A TRIP TO THE SOUTH

"...The lads decided that a drive through the Gap of Dunloe was a must"

Peter Gordon

IN THE LATE 1950's Dick Lawrence, Gabriel Moran and myself worked in Bradshaw & Clarke's in Mohill. In this institution of higher education, we learned things not taught in Yale, The London School of Economics or Harvard Business School. The 1950's was a time for us of high ambition, low wages and nil prospects. We needed to escape for a brief period from that depressing vista. At that time of mass emigration we thought it would behove us to see Ireland before our imminent departure for better prospects. Dick and I wondered what part of life's rich tapestry we were missing by not experiencing the delights of the Munster counties, Dick hired a car from our old friend Gerald O'Malley. On the following Saturday night, Leo Higgins, Tommy Gilmartin (RIP), Dick and I headed south.

Our first stop was the Garda Station in Pallasgreen, Limerick where Leo's brother, Gerry, was stationed. Leo asked us to stop there as he wanted to visit Gerry for a few minutes. We waited in the car. After a few minutes, Gerry and Leo came out to us. Gerry asked us where we were going, we told him, 'Cork'. 'Come in to the station, stay the night and I'll go with you in the morning' Gerry said. As it was now bedtime, Gerry threw a few mattresses on the dayroom floor and we slept soundly in our clothes until about 6 in the morning. Recently, I wrote to Gerry (now a retired Superintendant) to congratulate him on his recently published autobiography and recounted the great accommodation he provided 50 years ago. Gerry had omitted to tell us that the last time that anyone had lain on that floor had been in 1920, the time of the 'troubles'. What had lain on the floor on that occasion were the corpses of 9 Black 'n' Tans killed in a nearby ambush. The reason Gerry did not inform us of this was, that he was worried we wouldn't sleep if we knew those gory details. However, he need not have worried. Mohill men would sleep on a harrow after a long journey! Before we resumed our travels, Gerry prepared a big Irish breakfast to fortify us for the adventures that lay ahead.

We attended early Mass in Mitchelstown and headed to Cork where we visited many places of interest including the Ford Car factory. Unfortunately, said factory is now long closed. After Cork we travelled westwards to Bandon, Bantry, Dunmanway, and lunched at Casey's hotel in Blarney. Blarney Castle was our next port of call where we kissed the Blarney Stone, and it has been suggested in some quarters that I have not lost the gift of eloquence since!

After lunch we visited Killarney and some of the 'touristy' places such as the famous lakes and Kate Kearney's cottage. The lads decided that a drive through the Gap of Dunloe was a must. Leo had some reservations remarking that 'we had better keep out of all these Gaps', however the majority ruled and we approached the Gap. At this, the Jarveys, who were standing nearby, waiting for customers told us that we were not to bring the car through the Gap, but to hire their transport—sidecar and Jarvey, and that they would point out places of interest. We ignored their sales talk and proceeded on our journey. We preferred to leave the Jarveys to their soft vicissitudes of pleasure and repose. The Jarveys were irate and started pounding the roof of our car with their ash-plants. After breaching the ranks of the Jarveys and putting two or three saddle horses to flight, Leo

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put down the boot and all went well until we hit a sharp bend with protruding rocks. The only way around it was to lift the car away from the rocks, which we mustered enough strength to do. Further on we encountered a hump-backed culvert and the next thing we knew, our jalopy was balancing precariously on top of it and was refusing to move. This called for another manual effort by strong Mohill men and soon we were on our way again. It must be pointed out that Leo is no relation to Evil Knievel but his driving along the narrow mountain roads would scare the living daylights out of a person. Thank God we all survived! When some of the lads complained, Leo made the perspicacious observation that if you can't ride two horses simultaneously then you should not be in the circus. Leo exclaimed in what I think should be his epitaph, 'Gentlemen, failure is not an option.'

This was the day of the Connacht final and Gerry had brought along an old battery operated radio in the hope that we would be able to tune in to the match. We stopped at the Church of Our Lady of the Wayside, got out and switched on the radio. All we could hear was a muffled sound. We decided that there was only one thing to do and that was to climb the nearby mountain with our radio in the hope that the reception up there would be better. We spread out a coil of aerial wire over the rocks and plugged it in and switched on the radio. The reception was loud and clear, so much so that the sheep and goats nearby took flight in panic to get away as far as possible from the noise around them and the invaders of their territory. That was a memorable Connacht final for us.

We descended from the mountain and headed for a petrol station, as the gauge read 'Empty'. Leo gave the order, 'Get out there now and give her a belly-full'. Four gallons cost just £1 -changed times indeed. There was no oil crisis then, only a money crisis!

After our tea in Killamey, we headed back to Pallasgreen to return Gerry to base. Little did we know then that many years later, Gerry would rise to the rank of Superintendent and would be Private Secretary to the Garda Commissioner. By an amazing coincidence one of his colleagues there, was another Mohill icon—raconteur, and patron of the arts, tennis champion: Cyril McGovern. Our next stop was Cloudland Ballroom, Rooskey where we danced to the music of Maurice Mulcahy and his 15 piece orchestra. Here they were, pretty, powdered, smiling, rouged, 'mascara'ed', lovely hair-dos, 'pony-tails', Ra-Ra skirts, ear-rings, nose-rings and rings in unspeakable places and believe me the girls were just as bad!

Naturally our last stop was Mohill. There was an eerie silence in the town - a silence you could almost hear. I thought of the last lines of William Wordsworth's sonnet, Upon Westminster Bridge:

'The river glideth at his own sweet will,
Dear God! The very houses seem asleep,
And all that mighty heart is lying still '

Epilogue

I'd like to thank Gerry Higgins for providing me with his reminiscences for this article.

Carrick-on-Shannon Regatta

One of the four teams from Drumsna: Gary Evans, Paul Evans, Steve Pendlebury, Les Marlon, Noel Duignan, Sean McGovern, Gerry Gilroy, Ben Hawkins, Ryan Gilroy & Anthony Gilroy