

Ardfer
TOBAR NA MOLT

Cralee

Author's route

0 20 miles

DINGLE PENINSULA

Bally David
GALLARUS ORATORY

Anascaul Boolteens

Castlemaine

Killarney

MACGILLYCUDDY'S REEKS

Valencia Island

DROMORE CASTLE

Macroom

CORK

IVERAGH MTS

Kenmare

R. Lee

Gougane Barra L.

Shelby Mts

R. Bandon

STAGUE FORT

Lauragh Beava Peninsula

Bantry

Drimoleague

Tinoleague

Ballinspittle

Glanmore L.

Glengarriff

Healy Pass Sugar Loaf

Adrigole

Ballydoon

Leap

Unionhall

Rosscarbery

Glandore

CASTLE FREE

Clonakilly

Clonakilly Bay

Courtenasherry Bay

Mt. Gabriel

Skibbereen

COFFINERS COURT

Old Head of Kinsale

Ardara

Capel

Capel

Capel

Capel

Capel

Capel

Capel

Capel

Capel

Capel

HACOM TRAVELLING BEITONS

WEEK 6 (IRELAND)

ERIC NEUBY

Chapter 12

DUBLIN UNREVISITED



My intention was to write a chapter of the moral history of my country and I chose Dublin for the scene because that city seemed to me the centre of paralysis.

JAMES JOYCE. Letter to Grant Richards, 5 May 1905

Have a facial in a lofty room with marble fireplace . . .
and rococo ceiling . . .

Vogue. October 1986

It was March before the terrible winter of 1986 released its grip on us sufficiently to allow us even to contemplate biking in Ireland once more, and June before we actually got around to doing it, by which time the weather, at least in southern England, had gone into what looked like a terminal decline.

Meanwhile, studying the newly published Michelin map of Ireland which, in spite of its modest scale, was as big as a spinnaker and as intractable to handle in any sort of breeze, I had what seemed to me a brilliant idea about how to overcome one of the principal factors that made cycling so unpopular with Wanda, namely, hills. (The other was headwinds: she had not forgotten how a freak blast had literally plucked her from her saddle down in County Cork in January.) My idea was to ride westwards from Dublin, not on the N₄, which if it was anything like the dreadful N₁₈ was best left to the Irish, but along the banks of the Grand Canal, which begins where the River Liffey meets the Irish Sea in Dublin Bay and eventually comes to an end at Shannon Harbour. I figured this would entail the minimum amount of hill climbing, eighteenth-century canal builders and their financial sponsors being very sensitive to any unnecessary variations in the level of their creations. Another advantage, in theory anyway, was that we would only rarely encounter motor vehicles. And in the unlikely event of the Irish wind choosing to blow from points east instead of west, then that would be in the nature of a bonus.

Which was why, off the boat from Holyhead at Dun Laoghaire (pronounced Dunleary) we found ourselves the following morning astride our bikes, armed with nothing more lethal than a couple of bicycle pumps, in a run-down, spooky, some might say

positively dangerous area of Dublin dockland. To be precise, we were down by what were the Grand Canal Docks, otherwise the Outer and Inner Ringsend Basins, until they ceased to be used commercially in 1960. Now the only vessels in this expanse were a couple of small trawlers with no one on board, moored just inside the lock gates. Immediately downstream, the River Dodder enters the Liffey more or less at the point where the Liffey enters the Irish Sea, which is also where Oliver Cromwell landed in 1646 with twelve thousand men and an artillery siege train to begin the subjugation of Ireland.

These Docks are bounded by ruined warehouses, some of them overgrown with ivy and intersected with streets, some of them cobbled, and some, that morning at any rate (just in case the Corporation writes to me inviting me to eat my breakfast off them, in the way corporations do after cleaning up), littered with every kind of imaginable rubbish, including mattresses bursting at the seams and looking as horrible as only mattresses can, enough broken glass to warrant opening a bottle recycling factory on site, and bundles of what had been newspapers but were now gooey masses of papier mâché.

And across the water from where we were standing, beyond Charlotte Quay and what used to be the Dublin Tramway Power House, was the Inner Dock Basin by the Ringsend Bridge, which links Pearse Street with Ringsend Road, which in turn leads into Irishtown Road and Sandymount: streets traversed eighty-two years previously (give or take a few days) by Leopold Bloom, seated uncomfortably on a piece of lemon-scented soap (obtained from Sweny's the chemist in Lincoln Place), in a funeral carriage that formed part of the modest cortège which accompanied the remains of Paddy Dignam to Prospect Cemetery on Finglas Road, out beyond Mountjoy Prison and the Royal Canal.* There, on 16 June 1904, he was deemed to have been laid to rest in company with, among others, Parnell, O'Connell, Collins and the veteran Fenian, Jeremiah O'Donovan Rossa, who died in New York in

* At the time of Paddy Dignam's funeral Pearse Street was still called Brunswick Street. It was not until much later that it was renamed after Patrick Pearse, the devout Catholic schoolmaster turned revolutionary, and one of the leaders of the Easter Rising, who was born at No. 27 in 1879.

1915. Casement's remains were not taken there until 1966, fifty years after his execution in Pentonville Gaol; remains which, some ghouls suggested, were inextricably mixed with those of Crippen the poisoner, which like Casement's had been buried in quicklime in the same patch of unconsecrated ground.

In all this extensive and melancholy landscape on this cool, grey summer's morning the only living things in sight apart from ourselves were a solitary, snooty-looking seagull afloat in the Outer Basin and an over-sized ginger cat which was digging into some ordures in Green Street, off Britain Quay. In spite of this solitude we still had the uneasy feeling that if we stayed around in these parts we might get taken apart, a feeling that comes over one—well, it certainly comes over me—in any derelict, semi-populated urban area, potentially full, as Dublin certainly is, of heroin addicts and muggers. But by the time I had begun to think about saying, 'Let's get outta here!' like the guys in those 1930s B pictures, Wanda was already getting out, head down and pedalling away like mad, up Hanover Quay, along Grand Canal Quay at the foot of Misery Hill, past sundry decrepit gas works and along the Inner Basin,* before she dived under Maquay Bridge where the Grand Canal, Circular Line, begins at Lock No. 1.

Beyond this first lock, lined with noble trees, its grassy banks positively arcadian and in places overlooked by elegant terrace houses, the Canal curved away through unexplored tracts of South Dublin, following the same route as the Circular Road, built around the same time as the Canal in the mid 1790s. Now most of the through traffic follows a more modern route to the north, leaving the inhabitants of the Canal banks and the old road in relative peace. In the first quarter of a mile or so a series of four locks lifted the Canal, and us with it, a dizzy 29.8 feet above sea level without either of us noticing it. If it went on like this we would be laughing all the way to the Atlantic Ocean.

* Across the Basin was the site of Boland's Mills, which de Valera made his HQ, as Commandant of the Third Battalion of the Volunteers, on the morning of Easter Monday 1916. Seventeen of these Volunteers, who altogether numbered about 130, occupied a number of houses near Mount Street Bridge; it was here, on the Wednesday following the Easter Monday rising, that these seventeen fought a five-hour action with a British force of battalion strength, causing enormous casualties.

