



The Ceilíer

A Publication of the Pittsburgh Ceili Club

"All The News We Want To Print"

Fall 2026

THE TRAVEL ISSUE

We received so many good responses to our request for summer vacation stories that most of this issue is dedicated to the summer travels of intrepid Ceili Club members. Enjoy! First up is my own trip to Iceland...

Waterfalls and Woolens: My Trip to Iceland

Quiz: What island nation features friendly people, interesting history, waterfalls, great hiking, a strong literary tradition and lots of hillsides and fields so green they hurt your eyes? You wouldn't be wrong if you answered Ireland, but you also wouldn't be wrong if you answered Iceland.

I recently spent ten days in Iceland with my daughter Margaret and our friends Sarah and Anita. In many places, the terrain of Iceland is like no other place we'd



ever seen. Continuing volcanic activity, some of it very recent, creates a bleak landscape of dark volcanic rock and ash. Over time, lichens and mosses begin to cover the dark gray lava fields with shades of lime, sage and olive. Given more time, grasses and tiny flowers take hold, and you'd hardly know you weren't in Ireland or the Scots highlands.

Iceland is also known for its hot springs and its waterfalls, and we took full advantage of both. The Blue

Lagoon is the best-known hot spring because it is very close to the airport, and we visited there as soon as we had our bags and our rental car. The natural algae, silica and other minerals color the water a milky shade of blue, and the sauna, hot water and one free drink that comes with admission were very relaxing after our flight.

And the waterfalls! Frequent rainfall and melting glaciers feed icy water into the many ravines and crevasses formed by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions, so that one day we saw a dozen major waterfalls in one 4-mile hike.

The largest waterfall in terms of volume is Urridafoss. Margaret and I were lucky enough one day to see two fishermen (one with the pole and one with the net) catch a very large salmon on the river below Urridafoss. But the most fun waterfall is Skogafoss. Skogafoss is a very tall, high-volume waterfall, but the shallow pool at the bottom drains quickly into a deep ravine. So, you can walk right up to it if you don't mind getting wet. People from all over the world stand at the bottom of that waterfall, getting soaked and having their picture taken right in front of the roaring falls. The universal reaction to this is joyous laughter, no matter the age or nationality of the person



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What's Inside

Six Weeks in Ireland.....	2
Ireland in June	2
Kelsey and Evan Do Ireland.....	3
Fleadh Cheoil-Belfast 2026	4
Blessed Samhain.....	5

Fall Gardening.....	6
Day One: Edinburgh	6
A Rainy Irish festival	7
And a Rainy Picnic.....	7
Local Irish Events & Life Events.....	8

Six Weeks in Ireland

This summer I spent 6 weeks in Ireland to attend the weddings of two of my young cousins. I knew I was in trouble as I pulled out of the airport parking lot in an SUV when I asked for a small car, such as a Ford Escort or VW Golf. If you've been to Ireland, you know that the roads are not meant for SUVs.

Well, I made it through Day 1. I went to Ballybunion to visit my family's graves, go to the ocean and get a good night's sleep. The next day I was going to head to Sneem, County Kerry where the first wedding was to be held. According to Google Maps the Sneem Hotel was 2.5 hours away. I left Ballybunion at 10:00am, hoping to make it to Sneem by 12:30pm in time for my outdoor seaweed bath.



But the best laid plans are always subject to change. As I snaked my way through the mountain in this humungous car, I ended up hitting a rock as I made a left hand turn. I mangled the wheel which flattened the tire. I called the rental company and explained to them that I had a flat tire and I was sitting on the side of a deserted road. They asked me to PIN my location - I

said what's that. She started sending me texts on how to find my location. Eventually I came up with the latitude and longitude - that was good. As I sat there, a few people passed, but did not stop. Along comes a sheep farmer with a trailer full of sheep. He wanted to change the tire for me but I said No, they're sending someone. Well, he came back an hour later with no sheep and saw me still sitting there. He said he was going to change the tire and get me on my way - I wasn't that far! As he finished changing the tire, the tyre repair service showed up - this was 5 hours after I placed the first phone call for help!

