

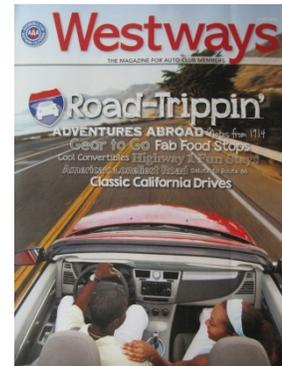
Westways June 2014

Irish Adventure

By Dean Nelson

I should have paid closer attention when the lady in the Kinsale, Ireland, tourism office drew us a map for a shortcut to Cobh. Holding a pen and smoldering cigarette with the same fingers, she sketched out a path to a river ferry she claimed would save us time.

My daughter, Vanessa, was about to begin summer college in Dublin, and we'd decided to drive through the country for a week before classes started. I was counting on Vanessa to navigate so I could concentrate on driving on the left side of the road for the first time.



Delightful detours, especially the drive from Kinsale (pictured) to Cobh, highlight a father and daughter's journey around Ireland.

Before leaving Kinsale, we headed to Charles Fort at the edge of town, driving on a one-lane road alongside a cliff that dropped sharply into the sea. We passed pedestrians who had to lean against roadside hedges so we wouldn't run over them.

"Good thing no traffic is coming the other way," I said, admiring a view of colorful houses built into a hill overlooking the bay.

"Dad, stop!" Vanessa cried.

A woman had come out of her house and stood in the middle of the road, waving a broom at us. What I'd thought was a road was actually a walking path that turned into an even narrower bike lane. I backed up.

Continuing to Cobh, about 30 nonhighway miles away, I felt as if I were in driver's training in reverse, this time with my daughter instructing.

"Dad, you're too far to the left—you're on the shoulder."

"But if I move to the right, that oncoming tour bus will kill us."

"Dad, turn here. Slow down. Dad, you're going the wrong way." We got so lost, we burst out laughing.

All the towns started looking the same—pub advertising traditional Irish music, bakery, storefront, pub, blue-and-white buildings, gray stone church, pub. Were we just going in a big circle? Were we in an Irish version of The Truman Show? At

last, we saw a sign with a picture of a ferry on it and joined a long line of cars. After 40 minutes or so, we pulled up to the kiosk.

“Passports?” said the uniformed woman.

“Why do I need my passport?” I asked.

A smile spread across her face. “Where do you think you’re going?” she asked brightly.

“Cobh,” Vanessa and I said in unison.

The woman’s smile broadened.

“You’re going to France!”

She let us out of the line, gave us better directions (this time we listened) and about 15 minutes later, we arrived in Cobh, the city that was the last European port of call for the Titanic and Lusitania.

Vanessa and I walked around town, where row houses painted in bright blues, yellows, and reds were terraced above the main street with its stores, pubs, and offices. We lunched on a deck overlooking the harbor and climbed the steep pathway to St. Colman’s Cathedral, home to Ireland’s largest carillon. With its 49 bells ringing in the background, we looked out over the water, grateful we weren’t in France.

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