



Fáilte, a chairde! Thanks for visiting with me through this little newsletter. It means a lot to me to know you're there and helping me stay accountable for improving my Irish. I often think about everyone who is trying to learn as I am. I hope you, too, will feel encouraged if you see the progress I make with a bit of patience, determination, and perseverance. **Bí slán agus fan slán!**

Bitesize Irish

If you've read what I've been writing over these months, you've seen me write many complimentary things about Bitesize Irish. I thought I should say, officially, that, other than being a customer of the service, I have no relationship with the company. I'm just reporting on my Irish language journey. Bitesize Irish has been an important part. I recommend it unreservedly.

I've changed my plans for participating in Bitesize Beo (live) sessions. Bitesize Beo has become quite popular among Bitesize members. This is good but less valuable for me. Many people are attending the sessions and are being divided up into a number of subgroups where people run through the script of the day. What this means is that exposure to a native speaker (Bitesize Siobhan) is reduced significantly. Because of this and because of my new Irish language contacts outside Bitesize, I've decided to change my plan to participate. I'm continuing to progress through the courses and still plan to finish by the end of May. I expect to stick with it, regardless, at least until the end of August, marking one year of intensive work.

Duolingo

I've now done my lessons on this platform for 191 days without missing a day. I'm nearing completion of the 3rd out of 5 sections of the Irish "tree". I'm on track to complete the whole thing by the end of May. That will be 9 months into my intensive study. I'm not sure what will happen then. I'm guessing I'll be using it for vocabulary review. Or maybe I'll stop using Duolingo. One step at a time.

Gaeilge gan Stró! Lower Intermediate Level

I spent the past 2 weeks doing cursory reviews of the vocabulary and structures from **Gaeilge gan Stró! Beginners Level**. Starting April 1st, I'll begin studying in the 2nd book, the **Lower Intermediate Level** book. Initially, I was worried about this. My confidence in my abilities was low. After meeting with my tutor/student online, though, my opinion has changed. I am not anywhere near "good" yet but I am where I would expect to be at this stage of my journey to becoming "conversational". Unit 1 of the new book is *Background and Where You Live*, which is sort of an expansion on what I've

already learned. This dovetails nicely with the online tutoring session April 2. I have committed to speaking at length on this exact topic when we chat.

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The course is proceeding as expected and is still easy. I've been told that I could skip all the courses I find easy and go on to more challenging content. I've decided I won't do that. I think there's value in knowing exactly what people expect you to know. I've noticed, from instructional book to book, from course to course, there will be different vocabulary introduced and material introduced in different orders. By following along on the 100 series courses, my knowledge/skill will be what it's expected to be when I get to their higher levels.

Listening and Speaking

My first Skype meeting on March 19 with a **gaeilgeoir** from Cork went very well for both of us, it seems. We decided then to meet once a week and do half-Hebrew / half-Irish. We met again on March 26 and again it was pleasant and productive for both of us. This weekly get together is taking the place of Bitesize Beo for me.

Through a mutual friend, I was introduced to a small social circle of older **gaeilgeoirí** from around Ireland who get together online every two weeks. There were seven of us, including me, in the gathering. We all took turns saying short prayers - this was the first time I'd said a prayer publicly in Irish - and then everyone just chatted for a while. It was wonderful for me. I was filled with such happiness I felt I would cry. This was the first gathering I was in where everyone was speaking mostly Irish and where they were there for socializing and not for my education. I was happily surprised how much I was able to understand and even that I was able to contribute something, however small, to the conversation. The folks were from all over the country (Donegal, Dublin, Wexford, Cork, Gallway, Sligo) and they were old friends. I felt honored to be welcomed and invited to join them when they met again. We'll see how that goes. I'll do my best not to be a burden and be able to add my own bit of news from **mo ghealtacht bheag fhéin** to the chat.

My Long Imaginary Walk

Oileán Chléire (Cape Clear Island) is the last place I'm "walking" to in my Long Imaginary Walk through the Cork gaeltachtaí. I've been in the Cork gaeltacht for over a month now and have been enjoying it. At the same time, I've had mixed feelings of joy and sadness. Oileán Chléire is, to me, the most perfect example so far.

