

Great Britain, The Country of Wales

Jim and Emmy's Travel Journal

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1980

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Drove from England to southern Wales, never did recognize the border, if there was one. After a day or two, we boarded a ferry to Ireland.

GB, Wales, Sept 4, Thu - 92 - 139 - 11,926

Emmy thinks she left her leather coat at Peggy's so tried to call her, without luck. Emmy does have another coat to wear in this weather. We shopped in a Monmouth market for fruit and meat. Emmy bought a "traditional Cornish" breakfast, very good pastry filled with vegetable and meat, kind of like a chicken stuffing flavor.

One store she went in had some pretty woven fabrics, also had some capes and skirts that were very heavy, and made Emmy look big as a house. What would she do with something that warm in Southern California.

We drove past another castle, and visited a furniture manufacturing place. The furniture was of excellent quality—solid oak and ash—but the price was high, the design was plain but decorous. Emmy saw a sweater she liked very much, displayed in a store window. We waited until the store opened and found it was a knitting store, so she bought the pattern. Wanna bet how soon we will see the actual sweater. (In fact, we can't even find the pattern!)

The Welsh countryside is beautiful and very green. There are flocks of sheep and herds of cattle all over the place. We are in a National Park, but there are some areas with no trees. Lots of sheep are grazing along side the road. There is coal mining near Neath, Wales. Some of the towns in Wales are entertaining, and some are not, but the people are all very, very friendly.

Some people are making a big fuss about the use, or lack of use, of the Welsh language. We see signs in two languages, and the local spelling for Wales is Cymru. A new TV station is going to speak Welsh or else, according to the locals.

We are camping on the Swansea Peninsula. Several people said there was electricity in this campsite, but there is none, and we didn't want to try and find another place. We passed the University of Wales earlier, excellent set of buildings. Started to rain just as we were camping.

GB, Swansea Wales, Sept 5, Fri - 93 - 116 - 12,042

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Good thing we borrowed a sleeping bag from Peggy. Sure needed it, and everything else by 5:00 AM. The rain has stopped and it's windy with the sun breaking through the clouds, then cloudy, and really quite chilly. The scenery in this area is beautiful, with cows and sheep everywhere.

Among the problems of driving on the wrong side of the road, is that each morning we must figure how to do it all over again. Also, in this area there are high hedgerows (10 to 15 ft. high) and high stone fences, and the roads are very narrow. In a vehicle with left hand drive, the driver is against the side of the road, alongside the hedgerows and stone walls, and has no chance to see far enough around a sharp curve to see what is happening down the road. The passenger just can't remember it's her job to see what is around the next curve, but she does serve other functions.

We have seen a couple of campsites today that are not listed in the camping book we bought the other day. We just passed an unkempt cemetery, and several thatched-roof houses. Today is meat day, and the butcher's truck is going door to door. We watched three sheep dogs drive a flock of sheep down the road. The dogs are amazing, and were really in control of the situation.

Gorgeous magenta colored hydrangeas are blooming in Wales. Toni's were finished blooming by Aug 15. Tenby is a pretty little seaside resort town, a little island off the coast has a castle on it, and there is another on the mainland.

Tenby has a stone wall around it, and at one gate there are five little stone arches at the entrance to the town. There is a beautiful sandy beach. Pembroke looks like a nice town too, with a huge old castle. School children, going to school or home, are all dressed in a uniform.

Turned out to be a clear sunny, but cold and windy, day. We are looking for a campsite near the Cathedral (St. David). We have been told the cost of a ferryboat ride to Ireland will drop by \$100 on Sunday, and we were told they are sold out for Sunday. Want to bet we get on the Sunday boat!

GB, St. David, Wales, Sept 6, Sat - 94 - 153 - 12,195

We were given a little more information about the Welsh language last night. The young girl, perhaps 12 to 14 years old, is studying the Welsh language in school. Her parents do not know the language, but her grandparents do! All three generations seem determined to insure the language will live!

Drove back to St. David to see the Cathedral. In this part of the world, the cemetery extends right to the edge of the building, and many of St. David's more famous Wales heroes are buried inside, under the floor, and they have memorials all over the walls. We have not seen any tombstones dated within the last 50 to 60 years, don't know where they put the recent local heroes.

While we visited St. David, Wales, we saw the magnificent Cathedral (St. David), the beautiful little town, and green rolling hills to the horizon. A few years after this trip, TV news included the story of Prince Charles at the entrance to the beautiful St. David Cathedral, and that's all most people saw, if they even saw that much.

But not us, we "caught" the name and "saw" the unusual wooden ceiling of the St. David Cathedral, we "saw" the cemetery that extends down the hill to the

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church walls, we “saw” the ruins of the abbey, and we “saw” the old lady polishing the brass mail slot in the front door of her old stone house, just down the street! Our ear may catch the name of a thousand cities, towns, or buildings, and with the help of our minds eye, we find an added reward for our years of travel.

