

Day 24 - Lord of the Rings

Sive Hostel where I stayed last night was a pleasant surprise. My room, though not large, had a good comfortable bed and ensuite shower room. There was a good kitchen with help yourself tea and coffee and a sitting room for residents. The weather last night was dank, a fine drizzle made going outside pretty unattractive but I went down the road to a pub recommended by Tripadvisor to find that, like the South Pole, last night, they weren't serving food. However that was, I think, serendipitous because the Kerry Coast Inn where I ended up fed me very well indeed. Most soups of the day seem to be based around Celeriac and are fine but last night I got broccoli with a touch of curry and it was excellent. I followed up with Lemon Sole on mashed potato and with various root veg. It was beautifully cooked, the skin nicely charred, and as tasty a piece of fish as I have enjoyed on this trip. I returned to write the blog feeling good.

This morning I was surprised to be offered a proper breakfast. Both hostels I have stayed in so far gave me cereals and toast but Mary, in charge of the kitchen, doled out a good bowl of porridge and then fried an egg to go on my toast. At 35 euros B&B it was good value.

I was packed and away by 0910. I'd been having an internal debate as to whether or not to take the ferry to Valentia Island and then to follow the Skellig Ring which hugs the coast but adds about 10 miles to the journey. In the event I went to The Point where Annie and I enjoyed a great lunch in 2013 but the ferry was across on the Island. Rather than wait I made my way by road to Portmagee which is where I would have come off Valentia by the bridge. The day was still very murky but dry as I took a picture of the harbour



Now was the do or die moment. I had the option of retracing my steps back to the main road or continuing on the Skellig Ring, knowing that I was letting myself in for a very steep climb. I decided to go for it as I wanted to see the Kerry Cliffs which were on the Ring. I paid 4 euros to walk about 10 minutes up a stone track to see the cliffs and they were spectacular



That is looking towards Valentia Island with cloud cover in the background and this is the opposite direction



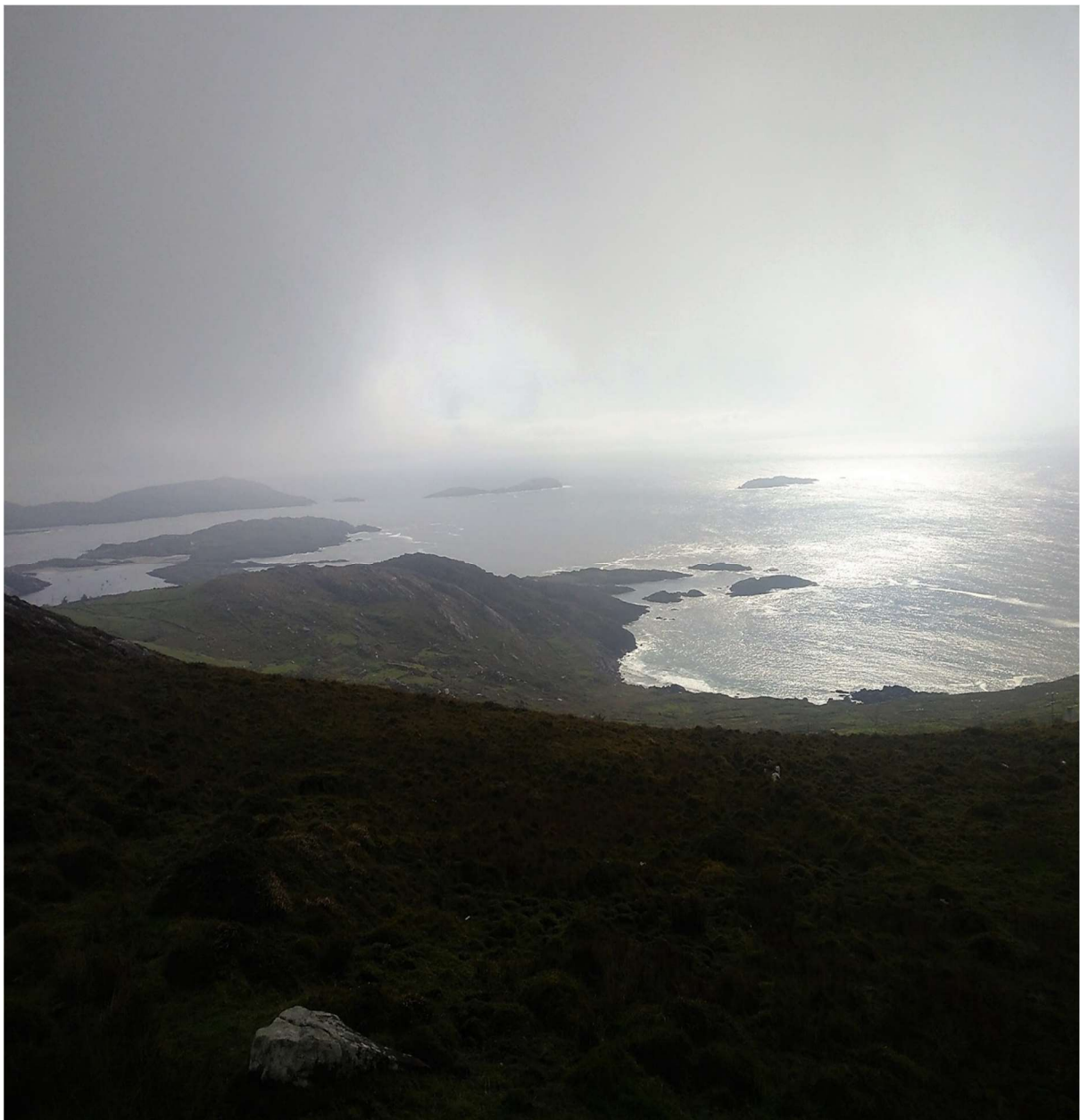
Well worth the price and the steep climb on foot to get the pictures. I imagine that it must be even more impressive earlier in the year with breeding seabirds, including Puffins. A shame that the cloud was still low and visibility limited.



I turned right out of the carpark and was straight into a 5% climb which quickly steepened until the Garmin was reading 14%. I had to pull over in a passing place to get my breath back but carried on into the cloud, stopping once more before I crested the hill and started the sharp descent towards Ballinskelligs which has a decent beach and a ruined abbey but I did not stop and was into the next climb over the headland, nothing like so steep and easily accomplished and headed for the N70 Ring of Kerry road.

The Ring of Kerry is pretty much a must do in a tour of Ireland so there are a lot of cars and particularly coaches using the road. It is about 111 miles round, running from Killarney in the East to Waterville in the West and encompasses some stunning scenery especially through Molls Gap and the Killarney National Park. Having left it at Caheersiveen I re-joined just short of Waterville at about lunchtime. Waterville is a favoured spot for coach parties to take lunch so the place was heaving, but I managed to get a bowl of soup and a pint of Smithwicks Red at the Lobster Bar.

There is a significant climb out of Waterville that grinds on for about four miles. It's not especially steep but every time you think you've reached the top there's another pitch. I managed to do the first mile off the main road by taking to the Kerry Way but after that there was no option. In places there is a hard shoulder for cycles but most of the time you're competing with the traffic. Fortunately my timing was such that most of the coaches had not left Waterville before I reached the summit so it was not too hair-raising. As I descended the sun finally broke through giving a good view of the coast far below



and by the time I reached sea level the sun was well and truly shining on Carroll's Cove

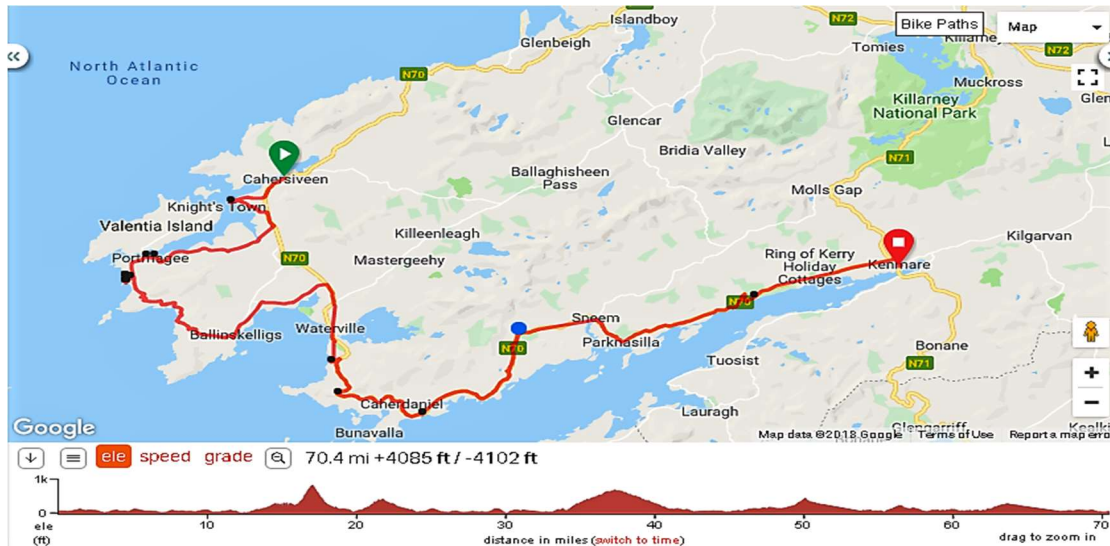


All the major climbing was now done and the scenery changed dramatically once past Sneem, another favoured coach stop. Now I was in amongst trees and there was a substantial amount of forest planting



and felling

I was feeling good. I think the combination of sun on my back and lack of wind make cycling so much easier that 70 miles doesn't seem so far, despite the amount of climbing that I had done earlier in the day. The last 7 miles were along a flat straight road and I arrived in Kenmare at about a quarter to five. I'm staying in another Hostel but have my own room.



