

Tuesday, May 5, 2009

Four people usually drove in Darrell’s van which was always in the lead. The remaining six went with Chris in his larger van. The leaders kept in touch by walky-talky until one battery charger ceased charging, something that was only determined after several days of silence.

We passengers switched places each day, giving everyone a turn at one of the front seats and not too many turns in the bumpy, cold back seat of Chris’s van. Sheila had her own maps and enjoyed following the route, very occasionally providing some useful information when requested by the drivers.

The drive on Tuesday was a long one. Our speed dropped considerably after we left the four lane highway. We crossed the border between Northern Ireland and the



George, Barb, Lola, Maynard, Elsbeth and Nancy

Republic of Ireland about twenty-five kilometres west of Sligo. While Chris inquired about a good restaurant or pub we looked at metal silhouettes of fiddlers and the plaque naming musician who had “left their native Sligo and took with them a



standard of music that enriched their new homes throughout the world”. We shared the pub with a group of priests who sat as far away as possible from our boisterous laughter.



Chris, Barb, Maynard, Darrell, Betty and George



Lola, Betty, Nancy, George, Elsbeth, George McLaughlin, Owen

At Sligo we turned south. As the crow flies, we were only 115 km from Galway, but the roads were curvy and hilly. Sheila was in Darrell’s van and in possession of a large scale map of Galway. There we navigated a succession of roundabouts and headed 25 km NW. We turned west on-to a very long, very narrow lane only to find we had the wrong establishment. We backtracked to a very obscure entrance to Ross Castle. We were met by the owner, Elizabeth McLaughlin.

This was not the Ross Castle in County Kerry which surrendered to the forces of Cromwell. This one was built after Galway was granted a royal charter by Richard III in 1484 as a reward for its loyalty to the Crown in the face of attacks by the fearsome O’Flaherties, the scourge of the Rosses. The Rosses were related to the Lynches, the most important family in Galway for three centuries. When the McLaughlins bought the building circa 1984 it was in ruins.

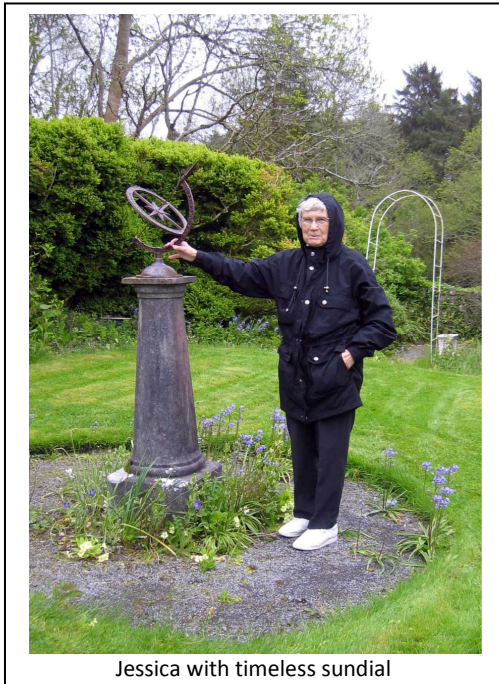


George M, Lola, Elsbeth, George in “paradise”

Octogenarian George McLaughlin is an MIT chemical engineer and Harvard business grad who made a lot of money in

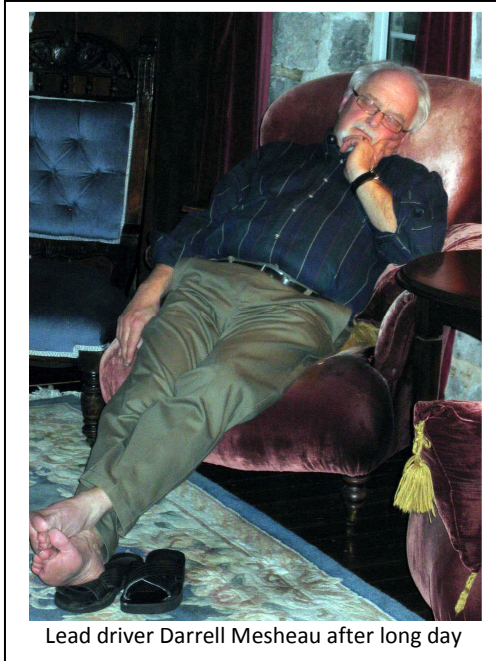
refurbishing mainframe computers. His second wife, Elizabeth, had been a concert

pianist. Their daughter was school aged when they came to Ireland and she now works in Dublin in securities.