Jim has been called a “name dropper” for obvious reasons, but he thinks “name catcher” is a more intriguing activity.

In Fishguard we found a hot water bottle for Emmy’s neck. It’s getting better, the neck that is, but still bothers her. Before we arrived in this town, we stopped at a little woolen mill with a small store next door, as they all do. She liked a pretty reversible tapestry quilt, but decided on several small cosmetic bags for gifts.

Drove to Cardigan, Wales and shopped awhile, then came to the campsite early, and believe it or not, there is electricity.

GB, Fishmonth, Wales, Sept 7, Sun - 95 - 75 - 12,270

We stopped to see a “working” farm in Wales. They claim to be farming, using only horses, and Jim wanted Emmy to see how he lived and worked years ago. Advertised that they plowed with horses, but admitted they had five tractors. It was a big disappointment. The farm yard and the barns were a mess. It started to rain, so they didn’t do any plowing at all. Dumb place.

Drove to the dock for the ferryboat to Ireland. We were early—surprise—but had no problem getting on. The only time we have ever failed to get on a ferryboat when we wanted to, was when we already had a ticket and a reservation. Reservations aren’t for these travelers! We arrived in Ireland at 7:15 PM, and since we had been on the upper deck with the trucks, we got off first thing, and we were in the campsite at Rosslare, about six to seven miles away, by dark. We heard later that autos on the other decks did not get off for an hour.

After a visit of about a week, we returned to Wales from Ireland.

Our first impression of Northern Wales was dismal. We drove a short distance to the area where Emmy’s friend Alice’s husband Bill was raised.

LLANFAIRPWLLGWYNGYLLGOGERYCHWYRNDROBWLLLLANTYSILIOGOGOGOCH is the town name. Which means LLAN—church—FAIR mary—PWLL a hollow—GWYN white—GYLL hazel—GOGE near to—RY the—CHWYRN rapid—DROBWLL whirlpools—LLAN church—TYSILIO (name of saint who founded the tiny church)—GOGO cave—GOCH red.

If that is difficult, try and find anyone who doesn’t live there who cares what it means. And they can really pronounce it, but don’t know if everyone pronounces it the same. Emmy, as a child, was captivated when Uncle Bill pronounced the strange name of this Wales town.

Nearby there is a church on a little island connected to shore by a little bridge. Alice H. always told Emmy St. Paul preached there, but the tourist office has a small brochure saying that didn’t happen. This whole thing was founded about 600 AD, and St. Paul was never that old.

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We checked a lot of campsites in the book for electricity, and we found one. We are in the town of Caernarfon, home of the castle used when they crown the Prince of Wales. Instead of round towers and turrets, they are many sided. Aerial photo's show there is a lot of open space inside the high walls—it's not all building in there. We went around to the other side of the river or inlet and looked back. The tide is out and boats are setting on the mud, waiting for water to return. Like we saw in France, some boats are constructed with legs to stand on, while the tide is out.

This is one of the more charming towns we have seen in awhile. Nice stores, a Woolworths, large supermarket and all. Bought a ham steak for Jim, and a "braising steak" for Emmy.

GB, Caernarfon, Wales, Sept 13, Sat - 101 - 47 12882

Rolling hills, low mountains, lakes, meandering streams, flocks of sheep, and green, green, green.

Some sheep had gotten into a vegetable garden. There are many rock fences along the road and through the fields. Many old stone houses, some with slate roofs, very woodsy, and a curvey road. We saw an old stone house someone was remodeling. Very cloudy day so far.

We stopped in an area with slate mines, and found miles of piles of debris and rubble, resulting from mining in this part of Wales for a hundred years or more. We took a ride down into one of the mines.

They had a miner leading our group, but when we arrived at a place of interest he turned on special lights, and a tape recording told the story of working conditions in the slate mines in Wales, a hundred years ago. Sure would not want to do something like this for a living. Unbelievable how they lived and worked, and how much debris is stored above ground here. Really spoils the countryside for miles, but what can be done with it now.

Betws-y-coed is a pretty little Welsh village with a pretty name. It's along a river in the Snowdon National Forest. Waterfalls, etc. Raining now. Emmy says her disposition is affected by the rain. (Jim wondered what caused that.) Jim insists the package of round, crisp, butter cookies we bought in Wales, are the best ever. So we bought several packages and would have bought more if we could find them.

Conwy has a lovely castle, and right next to it, and not now in use, is a suspension bridge. One of the first ever, or something like that. We drove into the town twice and could not find a space to park. They would not let us park the van where there was space, so we just went on.

Llandudno is a nice seaside resort. Many hotels, mostly painted white, line the long wide sweep of the bay. They look more like mansions than hotel buildings. We drove to the top of a high hill and looked over the town and countryside.

Drove into England from Wales, we saw no border. Then to Scotland, back to England, and back to mainland Europe.