Well, I finally made it to the Sneem Hotel in time for the Rehearsal party. I ended up staying in Sneem a few extra days while the rental company found me a smaller automatic car! There were more adventures during my 6 weeks, but I'll save those for another time. And I eventually made it to the seaweed bath before I left Sneem.



by Nan Pischke

Ireland in June

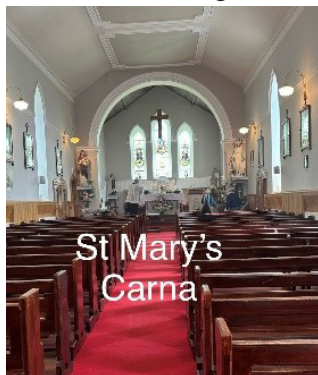
My daughter and I returned to Ireland in June. We went there in September 2025 for 2 weeks. The first trip was 2 weeks for a trip around the country starting in Belfast and ending in Offaly. We loved Galway so much we decided to return to Glinsk, Galway and stayed in the same house in June. We also spent 2 days in Mayo. Went on the second flight to Ireland on Aer Lingus. Weather was not as nice that week in June. It was windy and cold and chilly. It didn't stop us from having a great time. My daughter did all the driving. She does great in

those typical one car width roads. I was not permitted to drive. As a visitor, over 75 years olds are not permitted to drive in Ireland! Back to sheep farm, Kylemore Abby, Irish Mass, Irish cemetery, Sky Road, Croagh Patrick (we didn't walk it!), National Famine Monument, Hawk Walk in Ashford Castle and Our Lady of Knock Shrine. Still haven't seen the Cliffs of Moher! Missed it both trips. Weather was too windy on this trip and the company that does that boat ride canceled all their trips that day.

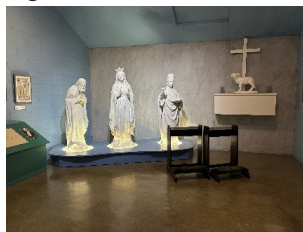
by Carolyn Bolton



Dingle



St Mary's
Carna



Mweenish Cemetery



Kelsey and Evan Do Ireland

Kelsey and Evan took their first journey to Ireland in July and plotted a grand road trip with some guidance from other club members. They took advantage of the new direct Pittsburgh to Dublin flights being offered by Aer Lingus and spent their first day wandering around and resting up in Dublin.

Next day they set out southward - first stop, Kilkenny, for the Smithwick's Experience (Evan's favorite beer) and then continued until they arrived in Kinsale, County Cork. They spent a day in Kinsale and experienced a sea safari where Kelsey held a jellyfish! They departed Kinsale for a spa break in Ballylickey where Kelsey took a seaweed bath. From there they had lunch in Kenmare and stopped at Moll's Gap on their way to Killarney to

settle in for a couple nights.

They then drove the Ring of Kerry including all the way out around the Skellig Ring (where they got some chocolate) and Valentia Island (where they hiked up to Bray Head Signal Tower).

They left Killarney to explore the Dingle peninsula where they saw a sheep dog demonstration and had some amazing views at Conor Pass before making their way to the Shannon Ferry to get to County Clare.

After the ferry they stayed at Fortfield Farms, an active dairy farm bed & breakfast which had the best butter they'd ever had which was served with their welcome scones and tea. They went on to see the Cliffs of Moher before heading to Dromoland Castle for afternoon tea and then had yet more scones after taking a scone making class just outside Galway city.

They walked the Salthill Promenade and enjoyed some live music. On their last full day in Ireland, they made their way back to Dublin, went to the Guinness Storehouse, and took a night bus tour.



Fleadh Cheoil-Belfast 2026

There was a Sweeney reunion (Mom's side) in Donegal this summer but that's another story. Afterwards it was Belfast, and a merry group of us headed there for the Fleadh Cheoil. And, ohmygosh, I can't emphasize enough what a fun 5 days this was. A complete saturation of Irish music from pub to pub, street corner to street corner, outdoor stage to outdoor stage. And oh yeah, it's Belfast and a mere 30 years ago this was unheard of.

Just two stories hit home...SiFiddlers (pron. "she fiddlers, look them up!") are a group of 13 female fiddlers from Co. Donegal who were one of the many amazing groups appearing at the Fleadh. One of them shared the story of how 30 years ago she tried to play trad tunes on her fiddle in the exact same spot (Belfast City Centre) and was told by the police to move along. Ciaran Quinn, the Sinn Féin Rep. of NA, told the story in a print publication that he tried to have an open air session in Belfast 30 years ago but was refused the license by the Unionist council. Traditional Irish music brought trouble in those days and peace in the North was so fragile. In 2026, the Fleadh Cheoil in Belfast broke the record of attendance at 1.65 million people because of traditional Irish music.