Hopefully it will prove as nice as last night.

Day 25 - Cables

Kenmare Failte Hostel is about as central as you can get. There was a message on the front door to telephone the warden, Mary (yes yet another Mary), who arrived, let me in, showed me where to put the bike in a locked garage and showed me my room. For some reason my room was behind a door marked private and I had a whole wing, incorporating a shower and two loos to myself. There was also a washing machine and tumble drier that I was told I could not use; but what I had suited me well. The hostel has a communal kitchen and sitting room and there is ad lib tea, coffee and toast whenever you want it.

Kenmare is still busy with lots of tourists doing the Ring of Kerry and so I was spoilt for choice for somewhere to eat. I wandered down the street and into a bar for a couple of pints of Guinness. I had a brief chat with

the owner and then on to find a restaurant. Unfortunately I chose badly. The crab salad starter was fine but the burger was overcooked and I came out feeling I'd done badly. So back to the blog and sleep in a very comfortable double bed. The room had an electric panel heater on the ceiling and I hung the washing around the edge of it and it more or less dried overnight. My wind jacket was a bit wet on the sleeves when I put it on this morning but it soon dried on me.

Breakfast was tea and toast which I shared with a German family, mother, father and daughter in her twenties. They all spoke impeccable English and had flown Ryanair from Frankfurt to Kerry airport, which is midway between Killarney and Tralee, for some ludicrously small sum and were touring in a car for three days. I suggested that they go and see Molls Gap and the Kerry Cliffs and, if time, down to Mizen Head.

I left at 0947 expecting a gentle 55 mile ride to Castletownbere by way of Dursey head to see the cable car that transports people and livestock the 200 metres to and from Dursey Island. The weather was lovely, sunny if a little chilly and I made my way over the Kenmare river and down the south side of Kenmare Bay looking across at the ground that I covered yesterday



About 7 miles into the trip I went to change gear and.....nothing: the lever controlling the back gears was completely solid. I continued for a bit to find somewhere I could stop in the sunshine, unloaded everything and checked to see if it was something I could fix. Unfortunately it was a broken cable and, although I carry a spare it is not an easy job to do at the roadside. I'd noticed that there was a bike shop opposite the hostel so thought it best to return to Kenmare and plead with the bike shop to mend it in good time so that I could continue the journey. When I got there Liam was minding the shop which sells anything to do with sports and children's toys and there was a steady stream of customers. I made my case and he said he'd see what could be done and telephone me when he had looked at the problem. I wandered next door for a cup of coffee and, to cut a painfully long story short, having walked around Kenmare a couple of times and had some lunch, the bike was ready to go at about 1.45pm at a cost of 40 euros which I didn't think was unreasonable.

I retraced my early morning route wondering whether or not to try to complete my plan or to cut the corner and go straight to Castletownbere. I figured that I could still get to Dursey Island and be at my B&B by 7pm if all went according to plan. It gets dark about 7.30pm so I should be able to complete it in the light.

My route to Ladragh was uneventful. The scenery has changed dramatically from the Ring of Kerry. Most of the time I was riding through trees and could not see the sea. Occasionally I emerged into scenery that reminded me of Cornwall and parts of Scotland



The day was still bright and sunny without much wind and I was enjoying the ride. My route left the Ring of Beara and I went along some narrow roads with grass down the middle, up and down like a roller coaster. It was certainly giving the new cable a workout. Through the town of Eeyries, every house, including some that were unoccupied ruins had been painted in pastel colours and it has won several Tidy Town awards



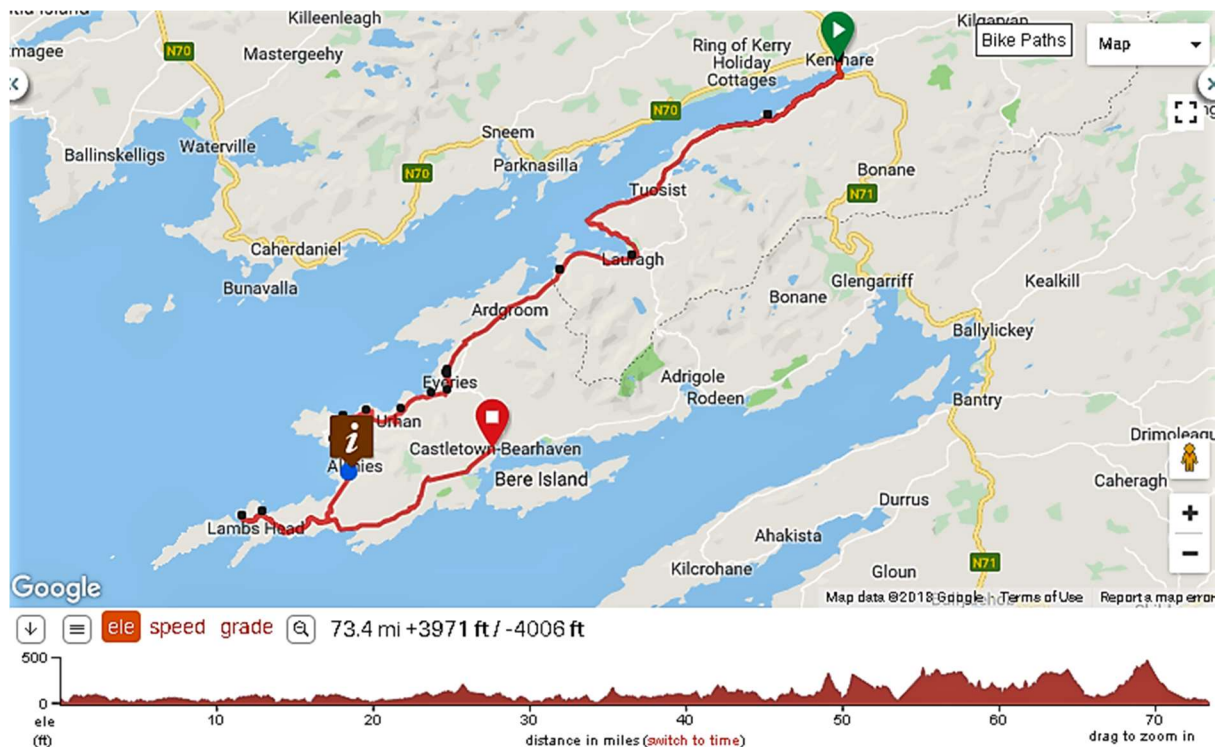
Shortly afterwards the day started to go even more wrong. First Gary Garmin froze and would not allow me to see where I was meant to be going. Then I took a wrong turn and ended going around the coast instead of in a straighter line across country. I tried to get back on track but came to a dead end and had to turn back. The coast road was lovely but very steep in places and adding time to my already long day, putting my finishing time in jeopardy.



I was getting views of the route I travelled yesterday across a now wide channel. The road twisted and turned and roller-coastered until I reached the village of Allihies where I stopped to buy a bottle of water from the grocery store. The GPS signal was poor so the route shown on the final map does not follow the roads but goes in a straight line in places. However I was now back on track and when I arrived at the turning down to Lamb's Head and Dursey Island I reckoned I had just enough time to get down there, take a couple of pictures and still be in Castletownbere before 7pm which was the latest time that the B&B wanted me to clock in.

Of course there's many a slip and the road to Lamb's Head was up and down and by the time I reached the cable car I was late and the light was poor. However the cable car was going across the straight and I grabbed a couple of pictures that are so bad that there's not much point in publishing them.

I turned and went hell for leather back to the main road to Castletownbere. At the junction I still had about six miles to go and it was a significant climb to start with, followed by a long descent which proved just how far I had climbed. I finally made it to the B&B at 7.10pm to find that the person expecting my arrival had left. However a phone call soon had Michelle along to let me in and show me around. I'm the only resident and have a very nice room and excellent modern shower room. The B&B is above a tea room where I shall be given breakfast at 9am.



I've no idea why the GPS signal has been so bad for much of the day but it has resulted in some strange tracks on the map but, as far as I can see, I've travelled 73.4 miles rather than the 55 I'd anticipated: however I may have travelled further than that, it certainly felt like it for the last 10 miles or so.

Day 26 - From Lamb's to Sheep's head

Some years ago I was given a book called McCarthy's Bar, probably by my son Jim. The premise of the story is that Pete McCarthy journeyed from Cork to Donegal and never passed a bar with his name on it. The picture on the cover of the book shows him standing in the doorway of MacCarthy's Bar in Castletownbere which is where I stayed last night.



Castletownbere is a major fishing port and, as such, you would imagine that it would have some amazing restaurants. However we are getting outside the season and, because I did not get to The Old Medical Hall until after 7pm I was not ready to go out until after 8pm by which time all the restaurants bar the Chinese were closed. So the Chinese it was: it was fine in a Chinese restaurant way but I would have preferred to have sampled the local fish. Knowing the story of MacCarthy's Bar I had to

drop in for a couple of pints after I had eaten, to join a very dodgy looking clientele. Anyway the blog called and I went back to pen my thoughts for the day.

