

Clockwise around Ireland 2022 - a journey in four parts.

We are Susan and Ray McGinty, RNYC members for twelve years or so, we sail our Bavaria 32 "Sandpiper" mostly around the west coast of Scotland.

After a short cruise to Northern Ireland in August 2014 when we visited Glenarm, Ballycastle and Rathlin Island and a two week trip to Ireland in July 2018 when we cruised down the east coast as far as Dublin and back via the Isle of Man, we decided in 2020 that the time had come to 'do' Ireland properly. Well as you know, the global pandemic put paid to everyone's plans that year, and again in 2021.

Finally after much anticipation 2022 was to be the year. We had been hearing great things about Ireland from other RNYC members - especially the south west Atlantic coast - I was now retired from my business, and Susan's part-time work could be put on hold for the summer leaving us free to devote several weeks to a circumnavigation. The initial plan was to go anti-clockwise, heading from our winter base in Ardrossan on the Clyde estuary across the north channel perhaps to Rathlin then continuing round Malin Head and down the Atlantic West coast, spending some time cruising in the south west perhaps heading home for a break part way round, then returning via the slightly more familiar (to us) and slightly more sheltered East coast.

Things in sailing seldom work out the way you plan them and so it proved. When it came time to leave Scotland we had days, if not weeks of westerlies forecast. Do we wait, or do we change our plan and get on with it?



Sandpiper is a Bavaria 32 - built in 2003, we have owned her since 2012.

The route

In addition to the Sailing Directions published by Irish Cruising Club, we found the www.eoceanic.com website very useful for route overviews and details of havens. Imray paper charts and iSailor and Navionics electronic charts were all used.

Part 1: Ardrossan to Crosshaven	4 June to 16 June	Total 314 nm, 64h 35m (7 days sailing)
Part 2: Crosshaven to Dingle	21 June to 3 July	Total 174.7nm, 36h 55m (5 days sailing)
Part 3: Dingle to Galway	8 July to 12 July	Total 143.8 nm, 38h 15m (5 days sailing)
Part 4: Galway to Portrush	10 Aug to 22 Aug	Total 321.4nm, 62h 20m (6 days sailing)



PART 1 - Ardrossan to Crosshaven, 4 June to 16 June
via Portpatrick, Ardglas, Dun Laoghaire, Arklow, Kilmore Quay and Helvik
(Dungarven Harbour)

A 4am alarm for our 52 mile journey, allowing for favourable tides going south and arrival at Portpatrick at the latest 2 hours before low water as recommended.

Quick cup of tea and slipped our lines from our winter quarters in Ardrossan with pink skies to the east. Turned into a gorgeous sunny day, but quite cool. Quiet seas and an easterly wind gave us a cracking sail as far as Loch Ryan, where the wind eased and went dead astern. Engine assist needed for the last hour to keep to the scheduled arrival time into **Portpatrick** harbour, where the harbour open day was in full swing - bands and bunting, what a greeting!



There was space for us to lie against the harbour wall (fender board deployed) and the cheerful harbourmaster turned up to collect our dues.

Plenty of lovely black guillemots around the harbour, where they nest in the walls.

On the wall at Portpatrick Harbour, nearing high water.

*Portpatrick Harbour bottom half of the tide, looking towards the channel
- turn starboard around the rock with flag, keeping lighthouse on the port side*



Leaving the marina at 7am the following day we made the 40 nm hop across to **Ardglas**, a very rolly crossing in 12kn easterly winds. We received a warm welcome from the marina staff, and very good facilities. Fish and chips for tea and a quick change of plan for tomorrow. We had intended to stop at Howth marina, but they are hosting the Wave regatta this week - and are not taking bookings from passing yachts. Dun Laoghaire it is then - an extra hour and a half onto the journey, making for 12 hours, but with no time restrictions from tides, no alarm needed for the next morning's departure.

Sadly no wind, so motored the 65 miles on smooth seas - glassy at times - and enjoyed the sunshine. Dublin VTS directed us to cross Dublin Bay between buoys 3 & 4, quite far into the bay, keeping us clear of the high speed ferry from Liverpool as it powered past.



Dún Laoghaire harbour

Dun Laoghaire marina is pretty big, with 820 berths. The walk from the visitors pontoon to the shore and facilities building took a good 5 minutes, but there is a barge much closer with toilets and showers, although no hot water when we were there.

Despite the presence of a border patrol vessel in the harbour, we were not approached for any documentation, possibly because we had made landfall in Northern Ireland before arriving in Europe, as a yacht that arrived direct from Falmouth did have their papers inspected. The information for visiting yachts UK to Republic of Ireland (and on return) is quite confusing, with 2 UK government websites offering different information. We had all our paperwork on board - Bill of Sale showing VAT status, insurance documents etc. but at no point on the journey were they requested.

Tuesday was a rest day, so we explored the town, visited the maritime museum, housed in the old Mariners Church building, and admired the old houses and terraces dating from the heyday of the late 1800s when the fishing village was transformed by the arrival of the navy and the railway. Dun Laoghaire town centre is uninspiring, but does have a good bakery, and excellent hardware shop, a big Tesco and a useful chandlery. All of which we made use of in the next few days.

The weather spoiled our plans to move on quite quickly, blowing a strong and gusty southerly for the next few days - so a mini-break in Dun Laoghaire for us.