In 1951, Ireland was still reclaiming its cultural heritage. Seeking a way to "improve the standing of traditional Irish music, dance and language," Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann was founded in Mullingar, County Westmeath. Meaning "Society of the Musicians of Ireland," the CCE held its first Fleadh Cheoil in 1951.

From its beginning, the goal of the Fleadh Cheoil (pronounced flahh keeole which translates to music festival) was to "establish standards in Irish traditional music, dance and singing through competition. The fleadh developed as a mainly competitive event with solo and group competitions in fiddle, button accordion



& flute to name a few, as well as trad singing in Irish (sean nos) and English."

"Dance competitions include céilí dancing, set dancing and sean nós solo dancing. Storytelling and conversational Irish language competitions also exist."

But what happens to musicians and dancers and singers when they

come off the competition stage? They keep playing music, dancing and singing. And the bonus is the rest of us are privileged to listen and maybe participate a bit. Whether on one of the many stages at planned events or in a pub or simply outdoors on a street corner. And not just the competitors. This was an epicenter for all musicians who play trad music.

The 2008 Fleadh Cheoil was held in Tullamore, Co Offaly and an estimated 250,000 people attended. "A record-setting fleadh took place in 2025 in Wexford, attracting over 800,000 people." Belfast 2026 doubled the last Fleadh.



Lucky for us, we had our own musician, my cousin Geraldine Murray, daughter of one of our own, Margaret Murray. Geraldine, has been an Irish dance teacher in Portland, Oregon for 30+ years but learned the tin whistle while in high school. She kept playing, learning later the long whistle, the flute and lately the banjo. Gerry had all her whistles with her so we were her willing groupies and just followed her to each session. She was an amazing participant at Madden's Pub, John Hewitts, Kelly's Cellars to name a few. All sessions not even on the official list of already officially organized events of the Fleadh. But every one was a gem of magic of musicians who know that reel or that jig and oh yeah that hornpipe too and then they play from the heart like it fills their soul, I hope, because it was filling mine.

We made a few of the organized events. One was a group who teaches challenged children and young adults how to play various instruments and sing...not a dry eye in sight as these talented musicians and singers gave it their all along with the guidance of their mentors. Another was the Shankill Road Defenders Flute Band, a loyalist group, which 30 years ago would also have been told to

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Waterfall and Woolens... con't.

getting soaked.



it was wet.

We didn't make our trip at the right time of year for it, but we got incredibly lucky and did see a show of the Northern Lights. As we applauded and oohed and aahed and squealed, we could hear people at other nearby cabins making the exact same sounds.

In addition to seeing beautiful natural features, we also rode Icelandic ponies and took a snowmobile trip to a glacier, where we drank 3000-year-old water as it melted from the glacier.

I'm a history nerd, so I also enjoyed the Settlement Museum and the Skogar Folk Museum, which portray the history of their country. Iceland was an independent nation from 970 until the thirteenth century, when they came under Norwegian and later Danish rule. They didn't regain their independence until 1944. During both independence and Norwegian/Danish rule, they were a rural, fairly democratic society. Disputes were settled at the annual Althing meeting – held at the location of the

For those who were following my practice hikes on Facebook, Margaret and I did almost complete our planned 10-mile hike. The only reason we turned around early and only made 8 miles was because it looked like rain was coming in and some of the hiking up was on pretty treacherous terrain that we didn't feel safe covering if

Mid-Atlantic Ridge which forms the boundary between the Eurasian and North American tectonic plates. We enjoyed hiking that area.

I was interested to learn that Icelandic history has a connection with Irish history. When the first Norse settlers arrived in Iceland late in the tenth century, no humans had ever before lived there permanently.



But a few Irish monks were known to have lived there temporarily as hermits. And when the Norse Vikings came, they arrived with Celtic slaves from Ireland, Scotland, England, Cornwall and Brittany. That's probably why many Icelanders have dark or red hair instead of the blonde hair that I expected.

I highly recommend a trip to Iceland if you like wild scenery. And it's only a 6-hour direct flight from Pittsburgh!

P.S. Even though Al didn't want to go with me, I did bring back one of the famous Icelandic wool sweaters for him. But you will probably not see him wearing it at the Harp. True Icelandic wool sweaters are way too warm to wear for dancing!

By Kathy Bashaar

Fleadh Cheoil...con't

move along. There were nightly ceilidh as well, two at Belfast Castle, where the ghosts of old had to be turning in their graves to think there was Irish music and dancing on the castle grounds.

