

Visiting Nearly Kiwiland

Get Up and Over Fan Fund Report

Trip 3 August 2019 to 30 August 2019
Visit to Dublin 2019 – An Irish WorldCon

Simon Litten

I was inveigled to stand for GUFF to ensure there was at least a race. Prior to having my arm twisted I had paid my membership of the Dublin 2019 world science fiction convention at the Helsinki 2017 convention. Pre-trip planning was on the basis of me travelling alone, as my partner (June Young) had previously expressed no interest in attending further WorldCons after attending the Spokane 2015 WorldCon. She enjoyed that experience but her stated review was "Gee, they're white." Something I had also noticed. I countered that, from the evidence of one European convention, that those held in Europe were significantly more racially diverse. Scepticism was expressed, but she would be staying home. Then at some indeterminate point she decided she wanted to see Ireland (I blame some fantasy books) and we would be travelling together.

Travel requirements were: accommodation should have a pool attached (for physiotherapy reasons); a stopover in Singapore was essential; trip duration was limited to four weeks; and that only one convention attendance was allowed. I was left free to arrange the itinerary in Ireland. Travel bookings were made in September and October 2018. The general itinerary was fly Wellington to Singapore, via Auckland, stay four nights; continue on to Dublin by way of Heathrow. Tour Ireland for approximately a week and spend about a week in Dublin doing the convention and tourist stuff. Return to New Zealand by way of Newfoundland (seven days again), changing airlines in Vancouver. The ferry to Newfoundland was investigated but the 14-hour trip quickly ruled that option out of contention.

Appropriate flight, hotel and rental car bookings were made, not without discussion with June as to whether touring Ireland before or after the convention was the right choice. The transAtlantic flight was a mere five hours, the hotels in Singapore and Ireland had swimming pools as did most of the ones in Newfoundland, and the car rental for touring Ireland was a late model Toyota. The hotel in Singapore was even on the trainline from the airport. June was happy. And then the dramas started.

As part of the planning, I had identified the Cassidy Hotel in north Dublin that was about a kilometre from the convention centre and made a booking through an online booking site. At some point I was alerted by the hotel that I didn't have a booking although charges for said booking had been made against my credit card. Minor panic. I contacted the credit card issuer (a specialist division within the bank I use) and forwarded all the details and then rebooked accommodation at the same hotel via a another, and more familiar, booking site. About this point people started levering my arm up my back to run for GUFF to avoid a one candidate race. After much grumbling and discussion with June, I consented to run. To my surprise I won. As I knew I wasn't going to be able to do much in the way of meeting other science fiction and fantasy fans before and after the convention I chose to largely self-fund the trip and not draw on GUFF to subsidise something to which I had already committed. This also involves cancelling the already booked accommodation in Dublin that I had desperately sought out. I felt like the worst customer in the world.

Saturday, 3 August and the flights to Auckland and then Singapore went well, with the latter flight being a modest 10 hours 45 minutes. Cleared Customs, purchased our Singapore subway cards and made it to the hotel in time for a pre-dinner dip in the swimming pool – located on the fourth floor. Singapore was a great place for a stopover. We did the tourist thing of taking the cable car to Sentosa Island. Exploring Universal Studios amusement park

– I rode the Transformers ride while June waited; the rider next to me kept shutting his eyes in fright – and trying some of the food available there. The odours emanating from the place selling durian pizzas were truly stomach turning. Attempted shopping on Orchard Road with me eventually buying a Samsung tablet at an electronics store complex (lots of electronics stores in the one building) elsewhere. We tried the local cuisine and had farmed turtle soup, and durian chocolate (kept in the hotel room’s safe). Fresh durian was smelt and then seen, but not sampled. To those who haven’t acquired the taste for it, durian has all the gustatory appeal of an open sewer.

The opportunity was also taken to meet up with local SF fan Devin Jeyathurai. There being little in the way of organised fandom in Singapore, Devin usually gets his fandom kicks by going to the Australian national conventions. He was kind enough to take June and me to a local bookshop chain where we purchased a couple of books and then had some very good food court in the same complex.



June and Devin



Durian pizza

Wednesday 7 August and we train to the airport for the 11 hour 40 minute flight to Heathrow. Check in is a breeze, but at some point I mislay my phone inside the airport. I notice the missing weight after boarding but don't ask to go back to the gate to do a search. It's in my luggage, right? We get to Heathrow and I establish that my phone didn't travel with me. Due to a pilots' dispute with British Airways, there is ample time to file a missing item report with Changi Airport (Singapore).

