

NETHERLANDS, BELGIUM, IRELAND, (GREAT BRITAIN) MAY 5 TO MAY 24, 2019

Our big 2019 trip involves air, car, and ship (but no camels, hang gliders, or rickshaws). We fly into Amsterdam, rent a car at the airport, and mosey around central and eastern Netherlands and eastern Belgium for six days before returning to Amsterdam. The following day, we board a SilverSea ship in Amsterdam which sails the North Sea with stops at several channel islands and a port in Wales before skirting the west coast of Ireland. The ship heads north and then east, stopping in Northern Ireland before ending the cruise in Dublin. Because the stays at Guernsey, The Isles of Scilly, and Wales are brief, Great Britain gets only parenthetical mention, above.

Owing to the fact that several of the ship's destinations are at ports that lack docks, transfer from ship to shore may be in an unsafe-looking rubber raft called a Zodiac (which I discover is both an object *and* the name of the company that manufactures them). SilverSea's literature urges passengers to have water-proof (or at least water-resistant) hats, boots, jackets, pants, (and probably jock straps). SWMBO (She Who must Be Obeyed) spent many \$\$\$ thus provisioning herself; HWO (He Who Obeys) ignored the warnings, arguing that if the weather is rotten or the waters too choppy, he will eschew (*gesundheit!*) the excursion and stay on board, drowning his sorrow in food, whisky, and reading matter.

Speaking of which, HWO has packed these magazines and books: five issues of *The New Yorker* (he has fallen way way behind in reading them), three issues of *Yale Alumni Magazine*, two issues of *The Progressive*, and one of *TIME*; three soft-cover books: *Gain* by Richard Powers, *The Biographer's Tale* by A. S. Byatt, and *Under the Banner of Heaven* by Jon Krakauer*; and seven books stored on his Kindle.

*This book has made at least five journeys to Europe, Japan, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand but I've never chanced to read it. I intend to remedy this oversight on the 2019 journey.

The latter requires some explanation. I'll save myself some typing time by lifting a passage from my 2018 Scotland-England travelogue:

An unexplained mystery. At one time or another, I "borrowed" several Kindle books from Amazon via Pierce County Library. As with a physical book, the borrowing period for e-books is only three weeks. Amazon is supposed to "snatch" them back electronically from the device. For whatever reason, several books have remained intact on my Kindle for a number of years: Meg Wolitzer's *The Interestings*, Joan Didion's *Blue Nights*, Olen Seinhauer's *All the Old Knives*, Christopher Hitchens's *The Portable Atheist*, Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, and Lynne Murphy's *The Prodigal Tongue*, all of which are (so far) unread. And there are several that I have read but which remain: Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Everything*, Jim Lynch's *Border Songs*, Michael Cunningham's *The Hours*, Jasper Fforde's *A Thursday Next Collection* (from which I read the first one), and Daniel Silva's *Gabriel Allon Novels* (from which I read the first of four). Why are these books still on the Kindle? *Wer weiß?*

And, now, to add to this list I have just downloaded these four e-books: Richard Russo's *That Old Cape Magic*, Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*, Kate Atkinson's *One Good Turn*, and Julia Glass's *The Widower's Tale*. Will any of these four be retrieved at the end of the three weeks? We shall see.

[ADDED IN JUNE: The suspense is over. Well, of course, Kindle/Amazon failed (again!) to recover the books on loan. Despite Amazon's having sent email messages on May 23 announcing that my loans would soon expire, in fact the four new downloads plus those from before all remain on my Kindle. 'Tis a mystery! (And I always thought that Amazon was all-powerful.)]

Over the course of the trip, I took some 942 pictures!! Oh, the joy of using a digital camera that does not require purchases of film and the cost of film processing! Only a relatively small number* have been

*By this I mean a mere 714. Well, I did say *relatively* small.

uploaded to my Google Photos account: some of the rejected pictures were poorly focused; others were poorly lit; some were very very very very repetitious; and some showed the two intrepid travelers in a less than flattering light. I've posted the pictures in four separate albums at <https://tinyurl.com/y7sbtg3t> Now if only the all-powerful people at Google will allow me to designate these albums as public viewing!