I took a tour on my own on our last full day to learn something of the history of Belfast. (Too early a rising for my fellow merry band of travelers). I learned much but the basic premise is that the fragility of peace is still present. Music played a huge part for seven days to push it to the background and the Fleadh Cheoil-Belfast 2027 is already being planned, I may have to buy my ticket to go back. You should too.

Some information sourced from Wikipedia

by Liz Grinko



Blessed Samhain

May the turning of
the year bring you
strength and joy.

Call upon the past
and celebrate as the
veil thins between the
worlds.

Honour your
Self, Mother Earth
and All Your Relations.

facebook.com/innerjourneyevents

Fall Gardening

I hate the fact that summer is almost gone. If you have children it is gone because they are now back in school. We do always get some really warm days in September, but the pools are closed and the days are getting shorter.

My annuals are starting to look tired as are most of the perennials. There are a few perennials that are blooming for a second blooming but never as nice as the first. The question is always when to pull them out and replace them with Mums, pumpkins and the metal decorations for Fall. I am not quite ready for Mums since I like them to last into November. The ones that are in full bloom now will be done almost early October. Mid September I will go north to the Amish Greenhouses to get my mums.

As I look at my flowers and vegetables I used this year, I will make a list of what worked and what didn't. My dahlia bed is very disappointing. I lost many tubers and plants. I don't know why this year was so bad. I stored them as clumps but put more than 1 in each bag. Maybe that was why many rotted in the bags...lesson learned. I didn't change where I store them, a cool room off the basement. I also lost plants after I potted them up and even after I put the small, sprouted tubers in the ground they rotted. I have a list of tubers to replace next spring. Most dahlia tuber suppliers start their sale in January.



Cherry/grape tomato plants did really well. I have googled recipes to use those varieties. I have some favorites and made a list of those varieties to buy again next Spring. Standard type tomatoes have had a varied success. The plum type, I have found to be very prolific, is Pony Express. Found it last year and planted more of that one. I tried Mariana Plum but I am not impressed. I may try it next year

to give it another try. The plants I call "standard type" are doing fair have been slow to ripen. I planted Mountain Pride, Mountain Fresh, Mountain Majesty, German Johnson, Beef Master and Argentina Giant varieties that are now ripening. I will decide which to eliminate next Spring.

I have a pond and was in the pond for the last time this year. I was pulling off bad leaves and spent flowers. With the temperatures this past week back into the 90's it was a good time to get in before the water temperatures are in the 70's...brr. There are 14 butterfly koi and 2 babies this year. I will stop the waterfall before the water starts to freeze. I had a leak because I ran the waterfall while there was ice along the waterfall edge. I will switch the food to the Fall and Spring variety. A donut shaped pond heater keeps the top of the water from completely freezing and keep the fish who move to the bottom of the pond alive.

by Carolyn Bolton

Day One: Edinburgh...

In early September, I travelled to Scotland with my two daughters and son-in-law. We flew into Edinburgh and arrived around 9:30am. Took a tram into the city and dropped our luggage off where we were staying and the adventure began. We trekked up from our Air bnb up to the Royal Mile and Edinburgh Castle. The Fringe Festival ended the weekend before we arrived but there were elements remaining. We signed up for a walking tour of the Royal Mile and Edinburgh Castle at 2:00pm so we wandered about until it was time. It was a bit rainy but not bad, we were prepared.

Our Tour Guide was Scancia(?) who was the product of a Dutch mother and Scottish father. She was a teacher but now guides fulltime. Her teaching job was to "teach English to Scots." We started midway on the



Royal Mile, and went through various "closes", around St. Giles' Cathedral, saw the Midlothian Heart Mosaic, onto Victoria Street then onto Edinburgh Castle.

To get to the Castle we walked through an area with stadium seats on both sides. The area is used for the Military Tattoo during the Fringe Festival in August. The seating is erected starting in May and removed in September.