Not a boat to be seen in this section. Hardly surprising. 'It is a good idea to seek the help of the lock keepers passing through the city section and even ask the Inland Waterways Association to provide a shore party,' writes Ruth Delany in her *Guide to the Grand Canal* (1986). Hazards include having one's boat stripped of its contents if left unattended, and being pelted with stones by schoolchildren. The offices of Bord Failte, the Irish Tourist Board, are at the fourth lock, behind expanses of glass that one would have thought would present a much more tempting target for stone-throwing children than a cabin cruiser and its crew, but there is no accounting for juvenile tastes. At this fount of knowledge I stocked up on such free literature as *A Visitor's Guide to Pubs in Dublin*, though I had not much hope of seeing, let alone entering one on this particular trip.

One of the nicest pubs I remembered from time past in Dublin was Doheny and Nesbitt's establishment in Lower Baggot Street, only a short distance from where we were now standing. Full of mahogany, cut and uncut glass, and mysterious partitions of a sort that always made me feel, hiding behind them, that I had come to denounce someone to the Dublin equivalent of the Council of Ten, it had a snug out front and a room at the back for ladies, or was it the other way round? In another half hour it would be open and I would be elsewhere, somewhere up the Circular Line or beyond.

By now the sun was coming out and it was going to be a lovely day. Just beyond this lock, beautifully inscribed on what resembled a headstone, and miraculously unvandalized, was a poem written by Patrick Kavanagh (1905–67), son of a farmer and shoemaker in County Monaghan and himself a farmer—a poem that in the circumstances made appropriate reading, even if it was June not July:

O commemorate me where there is water,
Canal water preferably, so stilly
Greeny at the heart of summer. Brother
Commemorate me thus beautifully.
Where by a lock Niagariously roars
The falls for those who sit in the tremendous silence

Of mid-July. No one will speak in prose
 Who finds his way to these Parnassian islands.
 A swan goes by head low with many apologies,
 Fantastic light looks through the eyes of bridges –
 And look! a barge comes bringing from Athy
 And other far-flung towns mythologies.
 O commemorate me with no hero-courageous
 Tomb – just a canal-bank seat for the passer-by.

Just by this stone was the seat for the passer-by, one who in this instance looked more like a permanent fixture: an emaciated Gael – he would probably have described himself, modestly, as being 'on the tin soide' – fortyish, with two mid-front upper incisors missing and wispy hair. He was dressed in a thick, dark, hand-made greatcoat several sizes too large for him, with puke on the lapels and equally over-size boots without laces, as if to emphasize, as the bound feet of Chinese ladies once did, the sedentary position of those who wear such footwear in life's race.

He was not the sort of citizen the Americans call a bum, or the British a down-and-out, but what the Dublin writer Tom Corkery used to say was 'a mouth' to his friends, 'a character' to tourists and 'a non-productive unit' to economists: non-productive, but unlike a real bum or down-and-out, certainly supported by some unfortunate woman, perhaps two unfortunate women and/or other next-of-kin.

'Have a place on Paddy's Seat,' said this non-productive unit graciously, moving sideways a perceptible bit to give me more *lebensraum* if I wanted it.

'Thank you,' I said, 'I won't actually. I'm bicycling and my wife's way on ahead; but before I go, tell me, what do you think of Kavanagh?'

'I tink of him as a thoughtful man to give me a seat here by the water, which I can use for the rest of me natural life, God willing, and as a great poet, too. Have you read "The Great Hunger", that's his best in every way, the one that begins "Clay is the word and clay is the flesh"? It's a long poem but I have most of it by heart if you would like to hear it.'

'I'm afraid it will have to be some other time,' I said. 'I've got to get on.' By now I was feeling like the Water Rat when he meets the Seagoing Rat who almost persuades him to go to sea.

'He died of the drink, they say; but he was a good age for a drinking man, sixty-two, or tree. Dere was only one man he couldn't abide, that was Brendan Behan. He was a *comic*, Paddy Kavanagh.'

To the right and left now, 99.9 per cent of it out of sight, was Dublin, inhabited as the spirit and events moved them by Gaels, Norsemen, Normans, Huguenots, Flemings and others: city of Sheridan, Shaw (who hated it), O'Casey, Joyce (who apparently hated it) and so on. Or rather, around us now was what is left of it following the 1916 Rising, the Civil War and the ministrations of vandals, demolishers and improvers in the guise of town planners.

Dublin must be one of the few capital cities in the world which has turned its splendid Parliament House, originally designed by Edward Lovett Pearce, into a bank – the Bank of Ireland – in 1802. Well, they had to turn it into something, not having a parliament any more. The Irish destroy so many of the things they love – or ought to love until they can produce something better to take their place. Instead of simply removing Nelson from his pillar in O'Connell Street, putting him through a crusher and having him re-cycled into some more homely folk hero such as Collins, Casement, or even O'Connell himself, in 1966 they chose to blow the whole thing, pillar and all, to smithereens. Thus, in one mad stroke, was destroyed the last embellishment, apart from the façade of the General Post Office, of what had been one of the more beautiful eighteenth-century streets in Europe.

It is a city in which the inhabitants were, as I remembered, completely indifferent to the march of time (which meant an almost total inability to keep appointments, at least on the right day), to the weather, to what is commonly regarded as edible food, and to their surroundings, but capable of talking the hind legs off the biggest herd of donkeys ever conceived; their folk heroes racehorses (but not the riders), greyhounds and whippets, footballers, hurlers and prisoners, preferably political; impatient

of and despising authority; hating what those who were not 'offeercials' referred to as 'offeercials' while longing secretly to be 'offeercials' themselves. A city in which, at this very moment, many of them would be drinking their first pint of the day from a glass without a handle in one of what were, when I was last there, its seven hundred or more pubs; pubs which, ideally for the older drinker, would have an ambiance compounded of brown-painted lincrusta and glittering glass; pubs in which the drinkers used to drink in companies or schools, each one waiting his turn to buy his round of what was called 'the gargle', which ensured that everyone had six drinks instead of three. For this was a city in which few men drank at home unless they were already drunk, or otherwise incapacitated, on the grounds that it didn't taste the same as in a bar: 'Now, Mr O'Leary sir, I tink you've had enough for a bit, sir.' I remembered singing pubs; pubs that looked more like libraries, but with bottles not books on the shelves; theatre pubs; pubs with poetry; one pub reputed to be used only by market women and no men; another a favourite stopping-off place for mourners on their way back from Glasnevin Cemetery. Here, in The Brian Boru House, the wake still flourished and you could drink 'a ball o'malt', Irish whiskey from a wooden cask. Hickey's, on City Quay, had one of the best pints anywhere.

To me the most wonderful of all Dublin pubs was O'Meara's Irish House on the corner of Wood Quay. Its façade was topped by six round towers of the sort but not the size that soar up above Irish monastic settlements and the façade itself was embellished with coloured stucco reliefs of such heroes of Irish nationalism and Catholic emancipation as Henry Grattan (1796-1820), making his last speech to the about-to-be abolished Irish Parliament in 1800, and Daniel O'Connell (1775-1847). But despite these remembrances of things and times past in Dublin's publand, for those of a selective nature or finicky disposition it is worth heeding what Swift wrote in a letter to Charles Ford in August 1725: 'No men in Dublin go to Taverns who are worth sitting with.'