We filled our time with boat jobs (there are *always* boat jobs), watching the racing dinghies hurtling around the outer harbour - lots of knockdowns, the safety boats were kept on their toes! and walks along the bay to neighbouring areas of Blackrock (west) and Bullock Harbour to the east.



*The prom at Dun Laoghaire
Looking across Dublin Bay towards Howth*

The area has a lot of Martello towers remaining from the time of the French Revolutionary Wars. Around Dublin Bay twenty-six towers were in line of sight of each other, but not all remain. The one at Sandy Cove, on the way to Bullock Harbour, houses a museum dedicated to James Joyce. He stayed there for 6 days with a friend and incorporated the experience into the novel *Ulysses*. It was interesting to see how the interior had been used as a 'domestic' living space - but I wouldn't fancy living there, far too gloomy and cold. Although the views from the roof were good.

Bullock Harbour is a tiny creel fisherman's harbour with nothing but a few fisherman's huts, 3 bungalows and a derelict commercial premises. There are controversial plans for the development of fancy houses on the site.

We took the train into Dublin one day - the train station is about 200m from the marina entrance and frequent trains (the DART and Irish Rail share the line) run into Dublin for a modest €5 return fare. We visited the magnificent GPO building to see the Easter Rising exhibition, then on to Trinity College, but sadly not the book of Kells exhibition as it was fully booked for the afternoon. Walked along the river to the Jeanie Johnston, a replica famine ship, back to the train.

Eventually the familiar sound of slapping halyards and wind howling through the rigging eased - we were off again, heading for **Arklow**, a 27 mile trip, which took us almost 7 hours.

The bright breezy weather gave way to overcast and dull, the wind fading in the afternoon, though we had a good tidal push through smooth seas getting us to Arklow mid afternoon. We got almost the last spot on the visitor pontoon on the river. The marina was packed full, and by evening boats rafted along the pontoon, making for a narrow passage between them and the local boats on mooring trots.

The river scenery is very industrial, with a lot of construction and dredging etc, as far as the pontoon, then a rural idyll upstream.

Looking downstream from the pontoon towards the fishing harbour



Looking upstream 19 Arches Bridge, Arklow

We walked over the 1750s 19 Arches Bridge into town, up the main street and back along the river. There is not much to commend the main street, unless you are in the need of a nail bar (of which we saw 4) or betting shop (4 too). There is a bank ATM in town and also a large shopping centre with a Dunnes foodhall, between the bridge and the marina. At low water the step from the pontoon onto the ramp to shore was quite a challenge for someone with short legs!

Onward to **Kilmore Quay** the following day. We took the “outside route” round the banks off Wexford and had 3.5 kn of tide with us. We later chatted with the crew of “Puffin” who had taken the “inside route” and made about the same time as we had, just shy of 9 hours

There was very little wind, 6kn maximum, with the sea smooth and silky, high cloud then sunshine. Very relaxing. Until we approached the Bailies, just north of Carnsore Point where we saw fierce looking overfalls, despite the smooth seas and lack of wind. A brisk change of course to get around and back into calmer waters.



Carnsore Point

Turning the “corner” at Carnsore Point, an unspectacular low headland with an array of 14 wind turbines, we headed west for about 8 miles, and after crossing St Patrick’s Bridge (following the buoyed channel) were soon at Kilmore Quay, a very sheltered harbour, with the 60 berth marina tucked in the corner.

The harbour was quite busy with mostly small day fishing boats and a couple of bigger trawlers, plus the trip boats taking folk across to the Saltee islands, famous for the breeding seabirds.

We checked in with the friendly harbourmaster, had excellent fish and chips for tea, and a stroll along the headland to the Memorial Garden. A variety of memorials are situated in the gardens commemorating those who had died at sea, either natives of Kilmore or victims of accidents in the locality. There were a lot of names.



Kilmore Quay Memorial Gardens

The next planned leg, heading west for about 50 miles to anchor in Youghall river, turned out to be too ambitious! After a clear, sunny (and hot) morning the wind and sea picked up after lunch and we made poor progress beating into 16kn westerly wind and bashing into the waves. After calculating the time needed for the last 20 miles or so, we decided that we would not be able to make the entrance into Youghall river on the last of the flood tide, and a diversion into the anchorage at Helvick, at the southeasternmost point of Dungarvan Bay was made. Anchored off the small artificial fishing harbour, we had a quiet night at anchor.



Anchorage at Helvik, harbour to left of picture

Due to the tide times we skipped Youghal and headed for **Crosshaven** in Cork Harbour. Cork harbour is an extensive natural harbour, with a choice of marinas and anchorages, including Cork City and Cobh. Set off at around 8 o'clock on Thursday, another lovely sunny morning, but alas, no wind. After lunch we did have some wind 7kn - less challenging than yesterday! giving us a few hours sailing before the wind faded as we arrived at the entrance to Cork harbour - only to pipe up again just in time for berthing!



Lighthouse at Roches Point, entrance to Cork Harbour

Rounded Roches Point and followed the buoyed channel into the entrance and turned west up the Owenboy River to Crosshaven.

Onto the visitor pontoon on the hammerhead at Royal Cork Yacht Club marina at about half past 3, 38 miles in 8 hours. Founded in 1720, the RCYC claims to be the oldest yacht club in the world. Checked in and checked out the facilities: electric and water on the pontoon, a fuel berth, shower block and laundry as well as bar and restaurant, although a full menu was only on offer Friday to Sunday. Pizzas and sandwiches were available other days. And delicious they were too! We were made to feel very welcome by all the staff.