This morning Kira gave me an excellent FIB and I was away at about 10am with 59 miles to travel to Kilcrohane in the Sheep's Head peninsula. The B&B was nice although the bed was a bit small. The road from Castletownbere to Glengariff is a real rollercoaster. At one point I was climbing at a steady 3-4% for about four miles - hard, relentless work into a head wind but at least there was a decent hard shoulder to keep me away from the traffic. I was pleased to turn the corner as I joined the N71 coming down from Healey Pass.

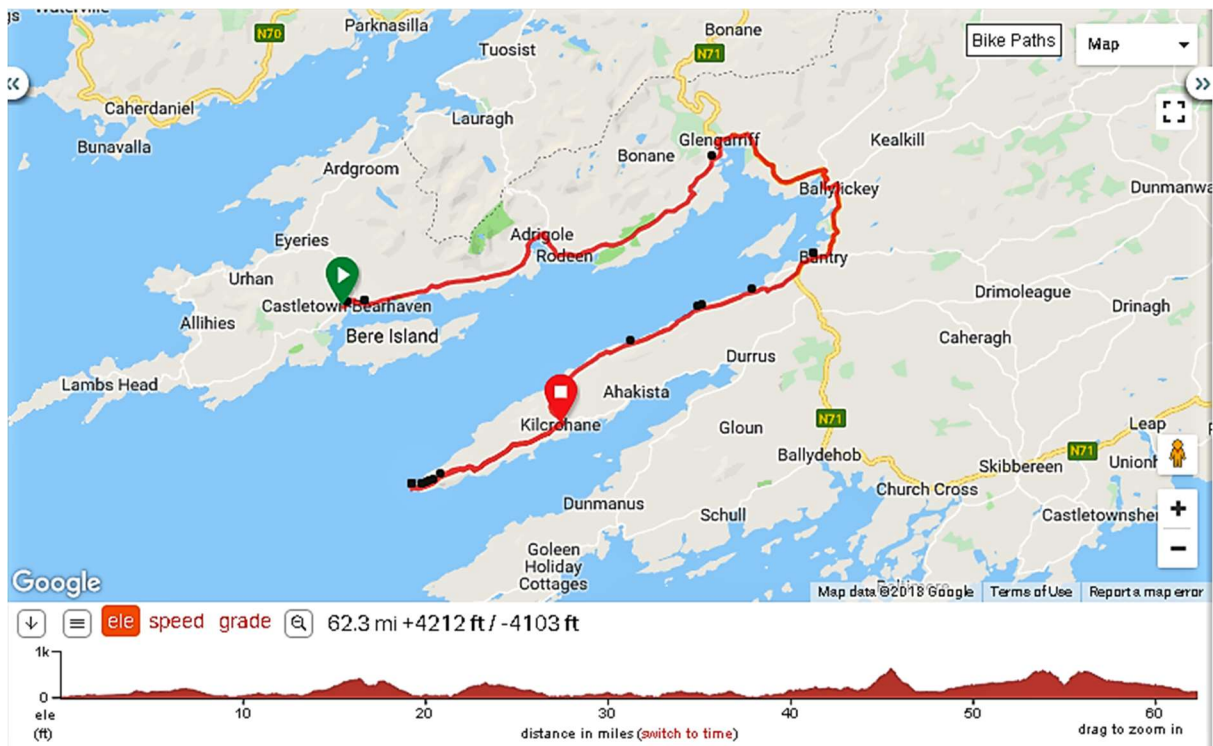
I was soon in Bantry on market day and the town was busy. I'd intended to stop for lunch but the day was chilly and the town was in deep shade so I went to the marina and took some pictures back towards the town.



Past Bantry I left the main road and hugged the coast of Bantry Bay past Rooska and Glanlough with great views across the bay and of rock formations

To get to my destination I had to cross a mountain - well a decent hill anyway and I ground away in bottom gear for about a mile of up to nearly 15% for a short stretch. The view from the top was excellent, looking across to the Mizen peninsula that I shall visit tomorrow with a distant view in the mist of Ireland's teardrop, the Fastnet Lighthouse. The descent to Kilcrohane where I am staying at the Bay View Inn was fast and furious and I was there at about 3pm. I wanted to go on to the end of the Sheep's Head peninsula to see the lighthouse that was completed in 1958 by flying in all the materials by helicopter. It was a 6 mile ride followed by another mile and a half on foot on some very up and down terrain but I made it and was back at the B&B by 5.15 for supper at 6.





Day 27 - Extreme(ly) satisfied

I was having trouble finding somewhere, convenient and reasonably priced, to stay on the Sheep's Head peninsula. Eventually I found a website for the Bay View Inn in Kilcrohane with few details but I, nonetheless, emailed for a price. Mary replied straight-away that she could give me bed and breakfast and provide a meal in the evening for 55 euros which was extremely good value. I agreed and said I would contact her nearer the time about my arrival, which I did from Castletownbere, saying I expected to be there at 3pm, would drop my luggage and cycle down to the Sheep's Head lighthouse and back in time for a meal at 6pm.

When I arrived on the dot of 3pm, Mary was behind the bar with a couple of paying customers inside and a few more in the garden. The Bay View Inn was much bigger than I had anticipated and has a large bar and restaurant, although, on the day, the latter was closed to all but me.

As reported yesterday, I duly cycled down as far as I could and walked about a mile over some very rough ground to the lighthouse before returning for the best fish and chips I have had on this trip. Mary had cooked some pollock fillets in tempura batter and they were delicious, served with a salad and some chips. I finished it off with some apple tart and cream.

By this time the bar was filling up with a lot of people in their mid to late twenties and I caught a number of obviously English accents. I started chatting to them and it transpires that they were all at Trinity College Dublin together and this was a reunion. There were about 30 of them, male and female and they were definitely in celebration mode. It must have done the bar takings a power of good and they were back again tonight and tomorrow so Mary will have had a good weekend.

I brought the computer down to the bar to write the blog as that was the only place I could get a WiFi signal, consequently more Guinness was consumed than was good for me and I went off to bed at about 10pm having had an enjoyable chat with Oliver who works for the British

Foreign Office in London but would prefer to work in Ireland.

I was given a good fry-up by Mary in the morning and we had a chat. She has been running the Bay View Inn for 16 years but it is up for sale as it is getting a bit much for her to manage. Anyway she looked after me well and even with all the Guinness the bill was only 77 euros.



I was away at 0856. My route followed the Sheep's Head path along the north shore of Dunmanus Bay to its head at Durrus. There was a fair bit of up and down but nothing especially taxing. The day was calm but overcast as I crossed the river and started to head along the south shore of the bay. There were some interesting views of the Sheep's Head peninsula and I could make out Kilcrohane in the distance



The road was narrow but reasonably level until about 20 miles in, when I climbed over the top of the Mizen peninsula and had my first view of Mizen Head in the distance. I dropped down towards a small lake and then I was back on the coast at Barleycove with the Atlantic waves curling onto the shore.



And then, suddenly, there I was at the Mizen Head signal station with a Start/Finish line painted on the road, just as there had been at Malin Head three weeks ago. The shortest road distance between the two is 380 miles and it has been completed in 19 hours and 3 minutes! Even taking account of the fact that I had to miss about 270 miles due to Storm Ali I have still covered about 1023 miles between the two Heads.



I decided to get off the bike and walk around the “Mizen Experience” which gives lots of facts and figures about geology, flora and fauna before you walk down well made paths to the Signal Station on the Head, crossing a concrete bridge over an Atlantic chasm on the way



A bridge of similar design was first built in 1909 but the current bridge replaced it in 2011. As I crossed the 50 metre span I looked down and could see at least four seals swimming in the waves 45 metres below. The old signal buildings have been used to explain the life of those manning the station and there are graphic details about the building and rebuilding of the lighthouse on the Fastnet Rock about four miles offshore. A wind gust of 191 km per hour was recorded at the Fastnet in 2017, so it must be well built. However I felt that the whole “experience” could be dramatically improved with the use of computerised audio-visual presentations and it is all looking a little tatty. Anyway the views are dramatic and even on a calm day like today the power of the waves was evident.

