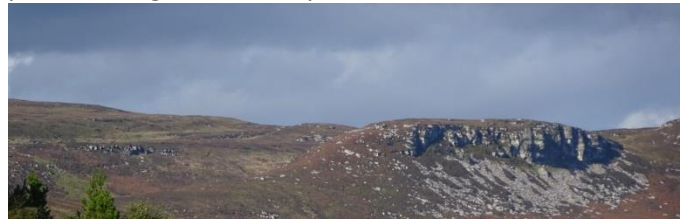


Lest you think all of our explorations this fall have been in Ireland, we also went on a Highland Archeological Festival hike through the clearance village of Doll,

where we got a feel for how the crofters had to live after they were forced off of the land they had worked for generations during the clearances. They were forced to move in May of 1821 and before the harsh Highland winter set in, they had to clear fields of large stones, from which these dividing walls were built.



And then had to construct houses and plant crops in order to survive the coming winter. It was a cruel period of Highland history.



The scenery around the Brora River, however, was spectacular.



Life has returned to some semblance of normal here in the Highlands, and we are finally able to get out and see friends at various functions. Everyone seems glad to be out of their working-from-home sweat pants and into civilized clothing again. We certainly are.

