

A NINE DAY DIARY

OR...

AN INCIDENTAL JOURNEY

Tues 30th Aug - Weds 7th Sept. 2016

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A brief outline of our original plan: **Tuesday 30th Aug:** - Drive north to catch the evening session of Day 1, Ireland v HK - Intercontinental Cup @ Stormont. **Weds – Friday:-** Days 2-4 of the same match. A golden opportunity to see some multi day cricket. **Saturday and Sunday:-** set aside for exploring, **Monday:-** two t20s in Bready (just south of Derry), **Tuesday:-** one more t20 match before heading home - staying over in Claregalway before the homeward leg **Weds 7th.**

TUESDAY

So... great progress on the first day, unusually (for us) getting away early enough to be on the road for lunch to be taken at a Dublin hotel just prior to getting on the M50 (the Dublin by-pass) and hey presto, we're progressing nicely on the M1 for Belfast. Looking well on schedule and justifiably smug!

And so it begins! Battery light on. Heck! What to do? We soldier on, limping into Dundalk – LOTS of lights on now! We know a good spot to get assistance. We get assistance – a diagnosis - it's the alternator - change of plan - stay in Dundalk overnight, ready to pick up our car in the morning.

WEDNESDAY

11.00am. Alternator not replaced yet - should be ready 3.00pm. 3.00pm? Replacement not reliable. Oh no! Another overnight? Panic! We ring our insurance company - get cleared to hire a car. We hire a car - which means getting a taxi to drive 30 mins South to Drogheda - before we can go North again. We arrive in Bangor (County Down) in our hire car around 7.30pm. So not only the evening session on Tuesday – but all three sessions on Wednesday lost. I'm struggling to find any more hair to tear out! We treat ourselves to wining and dining to compensate, a truly wonderful meal at the Salty Dog (about 200 yards from our B&B) – top quality food including a brilliant cheeseboard AND with a fabulous and comforting vintage port.

THURSDAY

Finally, we arrive for a full days cricket... except the rain (obviously!) has arrived with us. Instead of 3 sessions - we had about 8 - all of them painfully short. The best sunshine of the day was reserved for the hour when the umpires decided lunch should taken. Never mind, Ireland were well in control of the match - so despite interruptions - our lads were in a good place - more than that - we had been given access to 'hospitality' by a young cricketing friend. We ate with the movers and shakers (free of charge) and made some new VERY interesting friends. In the evening, we ate out of Asda - sat by the harbour at Donadee - and called into a bar for a glass before heading back to the B&B. The barman, noticing we were the only people on the premises at that stage, asked us what we'd like on the telly - we said thanks but no thanks - and then in banter I offered:- *the background music is pretty good, but have you got any Mozart?* His response? *Anything particular?* Less than two minutes later I was listening to Mozart Symphony No.38 in D - The Prague! Occasionally - you stumble on stuff you can't buy!

FRIDAY

The weather was better, Ireland made slightly hard work of closing out the match against Hong Kong - but eventually the crucial win was secured. 70 runs the margin, but Ireland retain their 100% win record in their current campaign in this vitally important tournament.



George Dockrell (bowling) and Tim Murtagh (Rt) who each took 5 wickets across the two innings in the victory over Hong-Kong.

We had a different B&B that night. In Lisbane, we found an extraordinary place with a mini concert room (seriously!!) built as an extension to a two story stone built cottage, boasting a view of a nearby lake and across to The Mourne Mountains in the distance. Beautifully furnished and appointed, the crowning glory was a Yamaha C3 piano, one of the TOP models. The eccentric landlord was a retired engineer who'd designed the room not just for the view - but for the acoustics also.

On another tack, we had earlier been tipped off about a lovely drive which explores the eastern shore of Strangford Loch - so we tried it, and were not disappointed. A perfect excursion prior to heading back to the nearby Poachers Pocket for yet another superb meal.