SUNDAY, MAY 5 TO MONDAY, MAY 6

We leave home at 2:00 for a 5:58 pm departure from Seatac Airport. It is a beautiful, sunny day, with highs predicted in the 70s and 80s for the coming week. It's a shame to miss out on this rare stretch of nice weather, but Europe beckons us (and, besides, the flights and cruise arrangements are set in stone). Arrival in the airport's parking garage at 3:00 followed by rapid check-in at the Delta counter* and speedy

*We are surprised to see two counters that seem to be "reserved" for certain privileged travelers: one for Amazonians, the other for Microsofties. We ignore the signs and choose the clerk at the Microsoft counter.

passage through the Pre-Check security line (no requirement to remove electronic devices from carry-ons) get us to the Delta business class lounge at 3:30. With Delta's increasing profile at Seattle's airport, this is a new lounge near Gate A1 (there is an older one in the south satellite). Alas, the air-conditioning is rather poor.

At a table next to ours is a group of six Gen-Y'ers who are, apparently, techies and who, to our surprise, are speaking French. I read the May 13 issue of *TIME*, which arrived in yesterday's mail. And I restrain myself by having only some snack mix, a cookie, and coffee. I know that we'll be well fed on the plane. At 4:45, we make our way to Gate S8 despite HWO's pronouncement that just because the electronic display says they're boarding the plane, they're not. Of course, the display screen lied; and there are already long lines of our fellow passengers who also, mistakenly, assumed that they'd be allowed to board.

It's not until 5:15 that the gates are open and we can find our seats in this Boeing 767-300R. We are assigned to seats 3B and 3C in the center section for the 1-2-1 arrangement of seats in Business Class. It seems that SilverSea assumes that I'd like to sit next to my spouse when, in fact, I'd much prefer a window seat even if it means being separated from SWMBO by an aisle. Lee was concerned that this would be an older plane, lacking some of the amenities of newer versions. But, in fact, the seats seem new (and are of the lie-flat type), the lighting is good, and the storage space is acceptable, although the video display mounted on the back of the seat in front is rather small. Well, in truth the storage space barely suffices - it is a mesh bag hung on the console in front that is wide enough for one book, the Kindle, my evening and morning pills, and a couple of magazines. Alas, it lacks by a good inch the width to accommodate a manila folder with crossword puzzles; oh, well, the folder will not suffer too much by being folded a bit.

Our first task is to figure out where to stash the voluminous pillow and blanket that are on the seats. Each is in a plastic (slippery) case which makes it a challenge to shove it into the open area where feet are supposed to go when the seats are reclined. I finally succeed by using my briefcase to push against the plastic bags and hold them in place ... until, of course, the plane begins to move and everything slides out. A flight attendant, feigning disdain for my struggles, offers champagne or orange juice.

The doors are closed at 5:50 and, at 5:58, the safety video is shown on the individual monitors. Unlike the

elaborate productions that BritishAir and Delta (on earlier flights) have used, this consists of minimal cartoons. Where is the imagination? The creativity? The style? Sigh. At 6:00 the plane is pushed back and, after a short taxi, is air-borne at 6:23. We take off to the north, probably right over downtown Seattle, the sight of which only my fellow passengers at window seats can enjoy.

At 6:55, I order a Macallan Double Cask 12 year old* (the only single malt that they offer) which has a

*This makes it sound like a very special formulation, but in fact various web sites show it as one of the less expensive whiskies that Macallan makes. As only the Scots can do, one web site describes the whisky this way: "**Nose**: Classic dried fruit territory, if less intense than the Sherry Oak expression. Aromatic butterscotch too. **Palate**: Creamy and honeyed with some thick-cut marmalade, cinnamon and warm pastries. **Finish**: Fruity with vanilla and sultana." Noted.

rather raw mouth feel. The flight attendants, justifiably concerned that we may be carrying germs and other cooties, distribute warm wash cloths for us to purify ourselves.

