



Fáilte ar ais arís, a chairde! Time goes by so quickly it seems. I turn around and it's time to give another report of what I've been doing and how the journey has been going. I understood from the beginning this journey was not merely an intellectual one but a deeply emotional one as well. I certainly have been experiencing the whole gamut! But the road goes ever on and on, eh?

Now that I've had actual Irish speakers in my life for nearly two months, I've noticed my stress level has gone up. My concerns about becoming "good" in Irish, about making mistakes, have gone up to the point I'm feeling it in my body. I also think this is tied to wanting to be liked. This is something I need to work on. All the deadlines and goals I've set for myself are self imposed. In other words, they're entirely arbitrary; I made them, I can change them. Even producing this newsletter every 2 weeks is arbitrary; I could change it to be every 19 days and it wouldn't matter.

I know I have a strong drive to improve my Irish. I have to recognize when I'm pressure-cooking myself too much and allow myself to back off. And not feel guilty!

Bitesize Irish

I am a self-motivated and self-disciplined person. I can be my own cheerleader. It's nice, though, occasionally to hear someone else say "Keep it up!" and to know they're pleased to see it, whether they say so or not. Aisling's departure from Bitesize affected me more than I expected. It felt easy to push myself because I knew there was someone who was expecting me to produce a report of what I was doing, someone who cared deeply about the Irish language and had a little bit of investment in my success. I felt like a prop had been kicked out from under me when she was gone. Knowing that Aisling saw the newsletter provided me with more emotional support than I knew. She had been there since the beginning of it and had even helped me with the newsletter's name. Now I'm having to fall back entirely on myself. I think this whole thing came to a sudden head for me when Bitesize Siobhán announced that Emma, the new Bitesize **bainisteoir pobail**, would be conducting the weekly **Beo** ("live") session instead of herself. I wrote to Siobhán immediately to make sure she wasn't planning on leaving Bitesize, too. Although I haven't had much interaction with Siobhán outside the occasional **Beo** session, it was the Bitesize videos she did which made it seem really possible for me to finally learn Irish. I know I have developed some sense of attachment to her. I think I would have felt truly lost if she were leaving, too. She assured me, though, it was only to give Emma the experience in case Siobhán was out on holiday or

something.

I continue to progress through the Bitesize material but emphasis for me has moved to actual, constant language practice and not merely studying new lessons.

I wrote to Bitesize Eoin and told him I'm planning on doing a video all in Irish sometime in the summer. I wanted to make sure it would be okay with him if I talked about my experience with Bitesize in the video. He was amenable.

Duolingo

I continue to chug along in Duolingo. I haven't missed a day since I first began 221 days ago. I'm moving at a rate to insure I finish on time (according to my self-imposed schedule). The process is occasionally drudgery but also satisfying and energizing at times. Fortunately for me, the stage I've reached is also dealing with the past tense, something that has been very much on my mind lately.

Gaeilge gan Stró! Lower Intermediate Level

I've changed my plans for using Gaeilge gan Stró going forward. Working with this new book, it became clear to me the book is better used in a classroom environment and not as a self-study resource. Instead of going through the units in the book one after another, I've decided I am going to listen to the audio files accompanying the book for listening practice.

FutureLearn Irish 104

I've reached the end of the 3rd week of Irish 104. Now that I've settled into the pattern of the learning (it only took 3 and $\frac{3}{4}$ course!), I'm enjoying this course more. They've introduced some things I didn't know and I've been working a lot on an **aimsir chaite**, the past tense.

Listening and Speaking

I've had 7 Hebrew/Irish get-togethers now. April 30 was the 7th. We have been meeting over Skype. A major advantage of this kind of in-person encounter is the opportunity for spur of the moment questions. As we're working on something, a question will enter my head. I can ask and get an immediate answer. I can also ask about nuance and appropriate situational use of words and phrases. I noted this in my last report but the effect has become magnified for me. Lately we

have been going over **an aimsir chaite**, the past tense, with a lot of different verbs. I've also continued to have plenty of opportunities to ask clarifying questions that I wouldn't have learning from a book.

My Imaginary Long Walk

I've left the town of Dingle now and am wandering around the rest of the peninsula. Ordinarily, I'm more interested in people than in things but the peninsula has over 2,000 ancient monuments and people have been living here for the past 6,000 years. And all the secrets hidden on the peninsula have not been discovered yet. Just the other day, an ancient tomb, previously undisturbed, was discovered by a resident who turned over a rock and discovered a rock-lined passage leading into the earth. It sounds like the beginning of a Dungeons & Dragons adventure! The specific location is being kept secret so archaeologists have a chance to examine it in detail without the site being disturbed.