Heathrow is June's introduction to a really large airport. Changi was big but Heathrow is a size larger. We take the underground from one terminal to another for our flight to Dublin and wait; and continue to wait for about five hours, arriving in Dublin about three hours

later than scheduled and having been awake for over 24 hours. The Harry Potter Experience store is a welcome diversion from waiting.

The airport hotel is magnificent to our sleep deprived eyes. The next day (Thursday) Changi confirms my phone is there, there are just a few pieces of paperwork required before I and it can be reunited. I soon realise that waiting until I return home is the sane option, even if there will be communication problems along the way. I then notice an interesting architectural feature of our bathroom: the door swings through 270 degrees, closing off the water closet to allow the other occupant to use the bathroom proper. A very neat trick not seen anywhere else on my travels.

Showered, shampooed, shaved and breakfasted I go off to collect the hire car. It's not a Toyota. It's not even Japanese. It's a very upmarket BMW, with all sorts of bells and whistles. Driving back to the hotel I can't work out why 50kmh feels so fast, so I ease off the accelerator. I'm also surprised that the engine cuts out when I stop at a red light. I soon resolve the engine cut out problem: it's a fuel economy measure. I stop worrying. Back at the hotel and June sees the car. There is no way she is going to drive such an upmarket car. I'm designated driver for the duration of our stay in Ireland. You lose some, you win some. Then we are off to our first stop outside of Dublin: Drogheda. On the motorway north from Dublin I spot little stickers on the speedometer facia: over the 30 mark is a little 50, over to 50 a little 80, and over the 60 a little 100. BMW has installed an mph calibrated speedometer for the UK market, and the Irish market has had to jury rig a kph translation. What lunatic country goes metric [in the 1970s] but insists on using miles for measuring road distances and speed? We're in Drogheda for a night and I've been invited to attend a book group hosted by James Shields to discuss a book I now have no record of. I do know it was a book I had already read.

I'm about to learn something very important about Ireland. This is the TARDIS country of history. Do not imagine that you have set aside enough time to properly explore the country. A loud, HA! to that notion (something I will be reminded of at length for years to come). Another interesting feature of Ireland is that the in-vehicle GPS directions aren't reliable. I have arranged to meet James Shields around lunch time after he has collected Gillian Polack (both former GUFF delegates) from the airport. We do a little sightseeing beforehand and try to find the site of the Battle of the Boyne. The GPS hasn't a clue where that is and guesses a couple of places in Drogheda. We park the car and have a look at some of the sights in the town itself. This is where Oliver Cromwell and several of his mates began their tour of the Emerald Isle and there is a plaque on the Drogheda cathedral noting an argument that occurred between Cromwell and some townsmen. It was about politics. Cromwell kept having very similar arguments in most of the places he visited in Ireland and for very much the same reasons. For reference the cathedral is St Peter's Parish (Catholic) and not to be confused with St Peter's Church of Ireland (Anglican), which is around the corner and one street back.

James is home and we go there, meeting his partner Fionna, their newish dog and Gillian. James gives me further details about that evening's book group meet up and directions to the battle site. Gillian accompanies June and me to the site but the GPS declares that the correct road doesn't exist and we go in a five-kilometre loop because the sealed road we

want is invisible to GPS. The Battle of the Boyne was where James II and VII, the no longer king of England and Scotland, lost against his son-in-law William III (of Orange) with respect to the crown of Ireland. James II is one of the few kings of England that the Irish and English share the same opinion, but for different reasons. I'll just say that very visibly abandoning your supporters mid-battle is not a good PR move. The site is definitely worth a visit. We arrange with Gillian to go Newgrange the next day.