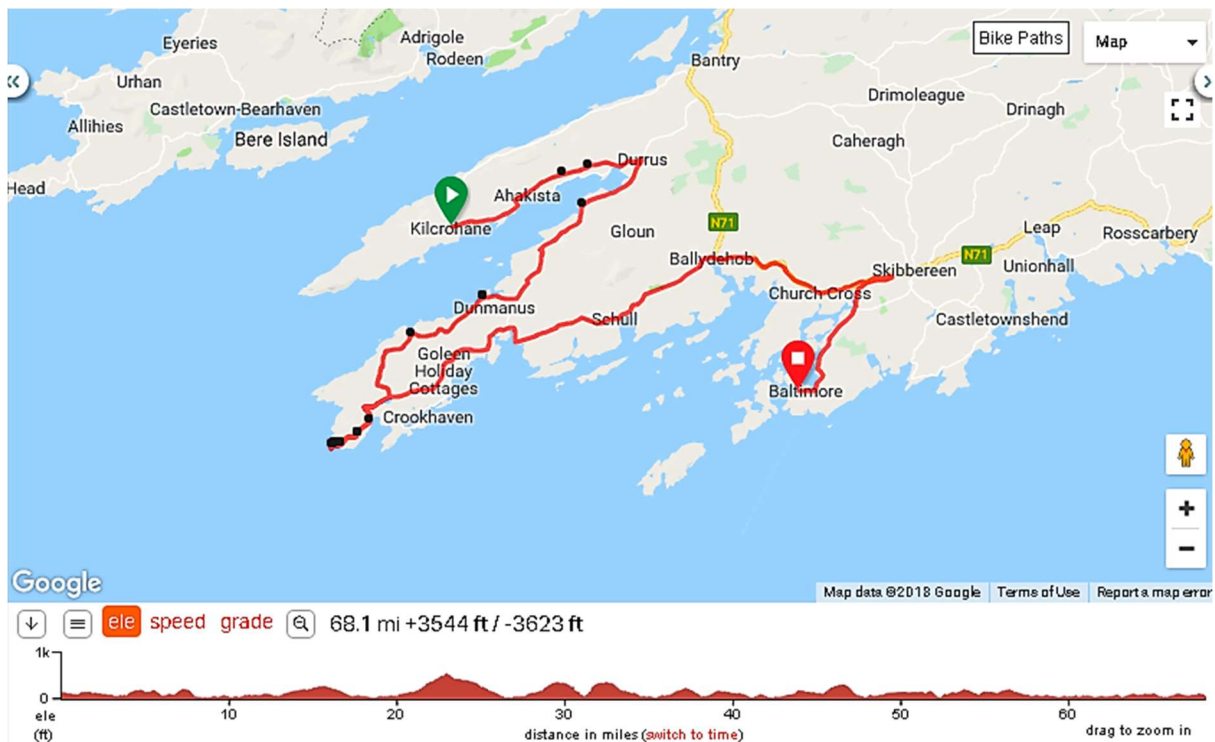


I retired to the cafe for a bowl of chowder and some chips to keep me going for the rest of the journey and started off again at about 1.40pm. As I cycled back I had a good view of Brow Head which is actually the southernmost point of the Irish mainland by a matter of a few metres from Mizen Head and, in the background is the Fastnet Rock Lighthouse



So I have now completed my sight of the four extreme points of Ireland, Burr Head in the east on Day 3, Malin Head in the north on Day 6, Dunmore Head in the west on Day 22 and Brow Head in the south on day 27. Now all I have to do is get back to Dublin in 5 days time.

The remainder of the journey was anti-climactic. I still had 36 miles, more than half the route, to travel and I suspect that I shall face a very similar roller-coaster ride for the next three days along the south coast. None of the climbs were particularly steep but there were a lot of them and by the time I reached the outskirts of Skibbereen and crossed the Ilen River by a rather splendid stone bridge I was longing to get out of the saddle. I bypassed the town on the way to my overnight stop 6 miles down the river at Baltimore, chosen because I couldn't find anything suitable in Skibbereen: however I shall go through the middle of it on my way to Kinsale tomorrow. I arrived at Fastnet House at about 5pm, greeted by Sandra, and the bike was stowed in the garage and I was washed and ready to go out for something to eat by 6.15pm.



Day 28 - Too many hills

Sandra and Ronnie have been running the Fastnet B&B for 21 years and it's like home from home. Sandra welcomed me and showed me where to put the bike before helping me take the bags up to my room. The bed was comfortable and there was a radiator to dry the clothes even if the shower room was a bit on the small side. As well as helping run the B&B Ronnie is also a recorded folk musician and a member of the Baltimore lifeboat crew.

Sandra suggested several places for an evening meal and recommended a walk up to Baltimore Head



but I thought I'd taken enough exercise for the day and strolled down the hill for a pint in Bushes Bar which was showing Leinster playing Connacht at rugby on the big screen and later, the big one for the locals, Munster thrashing Ulster. I went next door to La Jolie Brise a pizzeria and seafood bar and had a nice bowl of soup and a seafood platter (they'd run out of crab, so extra langoustines and mussels). All very nice and filling and straight back to Fastnet House to write the blog. I'd had trouble connecting to the WiFi earlier but fortunately by the time I got back it was working well.

This morning I had an excellent breakfast in the company of a couple from Florida. She was born and bred in Ireland but had moved away at an early age and was now definitely American. Ronnie and Sandra saw me off and suggested that I go by way of Lough Hyne, an unusual saltwater lake that is fed through a small rapid when the tide comes in, creating a highly oxygenated environment that sustains a huge variety of flora and fauna. As it was sort of on the way back to Skibbereen I followed their advice. What they didn't make so clear was the amount of extra climbing it entailed but I got there in the sunshine



and there were several people enjoying the Sunday morning stroll, some with dogs.

I carried on towards Skibbereen, up another testing hill and thought I would try to avoid the town and the main N71 road to Cork but only succeeded in losing my bearings and going round in a circle before crossing the river and taking the main road after all. There wasn't much traffic and cycle lanes in places until I branched off at Leap where yet another arm of water juts in from the sea. This is why cycling along this coast is so testing as you go up hills and down the other side to the sea before climbing to do it all over again time after time.



At this point there seemed to be a short cut: instead of following the coast as I should have done I went up and over a steep hill. This brought me to the Drombeg Stone Circle a largely intact megalithic site with 17 standing stones and a cooking area. Naturally I had to divert down a steep hill which had to be climbed once I had seen the site.

On through some rolling countryside dotted with dairy farms, of which I have seen few so far on this trip, until I once again joined the N71 and raced down the hill into Clonakilty, home of a famous black pudding. Yet another sea arm extends up to the town and it was my intention to follow the coast but the road was closed necessitating another lung bursting climb out into the countryside. I consulted the map and decided to take the straightest route I could find to Timoleague on the next sea inlet. Here I did follow the coast road with a good view back of the ruined monastery in the dim light.



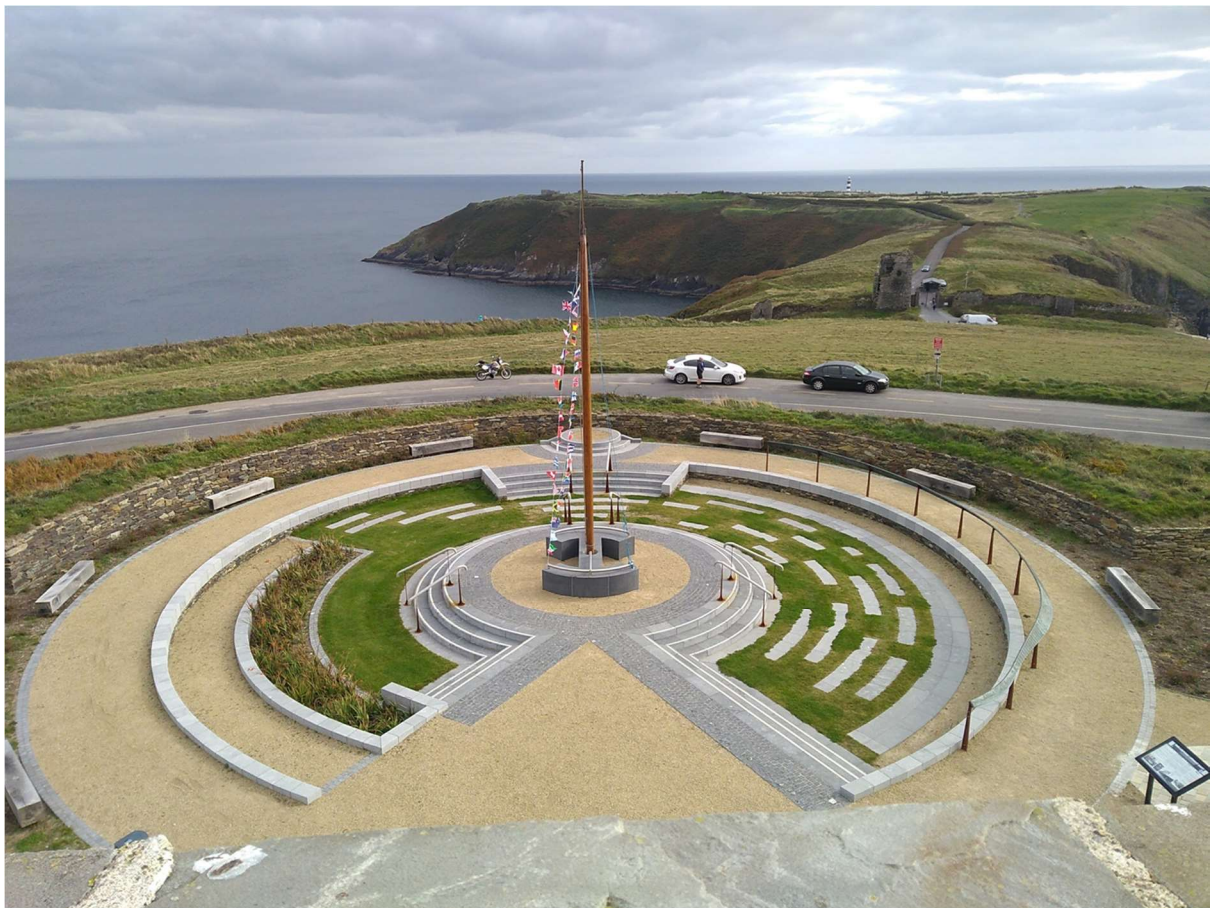
As I followed the estuary I was met by several tractors bringing in a maize harvest. They were travelling a considerable distance but none passed me empty on the return journey.



