

~~1,800~~ 2,100 MILE MOTORCYCLE PILGRIMAGE 2023

£4,327.07 Raised for Combat Stress



Thank you!!







Day 1 – 9 hours Travelling

Well I have made it to the Republic of Ireland. After 9 hours of travel and 260 miles (ok so some of those were on the ferry) I have made it to my first destination for the night.

Couldn't have asked for better weather with a peak of 22 degrees centigrade. Blues skies and sunshine all of the way. Looks like that will be the trend for my entire journey! Glad I left the laminated goretex outfit at home. Lol.



Day 2 – Offroad Setting

Well I set off early this morning around 0730hrs and first stop was Our Lady's Island, was very calm and peaceful there with the wild birds on and around the lake as well as the Pilgrimage Centre.

I also visited Kilmore Quay which was lovely but not too much open yet, Waterford, Admore and Clonakilty.

Another 206 miles covered today in a max temp of 22 degrees. Some of the roads today compared to small B roads but were at time extremely bumpy, (to the point I changed the damping on the bike to 'Offroad' setting). A good day of riding though with some fun twisty roads and of course what better weather to do it in.





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Day 3 – The Wild Atlantic Way

Firstly, wow what a hot day. A peak of 25 degrees centigrade from midday to the end of today's ride.

The ride itself started from Clonakilty and first stop was Drombeg Stone Circle (added a picture), then to Reen, Baltimore, Toomore and finally to Bantry. The road was awesome and twisty and the views are brilliant. It's hard to work out when to stop to take pictures as there is a new view around every corner!

As I parked up at my first destination at Drombeg Circle a Robin came to visit me and landed on my knee as I was locking up the bike. He sat there with me for quite some time and we had a chat. 😊



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Day 4 – 'General Failure'!??

It was suggested that I head around the Skellig Ring which I did and again wonderful scenery.

I must have been miles from any sort of Motorcycle Mechanic when the bike came up with a message on the screen: 'General Failure'. The bike was still running but a caution symbol came up as well. I stopped and scrolled through the info on the dash and under warnings it said again 'General Failure' with absolutely nothing else and certainly no suggestion of where on the bike the fault could be. So I turned to Google and that was no help as again lots of comments about how general, 'General' was!! Ranging from too hot to traction control failure or my favourite, no fault found!

So I did what anyone would do who hadn't a clue and switched the bike off completely including the electronics. Waited for 5 mins and then switched it on again and started it up. I was a genius and had fixed it. I then went on to Portmagee and from there Valencia Island.



MONSIGNOR HUGH O'FLAHERTY 1893 - 1963

On the grounds of the O'Connell Memorial Church lies the grave of Monsignor Hugh O'Flaherty.

He came during World War II, and he very organised an elaborate network for Allied POW's.

When the allies entered Rome in 1944, he and his colleagues had saved 6,500 lives.

He earned him the nickname 'The Angel of the Vatican'.

Monsignor O'Flaherty, a Kerryman, was the highest ranking Irishman named to the Office of the Commander of the Empire, the Medal of Freedom.



Charcoal sketch of the Monsignor commissioned while he was in Rome. Courtesy: www.hughoflaherty.com
Graphic Design: barbara.hodges@iveraghpanoramics.com



In 1918 he enrolled at Mungret College, Co. Limerick, preparing for a missionary priesthood, was then posted to Rome to finish his studies and ordained in 1925. He stayed to work for the Holy See, serving as a Vatican diplomat in Egypt, Haiti, Santo Domingo and Czechoslovakia. In 1934 he was appointed Monsignor.

During the early years of the war, he toured POW camps in Italy, later helping prisoners from recapture after the Italian occupation. At great risk, he and his diverse colleagues concealed refugees, escapees, Allied soldiers and Jews, in flats, farms & convents, even a hideout beside the SS headquarters.

In 1960 he retired to Cahersiveen, staying with his sister for the last three years of his life.

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Day 5 – I Think I'll Pass!