The menu that is distributed says that we'll have a starter consisting of: Salmon Tataki, Baby Gem Salad, and Parsnip Soup. In fact, at 7:15 we get a shrimp cocktail and a wedge salad, along with the advertised soup. I had pre-selected my dinner online: "Roasted Chicken Breast served on top of potato leek ragout with runner beans and smoked tomato arugula salad" but my notes don't reveal what actually was served at 7:30 except for my comment that the greens has a distinctly unpleasant grass-like taste. For dessert, I have coffee and vanilla ice cream with chocolate sauce. Lee, in her journal, is caustic about her meal: "salmon (the driest ever - nearly inedible!), with plain rice (not warm potato salad, as promised). The green beans are ordinary - not haricots verts as promised. The tomato bisque soup is delicious but the iceberg lettuce wedge is frozen and inedible."

Following dinner, I finish the issue of *TIME* and start on today's NYT Sunday crossword puzzle but am stymied by the crew's turning off the cabin lights at 8:15. Yes, there is an individual light behind my seat, but the hand that needs to write in the answers also casts a shadow on the puzzle, making it difficult to see where to enter the letters. I give up at about 8:30 and turn, instead, to the April 15 issue of *The New Yorker* and my Kindle on which I begin reading Kate Atkinson's *One Good Turn*. I also take my evening pills.

At 9:30, I'm feeling drowsy and at 10:30 I close my eyes and try to sleep. As is my wont, I fail miserably so at 11:00 I resume reading. I try to get to sleep again at 11:45 and actually succeed for one whole hour!! I resume reading and set my watch nine hours ahead to central Europe daylight time. The cabin lights are turned on at 11:00 am and breakfast* is served at 11:30. At 12:45, the plane touches down and, after a

*"Mixed Green Salad with Grilled Chicken": goat cheese, apricots, walnuts, and tomatoes with balsamic vinaigrette dressing. This is breakfast? Lee has chosen the frittata; the accompanying pineapple is rotten and the asparagus spears are on the tray, not the plate.

very long taxi in this huge airport, finally reaches the terminal at 1:00, right on schedule.

The grounds are vast and so is the terminal as we discover when we begin our long trek to the exit. For a while, I entertain the possibility that we will not have to clear passport control (we seem to be walking through the non-secure area gates and shops that departing passengers use) but my hopes are dashed when we find ourselves on a very slow-moving line at immigration. Escaping from the scrutiny of the dubious officer, we embark on another long walk (helped by some moving sidewalks) to baggage claim. I stop at an ATM to get a supply of euros.

We locate the Hertz car rental office, fill in the necessary paper work, and then start on another long hike to the garage where the cars are kept. We ascend an elevator, walk and walk and walk (again aided by some moving sidewalks) to another elevator where we descend to the garage. There we are introduced to

our vehicle for this week: a Lexus CT200H hatchback, a hybrid (the first I've ever driven), described online as a "premium sport compact hatchback. ... 'CT' stands for 'Creative Touring' and '200h' refers to the hybrid performance being equal to that of a conventional 2.0-litre engine." It has no key to insert in the ignition slot; rather, there is a button to push, which starts the (very very quiet) engine as long as the key is nearby. We can't figure out how to release the parking brake, so I return to the office and ask the woman who directed us to the car to help. She is also clueless, so she calls a colleague who amazes us by releasing a foot pedal, just like on conventional cars - who knew that this high-tech vehicle would be so "ordinary." We also need guidance in how to turn the engine off! (The instruction manual, in the glove compartment, is in Dutch.) Our biggest disappointment is that only one of the two hard-sided Delsey suitcases will fit in the trunk, no matter how hard we try. So the second one will have to reside on the back seat.