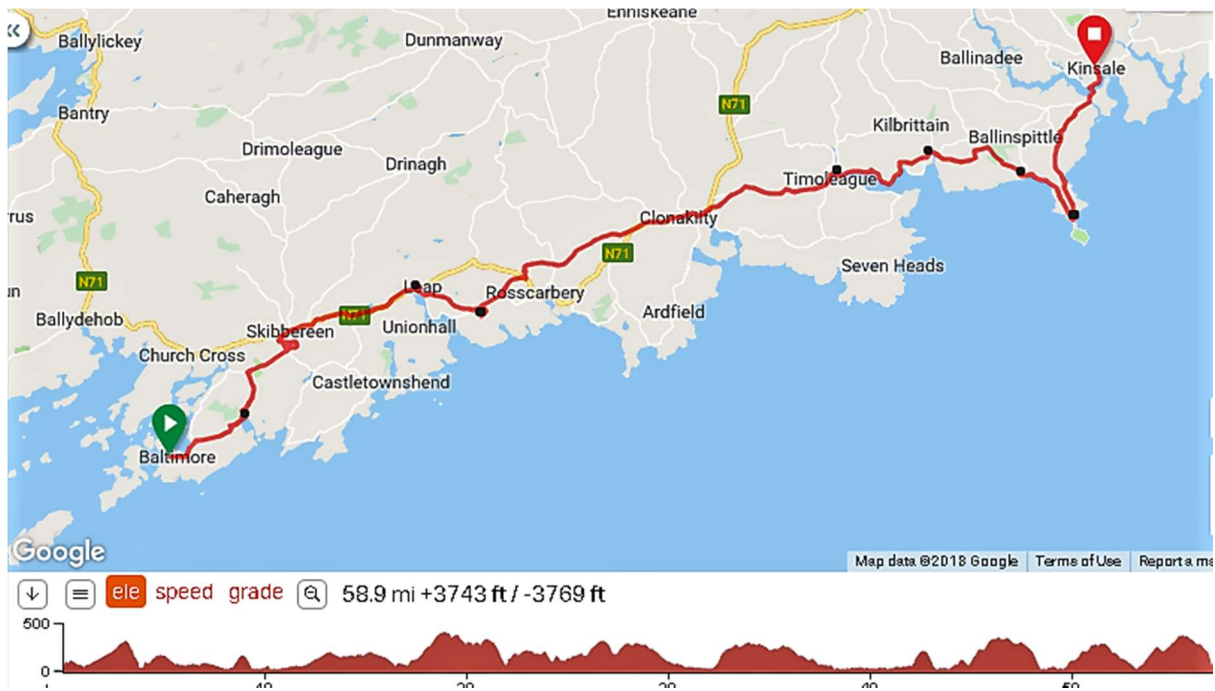
Once again I took to the hills and had the steepest climbing of the day before racing downhill to Garylucas beach which was crowded with

surfers, although the breakers looked a bit weak compared with most that I have seen.

I could have taken the direct road to Kinsale but decided to continue out to the Old Head to see the Signal Tower and the links golf course that adorns the headland. Lots more climbing but the bonus was the small museum explaining the Napoleonic signal towers and the sinking of the RMS Lusitania in 1915 by a German U Boat about 11 miles off the Old Head with a loss of 1198 lives including 128 US citizens, helping to bring the USA into the First World War in 1917. A memorial garden with the names of all the passengers has been set up in front of the restored Signal Tower



I stopped for a cup of tea and a piece of carrot cake at the adjacent cafe before cycling the final seven miles into Kinsale town where I am staying. Needless to say that, too, involved more hills. It's been a tiring day and tomorrow promises more of the same so I shall try to get a good night's rest before going in search of breakfast which is not included.



Day 29 - Past the port

As I was cycling into Kinsale last night I had a feeling of déjà vu and then I remembered that I had been part of the crew of a yacht that we had brought from Lymington to Kinsale to take part in the annual regatta. I forget the reason but I jumped ship almost immediately and flew back home from Cork to Stansted airport necessitating an overnight stay in Kings Cross - not a trip I remember with any great fondness. I'm also fairly sure that, before leaving, we had a pint in Jim Edwards' pub which was where I stayed last night. Unusually for me I'd booked this direct and got a deal for a bed and four course dinner for 70 euros. They don't do breakfast but if the price of the set meal of 27 euro is taken out of the equation the room, which was a good size with a superb shower, for 43 euro was very good value. The meal was excellent; a tasty goat's cheese salad starter and well-cooked hake with plenty of veg and some extra chips followed by apple crumble. I declined the tea or coffee and went for a quick stroll around the town before composing the blog. Kinsale was humming, like Kenmare last week, full of Americans and the pubs and restaurants were doing good trade.

The large bed was comfortable, although there was quite a lot of late night shouting and laughing outside the window and I didn't sleep particularly well. I was up and out shortly after 8am for breakfast round the corner at the Cosy Cafe who dished up very good scrambled eggs, tea and toast which set me up for the day.

I was packed up and away on the first day of October at 0918. It was chilly and overcast and remained so all day but there was little wind so the initial climb out of Kinsale was relatively benign



The road descended to a creek and I followed it up to Belgooly. I passed lots of early morning exercisers, some with dogs, but exclusively female: maybe they had just got the children off to school and were taking advantage of the lull. From Belgooly I had a seven mile climb, mostly easy but at times over 8% followed by a sharp descent to Carrigaline where I wiggled through a housing estate. I came up behind a man with his dog on a lead, he on one side of the road and the dog on the other. I dinged my bell twice, normally it's very effective, without any response and I had to pull up beside him before he apologised and moved out of

the way.

I was heading for the Passage West ferry that crosses a strait from Glenbrook to Cobh. It only takes four minutes to cross and goes backwards and forwards from 630am to 930pm, saving a long journey upstream through Cork City.

Cobh used to be known as Queenstown in honour of a visit by Queen Victoria in 1849 and it remained that way until 1920 when the Irish were getting ready for home rule. In 1912 RMS Titanic left Southampton, crossed to Cherbourg and then dropped anchor in the natural harbour at Queenstown.



On 11th April she set sail on her fateful maiden and final voyage with 123 passengers who boarded in Ireland, only 44 of whom lived to tell the tale. At least 1500 people died when she hit an iceberg and sank less than 3 hours later on the morning of 15th April. The International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea was agreed in 1914, heavily influenced by the tragedy.

Once across to the Cobh bank I followed the water, for once on my left hand side, until I reached the bridge at Belvelly which has a fine tower house castle which is undergoing restoration and is covered in scaffolding



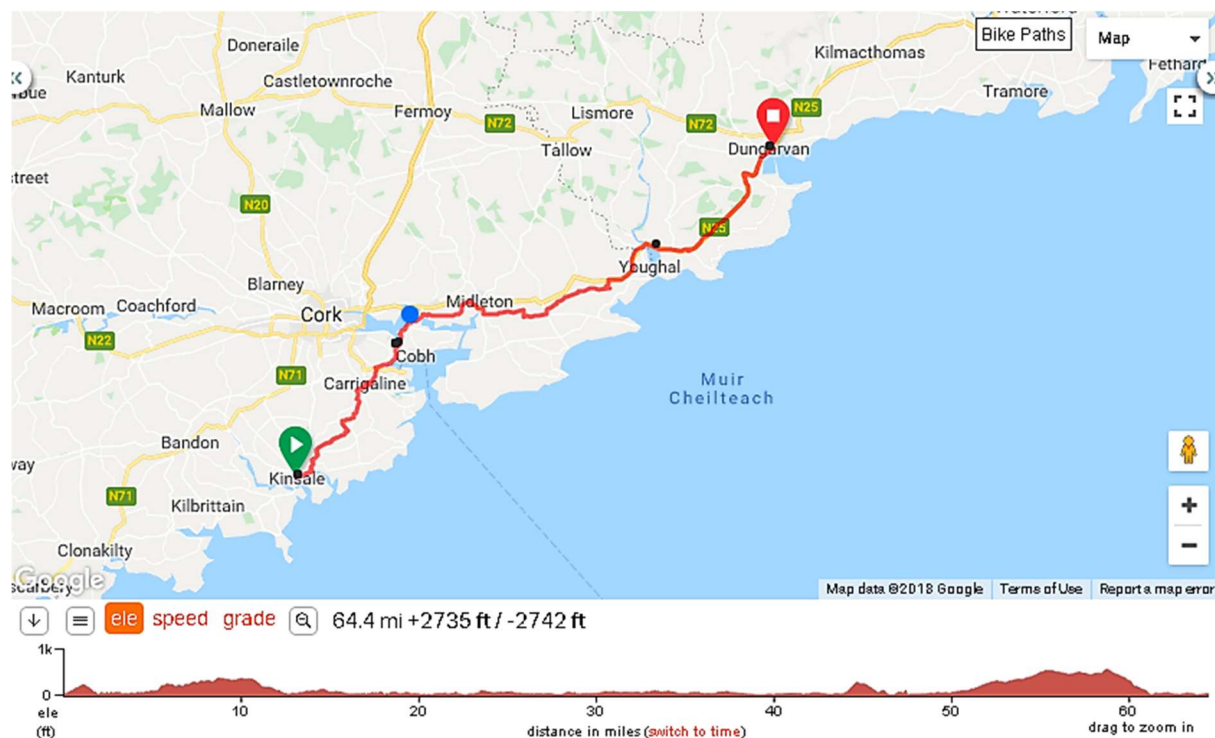
This bridge actually connects two islands, Fota and Great island on which the town of Cobh stands. I passed the gates of Fota House, said to be the finest Regency building in Ireland which has equally impressive gardens and a wildlife park similar to the one at Longleat. I did not dwell but pressed on into countryside reminiscent of home with dairy farms and hedges. The land was flat and I made very good time until I joined the main N25, a busy highway, fortunately well surfaced and with a wide shoulder, for a couple of miles before, once again, heading off into the boondocks for 15 miles.