June and Gillian



Newgrange neolithic pit prop

We return to James' and Fionna's place and June and I depart to the Boyne Valley Hotel and Country Club. Shortly after check-in I discover I am desperately short of sleep. I make my apologies to James and send through my book comments. Next day is Newgrange and Knowth neolithic sites, which we get to early enough to avoid queuing for hours due to busloads of tourists arriving from Dublin. Very much worth the visit and because the visitor centre was being rebuilt the entrance fees were much reduced. Back to Drogheda, a quick lunch and a farewell to Gillian. And on to the N51 to Athboy and the R154 and some local roads to the Loughcrew Cairns. The cairns are on the top of a hill. The car park is conveniently located at the bottom of the hill about 1 kilometre away. As we neared the cairns the weather changed. The wind picked up, the clouds closed in a bit and it started raining. We had packed rain ponchos and now was the time to use them. I executed a fine performance routine unfolding the poncho and putting it on – at least it didn't blow away. June showed how putting on the poncho should be done. Loughcrew Cairns is another neolithic site but not in the same state of preservation as Newgrange. The view from the

hilltop was impressive. We descended the hill as the weather cleared and drove on towards Sligo eventually intercepting the N4, which heads directly there. We checked into the Sligo Southern Hotel. The next morning it was some shopping in Sligo and then out to Carrowmore Megalithic Cemetery. Impressive and possibly the oldest megalithic site in Ireland, but by now we are replete with visiting Ireland's prehistoric sites. So, it's off to Ennis by way of the scenic route: the N59 to Galway, the R548 to Ennis and onwards to the Inn At Dromoland (or the Clare Valley Country Club as GPS would have me believe). The scenery was interesting and varied. At various points there were storyboard signs telling of shipwrecks from the Spanish armada coming ashore along the coast. Equally fascinating were the local sheep (goats?) that had been patches of blue and pink sprayed on their backs. About Maam Cross (before Galway) we had a rest stop. I made a big purchase: a rain jacket. Why I needed one in Ireland I can't say. The shop assistant recommended we stop by Aughnanure Castle. Unfortunately, this was closed when we arrived but it was still worth the visit.



The Spanish trail



Sheep? Goats?

The next day we went west to look at the Cliffs of Moher. We understood the fuss made of them. After a good walk, it was back to the car and off to Doolin Cave. Not big, but an excellent diversion. I was then asked by June to go to an artisan skincare products manufacturer in the heart of the Burren. Putting my trust again in the in-vehicle GPS we set out and almost immediately we are on roads the width of the car. If we meet someone coming the other way the situation will be entertaining to say the least. GPS says the distance is less than 40 kilometres. At some point we cross a signposted and sealed two-lane road. The signposts say the distance is 70 kilometres with the GPS saying less than 30. And suddenly the boundary hedges disappear and there is only straggly grass with stones marking the edge of the road. The last few kilometres are on a sealed road and not a goat track. The business is a nice diversion and even has tearooms attached. Then onwards to Killarney, via the R548, N21, N23, and N22 with a stop in Newcastle West and an almost private tour of Desmond Castle. It was an hour before closing and we were the only two tourists at the castle. The castle dates from the fifteenth century and has been well maintained. Finally, we arrive at to Hotel Killarney (propitiously next to the N22) for a much needed rest.



The Burren



Newcastle West

Morning dawns and a four to five-hour circuit of the Ring of Kerry is wisely abandoned as we want to get to Waterford before midnight. So, we motor down the N22 to Cork and a detour to Blarney Castle. On the way I spot Perry Middlemiss (co-chair of AussieCon 4) and his wife Robyn on the Laney River bridge in Macroom. Perry, Robyn and I talk about this in Dublin. Blarney Castle has impressive grounds and an impressive queue to see the Blarney Stone but after about 30 minutes we are on the battlements ready to be up-ended to kiss the stone. The weather is playing nice and it's a fine day to walk in the gardens. Not being castled out we follow the N8 to Cahir to look at Cahir Castle, which dates from the 1370s and has been restored after it fell into disrepair. Cromwell was able to capture it without a shot being fired. Then off to nearby Swiss Cottage (follow the R670). A pleasant walk down a forest shaded road to a bridge gives a good view of the servants' entrance to the cottage: up a sealed path, through a white-washed tunnel and one enters the servants' rooms under the cottage proper. Then the tour and the view back to the cottage from the lawn. The cottage was the wealthy's idea of roughing it for a week or two. After that culture shock it was back to the car and the N24 to Waterford for a night at the Woodlands Hotel. Just outside Clonmel, on the way to Waterford, we passed the Bulmers Cidery. It was huge.

At this point a reader may be looking at a map of Ireland and wondering why I avoided the motorways. I was informed by the car rental company that, apart from the M50 and short stretch north to Drogheda, the motorways in Ireland are tolled. Also, motorways have a tendency to bypass areas sites of scenic beauty and historical interest. Not something one wants if one wants to view those sites.