Well today started with Mass at Cahersiveen after which Mary and her family kindly bought me a coffee and had a chat. Thank you so much.

I then rode the Ring of Kerry as well as riding two very exciting twisty and narrow mountain passes, Ballaghisheen and Ballaghbeama. Really stunning views all round and directly below over the edges. Lol. No cyclists this time just sheep in the middle of the road along the passes.

On the way to the B&B for tonight I caught up to a motorcyclist and we then rode together for some 30 miles until we needed to go our separate ways. No discussion had about riding together but didn't need to it just naturally happened and tooted horns as we parted.

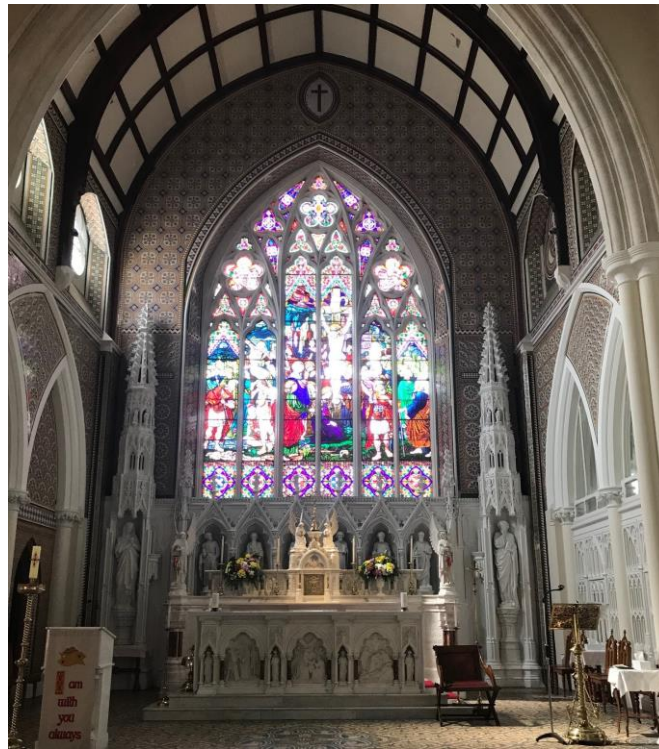


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Day 6 – Half Way Through

Well this morning started reasonably early and it was a nice cool ride from Valentia Island to Gallarus Oratory as it was 16 degrees most of the way.

On the way passed through Dingle which is very picturesque and relaxed as everyone will tell you. Visited Gallarus Oratory and took some shots and one person there on a bicycle riding along the Wild Atlantic Way asked for a drone shot with them waving in the picture. I obliged before heading out of County Kerry riding along the Shannon to Limerick.

Vespers and supper at Glenstal Abbey shortly. Despite the cooler start has turned into another scorcher of peak of 25 degrees.