I stopped at a filling station just south of the village of Castlemartyr for a sandwich and a cup of coffee and to rest the legs for 20 minutes before once again joining the N25 just short of Youghal where there was an energetic climb for half a mile before I once again saw the sea, crossing the River Blackwater about 2 miles upstream from the town. Youghal is an important tourist destination with sandy beaches and sporting attractions but I passed it looking grey and uninteresting, such was the weather.

The N25 climbs about 500 feet over the next 8 miles, not steep but a grind nevertheless and I was pleased when I came over the brow of the hill and descended to Dungarvan, my destination for the night.

It was a fairly painless day, mainly because there was little or no wind, but the countryside was uninteresting and the journey felt a bit of a chore rather than a pleasure. However I would rather have such chores than a 20+ mile an hour wind in my face and I arrived at about 3.20pm feeling quite fresh.

Dungarvan is one end of the Waterford Greenway, a former railway line that has been turned into a bike trail, which I shall follow for some of tomorrow. As a result there are several bike shops in town and, as my front brake has lost some hydraulic fluid, I took the opportunity to get it fixed before clocking into the B&B at about 4pm.

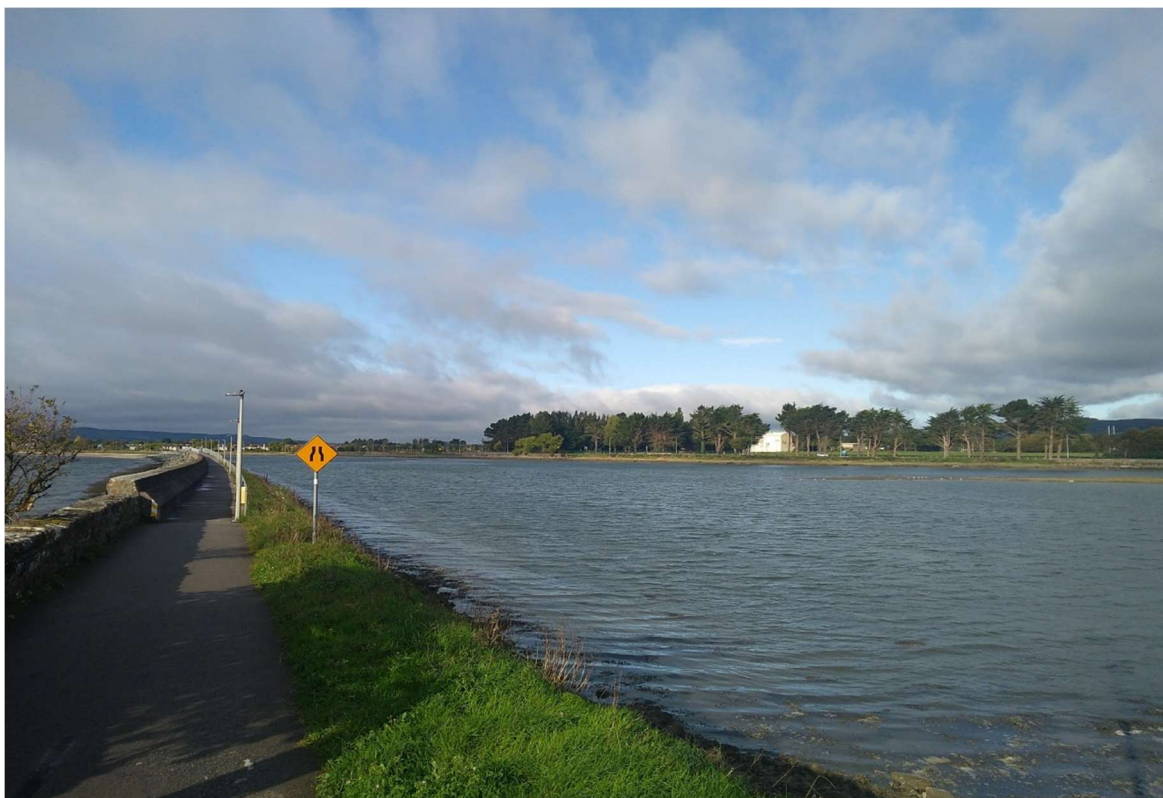


Day 30 - coastal challenge

St Anthony's B&B stands about half a mile from the town centre of Dungarvan but is an easy stroll on the flat. My hostess, Kay, has been offering accommodation for more years than she cares to remember and, indeed, my fellow guests last night, from Edinburgh, have been coming to her for 18 years. My room was a small single, indeed it would be difficult to see how you could fit a loo and a shower into any smaller space, but it sufficed and I was able to get things washed and dried overnight.

My flat stroll into town and back was to the Raj Balti. I fancied an Indian and it was not until I sat down and ordered that I realised they had no licence so I popped over the road for a bottle of red wine. They made no corkage charge so I had a nice set meal of onion bhaji and rogan josh with pilau rice and some poppadums for 16.95 plus 12.99 for a bottle of wine

This morning an excellent FIB set me up for a ride along the Waterford Greenway which runs from Dungarvan to Waterford along an old railway line. Unfortunately the Greenway followed the coast for about 6 miles before it carved inland and I intended to follow the coast as far as possible.



The greenway was pristine tarmac with few gates but it climbed all the way from Dungarvan until I left it. Unfortunately I missed a cue and stayed on for too long, going over the Ballyvoyle viaduct and through the Ballyvoyle tunnel before emerging at the Durrow carpark which was full of people who were being shouted at by an instructor. I'm not sure what they were up to but it looked like some sort of exercise class. It took me three miles to get back on course at Stradbally but once there I followed the coast up and down like a yo yo. At Bunmahon I descended to sea level and a nice little cove and further on a strange little park that traced the history and geology of the area with piles of stones and carvings



I climbed once again and came across what looked like a Cornish Tin mine winding house and, indeed, it was, as the mining company had imported the know-how and some personnel from Cornwall to set up the operation



The whole coast from Stradbally to Annestown has been designated a UNESCO Global Geopark and is known as the Copper Coast Geopark.

I now headed for Tramore a sizeable seaside resort with some grand hotels in the centre and caravan parks on the outskirts. There are some wide sandy beaches and a lagoon behind a sandbank. From the sea it was mistaken for the safe haven of Waterford Bay by a Military Transport ship in 1816 causing the deaths of 370 men women and children. As a result Lloyd's of London funded the building of five pillars on the headlands, one of which has a cast metal man on top of it.



Once again I climbed over a headland and down into the village of Dunmore East a fishing port at the mouth of Waterford Harbour.

Alongside the harbour were some interesting cliffs

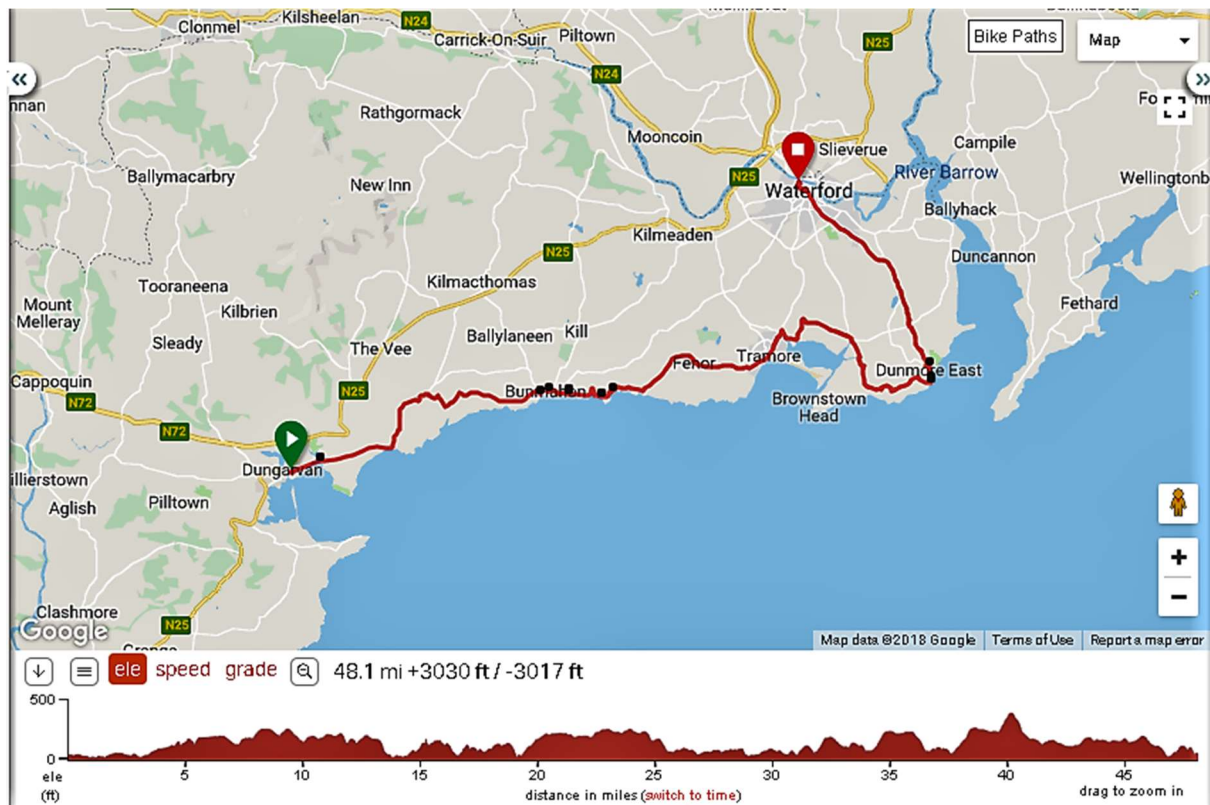


And after a further climb and descent a nice little cove with a hotel alongside.