A 20 minute walk takes you into Crosshaven to a very good Centra supermarket, which catered for our needs. Carrigaline, a short bus ride away, has a wider range of shops if more complicated shopping needed.



Crosshaven is a very busy place boatwise, with a choice berths at Crosshaven boatyard (100), Salve marina (56) and Royal Cork YC (200) plus numerous moorings in the river, all the way to Drake's Pool 1.5 miles upstream, where Sir Francis Drake and five of his fleet bravely hid from the Spanish Armada in 1587.

As well as the Wednesday and Thursday evening yacht races, there were young people out on Optimists, Toppers and Lasers every day.

The weekend was chilly, breezy and cloudy. Saturday we visited the renowned Cronin's Bar in the village, but unfortunately they are not starting meals for another week after refurbishing the kitchens. So just a Guinness and a bag of crisps it was, followed by a walk up (very up!) to Camden Fort Meagher, perched on the top of Rams Head, with good views across the harbour and out to sea. Constructed in the 16th century, it is one of 4 forts built to defend Cork Harbour, the current structures date to the 1860s. Originally named Fort Camden and operated by the British Armed Forces, it was handed over to the Irish Defence Forces in 1938. Renamed Fort Meagher in honour of Thomas Francis Meagher, it remained an Irish military installation until 1989. For the last 11 years it has been run by, and is being restored by, volunteers.



The summer weather decided to come back on Monday, in warm sunshine (and a stiff breeze) we walked up the Owenboy river along the Crosshaven Greenway to Kilnaglery.

The path runs along the route of the Cork to Crosshaven railway line, operational from 1904 to 1932. Running alongside the river, it is very picturesque, the only downside being the traffic on the road which runs the other side of the footpath, although on the other side of a hedgerow, which muffled to noise.

Pizza in the Yacht Club and an early night. Susan was heading back home for two weeks, starting with a 6.30am taxi ride to Cork airport, flight to Edinburgh and home again.

Ray then started his sail single-handed round the south west fringes of Ireland.

PART 2 - Crosshaven to Dingle, 21 June to 3 July ***via Glandore Harbour, Baltimore, Bantry, Lawrence Cove***

Tuesday 21 June

Tuesday dawned sunny and warm with only a very light breeze. The forecast was for NW or variable soon becoming N F3 or 4. Rain or drizzle. After an early start to see Susan off in the taxi as I walked back to the boat I was thinking through single-handed tactics for leaving the berth. Even though I've been sailing for around fifteen years this would be the first time I had single-handed any significant distance, but I was looking forward to the challenge and keen to get going. High water would not be till 1155 but I was ready for the off by 10. I reckoned the last two hours of the flood at neaps would not pose a problem leaving Cork Harbour.

John from yacht Talisker, another visitor to RCYC, who I'd been chatting to earlier was kind enough to cast off my lines and I motored very slowly down the Owenboy River on autohelm while I took in the fenders. I was heading west for an anchorage in Glandore Harbour, which was recommended by another John, John O'Sullivan from 'Rambler' who I'd been talking to the day before. John is a long-time member of RCYC and has sailed these waters for several decades. The distance was approximately 40 NM and with the ebb soon to begin and the predicted northerly F4 I was hoping for a pleasant beam reach the whole way. However the wind proved much more fickle going from F1 SW to an F3 and back to zero so I motor sailed the entire way. Glandore Harbour proved to be a very pretty spot indeed with excellent shelter. My first ever attempt at anchoring single-handed went smoothly and I felt some satisfaction and not a little relief to have got the first day done without a hitch.



Wed 22 June

A leisurely start today - planning a short hop to Baltimore of 16NM or so, waiting for HW to set off to take advantage of the west-going tide. the weather was sunny and warm once more with a northerly F3 or 4 forecast becoming variable F3 or less. In reality I experienced a south westerly F3 or 4 all afternoon - right on the nose. At about 1600 I spotted "Lot's Wife" a very prominent stone beacon at the entrance to Baltimore Harbour. I'd heard that Baltimore was a popular destination among local yachties, and as I turned the corner towards the anchorage I spotted an absolute forest of masts in the distance. I didn't fancy rehearsing my newly-acquired single-handed anchoring skills in a closely packed anchorage, so I turned to port and headed for an

alternative spot on Sherkin Island north of the small ferry pier beneath the ruins of Dunalong Castle. It was a bucolic spot - I could smell freshly turned earth where a farmer was doing some ploughing nearby and a herd of cows gave me the once-over from the next field.