One of the things I'm gradually coming to terms with is the constant presence of both joy and sadness as I travel around Ireland. For every joyous moment, there seems to be an equally painful one. For instance, the area I'm in is where **Na Blascaodaí** (the Blasket Islands) are. These islands were an important preserve of Irish language and culture. Peig Sayers lived in the Blaskets. Those islands are all empty now. No one lives there. Because of declining population and increasingly severe weather, the islands were evacuated by the government and the few remaining residents resettled on the mainland of Ireland, moving them from tiny islands to a much larger one. That happened just about 68 years ago in 1953. It's not that the islanders were forced off their land. Even they saw the need to go but it was the ending of a part of **gaeltacht** history and culture, something that can never be recaptured. **Gearoid Ceaist O Cathain** was the last child raised there.



This picture shows Gearóid with his grandfather, Pádraig (Ceaist) Ó Catháin, at **Bun a' Bhaile** on the Great Blasket. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/arid-20269424.html>
The original article with the picture labeled him "the loneliest boy in the world". The Irish Examiner article in 2014 notes he is the last survivor of the evacuation, the last person alive who actually lived on those islands. He produced a book about his life there - *The Loneliest Boy in the World: The Last Child of the Great Blasket Island* - and it's available for purchase online. He would be about my age today but I was unable to determine if he still lived. The area the Blasket evacuees were moved to is called **Dún Chaoin** (Caon's stronghold - Dunquin). I took the time to virtually wander through the area. I was deeply moved to see Peig Sayers' grave in **Reilig Dhún**

Chaoin (Dunquin Cemetery). She passed away in 1958, the year I was 10. On the large marker at the head of her grave is written "**Go raibhimid i gcomhlúadar a chéile i ríocht Dé.**" *We were in fellowship together in the kingdom of God.* I could see the back of her large headstone from the road. The front of the stone faces the sea and the islands she lived on. I was clearly not alone in feeling that was as it should be. Her son, Michael, is buried with her. All her other relatives came to the U.S. Apparently, some of them live in western Massachusetts. (I live in Central Massachusetts.)

The Blasket Centre, a heritage museum, has an online presence and is quite interesting. <https://blasket.ie/>
There are a couple of places to stay: **An Portán** (the Crab), a restaurant and B&B, and the **Gleann Dearg** Bed and Breakfast (the Red Glen).

The whole of the peninsula has little centres here and there. Each of which are easily visited with Google Street View. I could spend quite a bit of time going from one to the next all along the coast.

Séadna

You may remember I was very interested in this book **Séadna** by **an t-athair Peadar Ua Laoghaire** a while back. I set it aside but I've come back to it. The story, overall, is just too fascinating for me and I can't let it go. I've started going through it, breaking out the various story elements. As time goes by, I know I'm going to have a lot I want to say about it. To me, the opening line - **A Pheig, inis scéal dúinn.** - Peg, tell us a story - resonates with me as much as lines like "Call me Ishmael." or "En un lugar de la Mancha..." or "Marley was dead, to begin with." All of these lines, and others, can make a reader thrill with anticipation and excitement even when the story is known well. **Séadna** is an Irish book, not a book written to please English speakers, and is full of meaning that would be invisible to someone unfamiliar with the ground that gives it birth. I'm going to continue working on it and I'll share some of my thoughts about it here as time goes by. In the meantime, both the original Irish and an authorized English translation can be found at archive.org. The English version is entitled **Shiana**. The books will come up in a search for their names. You may want to take a look.

Learning New Words and Expressions on the Fly

I've already described some of my process in doing my Imaginary Long Walk through the **gaeltachtaí**. I thought it might be worthwhile to provide some insight into how I find new words and expressions while I'm doing it.

The whole process can be very stream-of-consciousness.

As I amble around on Google Street View, or look at maps, web sites and videos, unfamiliar words and expressions pop up. When I see them, I immediately take note, try to learn them, and even expand on the words. I've included a part of my travel around the town of Dingle as an example.

The example below starts when I found myself at the western end of the main road I would take to go into the town center. I am by a driveway leading up to a cooking school.

Scoil Chócaireachta = cookery school (saw on sign)

cócaireacht, f. (gs. ~a). (Act of) cooking.

About a decade ago, where the cooking school sign was, there was another sign pointing to **Ceardlann na Coille** = The Workshop of the Forest (my translation - the English actually said "Craft Village")

ceardlann, f. (gs. -ainne, npl. ~a, gpl. ~). Workshop.

coill, f. (gs. ~e, pl. ~te). Wood; forest.

The street name in English is "The Wood".