What I remembered most about Dublin was the poverty. The poor lived in what were sometimes large eighteenth-century houses that had once been among the most elegant in the British

Isles, but in Victorian times had become rookeries, teeming with inhabitants; what O'Casey described as 'a long drab gauntlet of houses, some of them fat with filth . . . long kennels of struggling poverty and disordered want . . . the lacerated walls, the windows impudent with dirt'. The poor swarmed in the street markets, filling the air with the adenoidal noises which rose to almost supersonic levels during their violent quarrels, called narks. They were to be found in the food markets high up around Thomas Street, and Meath Street, and Moore Street west of O'Connell Street, and around St Mary's Abbey, and in the junk and antique markets off Cornmarket and down on the quays. The big Christmas market was in Cole's Lane and there were second-hand books behind Bachelor Walk, where a minor massacre of Dubliners by British troops took place in 1914. Second- and third-hand boots and shoes and clothing were on sale in Anglesea Market and Riddles Row - markets more like oriental souks, where some still wore, and you could still buy, the black crocheted woollen shawls that had been since time immemorial the uniform of the female poor, and were now soon to become collectors' items.

The streets of the poor are almost certainly not now as they were then: there were doorways like the entrances to rock tombs in Chambers Street and in Crompton Court; shrines high on the walls with the lamps burning, just as in Naples; there was the vast cobbled expanse of Smithfield, as big as an airfield; whitewashed cottages with half doors in Camden Row and Sarah Place that looked as if they had been flown in from County Galway. They were beautiful streets, poverty-ridden but full of vibrant life: children swung on ropes from the lamp posts, or skipped with bits of rough cord; washing fluttered everywhere in the breeze; men wearing suits and caps, never without a jacket, sat on the kerb stones waiting for something to happen, watching the horse drays putting the motor traffic into disarray.

And there was Culture, much of it behind glass; and Trinity College, a seat of learning which housed a strange mixture of Northern and Southern Irish, Anglo-Irish, and others, even more exotic, from the third world, and in which, if Donleavy was to be believed, whores were kept in oubliettes under the floors of the

lofty Georgian chambers, maturing like port in more conventional establishments.

And food . . . city of the finest roasting beef (to be found in Meath Street) and – as a last resort – coddle-stew of bacon and sausage, or liver and mash *à la* Bloom. But it was to be for me, after thirty years of absence, Bloomsville still unrevisited.

I caught Wanda up, which didn't take long as she was barely making steerage way in a gear about two and a half times too low, and we pedalled on together along the towpath to Charlemont Street Bridge, south of which were the suburbs of Ranelagh, scene of a large-scale massacre of English colonists on Easter Monday, 1209, a day which seems to bring out the worst in Dubliners so far as the English are concerned; and Donnybrook, where an annual fair founded by King John in 1204, and wild even by Irish fair standards, took place every year until it was finally suppressed in 1855.

Then on past Rathmines and Terenure where, at No. 41 Brighton Square, on the borders of these two suburbs, Joyce was born in 1882. Down there too in Ontario Terrace he sited a Bloom residence, the one in which, according to Mrs Bloom, Mary the housemaid padded out her bottom in order to excite Mr Bloom, who appears to have been in a permanent state of excitement anyway, as those explorers who have finally reached page 933 of the unlimited edition would probably agree.

Well, we would not be seeing any of these wonders on this particular trip; nor Synge's birthplace and subsequent residence, both of them not much more than a Jacob's Dublin Water Biscuit's toss from the bank of the River Dodder, down in the undiscovered country on the Rathmines/Rathgar border from whose bourne no English cyclist has ever been known to return. Nor would we visit Mount Jerome, the vast Protestant cemetery which we would soon be raising on the port quarter, which contains the remains of Sheridan Le Fanu; William Lecky, historian; Edward Dowden, Shakespearean scholar; AE, otherwise George William Russell, poet; John Millington Synge, playwright, and a supporting cast of thousands.

At Suir Road Bridge, after a two-mile lockless stretch from Portobello, the Circular Line ended and the Grand Canal, Main Line, began. Originally the commercial terminus of the Canal had been in James' Street Harbour, a mile east of the bridge alongside the Guinness brewery which, at the time of its closure in 1960, was the Canal's principal user. From the brewery, boats used to carry the drink in wooden casks as far as Limerick, which took four days. The boatmen, who were wretchedly paid, were expert in drawing off a number of pints from each barrel on board for their personal consumption. This did not mean that the publican received less than he paid for at the other end, because the men in the brewery who filled the barrels always added a quantity over and above what there should have been, for the benefit of the boatmen. Guinness were only too well aware of this practice but there was really nothing the company could do to prevent it. It was useless to put seals on the bungholes as the boatmen had a far more sophisticated way of extracting the beverage. The company did hope when it introduced metal casks known as iron lungs during the 1950s that these would be impregnable, but the boatmen soon found a way of tapping them too. However, their triumph was short-lived. Soon after this the Canal was closed down altogether.

What a strange sight it must have been to see the crew of a canal boat tapping a barrel, presumably at night and in some remote stretch of the canal, with the tarpaulins thrown back, more than probably in the rain. One man would hold a lantern, another would tap away with a hammer and a cooper's chisel at one of the metal hoops, loosening it so that a small hole that would be invisible when the hoop was replaced could be bored in the barrel with a gimlet. In cold weather two holes might have to be made, and when it was really cold, and the drink became even more turbid, it was sometimes necessary to introduce a red-hot rod into the hole before the liquid would begin to flow. Meanwhile, someone would be waiting to catch the extra pints in one or other of two receptacles: a particular sort of sweet tin for a firkin (a barrel holding 9 imperial gallons) or a certain sort of biscuit tin for a 54-gallon hogshead. These held the precise amount that could be drawn off in each case without diddling the customer.

ROUND IRELAND IN LOW GEAR

These canal boatmen were often descendants of those who had worked on the canals since they were first dug, as were the lock keepers, the crews of the dredgers and those whose job it was to keep the canals free of weeds. Unlike canal boatmen in Britain, whose wives and families often accompanied them on their voyages and made up the crew, Irish boatmen had to leave their families at home while working, and lived together in incredible discomfort, often eating from a communal pot. Until 1911, when the Canal Company began to give up horses and equip the boats with Bolinder engines, a crew consisted of six men, including the skipper, who worked six-hour shifts in pairs; one steering for part of the time, the other looking after the horses and operating the lock gates. They had twenty-four hours off a week, from midnight on Saturday until midnight on Sunday, which meant that if they were lucky those who lived near the Canal might be able to spend at least part of that time at home with their families. For the rest of the week they travelled night and day and, except at Dublin, had to handle their own cargoes.

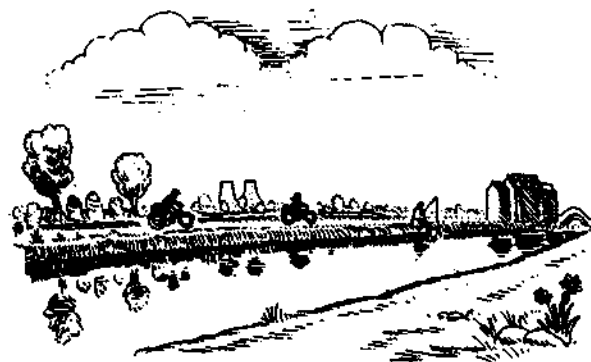
When engines were introduced the crews were reduced to four: the engine-room 'greaser', a boy of about fourteen who also acted as cook and general dogsbody, an engineman, a deckhand and the skipper. During the Famine the boats had to be given a military escort to prevent them being looted, but during the Civil War no guards were provided and the boats were often pillaged.