SWMBO drives the relatively short distance (less than 50 km) to Utrecht and our "home" for the next three nights, Grand Hotel Karel V <https://www.karelv.nl/en/>. Negotiating our way through downtown Utrecht is a bit of a challenge and when we reach the gate to the hotel we are stumped. I go to the front desk to ask for help, but in the meanwhile a woman, sensing our plight, opens the gate for us. How she did it, I don't know. But we discover two things: (1) contrary to the instructions from Google Maps, we were supposed to enter through a gate at the *other* end of the parking lot and (2) when we need to exit the lot, we'll need to insert a card that will be given to us at the desk. Oh. The hotel has a fascinating history. Shown here is the main building, but there are several others on the property.



From the hotel's web site:

More than 670 years ago, in 1348, the Knightly German Order ordered the construction of this monastery. Popularly, the Balije van Utrecht was soon called The German House. It was inhabited by knights and priests who had made the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The German House became the starting point for the Crusaders who went to the east to bring 'the heathens' to faith. In addition, the monastery, with good facilities for that time, also served as a reception centre for high-ranking kings and nobles. For example, in 1713 the House hosted a Spanish minister, the Count of Osasuna and his entourage, during the negotiations for the Peace of Utrecht.

The hotel owes its name to Emperor Karel V, one of the prominent guests who stayed here with his sister Maria of Hungary. In 1546 they visited the meeting of the Order of the Golden Fleece which held its chapter meeting in the "Balije van Utrecht", as the monastery was originally known. It was at the height of his fame: Karel V ruled the largest European empire ever. His motto was "Plus Oultre" or "Continuously". Karel V was boundlessly ambitious, and he wanted that in his realm 'the sun would never go down'.

In 1807, King Lodewijk Napoleon bought the German House of the Knightly German Order for 50,000 florins. He wanted to establish a military hospital here, which was eventually realized in 1823 after the French occupation by King William I of Orange. Until 1990 the estate served as a Military Hospital. Then, the badly maintained building was squatted for a few years.

In 1992, a renovation was started of the complex that since then has been declared as a national monument. Remains were found of a mantelpiece with the coat of arms of Karel V: the two-headed eagle carved out of sandstone. This can now be admired in the Restaurant Karel 5.

The restoration team has tried as much as possible to preserve the authentic functions of the spaces. The halls of the former military hospital have been converted into hotel rooms and suites in classicist

style (Napoleonic wing). In 2007 the garden wing was restored and renamed Roman wing. Archaeologists came across the remnants of a Roman burial ground from the period 40 BC. – 275 AD. It is possible that the builders of the Castellum Trajectum are buried here, the fort that lies under Domplein! The Roman wing now houses 49 modern hotel rooms and suites and a luxurious wellness and fitness centre. Throughout the hotel, traces of the past can be found in archaeological findings, exhibitions, archival photographs and historical drawings.

Our room is not in the main building but in the Napoleon wing, separated from the main building by an extensive garden. The "fancy" restaurant, called "Restaurant Karel V" (how imaginative!), is in the main building (we'll eat our breakfasts there). The "casual" restaurant, "Bistro Karel V," is in yet another building on the campus. We make a 6:00 reservation for the latter.

*The hotel's web site offers this "helpful" information about Bistro Karel V: "Pretend you are Mary of Hungary or Emperor Charles V, lounging in the spacious terrace, sheltered by the apple and pear tree orchard, at Bistro Karel 5 (formerly 'Brasserie Goeie Louisa')."

At 5:00, the lack of sleep on the plane is catching up with me, but we do go to Bistro for what we hope is a quick, casual meal. The menu selections verge on the edge of "precious" but the saving feature is that we are seated next to the open kitchen and can watch the two chefs engage in the elaborate preparation of various meals. Lee has a sashimi starter (I have no starter) and we both order duck (with a significant layer of fat) accompanied by lots of "weird" fancy stuff that we think are carrots, beets, and other veggies.