Lot's Wife which guards the entrance to the natural harbour of Baltimore

Thursday 23 June

The plan today was to head for a small marina at Lawrence Cove on Bere Island - a sheltered spot close to the mouth of Bantry Bay and somewhere I had visited previously. The forecast was anti-cyclonic, variable F2 to 4. I would have to round Mizen Head at the south west tip of Ireland and exposed to the full force of the Atlantic for the first time on this trip so I was glad the forecast was not for stronger wind. I chose to leave Baltimore Harbour via its northern entrance - "The Sound" - which made for some interesting pilotage following a narrow, twisting series of channels until I was clear into Long Island Bay. I was sad to transit this area so quickly as there is much to explore here - the sheltered harbour of Schull, a busy sailing centre, Roaring Water Bay, Cape Clear Island, but time was pressing and I needed to make progress if we were to complete this circumnavigation in one season. I weighed anchor at 1100 - it came up caked in thick sticky mud and I broke the special tool (a wooden spatula that we keep in the anchor locker) scraping it off. I set off into low cloud and drizzle but by 1500 as I was rounding Mizen Head the sun broke through and showed off the impressive cliffs. As I was admiring the scenery, Valentia Coastguard radio broadcast a Small Craft Warning for the following 24 hours. These SCWs are issued whenever winds of force 6 or more are predicted. Looking at windy.com the ECMWF forecast for the following few days was looking very poor as well with an approaching low pressure system and associated high winds. It looked like I would be stuck in port for a few days, and I needed supplies, so I modified my plan, leaving Bere Island to port as I entered Bantry Bay and headed directly for Bantry Harbour, still another three hours away. Sailing downwind in the early evening sunshine I was joined by a pod of dolphins who accompanied me for about half an hour. It's moments like these that I treasure and will remember for a long time.

As I rounded up and came alongside the long pontoon in Bantry's small marina a neighbouring

boat owner kindly took my lines. I found myself moored in front of a Hallberg Rassey 46 “Merlin” and behind “Asile” a Westerly Pentland ketch. In April of this year I had spent almost a month aboard Merlin sailing from Tenerife to Bantry to complete my Yachtmaster Ocean qualifying passage. The skipper, Chris, was not on board but I was to catch up with him a day or two later. Chatting to Simon and Sue aboard Asile I discovered that Simon was the Commodore of the Irish Cruising Association, and full of helpful advice about sailing these waters. I also discovered that I’d arrived, quite by chance, at the start of the week long Bantry Chamber Music Festival. I ended up spending a full week in Bantry which is a nice little market town - unspoiled as yet by tourism. I went to a couple of concerts with my new friends, Simon and Sue, swam in the hotel pool nearby, went to the cinema and to traditional music sessions in the town’s pubs. It turned out that Simon was also interested in folk music and he and I played in a late night session at Ma Murphy’s pub. Much Guinness was also consumed. We met Ma Murphy, an actual person - a young woman in her thirties I would guess - the third generation of women from the same family to have held that title and managed the pub.



Ma Murpy's Pub, Bantry - run by the same family for three generations

Thursday 30 June

Finally, a let up in the strong winds - it was time to tear myself away from the many delights of Bantry and head out to sea once more. I slipped my lines assisted by my new friends and motor sailed down Bantry Bay towards Lawrence Cove which I had skipped on the way past last week. Its a super little marina in a well-sheltered natural harbour on Bere Island and very well run by the owner, Rachel. The marina was full so I was put on the fuel berth. Strong winds were forecast again for Friday and Saturday, so it was Sunday before I left early at 0730 to catch the favourable tide past Fair Head, Black Bull Head, Crow Head and through Dursey Sound on my way toward Dingle.

Sunday 03 July

Dursey Sound was interesting - there's a cable car which crosses overhead - but there was plenty of clearance beneath even if the gondola happened to be directly above the mast. As I emerged from the sound I was met by a big Atlantic swell running counter to the tidal current. It quickly built up some huge waves, the biggest I was to encounter on this trip. I was sailing at this point with one reef in the main and the full jib, but I started the engine to help make progress against this big sea. Within half an hour or so I was through the worst of it and things calmed down a bit. There was still a fair sized swell running, but away from the exit from the sound the waves were not so steep.

My target for this evening was Dingle - chosen as it would be straightforward for Susan to get to by public transport when she flew back out from the UK to rejoin the cruise. Leaving Cod's Head to starboard, I headed north west towards Scariff island. At 1200 Valentia Coastguard broadcast a new Small Craft Warning for winds increasing to F6. By 1500 I was approaching Bray Head at the western tip of Valentia Island. Valentia Harbour was my final port of refuge before crossing Dingle Bay. There was a big Atlantic swell rolling in with waves I estimated to be between 2.5 and 4 metres but the wind was still only F4 so I decided to press on and made it to Dingle at around 1900. As I turned to windward to drop the mainsail a really big bottlenose dolphin passed under the boat and came up next to me to take a look. Dingle has been famous since the 1980s for their resident dolphin Fungie, but he is said to have died in 2020, so it cannot have been him.

The marina at Dingle has great facilities and has obviously had a lot of money spent on it. Work was underway to build a new restaurant on site and the showers and toilets were clean and modern. Colm, the marina manager was friendly and helpful, and the only thing lacking was diesel alongside. Walking to the nearest garage to fill cans was becoming a bit of a recurring theme on this trip!

I spent the next couple of days exploring Dingle on foot, renewing supplies and waiting for Susan to rejoin the trip.

PART 3 - Dingle to Galway, 8 July to 12 July ***via Fenit, Carrigaholt, Inishmore (Aran Islands), Rossaveal***

After a fraught journey (delayed buses and almost-missed connection) - 12 hours after leaving home Susan rejoined Sandpiper in the pretty harbour of Dingle on Tuesday 5 July, for the next stage north. And the forecast for the next couple of days was strong winds from the north. Oh well.

On Wednesday we explored the town of Dingle - quite a busy seaside vibe with many day trippers and coach parties, stopping off on the Sleah Head Drive. Plenty of boat trips running - wildlife around the harbour tours and out to Blasket Sound, plus angling boats. Fungie the Dingle dolphin is no more, after nearly 40 years residency in the harbour he hasn't been seen since 2020. He is commemorated with a statue on the harbourfront and the lighthouse buildings have a smart mural of him.

