

A Weekend in Kerry

28th-30th August 2020

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On the weekend of 28th-30th August a number of Irish Impers gathered in Killarney, County Kerry for a great weekend's craic organised by James & Sheila Looney. We had seven Imps, an MG Roadster and two modern vehicles in our convoy.

Our base for the weekend was the Torc Hotel on the outskirts of Killarney. We all started gathering on the Friday afternoon/evening where we had a lovely meals and drinks while catching up with each other (maintaining social distancing of course). It had been the first time we had gathered together since the Christmas dinner/AGM last November.

Saturday morning, after a lovely breakfast, we headed for Gougane Barra. We set off on the N22 through Glenflesk and Loo Bridge onto the R569 to Morley Bridge and we turned left towards Top of the Coom where we had a short stop. Top of Coom is officially Ireland's highest pub (OSI verified) at over 1045 feet above sea level and it has some breathtaking views.

We then headed through Coolea towards Ballyvourney. The films *Song for Raggy Boy* (2003) and

Wind That Shakes The Barley (2006) were both partially filmed in Ballyvourney. Turning right we drove to Renaniree and on to Ballygeary, before taking a right into Gougane Barra.

Gougane Barra is an area of immense wild scenery and natural beauty, with 137 acres at the edge of the Sheehy Mountains. St Finbarr Church is situated beside the lake. St Finbarr is the patron Saint of Cork, it's said that when he first arrived at the Gougane Barra he was so blown away that he decided to build a monastery on its grounds; some of the ruins are still in place today. After a walk around we headed over the Pass of Keimaneigh to Kealkill village, then onwards to Ballylickey for a lunch stop at Ouvane Falls Inn. Such a lovely setting in the background.

After lunch we headed towards Glengarriff turning short on to the Priest Leap road. What a road it turned out to be, our wee Imps got a good test up the steep hills. Priest Leap mountain pass is 25 miles of steep, narrow and winding roads with spectacular scenery. It is Ireland's highest mountain pass at 1500 feet from Coomhola in County Cork to Bonane in County Kerry. The mountain pass got its name according to legend, when Catholicism was prohibited by Ireland's British occupiers in penal times, a priest was on the way to a sick person in the area. As pursuing soldiers drew near, the priest managed to escape when his horse made a miraculous leap from the mountains summit to safely land near Bantry town hence the name Priest Leap road.

Coming down off the Priest Leap road we headed into Bonane Heritage Park. (See back cover. GP.)



Ballyfinnane
Hill Climb Memorial
Photo: Joanne Gillespie

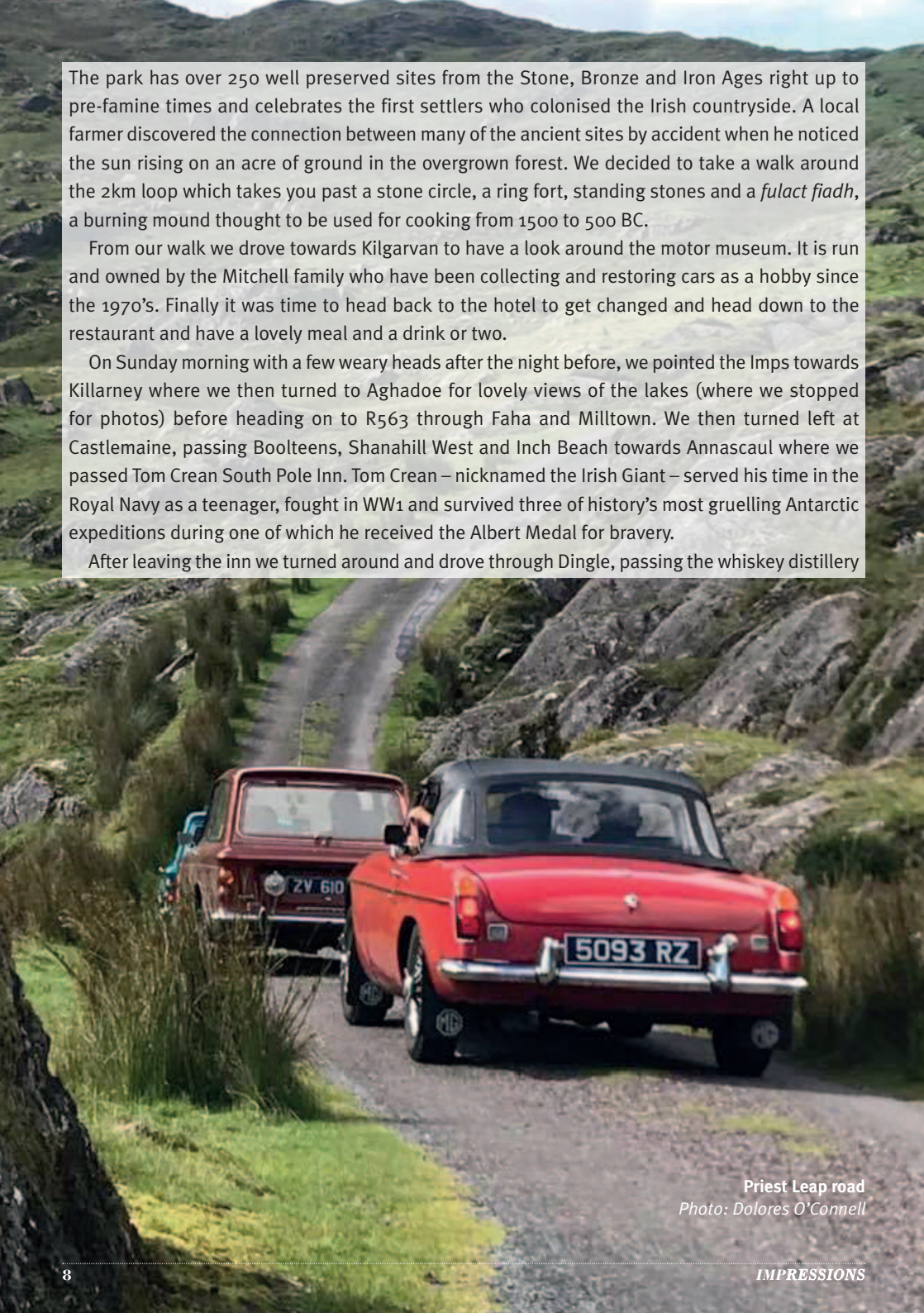
Enjoying the views on Sunday
Photo: Joanne Gillespie