Lee's notes, of course, are much more substantial: "... redfish sashimi with celery, curly endive, yellow carrot slices, cubes of squash, and an amazing sauce of rhubarb and kombucha (not the horrid fermented stuff). We both order barbary duck ... and this was remarkable to watch the assembly: carrot puree smeared on an enormous boat-shaped plate; caramelized baby carrots, baby beets, a cabbage round stuffed with duck sausage, the duck with a layer of fat, thin-sliced carrot ribbons, carrot-orange mince (tossed from spoon to spoon), finished with a duck liver cream sauce with kummel, prepared via immersion blender ... We drank a spät Burgunder and a Chardonnay, finished with café crème." Whew!! How does she do it? I just eat the stuff without being able to name every ingredient (with words I don't even know).

Back in our room, HWO tries to use the internet (the connection is slow, but usable), but when lack of sleep catches up with us, we go to bed at 9:30.

Here's a suggestion for an enterprising electronics whiz who wants to make a fortune. We need a *universal charging device* for the numerous devices that we carry with us when we travel. As it stands, I now pack plastic bags that hold the chargers and power cords for the camera, laptop, shaver, my cell phone, and Kindle; and Lee has the chargers for the iPad and her cell phone. On top of this, there are the converter plugs for adapting U.S. configurations to whatever weird outlet configuration a country has (an issue in Australia, New Zealand, and throughout Europe). And I should mention the cable for connecting the camera to the laptop. Wouldn't it be nice to be able to charge and/or cable all of these things with one device? Yes it would. Please get working, you geeks out there.

THURSDAY, MAY 7

As happens on all of our overseas trips, I have trouble staying asleep. This time, I get out of bed at 1:30, read for a while, return to bed; then awaken again at 3:30, repeat the process. I worry that tonight may prove to be even more restless, as is usually the case on the second night away from the U.S. We'll see.

Our room is somewhat old-fashioned, with a four-poster canopy over the bed, two plush chairs, a writing

table and chair, and another small table for eating(?). But the bathroom and plumbing are modern and features a separate enclosed room for the toilet. Also, the room's air conditioner seems to be working quite well, although how effective it would be on a really hot day is unknown. The weather on arrival in Holland, yesterday, was cool and cloudy and this persisted on our walk to dinner. Today, it is overcast but there is no rain ... yet.

At 7:30, we walk to the main building for breakfast. It is served in what is described (quite accurately I'd say) in the "lavish medieval dining room." There is a nice spread of hot and cold offerings, rolls and bread, but nothing to compare with some of the *great* breakfast experiences (e.g., Hotel Bareiss in Germany's Black Forest, see <http://web.utk.edu/%7Ermagid/Europe2015.pdf>, p. 34). Following breakfast, we stop at the desk to get the card that allows us to exit the parking lot; and we make a dinner reservation for tonight, 6:00. at Het Zuiden, within walking distance from the hotel.

At 9:15, we head out for today's adventures. I begin by driving. The car does handle nicely, although it takes some time to get used to the unusual way to start the engine and the equally unusual lever for shifting gears from P to D or R. There is a huge construction project just outside the hotel's grounds. We came through this when he went to the wrong gate last night and we'll work our way through it this morning. An interesting feature of the car is that if one switches lanes without turning on the direction signal, there is a loud beep that scolds you. This is true on both major highways and city streets.

At 10:15, we arrive in Gouda (pronounced Howda!), some 45 km to the west. Unlike the charming town of Edam, which we visited a couple of years ago, Gouda is a fair-sized city (about 75,000 residents) but much smaller than Utrecht (population 345,000). The morning proves to be sunny with temperatures (according to the car's thermometer) of 10-11 °C. We park near Markt Square and wander about the shopping stalls (alas, mostly clothing, no cheese products). We see the 15th century town hall with its red-and-white shutters and the ancient cheese weighing station (there's even a museum but we don't go in). A local woman tells us that at 2 minutes past the hour, chimes will ring (there are bells on the town hall wall) and there'll be a small puppet show featuring figures high up on the wall. We take a quick look at the main church, then return at 11:00 to hear the chimes, which play Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*; alas the puppets do not move.