Dingle marina is very well sheltered with good facilities with, once again, friendly helpful people. Water and electricity on the pontoons, fuel a walk away, a good Supervalu supermarket close by. Minor repairs and chandlery services are available too. Oh, and reportedly 52 pubs in Dingle!



Dingle harbour, marina on left

We ate fish and chips on the seats by the Fungie statue, then headed into town for a folk concert at St James Church, situated in the ancient town graveyard, the Church of Ireland parish church was rebuilt in 1807. The performers were all local people, and very accomplished. A jolly time was had by all.

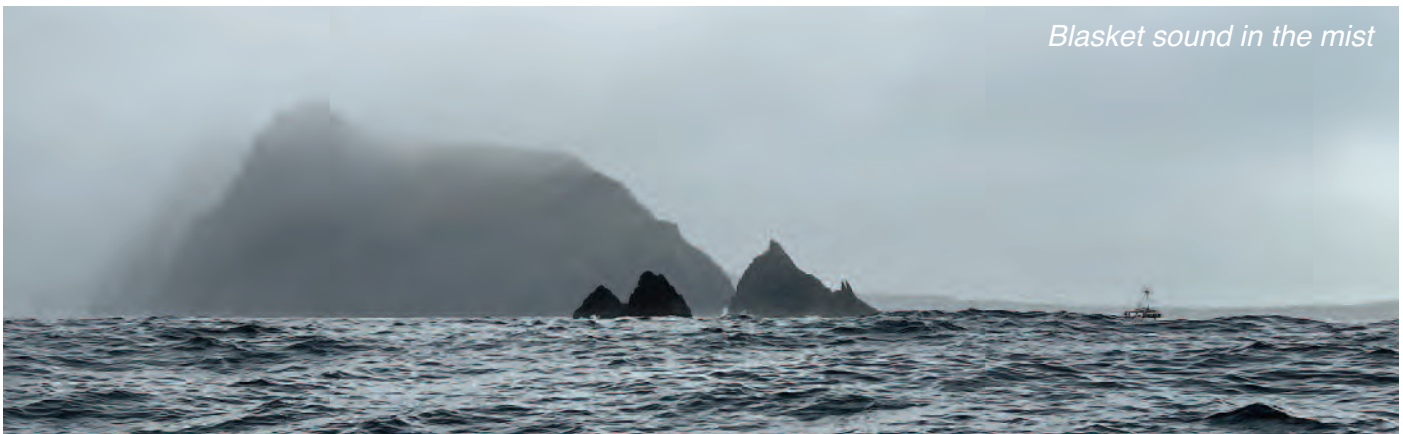
The next day was still a bit too blowy for the north passage through the Blasket Sound, so we had a bracing walk along the cliff path. Passing the ruin of Lough Tower, aka "Hussey's Folly", built in 1845 as a famine-relief job creation project, and the lighthouse. We reached a cove with coarse sand and jaggy rocks, the rollers coming straight in from Dingle Bay. Had a paddle - cold! Decided against a swim.



White tower light, Dingle Harbour, with Fungie mural

Next morning, up bright and early for the passage north through Blasket Sound we departed Dingle at 7 o'clock on misty, moody morning with little wind, heading for the Shannon Estuary and the harbour at Fenit.

We double checked the tide times and the forecast as the advice for Blasket Sound being *"pilotage ... straightforward and it provides a convenient route that avoids the extensive rocks and shoals that lie to the west of Great Blasket. As such, in reasonable weather, with fair wind or tide, Blasket Sound is the preferred leisure boat passage. But, in unsettled weather or at night, with its exposed position, uneven bottom and strong tides, it is best to pass to the seaward of the island group and its dangers"* The marina manager told us that it could be tricky too, so bracing ourselves, we motored round Slea Head.



Blasket sound in the mist

The Sound was lumpy and roly and quiet unpleasant, but only for a couple of miles, although the sea remained quite roly all day, with lumpy bits as we passed the headlands of Brandon Head and rounded into Tralee Bay. We were joined by dolphins for about 20 minutes as we crossed Brandon Bay - always a delight.



Arriving at 4 o'clock, after 41 miles, onto the pontoon hammerhead just inside **Fenit** harbour, met by John the harbourmaster. Again, very friendly and welcoming.

Fenit is a strange little place - the harbour mostly serves small fishing boats and is situated on Great Samphire Island, which is connected to the mainland by a viaduct.

On the peak of the island stands a rather grand statue of St Brendan The Navigator, pointing west, as this is where he was born. According to the 9th century text *"Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis"* (*Voyage of St Brendan the Abbot*) he reputedly set off in a currach built from oak bulwarks, ash frames and skinned with oxhides tanned in oak bark on a seven year voyage of exploration sometime around 512AD. Several local landmarks are named after him including Mount Brandon and Brandon Creek where his journey started.



Another early start for the tides across the Shannon Estuary, out of Tralee Bay and around Kerry head across onto the north shore. A favoured stopping place is the sheltered marina inside the lock at Kilrush, five miles inside the entrance and on the north shore of the River Shannon. However as the weather was settled we decided to skip the 8 mile detour (there and back), and anchor at **Carrigaholt Bay**, on the north bank of the River Shannon about 5 miles from Loop Head, a 26 mile trip from Fenit. It provides a good anchoring area in Kilcredan Bay just south of the castle. There was a lot of bird life around, and some seals, but not the famous pod of bottle nose dolphins.