In 1946, after what the Irish still refer to euphemistically as 'The Armaingancy', and everyone else calls the Second World War, by mutual agreement between employers and employees the crews were reduced to three who worked a sixteen-hour day which sounds terrible but gave them more time at home.

The little, watery world of the Grand Canal ceased to exist in 1960 when Guinness, the last customers to use canal boats, finally gave up doing so. They continued to do what they could to encourage pleasure boating by going into the hire business in 1963, as did Bord Failte, but things were never the same again.

Chapter 13

MAIN LINE TO SHANNON HARBOUR



O Irlande, grand pays du Shillelagh et du bog,
Ou les patriotes vont toujours ce qu'on appelle le
whole hog.

ANON. 'A l'Irlande' [par Victor Hugo] in G. W. E. Russell,

Collections and Recollections, 1898

It is wise to make a point of taking Locks 1 to 9 (on the Main Line) at a dash early in the morning, or during school hours, to avoid the sometimes boisterous attentions of children.

Guide to the Grand Canal, 1886

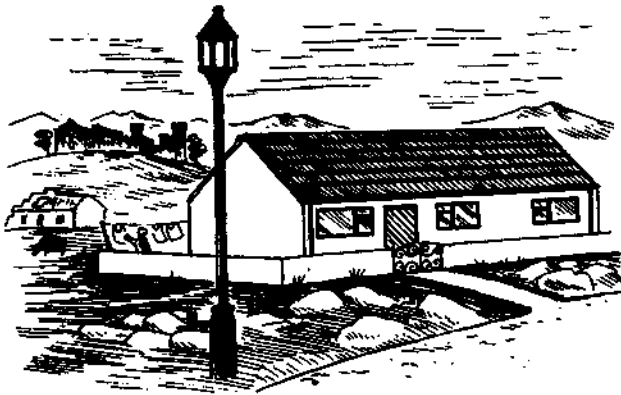
Chapter 10

ON THE ROAD TO SKIBBEREEN

My son I loved our native land with energy and pride
Until a blight came on the land and sheep and cattle died,
The rent and taxes were to pay, I could not them redeem,
And that's the cruel reason why I left old Skibbereen.

It's well I do remember that bleak December day,
The landlord and the sheriff came to drive us all away;
They set the roof on fire with their demon yellow spleen
And that's another reason why I left old Skibbereen.

Irish song, 'Skibbereen'



BIOLOGICAL WIND THRESHOLD*

Force	Description	Human Activity	Birds	Invertebrates
7	MODERATE GALE	Walking becomes difficult	Small perching birds grounded	Butterflies & deerfly grounded
8	FRESH GALE	General progress impeded	Swifts, ducks, swallows, few raptors flying	Only dragonflies still airborne
9	STRONG GALE	Children blown over	Only swifts airborne	All insects grounded
10	WHOLE GALE	Adults blown over	All birds grounded	—

*Source: LYALL WATSON, *Heaven's Breath*, 1984.

Looking back on our travels in Ireland in January 1986, it would be almost impossible to credit the weather we encountered, if I did not have before me as I write the Irish Meteorological Services summary of the weather for that period. There was only one place, Rosslare, where less than twenty rain days were recorded and even that managed to come up with a very creditable 97mm of total rainfall for nineteen of them; its best or worst day, according to whether you are a subscriber to the *Guinness Book of Records* or simply want to go cycling, registered an awe-inspiring 17.8mm. Snow, hail and sleet were frequent, as were gales, particularly on the coast where we were. According to the weathermen the depth of snow never exceeded 2cm, which is simply not true. We saw a 6-foot snowman on the Dingle Peninsula. On 29 January the temperature in south-east Mayo fell to -7.1 centigrade.

In the second of two periods of gale force winds – of up to 70 knots in some places – we got as far as the west side of the Beara Peninsula, part of which is in County Kerry, part in County Cork. On the first day out of Ballinspittle we skirted the estuaries of rivers, some of them too small to be named on our maps, passing sandbanks and villages of identical cottages painted in brilliant turquoise, imperial yellow and *sangue de boeuf*. At the head of the Arigadeen estuary, at Timoleague, what at a distance looked like a battleship cast up on the shore turned out to be the gaunt, grey, extensive ruins of a Franciscan friary, smashed up not during the Reformation, which spared it, but by English soldiers on a visit in 1642, who found thousands of barrels of wine in its vaults.

Then into a region of marshy land further south and west, with

a few poor farms and cottages. Lost in this wilderness, I tried to ask the way at a cottage surrounded by electronic debris and savage dogs. With torn curtains and a long wire trailing out of the letter box like an unlit fuse it was difficult to believe that it was actually inhabited, but it must have been because a naked electric bulb was burning in its unimaginably horrible front parlour. No one answered the front door, though. It was a wet Saturday afternoon and there was not a living soul on the roads; everyone was inside guarded by savage dogs rendered even more savage by not being allowed to watch TV. Finally I found a dogless farmyard with a man in it carrying a dung fork but when I approached him he, like all other Irish apparitions, simply faded away.

At dusk we came into Clonakilty, a town founded by Richard Boyle, the great effing Earl of Cork, passing a couple of tinkers' caravans down on the foreshore and what was left of a bungalow given to them by the local council, after they had stripped off all the useful bits, so that it looked as if a shell had burst in it. From one of the caravans two tinker girls emerged, bound for a night out in Clonakilty, as smart as handboxes. The rain was truly awful and we took refuge in a hotel with hat racks made from deer antlers and had tea while drying out among farm ladies and their daughters in for the shopping.

We stayed in a B and B kept by a truly formidable lady who had massed bands of relatives on the premises, and a maid to put coal on the fire, as if it was the 1930s, and woke up on Sunday to a dark scene: violent squalls were hurling themselves on Clonakilty from a sky the colour and consistency of ebony. Then suddenly it was clear, the orange street lights went out and everything was brilliant and rainwashed. As we went into the town we saw men standing on the corners reading the lubricious bits in the Sunday papers and houseproud women polishing their door knockers. While Wanda went to Mass in a church with a tall, slender spire, I hung about outside, studying the graves of eleven priests, all buried cosily together in a single vault, in company with other male black sheep who interpreted attending Mass as standing outside in the churchyard. Perhaps it was our imagination, but we didn't feel that people were as friendly here in Clonakilty as we were accustomed to.

We then embarked on what seemed a long, long ride (in reality only seven miles) up endless hills and down to Castle Freke, the wondrous and extensive ruins of a house built in 1780 by Sir John Evans-Freke and finally abandoned in 1952, with castellations, square and polygonal towers and a portcullis that still functioned. Gutted by fire in 1910, it was rebuilt in time for the coming-of-age ball given there in 1913 for the tenth Lord Carbery.