An Choill = the wood; forest

Going up An Choill, I find the little clutch of buildings that house crafters. One of them is Dingle Linens.

línéadach, m. (gs. -aigh, pl. -aí). Linen.

línéadach boird = table linen

línéadach leapa = bed linen

The Google Street view pictures of this area are over ten years out of date. I wonder if any of the craft buildings are still active.

Across from the Cookery School sign, at No. 140 Sleah Head Drive is a B&B, **An Tigín Deiridh** = the Last Cottage.

tigín = **teachín**, m. (gs. ~, pl. ~í). Small house, cottage.

deiridh = **deireadh**, m. (gs. -ridh, pl. -rí) last.

And, as it happened, An Tigín Deiridh was the last cottage in a line of cottages on Sleah Head Drive heading away from the town center.

Heading toward town center, I pass the **Uisceadán an Daingin** (Oceanworld Aquarium), closed for the pandemic.

uisceadán, m. (gs. & npl. -áin, gpl. ~). Aquarium.

The sign says "**Oscailte Gach Lá**", Open Every Day. When I see phrases like this, I know I can use them in conversation.

Mar shampla: Tá an siopa oscailte gach lá.

I go to Oceanworld's web site. I find some Irish there.

It's 8 euros for a one hour guided tour **as Gaeilge nó Béarla**.

Saor in aisce do mhúinteoirí = Free entry for teachers and classroom assistants

Tae nó Caife saor in aisce do mhúinteoirí = Free tea and coffee for teachers and assistants

saor, a1. Free. (**saor** has a LOT of meanings and uses <https://www.teanglann.ie/ga/fgb/saor/>)

saor in aisce, free, gratis

aisce, f. (gs. ~, pl. -cí).1. Request, favour; gift, present.

in aisce = for nothing, gratis

Turas as gaeilge nó trí bhearla = Guided tour through Irish or English

turas, m. (gs. & npl. -ais, gpl. ~).1. Journey. 2. (a) Pilgrimage. (b)Ecc:~ na Croise, the Stations of the Cross. 3. (There's more at <https://www.teanglann.ie/ga/fgb/turas/>)

Draíocht na farraige agus iontais na mara = The magic of the sea and the wonder of the oceans (my translation)

draíocht = magic, charm, enchantment

farraige, f. (gs. ~, pl. -gí). Sea.

iontais, m. (gs. & npl. -ais, gpl. ~). Wonder.

muir, f. (gs. & pl. mara).Sea.

I had learned **muir** way back when I was still in Drogheda (**Muir Éireann** = the Irish Sea) but I include it here anyway.

Íoc is Taispeáint = Pay & Display (parking lot sign)

íoc, m. (gs. as s. ~a, as vn. ~tha; pl. ~aí). 1. vn. of ÍOC3. 2. Payment.

taispeáint, f. (gs. -ána).1. vn. of TAISPEÁIN. 2. Show, display, exhibition. <https://www.teanglann.ie/ga/fgb/taispe%C3%A1in>

Across the street from the aquarium, a large breakwater extends into the ocean and I can see the **Club Seoltóireachta an Daingin**, the Dingle Sailing Club. It is also closed now.

seoltóireacht, f. (gs. ~a). (Act of) sailing.

When I go past the office of Dingle Boat Tours, I see all the advertising for Fungie and "Guaranteed Sighting or Full Refund". The Google Street View picture is from October 2019. We know now Fungie disappeared after October 13, 2020. It makes me a little sad.

Past the marina, I see the **Oifig Fáilte**, the Tourist Information Centre. It's closed now, too. Walking further up the street, past more shops, restaurants and places to stay, I discover I have now made the full circle and am back at the corner of Green Street and Holyground street.

Here's another example of learning words when I bought some Irish material online:

I bought the new edition of the book **Séadna** from litriocht.com. I also got the audiobook. This is where I learned the words **crua** (hard) and **bog** (soft), referring to the covers of the books. I also learned these words from the purchase receipt in Irish.

guthán, m. (gs. & npl. -áin, gpl. ~). Telephone.

fo-iomlán = subtotal

iomlán = total

When I looked up **crua** on teanglann.ie, I picked up a few phrases that stuck with me:

chomh cruu le cloch = as hard as stone

ag obair go cruu = working hard

saol cruu = hard life, hard times

There was a lot more under the **cruu** entry but rather than try to remember everything, I just go with what sticks easily in my mind. It was the same when I looked up **bog**. The only thing that stuck with me was something I already knew **Tóg go bog é** = Take it easy.

And that's certainly advice I myself can use from time to time!

Until next time,

Slan!