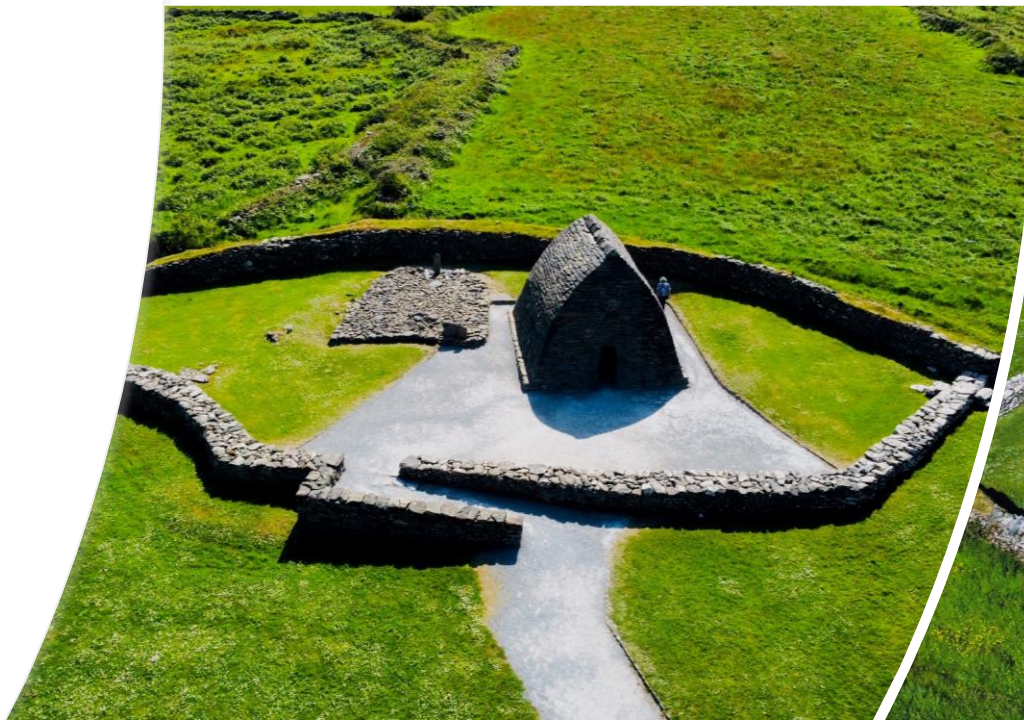


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Day 7 – Feeling Crafty

Well firstly, I was in two minds whether to title today's update as either 'feeling crafty' or 'relentlessly HOT!!'. Thought positivity was the way ahead! Lol.

So as you probably now have guessed it has been hot, sorry; HOT with peak of 29 degrees and with having done many miles at between 30 and 50mph I almost got off the bike to do a rain dance.

So left Glenstal Abbey this morning and headed back to join the Wild Atlantic Way and head north. So have been in 3 counties today: Limerick, Clare and Galway.

Stops today have included St Brigid's Well and also randomly for me a craft village.



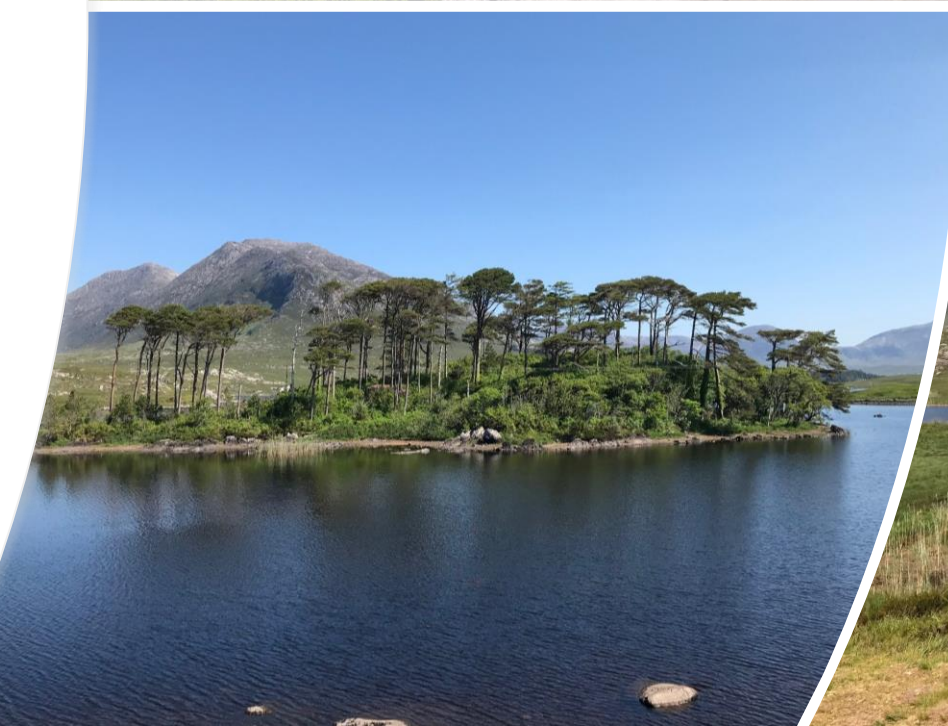
Day 8 – Farewell Wild Atlantic Way

As a little bit of information: The Wild Atlantic Way, 1600 miles (2600 km) in length, is one of the longest defined coastal routes in the world.