Swiss Cottage



Servants' entrance

'Waterford is rightly famous for its crystal. So much so that tour buses pull up to the Waterford Crystal store and with the guides herding the passengers in. The instore displays are magnificent and some of the items truly fabulous – and pricey. We saw much we liked and nothing we wanted to buy. Also visited were Reginald's Tower, a thirteenth century fortress, the Vardrarfjodr replica Viking ship (as Waterford was founded by Vikings), and the two cathedrals (Anglican and Catholic) as they were designed by the same architect. After a quick coffee we were on our way. Taking the N25 to New Ross. Where we switched to the N30; until it met the N80. Then onto the N81 until Hollywood, with a right onto the R756 through the King's River Valley and into the hills above Glendalough. We stopped at Glendalough and did a walking tour of the historical site accompanied by a few busloads of other tourists. The rain jacket again proved its worth. We continued down the valley until we intersected with the R115 and drove north towards Dublin. The R115 was the old military road and the scenery became more and more impressive the further we went into the Wicklow Mountains National Park. It was then onto the M50 (toll free) ring road and debouching somewhere in north Dublin. Eventually, our accommodation for the night, Clontarf Castle, was found. The building is a Norman castle dating from 1172 with later additions. This little piece of luxury was worth it. The hotel dining room was in in the old banqueting hall.



Reginald's Tower, Waterford



Waterford crystal

The next day it was time to book into the convention hotel, The Gibson, and return the hire car. After a few turns around the block I found a temporary car park and got us checked in. Next was returning the hire car. Dublin is a wonderful place with lots of hidden treasures, such as the hire car return depot. We found the right place by parking the car and walking the area. Next followed getting into central Dublin from the depot as we weren't near any public transport as far as we could tell. I think we flagged down a taxi. As it was only mid-morning, we decided to visit the Guinness Storehouse and do the tour. We then played an impromptu game of hide and seek in the gift shop, which June won. As my cellphone was safely in Singapore there was no way I could ring her to concede defeat and say I was returning to the hotel to prepare for the Lord Mayor's reception for the WorldCon. Fortunately, June was keeping an eye on the time too and she appeared soon after my return. Evidently, the gift shop covers more than one floor. As we were getting into our taxi we met Geri Sullivan, the TransAtlantic Fan Fund delegate, also going to the reception but whose Uber ride had vanished into the mysteries of central Dublin, so we shared the taxi. The reception was a great opportunity to mingle with invited fans and other guests. Afterwards, it was back to the hotel to change to less formal clothes for a fan get together that Rose Mitchell (the other AussieCon Four co-chair), Perry Middlemiss and others had organised at their AirBnB. As there was some shopping we both wished to do we decided to walk. Unlike most New Zealand merchant buildings, Dublin's stores don't have awnings to protect pedestrians from the rain. We were a trifle damp by the time we made the meet up. The evening was very convivial with the meet up being mostly Australian fans. June and I taxied back to the Gibson.

Thursday 15 August and the convention started. We get to the convention centre early and register (the queues were relatively short at this point). We have time to admire the hall costumes in the registration area. Then I'm off to my first panel of the convention *Fan Funds Around The World* with Marcin "Alqua" Klak, Regina Kanyu Wang, Alan Stewart, and Anna Raftery. I first met Marcin when he visited NZ and helped show him some sights in the Wellington area; and have known Alan since about 2002. I answer a question from the audience about establishing a Spain focussed fund. After this there is the rehearsal for the opening ceremony whereby I discover I am to give an award. After this, I do some milling around, check out the green room, the dealers' hall, and the bar where several fans I recognise have congregated. Introductions are made with names now forgotten. Queuing for events is proving problematic as ingress and egress are through the same corridor and the queuing area. Back to the hotel to freshen up for the Opening Ceremony reception, which magically segues into the Opening Ceremony. – and I discover that the award I'm about to present isn't onstage with me. Ellen Klages (one of the ceremony compères) and I now have

five minutes to extemporise some entertainment for the assembled audience. At least I didn't use any obscenities.