Carrigaholt castle

After a misty night the next morning was clear and bright. Up and away at 7 o'clock to catch the tide out of the Shannon and around Loop Head, a long day to the **Aran Islands** 45 miles along the most exposed section of the west coast. The few anchorages that are here all come with dire warnings of one sort or another. Even our destination at **Kilronan** bay on **Inishmore** comes with provisos: "*Kilronan is a good anchorage and the only reliable haven in the Aran group*" - but "*exposed from NW to East*"

We had a day of glorious sailing, sea slight with a gentle swell and dolphin encounters too. Arriving at half past 5, we took a visitor mooring and relaxed and watched the activities in the harbour as people made the most of a lovely hot sunny day.



Kilronan harbour from the moorings

The sailing directions describe Inishmore as very touristy - and boy are they right! Five inbound ferries each morning, each with the capacity for hundreds of passengers bring day trippers, mostly, it seems, to visit Dun Aonghasa/Aengus fort. Dating back over 3000 years, the semicircular fort of three concentric enclosures, is situated against the edge of sheer 100 metre cliff.

Next morning we beat the crowds to the bike hire (there are 3 places in Kilronan with 100+ bikes each) and set off on the coast path, but it soon became overgrown tracks, impassable by bike. We worked our way on narrow tracks between the small walled fields to the road and joined the bicycling throng heading to the fort. Minibuses and horse-drawn carriages all in the procession too. We stopped for lunch at the picturesque Port Mhuirbhagh/Kilmurvey beach, mentioned in the sailing directions as a temporary anchorage, handy for the fort. When we reached the Visitor Centre we parked our bikes in the bike park and walked the last mile up to the fort. Fabulously bleak limestone pavement landscapes and one fabulously impressive walled fortification.



One of the many carriages



Dun Aengus outer walls and view across Inishmore

Back in Kilronan we replenished provisions at the Spar and then made the short 10 mile hop across to **Rossaveal** (or Rossaveel) in Cashla Bay on the mainland, where we berthed overnight. The marina is well sheltered with water and electricity on the pontoons, but no other facilities yet - building work underway for scheduled 2023 opening. There is a local Spar shop half a mile away but apparently quite basic. We had considered leaving Sandpiper here for our planned return home at the end of the week, but on reflection decided that Galway Dock would be a better option for supplies, and entertainment. Although Galway has no marina toilets/showers either, the local hotel (500m away) offers the facilities for €10.

After consulting the very helpful harbourmaster at **Galway** (Brian) to check he could accommodate us for a month we headed the 20 miles east after lunch, arriving around 5pm, before the lock gates closed at high water. Into our allocated spot in an almost full marina, located in the inner basin of the commercial harbour.



The overcast skies gave way to hot, hot sunny weather and we explored the streets of Galway, walked along the banks of the river Corrib, back to the harbour through the 16th century Spanish Arch, which was part of the Norman walls of the city.

The next day we visited the Galway Museum - nicely laid out and not too big - and sorted out replacement Gaz bottle (camping shop in town) and diesel - by cans from the filling station a 10 minute walk away. On enquiring about tanker delivery we were told that the delivery charge would be more than the cost of a tank of diesel!

Galway is a very busy place, with plenty of tourists meandering along. The annual arts festival was getting underway the coming weekend, which attracts even more visitors. There are many shops for ordinary things as well as Irish souvenirs, and bars and restaurants on just about every corner.

The weather continued sunny and warm the following day. We packed a picnic and headed along the shore path to the neighbouring seaside town of Salthills, a rather brisk westerly in our faces! There were lots of folk out on the prom and the fine sandy beach. Went for a paddle - a long walk at low water Springs. On our return to Galway we came across high wire artists from the Community Circus walking across tightropes set up over Claddagh old harbour and the river. As we watched a couple of novices bravely ventured across. Impressive stuff.

After dinner we attended a recital of medieval sacred music from the Eton Choirbook at the Cathedral, part of their summer season. Very lovely. The impressive stone building was only dedicated in 1965, and as such is the youngest of Europe's great stone cathedrals.

Galway Cathedral



Galway Cathedral

Our last day of this leg was spent cleaning/tidying/packing in readiness for our return home via airport bus from Galway to Dublin and the flight to Newcastle.

PART 4 - Galway to Portrush, 10 Aug to 22 Aug ***via Rossaveal, Inishbofin, Killybegs, Aranmore***

Thursday 11 August. Returning to Galway after our month at home to find the boat - and the whole harbour - liberally sprinkled with fine limestone dust left after a limestone ship had been in harbour. Much washing down later and with the hope of a strong breeze to shake off the dust in the rigging, we were ready to go (after a provisioning run to nearby Dunnes foodhall). Leaving on the afternoon lock in glorious sunshine we noticed fire engines and crew on the end of the old pier talking to the sea anglers. One of the firemen waved us over and asked us to head across the bay to Hare Island as there were people reported in the water - cries for help had been heard. As we headed across the lifeboat overtook us, and soon we heard on the radio that a rib had recovered the people, so we continued on our way.



We arrived at **Rossaveal** at dusk (9pm) and spent a peaceful night on the pontoon.