It winds its way all along the Irish west coast from the Inishowen Peninsula, County Donegal in the north down to the picturesque town of Kinsale, County Cork, in the south.

So I have effectively been following this route in the northern direction since day 2 of my trip when I joined it in Kinsale County Cork. Sadly today I left this wonderful, twisting and turning road with its lakes, mountains, cliffs, seas, bays and beaches and rugged terrain.

I left it when I reached Westport in County Mayo to begin my journey East towards Dublin. I thoroughly recommend everyone travelling the Wild Atlantic Way at least once.



Day 8 – Farewell Wild Atlantic Way

Just been reviewing miles completed so far and distance yet to still travel. Essentially, I have so far covered more miles than planned to end of Day 8. This can be put down to passing places of interest and detouring and then heading back to pick up original route where I left it.

I also (confession time) rode the Ring of Kerry twice and two additional unplanned passes whilst in Kerry.

I have just recalculated and new estimate for distance covered by the time I reach home will be.....
(Drum Roll Please?)..... 2,100 miles approximately. For those who work in metric that's almost 3,400km.



Day 9 – Rest & Reflection

Well I arrived at Knock in County Mayo last night. I was kindly given 2 nights Bed, Breakfast and Dinner at St Mary's Accommodation which is part of Knock Shrine.

So I have only covered 2 miles today and that has been on foot as Day 9 has been a period of rest and reflection. A mini retreat you could call it. It has meant the buzzing in my ears from engine and wind noise has had a chance to pass. Lol.



Day 9 – Rest & Reflection

So whilst walking around I have had the benefit of peace and quiet and explored the grounds and buildings.

I have also been shopping in the local area, (well it's only a street really - lol) and picked up a couple more gifts to take home. Now wondering whether I have enough space in my top box and panniers to accommodate them.

Well, after the tranquility of today, tomorrow it's back on the bike for another 200ish miles. Oh and it's ok to use ish over here as most shops work on ish for opening times. They open at 9-ish. Ha ha.



THE APPARITION MOSAIC

Donated by Joe O'Toole, Tuam,
in memory of his wife Helen (née Toher),
his parents John & Celia O'Toole (née Whelan), Claran, Headford,
and all of his deceased relatives and friends.

"May this mosaic be a beacon of light and hope to all who gaze upon it."

Most Rev. Michael Neary DD, Archbishop of Tuam,
Unveiling of The Apparition Mosaic, 28th February 2016

This artwork represents the Apparition at Knock in 1879,
as described in official witness testimonies.
Composed of more than 1.5 million individual pieces of glass and marble,
illustrated by P.J. Lynch, Dublin, and crafted by Trivisanutto Mosaics,
Spilimbergo, Italy.

Day 9 – Knock Shrine

Knock Shrine is Ireland's International Eucharistic & Marian Shrine

Since the Apparition on the 21st of August 1879, pilgrims and visitors have been welcomed to Knock Shrine from all four corners of the world. It offers a peaceful, contemplative space in which to pray, to reflect and to reconnect.