OBSERVATIONS • When leaving Utrecht, we are astounded by the number of people on bicycles.

Some are "good drivers" and are cognizant of the larger, more powerful vehicle that we are driving. But others are quite reckless and assume that we'll apply the brakes of the car before slamming into the bicyclist. Gouda, also, is a bike-mad city, but not as annoyingly so as Utrecht. • We note a phenomenon that we'd seen before in Netherlands: a set of connected row houses in which one or more units is leaning forward, away from the adjacent structures. • Both Gouda and Leiden (which we'll visit later today) have brick and stone sidewalks and streets; it's a miracle that I don't trip and fall as has been my wont on earlier journeys.

Following the disappointing non-moving puppet show, we return to Sint Janskerk (St. John's Church) which dates from the 15th century and is particularly noted for its stained glass windows. When I learn that it costs €7.50 to view the windows, I opt to sit in the outer lobby and let Lee do the exploration for both of us. Following a stop for apple pie and coffee, we fetch the car to continue our journey.

From Gouda, it's just over 40 km to the west to Leiden (population 120,000) where our goal is the Rijksmuseum Boerhaave <https://rijksmuseumboerhaave.nl/engels/>. According to Wikipedia:

A university city since 1575, Leiden has been one of Europe's most prominent scientific centres for more than four centuries. Leiden is a typical university city, university buildings are scattered throughout the city and the many students from all over the world give the city a bustling, vivid and international atmosphere. Many important scientific discoveries have been made here, giving rise to Leiden's motto: 'City of Discoveries'. The city houses Leiden University, the oldest university of the Netherlands, and Leiden University Medical Center. Leiden University is one of Europe's top

universities, with thirteen Nobel Prize winners. It is a member of the League of European Research Universities and positioned highly in all international academic rankings. It is twinned with Oxford, the location of the United Kingdom's oldest university. Leiden University and Leiden University of Applied Sciences (Leidse Hogeschool) together have around 35,000 students. Modern scientific medical research and teaching started in the early 18th century in Leiden with Boerhaave.

According to the museum's web site, "Our museum has been named after Herman Boerhaave (1668-1738), one of the leading scientists in Europe in his day. He was an allrounder*: a skilled physician,

*Clearly a loose translation from the original Dutch.

anatomist, botanist, chemist, humanist and researcher. He had a great reputation as a teacher at the University of Leiden and for a long time held three of the five chairs in its Faculty of Medicine. He was also Rector of the University of Leiden and Director of the Hortus botanicus."

Leiden is an attractive town, but we are looking for the museum; having found it, the closest parking that we can find is a good four long blocks away. But beggars can't be choosers ... On the other hand, the parking garage is new and clean and well-lit and spectacular in appearance, featuring a spiral ramp and ample parking spaces.

The museum is a real find!! Its central focus is a reconstructed anatomical theatre. There are rows of benches in a circle, all looking down on an autopsy table. There is a naked body (androgenous, to be sure) on the table; and from time to time, various parts are lit up to show the blood system, digestive organs, skeleton, etc. In other rooms, there are originals (or reproductions) of scientific instruments from the 16th century on. Many are for astronomical observations but others are for medical or industrial use. It is a marvelous place and it's a shame that we can't spend many many hours here, but we need to return to Utrecht for our dinner reservation.



As we walk from the museum to the parking garage, it starts to rain and hail! We make the 55 km trip back to Utrecht and arrive at the hotel (the correct gate, this time) at about 4:30. It was a fairly difficult drive (lots of stop-and-go traffic) but Lee is driving so I'm not particularly bothered. (Not true.) And, of course, there are the many many bicyclists to contend with. Before going to dinner, I take pictures of the lovely grounds and statuary surrounding the hotel.