Hall costume



Retro-Hugo award presenters (me front right)



Geri Sullivan



James Shields and Perry Middlemiss

The second day of the convention and the queuing bottleneck had been resolved, sort of. There were now lines taped on the floor and queue marshals organising the queues. The marshals let people know which queue was for what room and when a queue had reached the room limit. When sufficient people had exited the finished sessions, the marshals gave the green light for the queues to storm the rooms for seating. This system worked surprisingly well. My first panel of the day wasn't until 3pm so I took the time to visit the dealers' hall. I assisted the ConZealand 2020 table by accosting passersby who looked vaguely interested and offering them an ANZAC biscuit (several packets had been purchased before leaving New Zealand). I had a brief conversation with Sidsel Petersen, whom I first met at the Helsinki WorldCon, then returned to my role of carbohydrate pusher to SF fandom (not a difficult task). The panel was *Falling In Love With Science Fiction* and was standing room only. I was moderator with the other panellists being: Jennifer Zwahr-Castro, Shaoyan Hu, and Ebba Svegelius Gunnarson. I was happily surprised when to a person we all answered the question "Which book(s) do you reread the most?" by saying we don't reread any books, and with variations of "too much new stuff, not enough time to keep up". The one question I could have answered much, much better was from a person who recently moved towns and asked about sourcing decent new SF. As this is a matter of personal taste I

should have said: trust your instincts when reading the blurb of a book; find someone with similar tastes to you and swap recommendations; and join a book group or SF club that talks about books they have read (not: let's all read the same book). In my defence we had just been given the wrap up the panel now(!) signal. An hour later I was facing the audience again, this time the panel was *Modern Alternatives to Classic Boardgames*. The other panellists were: Liz Dornan, Rachel Scanlon, Fergal Mac Cairthaigh, and Robin David. I may have classified modern boardgames into three broad groups: jigsaw puzzle games e.g. Carcassonne, resource management games e.g. Puerto Rico, and network games e.g. Ticket to Ride. Or I may not, I can't really remember. I got a book signed by Nancy Kress and later had a pleasant conversation while we walked to the tram station behind the convention centre. June and I dined out with the usual Australian suspects.

Saturday, 17 August and as the GUFF delegate my sole official duty was assisting at the scheduled, combined *Fan Funds Auction*, which was a successful fund raiser for the four(?) funds represented: GUFF, DUFF, TAFF and EuroFan. Another author signature was gleaned from Yoon Ha Lee. At some point during the day I helped a vision-impaired fan stalled at a not yet operation set of pedestrian crossing lights next to a building site. I don't know how long he had been waiting but he would have been there for some time if I hadn't asked if he was waiting for the lights. He thanked me for taking the time to come to his assistance. Fortunately, he hadn't been waiting long. Saturday evening saw the Masquerade. I always admire the skill and energy that fans put into their costumes, especially for this event. Back in NZ the SF costumers are being seduced to other events that cater more fully to their specialist interests.



Scenes from the Masquerade

Sunday was the Hugo reception, awards ceremony and after match function at the Guinness brewery (without detour to the gift shop). The reception was a very pleasant surprise where I was seated next to the author and convention guest of honour Ian McDonald. At the same table, June was seated next to Greg Hullender and Eric Wong, the Hugo nominees for the fan site Rocket Stack Rank, which specialised in reviewing short fiction (novella, novelette and short story). June had been a commentator on their reviews for a few years and I had met them in Helsinki. In the auditorium June got to sit next to Zen Cho, who won the novelette category for *If At First You Don't Succeed, Try Try Again*, and whom June had met at an Asians in fandom meet up. After that meet up I was introduced to Kin-Ming Looi and his partner Lisa Smith who were collectively trying to emigrate to New Zealand from the UK. The awards ceremony was also memorable for Jeanette Ng's expletive heavy acceptance speech for the then titled John W. Campbell Award for Best New Writer in which she criticised Campbell's attitudes to people of colour and women. The award's sponsor, Dell Magazines,

fairly rapid changed the award name to the Astounding Award for Best New Writer. And Afua Richardson, a comics and graphic artist featured guest surprised almost all the audience by doing a few musical numbers and playing the flute. The after match function was a very well catered affair and June and I had a pleasant time catching up with people. Roderick O'Hanlon and I compared notes as to the freshness of the Guinness porter served at the brewery.