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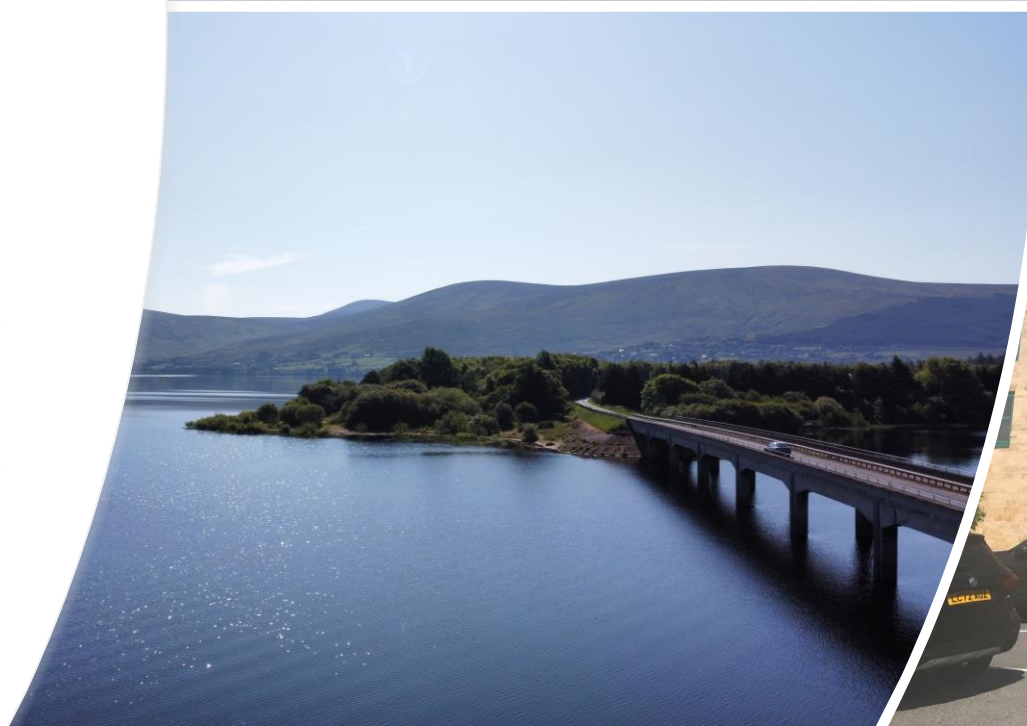




Day 10 – 'Whiskey in the Jar'

Well this morning started at 0500hrs. 'What does the O stand for?.....Oh my God it's early!' (bonus point for anyone who can name the film the quote comes from - lol). Anyway got up at that time so that I could try and get some pictures of Knock 1. With the sun coming up and 2. Before people were around and getting in the way. Lol.

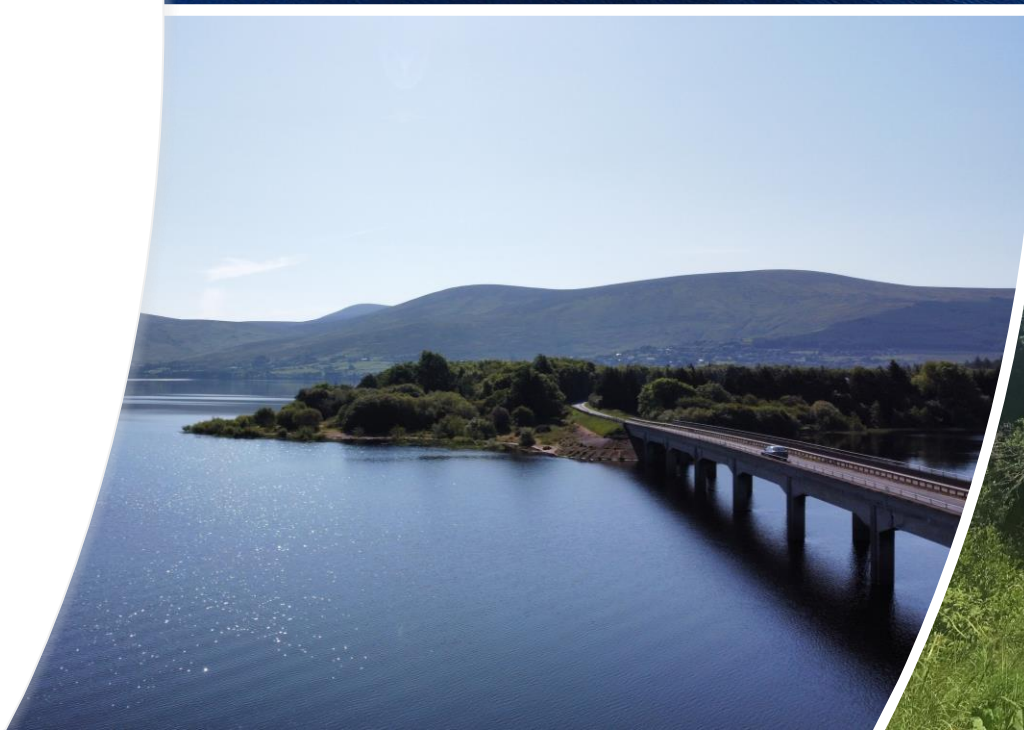
On today's route I decided to have a change and stop off at the Tullamore Distillery and yes there certainly was whiskey in the jar, (but as it was County Offaly there wasn't any sign of the Kerry Mountains or Captain Farrell). There was such a strong smell of alcohol and whiskey even before I had pulled into the grounds. Outside the building in the open air was the very unmistakable smell inviting the visitors in. Sadly, no more room left on the bike to purchase anything, too many gifts on board. Lol.