Jessica with timeless sundial

Mr. McLaughlin walked with a cane due to two recent strokes, but nonetheless was delighted to show us the extensive grounds which included an enclosed quadrangle, and two walled gardens. His paradise was a formal garden of several acres, and beyond that was an orchard that once grew grapes with the roots outside of an enclosure and the fruit ripening under glass. Also an ingenious greenhouse captured and recycled the rainwater and was heated by a peat furnace.



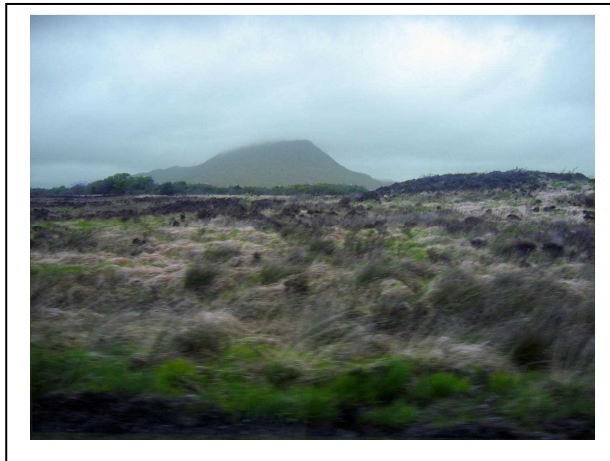
Lead driver Darrell Mesheau after long day

While some of us were exploring the grounds, Chris was cooking the first of many meals. The kitchen and dining-living room were on the top floor of what had once been the stables. There was room for 12 to sleep in that wing, but rather than have Darrell and Chris share a room, we Washburns were given our own apartment separate from the rest. The meal turned into a 72nd birthday party for Owen. The leaders had not been to Ireland before, and distances took longer to drive than anticipated. Everyone was ready for bed soon after the meal.



Wednesday, May 6

Like the Ever Ready Bunny Chris never stopped. He was out running before he cooked us breakfast. Later we went through some wild and wonderful country on the way to Clifden.



There were few places to stop and pictures were difficult to take from a moving van.

Clifden is near the site of Marconi's Radio Station and near where Alcock and Brown crash landed in 1919 after they flew 1800 miles non-stop in 16 hours from Newfoundland to win the £10,000 Daily Mail prize.

We must have had lunch in Clifden, but Sheila forgets because she was so captivated by the jewellery making shop and store, O'Dalaigh, that Owen bought her a white gold pendant for their 48th wedding anniversary. It was very cold and most if not all of the men, including Owen, bought handsome headgear. We returned to Ross Castle via the Sky Road.



Betty, Elsbeth, tourist and Maynard at jewellery store



Sky Road from Clifden – source Google

We timed our return to Ross Castle in order to have tea and cookies with our hosts at 4 p.m. This included a tour of the tower, which with the basement, was five storeys in the back half. Elizabeth was her own architect and its likeness to the original castle is uncertain. The windows are double-glazed and the interior is gracious with many antiques carefully selected from two continents. The McLaughlins, who both had Irish roots, were as fascinating as their “castle”.

If there was a stopping place on the precipitous Sky Road we neglected to take pictures there. These two have been scabbed off the internet. We were amazed that sheep could even get a toehold on the steep hills. After we turned south towards our hotel we passed near and had a swift glance at Kylemore Castle. The church and abbey houses a secondary girl’s boarding school to which the McLaughlins sent their daughter.



Kylemore Castle – source Google



Elizabeth McLaughlin, Barb, Owen and Darrell

pictures taken early that morning, one from inside our apartment, two of the formal garden and two on the grounds outside of the “Castle”. Owen and Darrell are the distant figures in two of the pictures. Chapter 3 describes our southward travels.

Chris cooked us another delicious meal that night. We were content to stay put. We were glad to have a quiet evening to reread an old novel in a bookcase in the apartment, study bird books and catch up on our sleep.

Thursday, May 7, 2009 we rose early to take pictures and look for European birds. It was the sunniest period we had experienced so far. The next page is a collage of



Maynard, Lola, Jessie, Betty, Darrell and Barb in the Library.



View of Ross Castle from the Driveway - our vans to the left



R to L - quadrangle from apt. door, formal garden looking north and then east towards orchard and finally Lola and main house.



On Thursday, May 7, we bid goodbye to the McLaughlins and their Ross Castle.
For more information on the accommodations go to www.rosscastle.com