The park has over 250 well preserved sites from the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages right up to pre-famine times and celebrates the first settlers who colonised the Irish countryside. A local farmer discovered the connection between many of the ancient sites by accident when he noticed the sun rising on an acre of ground in the overgrown forest. We decided to take a walk around the 2km loop which takes you past a stone circle, a ring fort, standing stones and a *fulact fiadh*, a burning mound thought to be used for cooking from 1500 to 500 BC.

From our walk we drove towards Kilgarvan to have a look around the motor museum. It is run and owned by the Mitchell family who have been collecting and restoring cars as a hobby since the 1970's. Finally it was time to head back to the hotel to get changed and head down to the restaurant and have a lovely meal and a drink or two.

On Sunday morning with a few weary heads after the night before, we pointed the Imps towards Killarney where we then turned to Aghadoe for lovely views of the lakes (where we stopped for photos) before heading on to R563 through Faha and Milltown. We then turned left at Castlemaine, passing Boolteens, Shanahill West and Inch Beach towards Annascaul where we passed Tom Crean South Pole Inn. Tom Crean – nicknamed the Irish Giant – served his time in the Royal Navy as a teenager, fought in WW1 and survived three of history's most gruelling Antarctic expeditions during one of which he received the Albert Medal for bravery.

After leaving the inn we turned around and drove through Dingle, passing the whiskey distillery



Priest Leap road
Photo: Dolores O'Connell

through Ventry village and on to Paidi O Se's pub for tea and scones. Replete, we headed towards Dunquin and into the Blasket Centre.

The Blasket Centre is a cultural and heritage centre/museum, honouring the unique community who lived on the remote Blasket Islands until their evacuation in 1953. After a walk around inside and out we followed the Sleah Head Drive Road towards Knockavrogeen and Kilfountain, before going to Dingle Skellig Hotel for a late lunch.

After lunch we made our way up to Conor's Pass which has 12 km of narrow twisting roads with breathtaking views of a glaciated landscape of mountains, corrie lakes and a sweeping valley. We stopped at the car park at the highest point of Conors Pass – the view is considered one of the most iconic viewing points of the Wild Atlantic Way.

Onwards we went towards Stradbally, Camp and on to Tralee via Blenderville where we passed Blenderville Windmill, the largest working windmill in Ireland. It was authentically restored to full working order in the 1980's.

After Tralee we pointed our Imps towards Farmer's Bridge and made our way to Ballyfinnane where the first motorsport event in Kerry took place called the Ballyfinnane Hill Climb on 15th July 1903. The Hon Charles Rolls (yes, that Rolls), driving a 80 hp Mors won the hill climb, taking home a silver cup and was watched by over 1000 people. We stopped at the monument commemorating the hill climb, and were able to drive along the narrow road where the Ballyfinnane Hill Climb took

Richard Gillespie, Kate & Jim Stephenson, Sheila & James Looney at Gougane Barra
Photo: Joanne Gillespie



place. There is a man half-dunked upside in a barrel to show where the hill climb started.

Ballyfinnane brought our adventures in Kerry to an end, and we headed back to the hotel for our last supper together, before leaving for home the next morning.

A great weekend was had by all.