By walking between two of the smaller buildings in the Karel V property, we emerge into "old Utrecht" and Springweg, a pleasant commercial street with shops, bars, and restaurants. A narrow street with one-way traffic (although the bicyclists don't seem to respect this), in a short while, the street name changes to Mariastraat (pedestrians only but still lots of bicycles) and we are looking for restaurant Het Zuiden at No. 4. Well, we get to the end of the street and there is no restaurant, so I walk into a store and ask for help in finding it. After figuring out the name that I'm mispronouncing, a man takes me outside and points right across the narrow street - and there is it. Turns out that their wall board and sandwich board both advertised *Meat and More*, with the real name only faintly on the awning. No wonder we missed it.

The web site <https://www.restaurant-hetzuiden.nl/> provides no menus, but these can be found at other postings. We each start with soup (tomato for me, fish for Lee, with a variety of crustaceans in shells, salmon, and white fish). My main is fruits de mer, a huge portion with potatoes, vegetables, and many kinds of fish. It is very messy, as the sauce makes it difficult to get some of the fish out of their shells. Lee has "langoustines in the shell (devilishly hard to dismantle and giving little meat, baked with tomato sauce, onions, and peppers. Delish! Her go-withs are 'lips' French fries and a mixed green salad. We have a pinot grigio (Ron), Grüner Veltliner (Lee), and café crème (what normal coffee is called) which comes with a small cookie."

OBSERVATION Most of the pedestrians whom we see, male or female, are tall, blond, athletic, and young I hate them! (Except for the six tall, blond, athletic, and young Amazons who stride past us - them, I love.)

Back in the hotel room after dinner, I struggle (again) with the slow internet connection. And I learn that MyChart (which is the connection to my doctors and clinics back home) has a message that my May 27 appointment for an MRI is cancelled. No explanation. I send a message to Arroyo's office to ask them to confirm this. They do. I'll have to wait until we return to the U.S. to reschedule the MRI and also the subsequent biopsy in Arroyo's office. (When I do get back, I learn that the hospital cancelled the May 27 appointment because it was Memorial Day. Let the record show that when I first asked St. Joseph's for an appointment and the woman offered May 27, I did ask if she knew that that was Memorial Day. "Oh, yes," she replied, "We'll do MRIs as scheduled." Hah!) We go to bed at 10:30.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 8

Again, I awaken at 2:45 but stay in bed and try to sleep. I doze until 4:00, then get up and read some more of *One Good Turn*. I return to bed at 4:45, toss and turn for about a half-hour, then *do* fall asleep until the alarm sounds at 7:30. So, a total of 7.5 hours of sleep, if intermittent. Not bad.

After last night's dinner where I more-or-less bathed in the fruits de mer broth, my shirt still has a faint fish smell. As long as I don't encounter any cats today I probably don't have anything to worry about. Breakfast is in the huge dining room, again. I partake of cold meats, salmon, cheese, corn flakes, a roll, orange juice, and coffee. Yum. The day is overcast with a hint of rain.

OBSERVATION On the streets of Utrecht, Leiden, and Gouda we encountered essentially no cigarette smoking, although we did see one young man with an e-cigarette (and lots of smoke) as we returned from dinner last night. Along with the excellent exercise that they get from bike-riding, the Dutch seem to be intent on preventing nicotine/tar induced damage to the body.