Greg, Eric, June and me

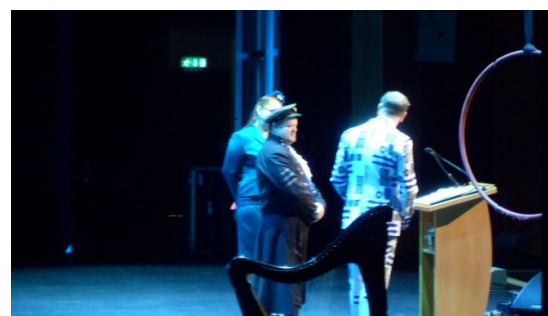


June and Zen Cho

The last day of the convention saw me miss the art show, which I had intended to view, and give a solo presentation on *New Zealand's Space Programme*. Before my talk, Roderick gave me some good advice: if you run out of talking points start asking the audience questions. Fortunately, it never came to that. The audience seemed to enjoy the talk and laughed at the space programme spoof the New Zealand Broadcasting Corporation had aired in the late 1960s. Afterwards I was asked for a copy of my film clips and talk by an English fan whose wife was a Kiwi. I was delighted to oblige. I soon discovered I would be required onstage one last time for the closing ceremony. Norman Cates, incoming co-chair of CoNZealand 2020, and I attempted to convince Afua Richardson to come to Wellington – if not for the convention at least for the World of Wearable Arts show that would be held about four weeks after the WorldCon. We both got told off for talking too loudly. I got a cheer from the audience for drinking beer onstage as part of my farewell twerl.



The after match function
2020



The passing of the gavel to CoNZealand
2020

The convention had been a happy experience for both me and June. June was struck by the cultural diversity in attendance and contrasted it most favourably with American conventions. She had also got to meet several authors she enjoyed reading, and the aforementioned Greg and Eric. I was excused allowing my name to go forward for the GUFF ballot.

The Tuesday was a free day in Dublin that we used to some low impact sightseeing and touristy stuff. First, we walked over to Trinity College and looked at the buildings, grounds and installed art. While we rested on a park bench, I said that the only university in New Zealand that had comparable grounds to Trinity was Canterbury University, which caused a passing stranger to swing his head and join our conversation. It transpired that he had studied at Canterbury and done his doctorate at Trinity, and was back in Dublin for the launching of his book *Defending Trinity College Dublin, Easter 1916* (by Rory Sweetman). Being a graduate, he invited us in to the library, bypassing the extensive queue and saving us the admission fee, to see the Book of Kells and strongly recommended that we go upstairs to see the gallery. We were both Impressed with the Book of Kells, but me less than June as I had had the pleasure of examining a facsimile copy issued by Trinity College and bought by the National Library of New Zealand when I went to the library on a work visit. Other precious, and beautiful, documents were on display with the Book. Upstairs was a revelation. The gallery was the scenic inspiration for the library in the Harry Potter movies, with marble busts of old boys lining the lower gallery. There was also O'Carolan's Harp in its own display case. This is the emblematic harp used by Guinness and, in reverse the Irish coat of arms. After Trinity College we exited via the west gate in Regent House. We stood on Grafton St opposite the Parliament House on one corner and the Irish Whiskey Museum on the other corner. The museum won by several lengths. We did the upmarket tour, which included tasting of four whiskeys rather than the standard tour with three. My hopes of getting eight samples of whiskey came to a grinding halt after the first not very smooth glass. C'est la vie dans la grande ville. We took in both cathedrals: St Patrick's and Christ Church, which are both Anglican – the Irish Catholic church has yet to ordain St Mary's Pro Cathedral as a full cathedral. And took in the Temple Bar area. We returned to the hotel somewhat exhausted.



Trinity College Library



Irish Whiskey Museum – the tasting

That night June described Ireland as very much like New Zealand: green, hilly, and with very changeable weather, but with much cheaper fish. These comments give rise to the title of this trip report.

Wednesday saw us back at the airport, having used the airport bus, which had a stop very close to the hotel and on a transAtlantic flight to Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. When booked this was supposed to be a five-hour flight by 737 to St John's, Newfoundland but West Jet revised its routes and our itinerary. So, we had six hours to Halifax and an hour back to St John's. At Halifax we had to be careful reading the destination boards as we could so easily have ended up in St John, New Brunswick. The purpose of the visit to Newfoundland was to

visit L'Anse aux Meadows. I now had to switch mental gears as we were now going to be driving on the wrong (righthand) side of the road.