Although now almost completely hidden from view by encroaching vegetation on the gatehouse side, where the portcullis still hung, there were still long, magnificent views across the wooded demesne to the lighthouse on Galley Head, and westwards over Rosscarbery Bay. We followed the wall of the demesne, beautifully made with slates laid vertically, past entrance gates topped with what looked like whipped cream walnuts, down to the bay itself, where the surf boomed on the sands, the air was filled with flying spume and there was a gimcrack motel with forty rooms with broken windows for sale, already an Irish ruin. Then to Rosscarbery, a small place above a spacious estuary with sandbanks covered with green veg, and reached by a causeway.

There were six pubs in and around its main square, which was only 100 yards long. We chose Nolan's Lounge, the only one offering sustenance on a Sunday afternoon, which was jam-packed with people. Suddenly, as we were downing powdered mushroom soup and damp ham sandwiches (this was no *route des gastronomes*), the landlady got the message that the Garda was on the way (it now being long after closing time), the lights went out, and we found ourselves in the street still clasping uneaten sandwiches. Soon the pub was empty except for some stubborn old hardliners, quivering and quivering and dribbling, hoping they would be invisible in the gloaming. In the end the Garda never came. They had been right to hang on: there was rain and huge rainbows and on a long straight stretch of road an apocalyptic wind – it had to be at least Force 10 – a blast of which literally blew Wanda off her bike and into a ditch, from which I rescued her crying with vexation.

Hereabouts in a deep valley, out of the terrible wind, was what was left of Coppinger's Court, an ivy-clad seventeenth-century

fortified house occupied by an amber-coloured donkey with eyes to match which was groaning away wanting sympathy, and a he-goat that didn't want any. Then up a horrible hill past the Drombeg Stone Circle, Hut and Cooking Place that neither of us felt inclined to visit; then a lovely swoop down to Glandore Harbour, where we wanted to stay the night but found all the hotels were shut.

So out of Glandore, with the sun gone in, past a pretty Protestant church hidden among the trees with a tunnel leading up to it through solid rock, and along the shore of the inner estuary and past a bridge leading to Union Hall across the water, where Swift stayed in 1723 and liked so much that he wrote a Latin poem in praise of it: 'Carberiae Rupes', or 'The cliffs of Carbery'.

Leap, at the end of the estuary, also had six pubs within 100 yards, of which the biggest, the Leap Hotel, was bulging at the seams with members of the local hunt who had been having a Sunday meet and were all dressed up for it, and another party, equally dressed up, recovering from the effects of a funeral they had attended, sipping away like anything at Irish whiskey and hot water. By this stage both parties had become somewhat intermingled. In this hospitable place we each had two set teas with scones, two hot whiskeys with water, two high teas and more hot whiskeys and water, while an Irish group played and sang Irish airs. All this was served like lightning by Mrs Ann Sheahan, wife of the proprietor, and together with two bed and breakfasts came to just £25.

It poured all night and was still pitch dark when we woke, but it cleared a bit later, when we took the road to Skibbereen, six miles to the west, at first uphill past gorse tussocks, rocky outcrops and, to the right, little loughs. While we were exercising ourselves in this fashion a van passed us, the driver of which dropped a bundle of newspapers outside a small shop. A dog emerged, and having sniffed it and looked it over thoroughly in case it contained any pornography or contraceptive apparatus, none of which is well thought of in this part of the world, bore it back into the shop to be given a further going-over by the proprietor. The buildings on the outskirts of Skibbereen were rendered in bright turquoise, acid green, vivid yellow and orange. It was sale time: one shop had

a close-out lot of Makita angle grinders on offer, but we did not allow them to detain us and pedalled on along the bank of the River Ilen en route for Schull, passing Abbeystrowry, an ivy-clad monastic cell built by the Cistercians, even in such weather beautiful and mysterious. The road was now beginning to traverse what were some of the poorest parts of Ireland, whose inhabitants had suffered the most terrible privations in the years of the Great Famine – more poor tussocky land with slatey-looking stone pushing up through it. Ahead of us now was Mount Gabriel, a bleak mountain, bare apart from the pale dome of some warning system on top of it; to the left fleeting views of a castle on Mannin Island, one of the 127 assorted rocks, islets and islands in Roaringwater Bay.

Schull (it means School) had a rocky foreshore, a small jetty which was in the process of being dug up, a fish factory and a pair of dank but commodious public lavatories which we both patronized, a positive treat after performing in the rain, as we usually found ourselves doing. Half mad with thirst we pedalled up its hilly main street past a pub which also sold coal and went in for undertaking, to the Bunratty Inn, Irish Pub of the Year 1983, at which we finally came to rest. The only other customer was an ex-Fleet Air Arm navigator who had come to Schull to make arrangements for his wife's ashes to be scattered here, the place where she had been born.

Mrs Mulvaney, the innkeeper's wife, was, unfortunately, seriously ill and it was her husband from whom we ordered drink and sandwiches. He had worked for the American Tobacco Company in a previous incarnation, both in Shanghai before the revolution, and in Singapore; and he had an extraordinary collection of cigarette packet labels (which he had extracted from the firm's copyright department), one of them for a Chinese brand that had been the world's biggest seller. Here we ate delicious crab and smoked salmon sandwiches – the best pub food we had so far found – and that night we slept above O'Donovan's Grocers on Main Street, now the premises of Mrs Mary McSweeney.

Our room had been papered with large-scale maps of the area by some archaeologists who once stayed there, and these provided a lot of fascinating information about this part of the Mizen Head

Peninsula, including the whereabouts of a number of children's cemeteries which dated back to 1846, the worst year of the Great Famine.*

Skibbereen and the surrounding countryside suffered fearfully during the Famine. The only employment was on public works, which paid a man 8d a day, a sum wholly insufficient to support a family; this was reported to the British Government in London by two local Protestant clergymen who specially went there for this purpose, but no food was sent. On 15 December 1846 Mr Nicholas Cummins, a Cork magistrate, visited Skibbereen and as a result of what he saw wrote a letter to the Duke of Wellington, who was himself an Irishman, sending a copy to *The Times*:

My Lord Duke,

... Having for many years been intimately connected with the western portion of the County of Cork, and possessing some small property there, I thought it right personally to investigate the truth of the several lamentable accounts which had reached me of the appalling state of misery to which that part of the country was reduced. I accordingly went on the 15th inst. to Skibbereen, and to give the instance of one townland which I visited, as an example of the state of the entire coast district, I shall state simply what I there saw. ... Being aware that I should have to witness scenes of frightful hunger, I provided myself with as much bread as five men could carry, and on reaching the spot I was surprised to find the wretched hamlet apparently deserted. I entered some of the hovels to ascertain the cause, and the scenes that presented themselves were such as no tongue or pen can convey the slightest idea of. In the first, six famished and ghastly skeletons, to all appearance dead, were huddled in a corner on some filthy straw, their sole covering what seemed a ragged horse-cloth, and their wretched legs hanging about,

*In Skibbereen Workhouse more than 50 per cent of the children admitted after 1 October 1846 died 'due to diarrhoea acting on an exhausted constitution', according to the workhouse physician. I am indebted to Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger, Ireland 1845-9*, Hamish Hamilton, 1962, for this and much other information on the Famine quoted here.

naked above the knees. I approached with horror, and found by a low moaning they were alive, they were in fever, four children, a woman, and what had once been a man. It is impossible to go through the details, suffice it to say, that in a few minutes I was surrounded by at least 200 such phantoms, such frightful spectres as no words can describe. By far the greater number were delirious, either from famine or from fever. Their demoniac yells are still ringing in my ears, and their horrible images are fixed upon my brain. My heart sickens at the recital, but I must go on.