Friday was hot and sunny again. Leaving Rossaveal after breakfast, we motorsailed all day, beating into a NW/N wind round Slyne Head to the anchorage at **Inishbofin**. 46 miles in almost 11 hours. We anchored as recommended opposite the new pier, below the ruins of Cromwell's castle, a star shaped fort built around 1656, guarding the natural harbour. There were a handful of other yachts in the anchorage.

The next morning we went ashore and walked around the Middlequarter Loop, one of 3 marked circular walks on the island. It took us past the fenced off airstrip, built in 2008 but never brought into use as the recession hit. A baking hot day on the island, although there was a cool northerly blowing through the harbour, but nowhere else. The walk took us through the desolate interior of flooded peat cuttings and rugged moor, then a bit of a scramble up to the summit where we had good 360° view of the island.

Back in the village we had a cold beer and reviewed the weather - which was forecast to deteriorate over the next week - and considered our options for stopping points heading north.



Inishbofin anchorage

We decided to go for a passage straight to **Killybegs** on the north of Donegal Bay - about 120 miles. So off we went - motor sailing into a F4 northerly wind. We approached Achill Head as it began to grow dark. The wind increased to F5 and the sea built with it to a horrible, choppy, rolly



Achill Head at dusk

mess. We put another reef in the main and rolled away some headsail. Ray was starting to consider diverting to a safe anchorage until the morning. He checked with the crew, but morale was high and with an improving forecast for the next few hours we decided to press on. Once round the point, the winds eased to 10kn or so. A cloudy star-less night, with only a peek of moon through the clouds. The night watch was uneventful - apart from distant fireworks sighted at 4am, over County Mayo, near Eagle Island. Most unexpected.

Sunday dawned grey and cloudy, the wind continued from a northerly direction, but once we rounded Erris Head we were sailing north east across Donegal Bay, on a good close reach. A minke whale was heard and seen, quite close to the boat, then it and another swam leisurely away to the east. We also had a brief encounter with a small group of dolphins, and there were many seabirds around - something we hadn't seen for a while. The wind had reduced all afternoon and as it faded to 5kn we motored the last 10 miles to Killybegs harbour, arriving at 5.30pm after 26½ hours. As we were berthing at the marina the boat was reluctant to reverse, but we managed to get alongside. Deciding to leave the problem for another day, we ate and went to bed.

The next morning we tested going forward and reverse - it was still not feeling right - suspected something fouling the prop, so arranged to get lifted out at Mooney's boatyard tomorrow to have a look.

Meanwhile we had a walk around Killybegs. It didn't take long. We had a very nice lunch at the Ahoy cafe, which is close to the marina entrance.

Back on board discovered a lot of fresh water in the bilge. Tracked it back to a dripping connector from the hot water tank. Repaired and mopped up before walking to the petrol station - about 2km up the road - and filled the cans with diesel. We will never take pontoon-side fuel for granted again!

We were lifted out at 8.30am - quite hair-raising getting into the hoist bay without much reverse power. The prop looked absolutely fine - our hope of a quick clean up and back in the water gone. After consultation with the local Volvo engineer he concluded either the clutch was gone, or the prop rubber perished. It turned out to be the latter. New prop on order, just hanging around until it arrives and is fitted. The owner of the yard, Lee, very kindly allowed us to stay on board while we were in the yard.



The lift out

The yard is quite a big operation, Mooney Boats are the largest ship building and restoration company in North West Ireland, specialising in boat building, engineering, repair and maintenance of, mainly, the fishing fleet based in Killybegs - trawlers up to 48m long. Plus a little Bavaria 32! Lee, and his staff, were so helpful and welcoming.



2 recently built 32m trawlers undergoing fit-out

Wednesday was warm and sunny. We walked to Fintra beach about 3 miles away and had a swim in the warm sea - about 21° apparently. We saw dolphins swimming just off the beach too. There were a lot of folk out enjoying the windless sunny day.

Fintra beach - a long walk to the sea



We had fish and chips at the Marina Cafe in Killybegs. According to Google it was “busier than usual” There was us and one other couple!

The propellor is on its way, but not yet arrived so the next day we got the bus into Donegal town. It was very warm, but a bit wet and rainy.

Donegal Castle



We looked at the castle - built in 15thC by Red Hugh O'Donnell. English captain Sir Basil Brooke became the castle's new lord in 1616, and built a manor house beside the tower. The buildings fell into ruin in the twentieth century, but was partially restored in the 1990s.

We visited the railway heritage centre, a volunteer-run museum, housed in the old railway station, telling the history of the narrow gauge railway opened 1889. No track or trains as yet, but interesting artefacts and very enthusiastic guide.

