

By Mark Jarrell.

In September, I was the happy and fortunate recipient of an invitation from Joe Conoly of Bayer Environmental Science to join about 50 Bayer clients and employees on a golfing tour of southwestern Ireland. I had heard glowing descriptions of how beautiful the country and how great the golf courses are from many friends who have traveled there, and I found them all to be true. I'd like to play travel writer once again and share photos and impressions of the Emerald Isle on my first trip across the big pond.

As luck would have it, a rotator cuff injury kept me from play-

MARK MY WORDS



chomping at the bit to be able to chase the white ball in such unique and incredibly beautiful surroundings.

ing golf, and as an indifferent golfer, I anticipated little disappointment in not being able actually to tee it up. One look at Old Head Golf Links, the first of our stops, and I was

The week-long tour was set up to play golf five days in a row, and I was able to walk and photograph all but one of the golf courses before or after sightseeing excursions to local points of interest. All but one - Killarney Golf Club - were true links golf courses, one just as beautiful as the other, with a look and feel that cannot be duplicated here in the states as some have tried. The maintenance standards, while a bit more relaxed in some areas than we're used to in the better clubs of the U.S., were excellent and, in my opinion, make more sense than the immaculate and costly grooming of every blade of grass that seems to be the holy grail in our coun-

try. It was an incredible trip, and I'll be forever grateful for Bayer's generosity and gracious hospitality.

Ireland is as green and beautiful as all the coffee table books and travel brochures portray. Traveling in September, so I was told, can be chancy with the weather, but we had perfect weather except for two cool and drizzling days in mid-week. It seemed there were as many cattle as there were sheep, and the countryside sparkled with emerald green fields broken up into small patches by hedges or stone walls, but rarely with fences. We spent two nights each in three of the largest cities - Cork,

The Cliffs of Moher

Ireland - The Origin of Green



Ross Castle



Tralee GC



Adare Pub



Doonbeg GC

Killarney, and Limerick - but they still had a quaint, small town feel.

While I could probably go on for many pages, for the sake of brevity, I'll finish with a short list of impressions:

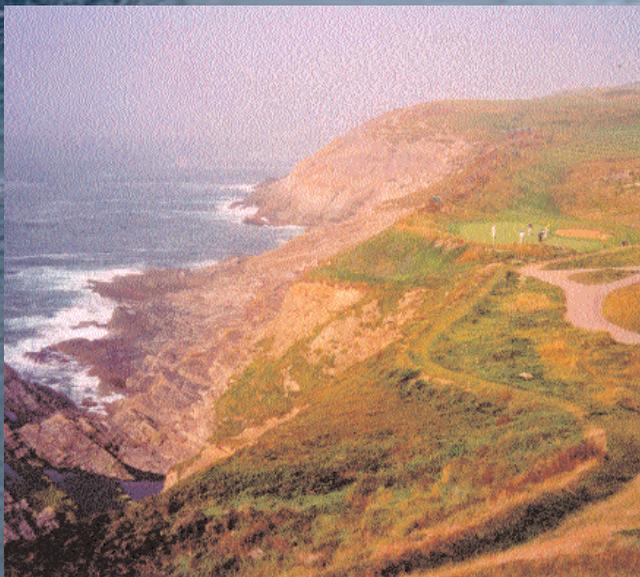
Ireland is not cheap! My perception, or misperception, before going there, was that Ireland was a quaint, rural country with good bargains and low prices. Not so! Checking out real estate prices while walking various towns left the impression that a modest three-bedroom house cost between 350,000 and 450,000 Euros (add about 15% to come up with the dollar conversion). A pint of beer or ale cost more than \$4 in most of the pubs we visited. Discussions with our tour bus drivers gave the impression that Ireland had experienced a real economic boom about 10 years ago after joining the European Union and most Irish were improving their standard of living.

Irish drivers must be the best in the world, especially bus drivers! The typical Irish road is about as wide as a lane-and-a-half in the states, so you can imagine how many times we passed cars (or other buses or tractors!) with no more than a couple of inches to spare between vehicles and a rock wall. The newer freeways - mostly built with EU funds in the past decade or so - are as wide as U.S. highways.

The Irish people are as friendly and accommodating as their reputation, but, curiously, I did make the observation that most didn't make eye contact and greet you when passing in the street. As a student of history and from chats with our tour drivers, I have a theory! I think maybe the Irish were treated so poorly for so long by the English that it is possibly ingrained survival behavior, but after introductions, their congenial nature knows no bounds. My apologies if my half-baked theory offends anyone of Irish heritage, but I also have Irish roots (Jarrell is believed to be derived from Fitzgerald, a family which was once considered the unofficial rulers of Ireland).

Hurling, the national sport of Ireland, looks fascinating, so much so that I'm surprised it hasn't gained a foothold in this country with its high percentage of Irish descendants. It looks to be a fast-paced combination of rugby, lacrosse, and soccer, but I didn't see enough of it to figure out the rules. Our trip coincided with their "Super Bowl" of hurling, and as a student of the American Civil War, I was stunned to see the Cork team called the Rebels and carrying flags like the Stars and Bars battle flag of the Confederacy. I never did find out why the flag was used, but the Cork "Rebels" are called that because the city was the center of a 19th century Irish independence movement.

I hope you enjoy the photos, and I highly recommend Ireland as a vacation destination!



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