In another case, decency would forbid what follows, but it must be told, my clothes were nearly torn off in my endeavours to escape from the throng of pestilence around, when my neck-cloth was seized from behind by a grip which compelled me to turn. I found myself grasped by a woman with an infant, just born, in her arms, and the remains of a filthy sack across her loins – the sole covering of herself and babe. The same morning the police opened a house on the adjoining lands, which was observed shut for many days, and two frozen corpses were found lying upon the mud floor, half devoured by rats.

Sir Randolph Routh, Chairman of the Relief Commission, blamed the landlords:

The proprietors of the Skibbereen district, he told Charles Edward Trevelyan, Permanent Head of Treasury, 'draw an annual income of £50,000'. There were twelve landowners, of whom the largest was Lord Carbery [of Castle Freke], who, Routh declared, drew £15,000 in rents; next was Sir William Wrixon-Becher, on whose estate the town of Skibbereen stood; Sir William, alleged Routh, drew £10,000, while the Reverend Stephen Townsend, a Protestant clergyman, drew £8000.*

In the county of Cork alone the desperate state of Skibbereen was

*Source: *The Irish Crisis*, quoted in Cecil Woodham-Smith, *The Great Hunger*. I remember reading a letter in a magazine or newspaper, some time after the publication of Cecil Woodham-Smith's book, from someone who had found the book in a university library in the United States filed under the heading 'Gastronomy'.

reported to be paralleled in Schull, Bantry, Brandon, Baltimore, Crookhaven and Castlehaven. During all this time fever was raging and by March 1847 it was epidemic, carrying off thousands more.

The most accessible of the six children's cemeteries appeared to be the one in Ardintenant, east of Schull Harbour, and with the sun now shining brilliantly we set off to look for it. Marked on the map north of the Harbour was the workhouse and on the same site, the fever hospital, and we went to see them on the way to look for the cemetery. The buildings, or what was left of them, were hidden behind huge, high ivy-clad walls and stood in a morass of mud churned up by the cattle which grazed around the place. A gateway fitted with iron gates led to them: one, an amorphous construction covered with ivy; the other, a larger, two-storey building with what might have been one big lofty room with an open fireplace at both ends. The roof and upper floor had collapsed and a dense growth of ivy covered this too. Which had been the workhouse and which the fever hospital was difficult to say. It may have depended on who outnumbered whom, the living or the dying. A stream ran through the field in which they stood, the waters of which, besides being used by the occupants of the workhouse, had been used to work a carding mill, and possibly other mills, down near the shore where there was a miniature harbour.

It took a long time to find the cemetery. A man building a very ugly stone wall for someone's bungalow down on the road to Ardintenant – 'Me labour's costing him two thousand pounds, let alone the materials' (someone to be avoided like the plague) – had never even heard of it. A farmer who lived within sight of it among a very dangerous collection of disused copper mine shafts thought he knew where it was, but was wrong. Most vehement was a woman living in a bungalow who said 'it wasn't anywhere at all nearby'. Finally, an old man living alone in a very small whitewashed cottage told us where it was: in the field which belonged to the vehement woman, immediately opposite her house. It was thickly overgrown with brambles and gorse and only one stone was visible above the undergrowth but the rest, innumerable small stones, could be felt underfoot. It was horrible: I felt as if I was treading on living children. Our interest in children's famine cemeteries evaporated.

Back in Skibbereen, having cycled there with the wind astern, a novel experience, we lunched in Brendan McCarthy's pub under a poster advertising 'Monster Card Drive - Prizes: Bull Calf, Half Ton of Coal, A Ham, Four Bottles of Whiskey'. The local head of Bord Failte kindly did some brisk telephoning on our behalf and arranged for us to get to Clear Island (offshore Irish islands being difficult to reach, especially in winter), so after tea in a caff we set off for Baltimore, from where the island boat sails. We followed the river Ilen on its last laps to the sea, past old demesnes, one of which had a Gothic church tower rising picturesquely among deciduous trees. One of the good things about the Church of Ireland was that they certainly were dab hands at choosing beautiful situations for their excellent, mass-produced churches. Further downstream the Ilen suddenly became an estuary, and a lovely one, with minute grassy islands apparently floating in it, all flooded with a stormy, magical, lemon-coloured light. Who is responsible for these miraculous effects, so much more satisfying than meretricious moving statues constructed of cement?

We got to Baltimore about four-thirty, passing the decrepit Gulf Stream Hotel which was for sale - hardly surprising if what we were now sampling was representative of the weather. It was now raining and blowing hard from south-west and Baltimore was very, very cold, in spite of being hemmed in on all sides by islands of various shapes and sizes; but it was nice down by the harbour, which was overlooked by a little castle of the O'Driscolls. We were now in O'Driscoll country: it was here in 1537 that one of the O'Driscoll lords took for himself the contents of a ship loaded with Spanish wine bound for Waterford, which had taken refuge from the weather. This led to the burning of the town by an expeditionary force of Waterford men, and the ruination of the castle. It was here, too, that a force of Algerian pirates put ashore on the night of 19 June 1631; they, too, sacked the town and carried away 117 of its inhabitants of both sexes as slaves, introducing what may well have been the first female O'Driscolls into the harems around the Mediterranean. The man who piloted them in, a fisherman called Hackett, was later tried and executed at Cork.

We found accommodation in O'Driscoll's Corner House Hotel

above the harbour. The hotel was being repainted and the owner himself, who was getting married shortly and was also involved in running the post office, was existing in a state of some confusion in a kitchen, the principal ornament of which was an enormous American gas stove suitable for cooking mammoth steaks which were not on offer on this particular p.m. All night it blew like hell, the wind rattling the casements and the rain battering them. Outside, chocked up on the waterfront, was a yacht with a single occupant who must have felt rather like St Simon Stylites on his column. Inside we had an electric heater, a rather frightening electric blanket, the O'Driscolls' answer to the electric chair, and lots of nice cold water to wash in, but you can't have everything and at least we had a roof over our heads.

In the morning we rode out to a huge white sugar-loaf beacon known as Lot's Wife which looks across a narrow sound to Sherkin Island. The rain had stopped and the sun was shining but the wind was blowing so strongly that we could lean out on it without falling over, which meant it was Force 9. Gouts of froth streamed up the face of a precipice on the extreme edge of which a herd of cattle stood grazing, accompanied by an enormous, wily-looking goat; apparently the cattle often fall over, having neither apprehension nor fear of heights, but never the goat. Having done this there was not much else to do, the mail boat not being due to sail for Clear Island until half past two in the afternoon.

'I'm afraid I can't go on with much more of this,' said Wanda, as we sat in a deep valley leading down to the sea next door to an abandoned Morris done out in jungle camouflage with nothing inside except seatbelts. 'The winds and the rains are simply killing me.' And she shed a tear or two. Nevertheless she promised to delay her decision about abandoning both me and Ireland until our return from Clear Island.