Railway Heritage Centre

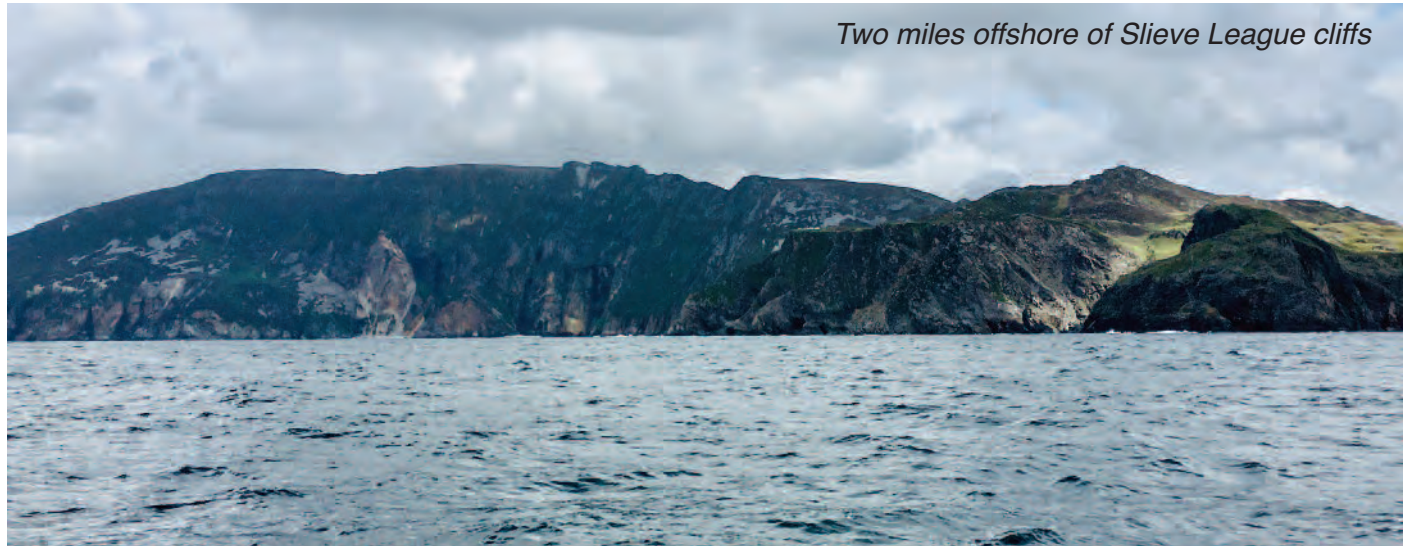


Lunch at the Abbey Hotel - very nice. Spent some time browsing in a large bookshop, then got the bus back.

On Friday, just as we were heading off to do shopping and take laundry, Lee called us into the office - the propellor had arrived! It had to be modified slightly by Gerard the engineer, then fitted and painted. Hurrah! Lift in tomorrow.

Our last night on the hard was not restful - wind blowing up to F8 and heavy rain made for a lot of noise and vibration.

Back in the water around noon the next day and onto the pontoon for final prep/provisioning and fish and chips from the Seafood Shack - very tasty. Cloudy and a chilly breeze though.



Two miles offshore of Slieve League cliffs

Next stop **Aranmore** (Donegal Aran islands). Headed off into swelly seas and cloudy skies. Passed the massive Slieve League cliffs and round Malin Beag headland, a westerly wind but even though only F3 to tack into, engine assist was needed. 10 hours of uncomfortable seas to get 53 miles to Calf Island anchorage at Aranmore, tucked out of the swell. Lots of small craft moorings in the area charted as anchorage, as is often the case, but plenty of room still to be had avoiding the ferry pier. Overnight the wind shifted to the south - not so sheltered now! Swell running in, plus wind whistling in the rigging disturbed our sleep.

Monday - a day of options. We could have a day sail to Fanad Head, at the entrance to Lough Swilly, sleep there and then continue to Portrush, (but with the risk of being stuck at Fanad if the low pressure system arrives sooner than forecast), or a longer sail to Portrush (70nm) while the weather holds. We chose **Portrush**. The sea was much calmer today and we had a lovely sail all morning, then the wind went to the east and we were heading into the wind and waves again. Not too bad though, warm and cloudy, with a bit of sunshine for a time, and drizzle to welcome us to Portrush. We arrived at the harbour entrance at half past nine - half an hour after sunset. The entrance was tricky to spot against the town lights - and the lights of the funfair! The sailing directions describe a 45m pontoon in the harbour, but half of that reserved for lifeboat operations, so only room for 2 or 3 visitors. We tucked in behind a fat motor boat, clear of the lifeboat area.



Portrush harbour & pontoon

Our last port on the island of Ireland, the weather gave us a good send off the next morning, bright and sunny, with light southerly airs. After making use of the marina-side facilities block (our first on-shore shower since Dingle) we set off northward again, towards Islay and onward to our moorings at Linnhe Marine.

In Conclusion

Someone once said to me, “don’t have a plan when you’re sailing, because you won’t be doing what you planned”. Well that was very true about this trip. Having anticipated it for a few years, I was sure we were going to go round anti-clockwise, and all my prior passage planning had been based on that. When it came time to set off, that simply was not possible for as far as the forecast was predicting. Rather than wait a week or two we decided just to get going, so we turned left out of the Clyde and headed down Ireland’s east coast.

Overall, the trip took much longer than I anticipated. Many more days were spent in port waiting for a change in the wind direction than I expected, but we tried to make the most of those by exploring our surroundings. We spent much more time motoring than I wanted - it seemed that even when we had an excellent forecast the reality did not match up.

Did we enjoy the trip? Yes, very much. One of the things I like best about sail cruising is exploring places you’ve never been, arriving at a completely new destination based just on the information in the charts and the sailing directions and discovering how they match up with reality. We enjoyed that experience over and over again on this trip.

There was so much to see and so many places to explore that the wish to get round in one season was often at odds with the desire to stay and spend more time in one place. If we were to do it again I would be inclined to cover some of the “less interesting” sections as a two to three day passage, giving us more time to linger in some of the sailing sweet spots.

Total distance logged:	953.10nm
Total time underway:	201h 5m
Total number sailing days:	23 days
Number of days in port:	29 days