On the Castle grounds we could look to the north and see Edinburgh's New Town, considered a masterpiece of Georgian planning and architecture. Built between 1766 and 1820. Inside the castle we walked through various halls used for celebrations, displays of the Scottish Crown Jewels, areas used for a time to house prisoners and St. Margaret's Chapel... to be continued!

by Jim Guay

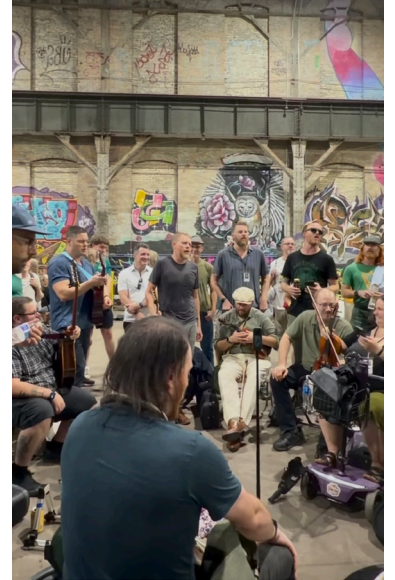


A Rainy Irish Festival . . .

The Irish Festival this year was partially flooded, but guests managed to have fun anyway.

Our PCC performing group wowed the audience as usual. They even wore their fairy wings for the fairy reel!

When the worst downpour started and some tents were flooded, the festival was evacuated. Guests had the choice of retreating to their cars or to a big empty warehouse of the festival grounds. Kathy Erhart reported that it turned out to be fun. Colorful graffiti adorned the walls. Musicians had already set up in the warehouse, so there was a jam session and spontaneous step and ceili dances broke out, with our own performing group leading the way. Fun people can usually find fun in any circumstances.



And a Rainy Picnic...

A bit of rain couldn't deter the Pittsburgh Ceili Club from holding our annual picnic at Rose Barn in North Park on September 20. Not so much in the way of outdoor games this year, but we danced up a storm of our own, thanks to musicians Mike Hurley, Bruce Molyneux and Richard Withers, and caller Jim Guay.

The committee ordered chicken, and PCC members filled out the menu with delicious main dishes, sides and desserts.

Our performing group took a little break and danced at the International Day of Peace festival that was also happening at the park on Sunday. Our own Theresa Orlando is active in one of the groups that sponsors the festival each year.

Another fun time in spite of the rain! Thanks very much to our picnic committee: Elizabeth Donohoe, P J Kernick, Mary McGinley, Colleen Rumble, and Maureen Strotmeyer.



Upcoming Local Irish Events

What	When	Where	Contact & Information
Waltz dance	10/18/26, 12-1p	Avonworth Community Park, 498 Camp Horne Rd.	
Contra dance	10/18/26, 2-4:30p	Avonworth Community Park, 498 Camp Horne Rd.	
West Coast swing dance	10/18/26, 7-9:30p	Avonworth Community Park, 498 Camp Horne Rd.	
Gaelic Arts Society Daniel J. Taylor lecture "Exiled to Liberty"	10/25/26 2 p.m.	AJ Palumbo Center, Carlow University	Shirley Murphy, pghgaelicarts@gmail.com or smurphy9373@gmail.com.
Solas online music camp: banjo, mandolin flute, whistle, fiddle, singing,	10/31/26	Link to register: https://solastheband.com/music-camp accordion, concertina and guitar	
5th Annual Cleveland Pipers Weekend Concert	11/7/26, 8-10p	13000 Athens Ave. Suite c303c, Lakewood Ohio	https://www.eventbrite.com/e/5th-annual-cleveland-pipers-concert-2026-tickets-1995148811804
Gaelic Arts Society: Chris McNally lectures on "Freedom for All Ireland"	11/15/26, 2 p.m.	AJ Palumbo Center, Carlow University	Shirley Murphy: pghgaelicarts@gmail.com or smurphy9373@gmail.com.

As always, thank you to Diane Byrnes for most of this information. Listen to Echoes of Erin on WEDO 810 AM and 93.3 FM at 12:30 every Sunday

If you know about upcoming Irish-themed events, please email kbashaar@gmail.com.

Life Events

Amy Bennett turned 50 on August 11 and she and her husband celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary on September 15. Congratulations to Amy and her husband!

Al Bashaar recently spent a few days in the hospital for carotid artery surgery (technical term is endarterectomy). He's doing much better and thanks everyone for the cards, calls and texts.

Two of our best dancers, Kathy Erhart and Ken McCarthy, took a tumble at the Harp one evening recently! Just goes to show you that even good dancers can get their feet tangled up on a crowded dance floor Be careful!

We were so happy to see Gia Regan at the picnic and the Harp after her long absence due to two back surgeries.



Ceilier STAFF: Editor- Kathy Bashaar; Layout- Jim Guay

If you have an article of Irish interest that you would like to place in The Ceilier- email kbashaar@gmail.com.