The hill out of Dunmore East was testing and went on for about three miles but it was the last of the day and the road into Waterford was relatively flat. Not realising that Waterford is built on the side of a hill I had taken the straightest route to the B&B. Unfortunately it went up and over a hill so there was a sting in the tail. I could easily have followed the river and arrived on the flat - heigh ho. The Dye house is a quirky little B&B run by a retired architect and his wife who has done a lot of tour-guiding. Oli showed me the ropes and we had a good chat before I went to clean myself up.

I've done less than 50 miles but it feels like a lot more. Fortunately the, at times, strong wind has been at my back for most of the day. Tomorrow I take my final ferry journey in Ireland across the Waterford estuary.



Day 31 - The Norman Way

I've never known a city quite as dead as Waterford was last night. Both the pub and the restaurant Oli recommended were closed. He also suggested that I visit the Catholic and Protestant Cathedrals, both designed by the same architect, local man John Roberts, in the 18th Century. Sadly the Protestant Christ Church Cathedral closed at 5 but there was a service in the Most Holy Trinity and I poked my nose in. It is a lovely light and airy building, not over decorated as many Catholic churches. Oli said, by contrast, that Christ Church is dark and dingy.

Waterford celebrates its Viking roots: it is the oldest city in Ireland founded in 914 and remained a Viking stronghold until the Anglo-



Normans under the 2nd Earl of Pembroke, nicknamed Strongbow took over. There is an amusing pair of bronze statue/seats of Strongbow and his wife Aoife in the Viking triangle, the area of the city that houses museums and churches

Opposite is the Waterford Crystal building. I'd assumed that Waterford Crystal is all made there but apparently the company became insolvent in 2009 and the only manufacturing is for the tourists who pay to visit the centre. Nearly all the crystal is produced in the Czech



Republic and Slovenia. I learned much of this from the landlord of the City Arms where I went for a couple of pints before dinner. He said that the city hadn't really recovered from the recession, 5000 jobs were lost from the glass factory and there is precious little industry to take its place. At 730pm I was the only customer in the pub.

I went in search of food and ended up in La Boheme an underground french restaurant, large but very sparsely populated. My meal was very well balanced and I left feeling comfortably full of pate, guinea fowl and creme brulee.

This morning I had breakfast with a German family, mother, father and 2 school age daughters who were touring by car for a few days. No FIB at the eclectic and colourful



Dyehouse but plenty of cereals, yoghurt and croissants so I ate well knowing that I had about 70 miles to travel. Oli and Liz were good company and informative about the area and i enjoyed my stay.

My first destination was the ferry at Passage East (Passage West was across to Cobh) and I covered the eight miles at quite good speed even though a lot of it was uphill. The ferry shuttles back and forth all day, only pausing for long enough to load vehicles.



It cost me 2 euros to get across and I was soon on my way down the other side of the Estuary towards Hook point that I had seen across the water from Dunmore East yesterday.

I didn't go as far as the lighthouse or Loftus Hall, said to be the most haunted house in Ireland, but turned east and followed the coast by mostly flat roads. I was getting glimpses of sea and salt marsh but much of the time there was little of interest. I went wrong a couple of times and had to re-adjust but by 1.30pm I was in the fishing port of Kilmore



Quay, where I stopped for an excellent lunch of mushroom soup and crab claws at the Silver Fox. I also was introduced to the first decent ale that I have tasted on this trip, albeit that it comes out of a bottle. Brewed in Wexford by Drew Fox Brewing Company under the name of Clever Man Irish Craft Beer I drank Little Willie Tank Pale Ale and it was very pleasant. The brewers are American!



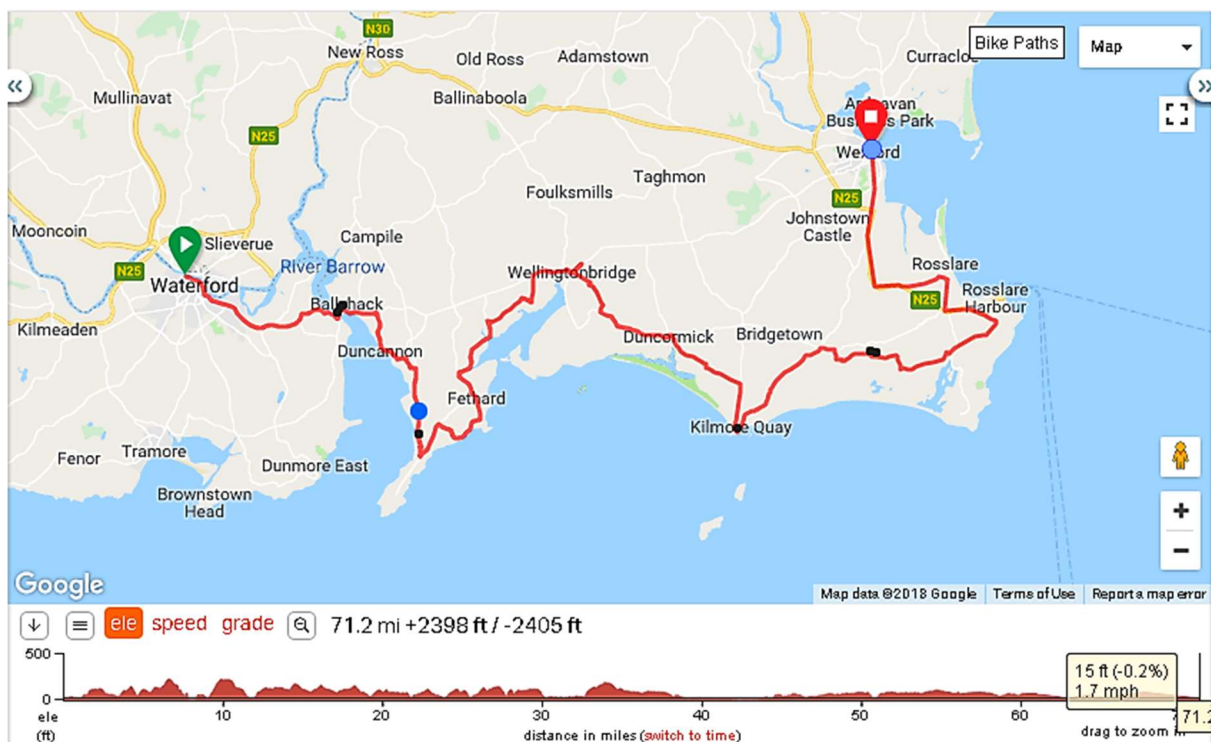
I now wound my way across country following signs for the Norman Way, a heritage trail that highlights the history of Strongbow and his descendants. I was also on Eurovelo 1 the route that follows the Atlantic Coast of Europe from the North Cape to Portugal but including the Wild Atlantic Way and the southern coast of Ireland to Rosslare, my next target

I passed the ruins of Ishartmon church. It is hard to believe how the remains are standing and I wouldn't want to be standing under the gable in a strong wind.



Now the coast turned north and I was back on the east coast of Ireland

after a month of travel. I passed Rosslare Harbour where I could have jumped on a ferry back to west Wales and wound my way slowly towards Wexford Town. Last night whilst wandering around Waterford I received a phone call from the B&B that I'd booked months ago to say that they were full, but that they had arranged for me to go to Abbey House B&B, slightly nearer the town centre. So that was where I landed at about five minutes to five to be greeted by Georgina who made me feel most welcome. The room is small but adequate and the washing is all done. Will Wexford be any busier than Waterford?



Day 32 - East coast ramble

The answer to last night's question was that Wexford was not a lot more lively than Waterford. Georgina told me that the town had lots of good eating places but the only one I could find near to the B&B was the Thomas Moore Tavern which looked pretty dead from the outside. I think that the Irish Government is trying to reduce alcohol consumption, so there is a tax on alcohol and every bar looks from the outside as

though it's closed. I thought that I'd wander up the street to see if anything else took my fancy: however the main street is well over half a mile long so my wander took a little while. Eventually I found a Tapas Bar which was, confusingly, both Spanish and Italian but I went in and had a good meal of Patatas Bravas and porcini risotto washed down with another bottle of Little Willie Tank Ale.

There were few people around as I walked back to Abbey House, past the National Opera House, unassuming at street level but grand within. It was built 10 years ago, in Wexford, as a result of the success of the annual opera festival that has been running since 1951, this year from 19th October through to 4 November. It is celebrated for staging unusual and modern opera along with some of the better known repertoire and has encouraged young performers, especially Irish ones. It also brings Wexford some late tourist trade which is welcome for the



hotels and restaurants.