We put to sea in the good ship *Naomh* (Saint) *Ciaran II* (Ciaran or Kieran being the island's patron saint.*) The only other

*St Ciaran of Saighir (to distinguish him from his more celebrated namesake St Ciaran of Clonmacnoise), was of the royal blood of Munster. He lived in the fifth century, and studied at Tours and Rome, from where he returned to Ireland a bishop. He inhabited a cell in upper Ossory around which grew the monastery of Saighir.

passenger was the representative on the island of the Cape Clear Development Co-operative, set up in 1970 in an attempt to arrest emigration from the island, the population of which had fallen from 1000 to 180 in a century. While courteous enough, he was not exactly a fount of free information about his kingdom. Maybe he thought we were going there to erect a casino, a tower block or something similar.

The skipper of the *Naomh Ciaran*, a steel-built vessel of about 38 tons, was Conchubar O'Driscoll, and there was yet another O'Driscoll among his crew. They had just finished loading a large tractor, and the ship was full of other produce ordered by the islanders from Skibbereen. The skipper took her out round the west side of Sherkin island, past more O'Driscoll ruins, and into a patch of nasty short, steep sea into which the *Naomh Ciaran* smashed with vigour, throwing spray over her deck-house, as if it was bath night. Once across the Sound between Sherkin and Clear Island he turned her to go inside the Bullig reef off Illauna Island, a manoeuvre which threw us all over the place and broke my glasses. It was clear now and across the Sound the cliffs of Clear Island with the seas breaking on them and the green, stone-walled fields above them were brilliant in the sun.

It took a little under an hour to reach North Harbour. It has a labyrinthine entrance which makes it practically impossible to get out of when something known as 'the draw', a nasty sort of undertow, is working. The jetty was crowded with islanders, together with a few specimens from what, apart from the Australian Outback, must be the world's largest concentration of beat-up motor vehicles. There is no insurance, no need for a licence and no driving test, and the mainland is scoured for vehicles suitable for use on the island by the twentieth-century equivalent of grave robbers. The surroundings of the harbour, above which rises a big hill, were disordered and picturesque. There were a number of old houses and sheds used by fishermen, heaps of lobster pots, boats in various stages of decay, the power station, out of sight round a corner; and the ruined church of Trawkieran, otherwise Teampall Ciaran, built around 1200 on the site of an earlier monastery said to have been founded by St Ciaran. And down by the beach was Tobar Ciaran, his holy well,

with a solitary palm tree growing on it, from which water is still procured for blessing the homes of the islanders and the sick. Next to this was a Grotto occupied by Our Lady and St Bernadette, with what looks like a lingam in front of it but is really the stump of a cross.

In search of somewhere to stay we set off up the hill past a stone building with the sign 'Club Chleire Heineken', that was in the process of being converted by the island co-operative into a very agreeable social club, with a bar that was unfortunately closed; past a grocer's shop with a bar inside it that was a bar no more, past a line of picturesque cottages on a ledge carved out of the hillside, all now abandoned, and past Bourke's pub, also closed.

We put up in the commodious modern bungalow of Mrs O'Reagan. It was still only a quarter to four so we decided to walk to the Bill of Cape Clear. The scene from the cliffs above the Bill was awe-inspiring. Four miles off to the south-west was the Fastnet Lighthouse, a tall, angular granite tower rising 147 feet from its foundations. It was now blowing Force 10 and huge seas were battering against the tower, leaping up the side of it from the boiling cauldron below. Beyond it a big slab-sided container ship was punching out into the storm but it was soon lost in the murk. The air between the Bill and the Cape was full of what looked like ping pong balls: goutts of spume generated at the base of the cliffs which were now floating inland on the wind. At four-thirty the light on the Fastnet came on. By now the sky to the north-east was clear, with a big moon riding high in it, but everywhere else it had closed in, except when the cloud opened up for a moment to allow an unearthly yellow light to illuminate the Rock.

The only time I had seen the Fastnet from the sea was in June 1939, when we had raised it fifteen miles to the north-east at eight in the evening, coming up to it in a four-masted barque. We had been within an ace of making one of the fastest sail passage from Australia to Europe between the wars, but now, ninety days out from Spencer's Gulf, South Australia, baffled by contrary winds, we had long since lost out to the *Parma*, which had made it in eighty-three days in 1933. As night came down the wind fell away and all through the night the light flashed at us mockingly every five seconds. By the next morning there was still no wind and we

were closer in to the land, making a lot of leeway. The air was full of haze and what we first took to be a dredger with a white funnel resolved itself into the angularities of the Fastnet seen in strange perspective with the white lighthouse on top of it.

All that day we hovered near the rock. Later in the afternoon a boat approached, with five men in it rowing like demons, and an old man in the stern sheets looking like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner. They had rowed nine miles from the village of Crookhaven on the Mizen Head Peninsula. We invited them aboard and the Captain gave them rum, and soon a light breeze began to stir and the ship began to rustle through the water. It was time for them to go and the last we saw of them they were drifting away into the sunset, very drunk, towards the New World, with the Ancient Mariner sitting erect in the stern. They were the first strangers I had talked to for ninety days. Some twenty-five years later I went to Crookhaven and got drunk with the survivors.

Back at Mrs O'Reagan's we had bacon and eggs and whiskey. She had come to live on the island from the mainland with her husband, who was a mechanic. He had died twelve years previously, leaving her with a daughter who had first of all gone to school on the island and then, when she was old enough, to a boarding school on the mainland, which was the usual arrangement. The school on the island now had twenty-five children on the roll. She didn't speak Irish herself, and said the families on the island were very self-contained. The majority were O'Driscolls.

When her husband died Mrs O'Reagan continued to keep about a dozen heifers for fattening. She tried to grow green vegetables but the island is infested with rabbits which makes it difficult; the latest news was that someone had introduced myxomatosis. Like all the offshore islands I had ever visited, the economy of Clear Island verged on the dotty. Milk, or most of it, came from the mainland. Only one family had sheep and only one person knew how to butcher them. Some people grew potatoes; one man grew wheat for his own use. But most food was ordered from Skibbereen.

After the bacon and eggs we decided to go to a pub, not knowing that none of them opened until nine or after. We were in bed by eight.

The next morning was one of cold, violent rain squalls, and we learnt that 'on account of the draw', the *Naomh Ciaran* wouldn't be able to leave at least until noon, if at all. So we decided to walk to the Old Lighthouse which was high up on the east side of the island. Whoever built it had obviously failed to notice that the site chosen was shrouded in fog for the greater part of the year, rendering the light quite invisible. The road climbed steeply through a stone-walled landscape, its houses either ruined or secretive-looking, like their occupants. There was not a dog to be seen. Had the islanders eaten them all? All along the road and in the fields and farmyards were numbers of what appeared to be parked cars, but were in fact cars that would never move again. Far off we could see the Fastnet still getting a battering, and the ping pong balls of froth continued to drift in across the fields. From time to time we were whipped by hail. It was a melancholy scene. I tried to imagine what life would be like for us if the *Naomh Ciaran* didn't sail, or had already sailed and never came back - and failed.

Back in Bourke's pub near the North Harbour which for some inscrutable reason known only to himself Mr Bourke had decided to open, we listened to Mr Bourke's tale of woe in what even by Irish standards was a remarkable orange and yellow interior, lit, a bit early in the day for it, by one gas mantle, and so old that the stone that separated the front from the back part of the premises had almost been worn in half by the passage of innumerable booted feet. 'Sixty years in the Bourke family,' he said, 'and I can't open in the evening anymore because the custom doesn't pay for the fire.'