After collecting the rental car and finding the hotel we spent a while in downtown St John's. We thought the sign for the Dildo Brewery was amusing. The next day was spent exploring the area around the city, taking in some of the historical sites and enjoying the rain blowing in from Greenland. Next followed a two-day drive to L'Anse aux Meadows, overnighing in Deer Lake. At Deer Lake we said farewell to route Canada 1 (which starts in Vancouver and ends in St John's), and took provincial road 430 through the UNESCO-listed Gros Morne National Park, with the St Lawrence seaway to our left. At St Barbe we passed a sign for the ferry across the seaway with estimated distance times. The crossing to Blanc Sablon was about an hour, the joining ferry to Quebec City was given as three days. On the way up the coast, we visited the Port au Choix National Historical Site and Point Riche Lighthouse. They are more or less on the same site. Port au Choix at various times was occupied by various Indian and Eskimo tribes, but the settlements never overlapped. (The local Inuit tribes don't object to the use of the term Eskimo as they are unrelated to the vanished tribes.) As we were about to leave a small herd of caribou walked past the car. A most unexpected sight. Just shy of St Anthony, where route 430 ends we stayed at Viking Lodge with a clear view across the seaway to Labrador.



Gros Morne National Park



Caribou

Fortunately, the lodge provided breakfast as we were kilometres from a café. Then it was a 30 to 45-minute drive up route 436, which terminated at L'Anse aux Meadows. L'Anse etc gets its fame from being the first documented site of European settlement in North America (ignoring Greenland), and if one has the time is well worth a visit, but by God is it out of the way! The drive took about fourteen hours from St John's. The site is another UNESCO-listed site. The truth is that L'Anse was not a settlement, it was a wintering over site. The Vikings could get to the Labrador coast, and fell timber there, from Greenland in about two weeks. Getting down to Newfoundland took considerably longer, probably due to unfavourable winds. The wintering over party had to stay because they needed to repair their ship. Evidence of bog iron manufacture was found. Aside from the historical site is a nature trail and close by an historical re-enactment Viking village, called Norstead. The weather played nice and we had a good day out. On the way back we dined at Northern Delight, where June had a fish dish and I had crab legs, lobster being no longer in season. The legs were huge. I had a lot of fun playing with my food.



L'Anse aux Meadows



The actual site, with Labrador to the left

On the journey back to Deer Lake we decided to visit Conche, where a 66-metre long tapestry a la the much more famous Bayeux tapestry, had been created recording the history of the French Shore of northern Newfoundland is on display. To get to Conche we took unsealed route 432, turned off down route 433, then turned off again on route 434. Just before the descent to the village there is a lookout point and observation platform giving a fantastic view of the sea-arm and down to the settlement. We weren't disappointed with the tapestry; it was worth the detour. Then back to the car, back along route 434, 433 and we completed the length of 432 to join up with the sealed route 430 again. Deer Lake was a welcome sight. On the drive back to St John's we played a game trying to determine whether any body of water we saw was a lake, a river (not very often) or the sea. Newfoundland has a bleak forested beauty but not much in the way of magnificent vistas. We get back to St John's and have a final finish dinner. Seafood is cheaper than chicken in Newfoundland, even my crab leg dinner was.



Newfoundland landscape



Part of the French Shore Tapestry

The next day we return the hire car and catch our flight from St John's to Calgary, then an hour or so later the connecting flight to Vancouver. At Vancouver we have a seven-hour layover until we fly overnight to Auckland, New Zealand. Due to some forward planning before leaving NZ we meet an SF fan from NZ, Richard Scheib, who has emigrated to Canada, and his Canadian partner at the airport. Richard is in fine form and healthwise has benefited from his move to Canada; his allergies and asthma are nowhere near as severe as they were in New Zealand. After a few hours we have to check in for our flights so say farewell.

The flight is uneventful until about two hours from landing in Auckland when a passenger in the section we are travelling in requires medical attention blocking access to the toilet, almost until touchdown. Due to my bodily needs, June and I are separated and I am late clearing Customs. The absence of a cellphone means I can't contact June. She makes the connecting flight to Wellington and I have to get the next one an hour later. Eventually, I

arrive in Wellington get to my car and get home. June took a taxi. My cats are pleased to see me. I'm not sure what opinion the small mountain of physical correspondence has to me being home. It will never tell me. I now have the time and available tools to start the process of getting my cellphone home from Singapore. A welcome reunion occurs a week later.