Day 10 – 'Whiskey in the Jar'

My route took me through 6 counties today: Mayo, Galway, Roscommon, Westmeath, Offaly and Kildare. Oh and as I got here too early for the B&B, I quickly popped into County Wicklow as well (so 7, I just can't count). As you would expect from the inland counties the scenery has changed to countryside with lakes and rivers.

Some parts resembled English countryside apart from the road markings, signs and house designs, (there are a lot of bungalows and 1 1/2 storey houses over here). Tomorrow when I travel more into Wicklow I plan to go through the mountains on my way to Glendalough, but I already miss the Wild Atlantic Way and indeed those Kerry Mountains!! 😊



Day 11 – Bank Holiday Mayhem

Well to start today's update a word of advice..... On a bank holiday weekend don't get within 30 miles of Dublin. Certainly don't try to enter Dublin as you won't get in.....why???.....

Because everyone is trying to leave and either go on holiday or visit the local attraction and visitor centres in the North East of the Republic. I have literally been in traffic jams not realising why only to find these are queues to get into these attractions. The Fun Park I passed looked anything but as at 1000hrs a long queue of cars were on the main road with people out of their cars due to the wait and that was just to enter the car park. Lol. I guess it doesn't help the fact that some of the school years have also started their 3 month summer holidays!!! Yes 3 months.



Day 11 – Bank Holiday Mayhem

Anyway, I escape the mayhem and found some awesome twisty and quiet roads in County Wicklow and through Wicklow Gap. I stopped at Ferns where there is the remains of a 7th century monastery.

Continuing on my journey back to Rosslare Harbour I went via Wexford (in the County of the same name), and took some shots of Wexford Harbour. I am now back at Rosslare where I got off the Ferry 11 days ago. I have already surpassed the 1,800 mile target. But as I mentioned before there were so many places to see and so the odd detour adding extra miles were worth it every time.

One thing I have learned about this trip is that I have have got just as much out of those opportune moments and places that have presented themselves on the trip as i have from all of the planning I did beforehand. Spontaneity should not be ignored; there are so many brown (tourist/attraction) signs and well worth following them sometime. You will be amazed what you are presented with. There is so much out there to see, experience and explore!!



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Day 12 – Home Safe & Sound

So I am writing this one a bit later than recently. Has been a long hot day heading home. The traffic from Wales heading east was pretty bad. After the last 11 days of not seeing much traffic, today certainly made up for that.

After a lovely smooth cruise on the ferry I found a delightful 6 mile queue around Cardiff, followed by an 11 mile queue towards Bristol as the Almondsbury junction and to M32 is being dug up again. Lots of hectic filtering and jealous car drivers actively trying to block my progress led me to once again and already long for those open, yet twisty roads in Ireland. In terms of miles I have exceeded the target set so please everyone be grateful you pledged a fixed amount and not per mile. Ha ha.

But honestly, thank you so so much to everyone who has donated to this event and Combat Stress. I really appreciate how kind and generous everyone has been. Thank you so much. I will try and upload some other pictures in the week. Thanks once again. Truly amazing.





























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