We eventually sailed at twelve-thirty in a wind Force 8. When a beam sea hit the *Ciaran* just after we left the harbour I nearly broke my other pair of glasses. The following sea, when we got on course, was not all that nice either. Again we sailed inside the reef, which was displaying horribly spikey rocks on either side of it which I hoped the skipper had noticed; from time to time everything was obliterated by heavy hail. There was no doubt that these were dangerous waters; even a *précis* of ships lost in them had made chilly reading.

Baltimore was cold and miserable, but a bus was leaving for Drimoleague on the Bantry Road at two o'clock, and the driver let

us put our bikes on board. Travelling with this kindly driver was his daughter, a solemn little girl of four, and 'a great one for the buses'. He was a mine of information, some of it on the most recondite subjects; passing a place called Caheragh, invisible from the road in the rain-sodden greenery, he volunteered the following: 'At Caheragh there is a cemetery. It was three years ago now they were disinterring a girl aged fifteen or sixteen who'd been buried for sixty years, to make room for an additional one, and when they opened up her coffin they found her in it, uncorrupt.'

'Dead, dead,' said the solemn little girl, having presumably heard the story when travelling the same route on a previous occasion, being a great one for the buses, and looked even more solemn. 'She was dead.' As a result of all this, Caheragh had become a place of pilgrimage.

It was not surprising that when the time came to leave this pair, we did so with genuine regret. Especially as the driver of an Expressway bus which was due to leave Drimoleague for Bantry at 15.07 was an old fellow of near pensionable age who would not allow our bikes on his bus. The next twelve miles to Bantry, with the rain beating down on us, were pretty boring, most of them being up rather than down.

Bantry, with its huge square full of pubs opening out on to the Bay, should have been nice, even in the rain, but it wasn't really, even though there were no huge tankers discharging oil at the Terminal in the Bay. There was no problem about coming to a decision about whether or not to visit Bantry House, built in 1765 by the first Earl of Bantry and filled with treasures by the much-travelled second Earl, because it was closed. By now it was dark. Neither of us wanted to stay in Bantry but the next place was Glengarriff, eleven miles off around the head of the Bay by a road which on the map looked like a snake in its death throes. It was no time for false economy. Feeling musty and dilapidated we chartered a large taxi, and followed the driver's recommendation to stay in the Bay View Guest House. It was jolly good, not the least of its charms being a huge cast iron bath in mint condition which the landlady, Mrs Heffernan, wanted to get rid of on the grounds that it 'uses too much hot water. Not all the people who come here being educated like yourselves.'

Unfortunately, Mrs Heffernan drew the line at supplying supper so, being ravenous, we were forced to re-robe ourselves in our Gore-Tex suits and sally out into the terrible night for the mile-and-a-half walk into Glengarriff, where Mrs Heffernan had said she was 'by no means sure that you will find a bite of food at all.' She was nearly right. Of the six pubs we found there only one, called Perring House, had anything, and that was a choice of stew or re-heated roast beef, but at least they meant well. Behind the bar was a Cockney mulatto girl from Kilburn of about sixteen whose uncle played in a local folk group. She was bored out of her mind, she said, by winter in Glengarriff. The owner, who also spoke Cockney, was Irish but had spent six years in England, putting in foundations for houses, first living in Kilburn - 'Kilburn's all right' - then Stanmore: 'Stanmore's a sort of death in life. I met my friends either at the Cricklewood Tavern, full of Irish, or the Welsh Harp Inn, which had an Irish landlord, that is until it went and got burnt down, didn't it?'

Then we went back for a go in the huge bath, sharing. Educated people like ourselves know the value of water, especially hot water. Downstairs Mr Heffernan, an otherwise cheerful fellow, was immobilized before the TV, bored to death.

The next day dawned, when it did, long after eight o'clock, wet and cold with a very strong wind and snow on the 2000-foot tops of the Caha Mountains. We left the nice, warm haven of the Bay View Guest House with extreme reluctance, and on the way out of Glengarriff we met an Australian dressed like an imitation Irishman in a long black overcoat and a woolly hat with a bobble on it, waiting by the roadside for a bus to Bantry. He told us that he was living in a cabin on the mountainside on property belonging to a friend, and that he passed the days gathering wood in an enclosure of oaks which once formed part of the demesnes of the Lords of Bantry. Given the kind of weather we were having it sounded a rather joyless occupation. He was going back to Australia in February. How we envied him. Then we set off westwards along the south side of the Beara Peninsula on the road to Adrigole, crossing an arcadian, wooded river on the banks of

which flourished an assortment of wonderful trees and shrubs, with a view downstream of the ruins of Cromwell's Bridge, said to have been built for him in an hour. Here, in the surroundings of Glengarriff, the vegetation was extravagantly rich – giant fuschia up to twenty-five feet high, escallonia, eucalyptus, tree ferns, oak, holly, yew, mountain ash and Chilean myrtle – while *clethra arboreus*, pink saxifrage, Irish spurge, pale pink English heather and greater butterwort were some of the flora that clamoured for attention in due season.

The sun chose this moment to make an appearance, illuminating the little tree-clad rock islands in the Bay, and the snow-covered mountains behind. Then it began to rain again. What followed was the very steep ascent via Furkeal Bridge, more or less at sea-level, to the Avaul Loughs 400 feet up, in a distance of only a mile and a quarter. To the right of the road was a wilderness of bogs which turned orange when the sun came out, and above them huge expanses of dead grass with waterfalls of shiny stones pouring down from the slopes of the Cahia Mountains, the highest of which in view was the Sugar Loaf, which gave the impression of being a perfect pyramid and looked as inaccessible as a peak in Tibet. The air was filled with the sounds of innumerable, invisible brooks, but there was not a bird in sight; those with any sense were down near the Equator. The loughs were near a pass from which there was a stupendous view over Bantry Bay, with Cooleragh Harbour immediately below and, across what was now a shimmering expanse of water in which a solitary fishing boat floated motionless, the Whiddy Island oil terminal, the long, black finger of Sheep's Head Peninsula pointing into the Atlantic, and, far away to the north-east, what were probably the Sheehy Mountains on the Cork – Kerry border, also covered with snow. Then a steep descent – what a waste of hard-gained height – to Cooleragh, a hamlet above the Bay, followed by a stiff climb from 281 feet to 415 feet in half a mile. Ahead now were the extraordinary contours of Hungry Hill, at 2251 feet the highest peak in the Cahia Mountains. When it wasn't blotted from view by the elements it looked like a whipped cream walnut. I mentioned this to Wanda and she reminded me this was the comparison I had used of the

gateposts at Castle Freke, what now seemed a lifetime ago, and that if I wanted to have whipped cream walnuts in my book either the gateposts or Hungry Hill would have to go.

From this dizzy height we flew downhill among bogs, expanses of gorse and bracken and small walled fields in which little groups of black and white cattle stood around, no doubt discussing the absence of tourists and the dreadful weather, which was keeping them away in the fleshpots of Glengarriff, and wishing that they themselves were under cover in the white *clachans* (or small groups of dwellings) of their owners on the hillsides of Curragh and Curraduff.