The fact of the matter is, I can't actually walk to get there, even if I tried. The island is 8 miles off the southern coast. I have to take the ferry. COVID-19 is making this harder. Naturally, the ferry requires masking up and social distancing. In addition, they ask you to use the public toilets at the harbors rather than queuing for the toilet on the ferry. (I laughed at the thought someone might be saying: "All right now, have we all gone to the toilet before we leave?") I take the ferry from Baltimore and I get dropped off at North Harbour on the island.

The island is 3 miles long and 1 mile wide. At last count, fewer than 150 people live there. The population has been declining steadily for a century. Some people have said they think they will live to see the end of the gaeltacht here. One of the first sights I see at the end of the harbour is a cemetery. A stone's throw away to the right, though, is **Réadlann Éan**, the Bird Observatory. Off to the left down the road, I see Cotter's Bar. A bit of black humour thanks to COVID: they have a sign on the wall "Shut Happens". But they also have a nice area of separate tables set up outside. They're open from noon till 11 at night. And if Cotter's doesn't suit, **Séan Rua's** restaurant and the grocery, **An Siopa Beag**, are just across the street. **Bia trádisúnta slaintúil**, their sign says.

Heading southeast for a while, I can see **Teach Solais Cléire**, the old Cape Clear Lighthouse. There are two buildings: the ruin of a Napoleonic era watchtower and the old lighthouse. There's a "Danger, keep out" sign near the buildings. It's all in English. I couldn't help thinking it didn't need to be **as Gaeilge** because only tourists would go into a place the residents already knew was dangerous. But maybe I'm wrong.

To the northwest of the old lighthouse is the **Músaem & Cartlann Cléire** (Museum and Archive). There's no straight road between the two places. I imagine I could walk across the fields and climb the rock walls between them. The land doesn't seem particularly hospitable, one large island of rock wearing a thin dress of soil. It's like the island is daring you to try living there. Countless rocks have been cleared so there can be fields; the rocks turned into walls. The museum is not big but I find its exhibits incredibly interesting. Take a look, if you get the chance. <http://capeclearmuseum.ie/exhibition-areas/> Up at the northeast end of the island are the **Gairdíní Comillane** (Comillane Gardens), a 14 acre private botanical garden developed over the past quarter century. I can visit it if I make arrangements with the family in advance. There are some standing stones not far away to the north as well.

A happy note: the island being used for summer schools for youth by **Coláiste Chiaráin** in Cork and by **Coláiste Pobail Chléire** themselves. Here's a video with a lovely song about a summer school in Irish by Coláiste Chiaráin. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RGJ4VpPQZdQ> It's sort of natural. Saint Ciarán was supposedly born on Oileán Chléire.

There is an elementary school <http://snchleire.com/> but there are only 6 students. They put on a **Seó na Nollag** (Christmas show) for 2020 that was as dear as you can imagine. The school had been struggling for a while to replace a principal and a teacher but re-opened in 2018 with only six pupils. Once students finish elementary school, they have to go to the mainland for secondary education. This can be a path, long term, to leaving the island.

There's a library in the North Harbour area, **Leabharlann Oileán Chléire**, just in front of the cemetery there. The library has about 3,000 various items available for patrons. The librarian tells me the regular population of the island has dropped to about 100. Of these, perhaps 10% use Irish **gach lá**. A lot of people have some Irish and will answer you in Irish if you speak to them that way. Some people, though, have moved to the island from outside and have no Irish at all. The librarian also tells me there's a draft plan for Irish language and culture development submitted to the national planning board for approval. This will, no doubt, have a positive impact on the future of the community.

The community has fared well in the COVID pandemic. The island being separated allowed the community to keep to their own "bubble" of people. The various levels of lockdown, have affected them, of course. At one point, visitors coming to the island were more restricted than they are at the moment. Even so, as of this writing, they're not completely out of the woods yet.

I did learn a new word **as Béarla** as a result of my visit: **glamping**. This word is a combination of "glamorous" and "camping". When restrictions ease up, Oileán Chléire offers glamping opportunities. One can stay outside in a luxurious yurt and have all the amenities with a minimum of hardship. Read all about it at [Glamping on Cape Clear Island](#).

Here's an interactive map of Oileán Chléire. <http://www.capeclearisland.ie/map> Give it a look.

In closing

My new favorite word is **ball broinne** = birthmark. **Tá ball broinne agam ar mo chos**. It's shaped like Ireland. My father had the same one.

Until next time,
Slán!