Georgina gave me and half a dozen others a good FIB and sent me off with a warm smile. She has been running Abbey House for 18 years with help from her husband and now two strapping sons, one of whom is a potential Leinster Rugby player. She bemoans the lack of time off but she seems cheerful enough.

I was away at 0941, knowing that had less than 60 miles to cycle to Wicklow. I crossed the bridge and stopped to take a picture of the town in the murky morning. There was a charming little garden to commemorate all children who have died in tragic

circumstances



There was now 10 miles of largely uphill terrain, not steep but testing. Some of it was on the main road and I was glad to turn off and go across country. It was a largely uninteresting day, mostly away from the coast, and with little of note to see. I stopped to take a picture of a wind farm which was working well, although the wind was not strong.



but that was it. Fortunately the Wicklow Hills do not, generally, come down to the coast road so I was spared any major climbing except at Ballymoney where the road rose to about 250 feet and threw a short 10% pitch at me. Having weathered that OK I reached Arklow at lunchtime and stopped at Lidl for supplies which I ate in the carpark.

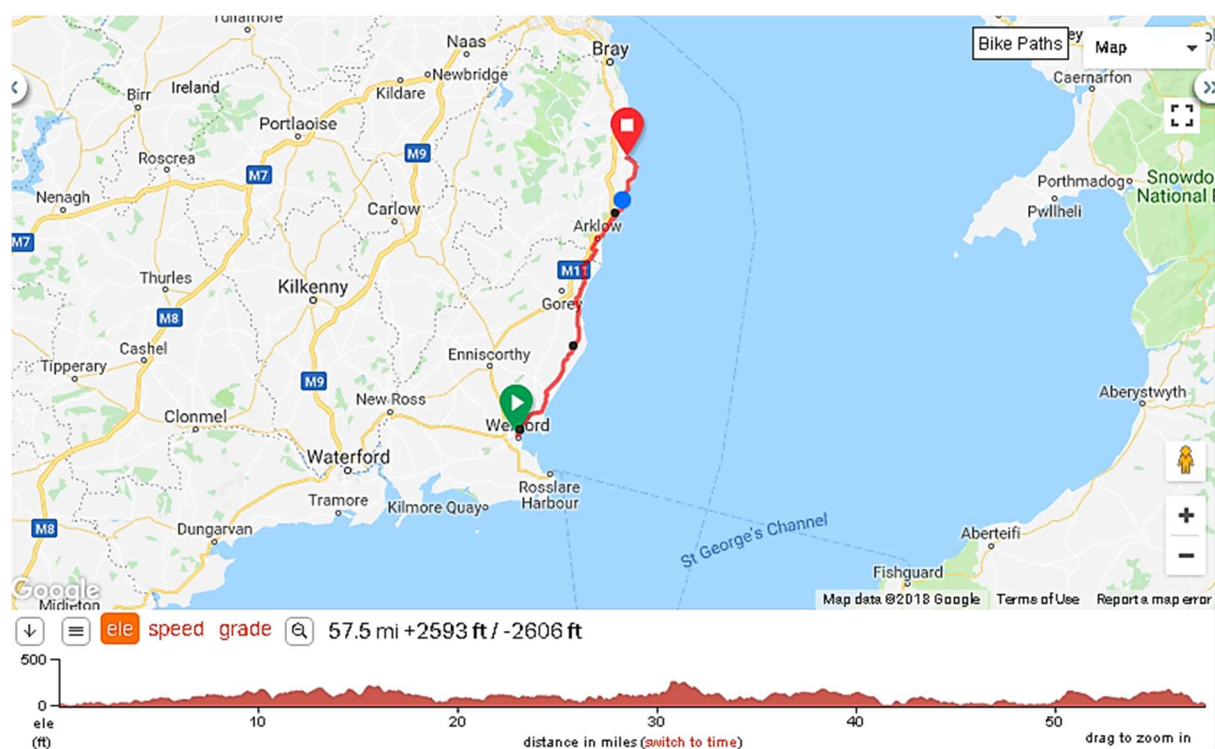


Arklow is another Viking Town divided in two by the Avoca river which is spanned by a handsome stone bridge of 19 arches, the longest stone bridge in Ireland.

After 40 or so miles the road finally came within sight of the sea at Brittas Bay a favoured holiday spot for Dubliners. The two and a half mile long sandy beach is divided from the road by extensive sand dunes and there are two large car parks, today largely deserted



I had booked a rather unsatisfactory B&B close to Wicklow some while ago. The reviews on almost all sites were poor and it is about a mile and a half from Wicklow Town centre. However it was cheap and I could have got a taxi to the town and back or rung for a takeaway for the cost of staying in the town. But weighing it all up I decided to pay a bit extra and four days ago I cancelled Dunbur Lodge and booked a room at the Bridge Tavern for 70 euros B&B, busting my 50 euro budget. I'm glad that I did so: the bike is secure in a garage, I've got a large room with a decent double bed and there is a bar and dining room in the building. I may go out anyway but at least I've got the choice. All being well I shall be back in Dublin and on the ferry at 1450 tomorrow afternoon.



Day 33 - The last leg

It was definitely worth being in the centre of Wicklow last night. The Bridge Tavern, built in the 18th century, has been extensively refurbished to provide large comfortable en-suite bedrooms and bar and dining facilities downstairs



I was up two and a half flights of stairs with a view over the river but didn't catch sight of Sammy Seal who is a local celebrity who surfaces when there's fish about. I got everything sorted, had a bit of a rest and then went out in search of a drink and some food. Wicklow is not much of a place, a main street that is divided in the middle to give one way traffic in each direction. There was little life in the place, lots of take-aways but not much in the way of restaurants. I went into one pub for a pint of Guinness and then back to the Bridge Tavern for another. I walked up the south quay which was being stabilised with pumped concrete and found the Lighthouse Restaurant which is part of a wet fish shop, generally a good sign if you enjoy fish. The restaurant had 34

covers and was about half full when I went in just after 7pm. There was a steady stream of punters coming in and going out so the reputation is obviously good. I enjoyed a starter of squid, a main course of hake in tempura batter and finished with an Eton Mess. There was no beer to be had so I had a glass of Chilean white. It was a good meal without being excellent. Nothing has surpassed Mary Daly's pollock at Kilcrohane and I'm afraid that the hake didn't come close. The blog called and I answered and was finished by about 1030, feeling pretty tired and ready for bed. The one drawback of my room was that it was next to the kitchen ventilation fans which were very noisy. I had the window open to help the clothes dry but had to get up and close it in the middle of the night so had a bit of a restless night.

Breakfast this morning was in the bar. No cereals, juices or toast but a good FIB that set me up for the last 35 miles to Dublin and the ferry back



to Britain. The early morning traffic when I left at 0856 was quite heavy, mostly heading for the motorway to Dublin so when I turned off the main

road after a couple of miles it virtually disappeared and I had a nice trundle through the countryside on well surfaced roads out of sight of the sea. About 10 miles in there was a steady climb up into the Wicklow Mountains and just past Greystones I gained 290 feet in a mile, making me puff a bit. Fortunately the road was nice and wide and with a good shoulder. The run down the other side took me almost to sea level at Bray. The day was still very overcast and I had a bit of light rain to cope with but not enough to warrant a rain coat.

I had planned to go slightly inland to avoid a climb over the headland at Dalkey but the navigators failed to warn me of the turning and I had a nasty half mile at over 10% but my legs are now so good that it wasn't a problem and gave a nice view over Dublin Bay from the top of the promontory.



I was now in James Joyce country. The opening 3 episodes of Ulysses take place between Sandycove and the city, the route that I was following through Dun Laoghaire and Blackrock. There is a Joyce museum in the Tower at Sandycove that forms the location for episode 1

and was, at one point, Joyce's home, but I passed it by.

Generally I have been most impressed by the efforts made by the Irish on behalf of cyclists but, curiously, there is a path that runs along the seafront at Sandymouth Strand (episode 3 of Ulysses) that is barred to bicycles and skates. The alternatives were the busy road or the pavement which is what I, illegally, took. Looking across the bay at Howth which figured heavily in my first days cycling (was it really over a month ago?) I could see the Stena ferry that I would be taking to Holyhead coming into the harbour.

I ended up at a junction which had no crossing point so I took my life into my hands and made it across by eyeballing a lorry driver to let me go. I was now in Irishtown and only about 5 miles from the ferry so I stopped for a BLT baguette and a cup of coffee. I still had plenty of time so I cycled up the Liffey for a mile or so to get a picture of the interesting



Samuel Beckett Bridge designed by Spaniard Santiago Calatrava and opened in 2009. The main structure was built in Rotterdam and

transported to Dublin by barge. The embankment at this point was being well used by lunchtime runners and joggers and there is a two lane off road cycleway.

I returned to my original route and arrived at the ferry terminal just after 1pm. I collected my tickets for the ferry and the return rail journey, gave the bike to the baggage handlers and went to sit in the passenger lounge until we were taken by coach onto the ferry.

The ferry docked on time but it took a long time for the foot passengers to disembark and I was not out of the terminal until dusk so needed my lights to get me to Anglesey Outdoors, an adventure centre about two miles from the train station. I have a room with two beds and shared shower and loos but it's all I need for the night. I'll be away from here by about 0800 and grab some breakfast before the train leaves at 0855. Changes at Chester, Birmingham and Newport should get me to Bristol mid afternoon.