SATURDAY

I had the opportunity to play the Yamaha C3 before breakfast and the room did have a truly sumptuous acoustic, perfectly suited to their gorgeous piano. This was such an unexpected treat, ten minutes of PURE self-indulgence, followed by a great breakfast. We were well set to return to Drogheda to pick up our car which was now ready, and to take the hire car back to base. Car collected at 12 noon and all is fine once more... we spun up to junction 14 and took the N33 for Ardee, heading towards Derry by the N2. Approaching a roundabout (roughly 2 miles along) we slowed - as you do - when a jeep pulling a small trailer (for sheep or goats) pulled out in front of us with no warning whatsoever. Rude driving, (extremely so) but no harm done, we were travelling slowly enough anyway preparing for the roundabout. He was struggling with a puncture (or worse?) on his nearside trailer wheel. You'd sympathise! He took the straight ahead exit for Ardee (same as us) and then pulled left - we assumed to park up again and have another look at his problem - we were still travelling quite slowly as we pulled past him when again - without ANY indication whatsoever, he decided to swing right in an attempt to make a U-turn - he was completely unaware we were there and scraped all four of our nearside panels. This was roughly 30 minutes after collecting the car from repair! You may find this hard to believe, but... we were **NOT** happy! Another conversation with our insurance people - and a further 90 minute wait to get it checked and declared road worthy. Finally, the journey north resumed around 2.30pm. 4.00pm? Monaghan! We found an oasis of tranquillity and sanity and perfect coffee in Monaghan. Much needed, much appreciated.

SUNDAY

Wake up in Derry. Sunday was a good day! Well, surprisingly - it started with rain. We were not daunted - after all, it's been a bit changeable weather wise this year. So... we head for Limavady en route for the Greencastle ferry which traverses the head of Loch Foyle - between UK and Donegal - then onwards to explore the Wild Atlantic Way right up to Malin Head.

At the first major roundabout, about 400 yards from our hotel, we have a small delay for the Derry Half Marathon runners - great - we got to see them in action - we proceed round the round about - ahhh - the Limavady Road is closed for a cycle race! A helpful policeman gives us a great alternative route - but one which we eventually discover is part of the cycle race route. So we need to slow down... once... twice... thrice... and morce... for the safety of crew and athletes - fair enough. So we've hardly started our journey - but we've seen two major events taking place. It's all good - the weather is brightening - we're soon up to the ferry - sailing across Loch Foyle, and we're back in the Republic! Beautiful journeying - Donegal is special! At Malin Head we are puzzled - but in a good way - it's Sunday 4th September, we're at the most northerly point of Ireland and everyone is in summer clothes because it's SO warm! We pass through Buncrana on the way back to Derry and stop for coffee at 'The Drift Inn' - formerly this was Buncrana Railway station. It was packed - so not the right moment for enquiring about memorabilia - but a small if tenuous connection with railway history for me. Arriving back in Derry we decide to 'Walk The Walls' - rather a touristy thing to do - but a fascinating one - we were in good time and good form, so we walked the Peace Bridge too. If you visit Derry and have opportunity I would strongly recommend a walk over that bridge. A simple thing in some ways - inspirational in others.



MONDAY

Bready is only the second cricket ground we've visited in 'The North'. Stormont has become a regular haunt for us - so it was good to experience a match in the North West; fresh surroundings. It's Monday morning - so of course - it's raining. No rain was forecast - but it's raining drizzly stuff. So the ladies match in the morning is shortened from twenty overs each to ten for each side. A wee bit token - but the Irish women prevail over the Bangladesh women. That's a fantastic result for our girls. In the men's afternoon match against Hong Kong, Ireland are experimenting with three new international caps including 16 year old Josh Little. I'm delighted - his is a name I've noticed more than once, and our squad badly needs an injection of new blood. We were outplayed by Hong Kong - and though that's not a good thing - it's a long overdue experiment and all three of the youngsters impressed greatly.

Monday night we eat at 'The Exchange' - it's one of the trendy places to eat in Derry. Fabulous - simply fabulous! And that's another box ticked off the 'things to do list' Val was given by one of our cricket fan friends.



Lucy O'Reilly - bowling in the win over Bangladesh.

TUESDAY

We planned to stay for the second ladies t20... but guess what. Overnight rain had rendered the ground unsafe... and the match was abandoned without a ball bowled. We said our goodbyes and headed south for Claregalway - we'd decided to break the long journey home at a tried and tested hotel. Good decision - it was better than we remembered!

WEDNESDAY

I have a chore to complete before the final leg. There's a piano to inspect for one of my star pupils - it's a possible transfer within the family - my job is to check whether it is worth moving or not. Sadly it isn't - so I have the uncomfortable task of informing my pupils uncle that this piano is most probably not economically repairable. Ouch! Still - the truth must out - the bullet must be bitten. Job done, we take the N67 through Clare - stop off for a toasty at The Falls in Ennystimon - before driving on to Killimer to take my favourite ferry trip and head home via Listowel. Some good news transpires? The naughty man who so foolishly tried to do a U-turn - (rather than just drive round the roundabout!) has accepted liability for the incident. All WE have to do is agree details with the insurance company's assessor.

Oh - and I have some sleep to catch up with!