At 9:30, we head about 60 km to the east to Hoenderloo and the Kröller-Müller Museum in the Hoge Veluwe National Park. This will be our third visit to this museum, the earlier ones having been in 1995 and 2012. We stop at the entrance to the park to buy tickets, then drive a considerable distance within the park before we reach the museum which we reach at 10:40. That we are visiting for the third time is a testimonial to how magnificent this museum is, both its indoor collection of painting and sculpture and its extensive outdoor sculpture garden; and how much we enjoy it. The little bit of rain that we encounter when we stroll the grounds is not a serious deterrent to enjoyment. The web site gives this history of the museum <https://krollermuller.nl/en/unique-in-every-season>:

The Kröller-Müller Museum is named after Helene Kröller-Müller (1869-1939). Helene Kröller-Müller collected almost 11,500 art objects with the help of her advisor, H.P. Bremmer. The purchases were paid for from the capital accumulated by her husband Anton Kröller as director of W m. H. Müller & Co. Helene Kröller dreamt of a 'museum-home', a dream that came true in 1938 when the Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller opened its doors. Helene Kröller-Müller was its first director. After her death in 1939 the museum building underwent a few expansions with the addition of a congress wing and sculpture gallery in 1953 and a whole new wing between 1970 and 1977. This wing served as a suitable accommodation for the growing collection of modern sculpture. The museum's sculpture garden has increased in size over the years and is now one of the largest in Europe.

The Kröller-Müller Museum boasts the second-largest Van Gogh collection in the world: almost 90 paintings and over 180 drawings. The Van Gogh Gallery displays varying selections of about 40 works by Vincent van Gogh. Furthermore, you will also find masterpieces by modern masters such as Claude Monet, Georges Seurat, Pablo Picasso and Piet Mondriaan.

The museum's entire collection can be viewed at: <https://krollermuller.nl/en/search-the-collection> From our earlier trip, we recall the unique Jean Dubuffet installation that he called *Jardin d'email*. SWMBO is eager to see if HWO can maintain his equilibrium after climbing the stairs and trying to balance on the structure. Well! I'm relieved to learn (actually, we knew this before arriving) that the sculpture is being restored and won't be open for visitors until next year. The details of the conservation work can be read at: <https://krollermuller.nl/en/conservation-jardin-d-email>



Here's what I wrote in 2015 when we last visited the museum:

The breadth* and quality of the collection is exceptional. Because picture-taking is permitted indoors, I have some wonderful images (see the Google photos site) of oils and small sculptures by Brancusi,

*I cannot type this word without recalling an incident from 1985. I was serving on the search committee to hire a new Dean of Liberal Arts at The University of Tennessee. A letter of recommendation for one of the more promising candidates extolled his academic achievements with "His knowledge is immense. When he opens his mouth, his breath is extraordinary." Alas, he did not receive an on-site interview.

van Gogh, Picasso, Manet, Giacometti, Gauguin, Monet, Renoir, Modigliani, Leger, Moore, Cézanne, Mondriaan, and Gris. (Ooh, what a name-dropper!) The van Gogh collection is especially impressive, numbering nearly 90 works including some of his most famous: *Self-Portrait*, *The Potato Eaters*, *La Berceuse (Augustine Roulin)*, *Portrait of the Postman Joseph Roulin*, *Haystacks in Provence*, and *The Langlois Bridge at Arles*.

It's not until 1:45 that we complete our rounds of the indoor exhibition. Exhausted both physically and intellectually, we repair to the museum's café for apple pie and coffee. And then it's time for a stroll through the sculpture garden. It is immense and the sculptures are displayed all over the place, including within fountains and behind trees. Among the more familiar artists are Tony Smith, Jacques Lipschitz, Rodin, Renoir, and Henry Moore; the majority, however, seem to be Dutch whose names are not well-known, at least to me. Among the most memorable sculptures are: *Needle Tower* by Kenneth Snelson, another example of which we encountered in Washington, D.C.; *Jardin d'email* by Jean Dubuffet (about which more in a moment); the Aldo van Eyck Pavilion, featuring numerous bronze, metal, and granite sculptures, both abstract and figurative, by a variety of artists; a tree whose trunk and roots are metallic, but at first sight appears to be growing out of the ground; and a pavilion that is not on our map but which features numerous spectacular sculptures by Barbara Hepworth. Our map of the garden suggests that there is a Richard Serra steel sculpture nearby but we are looking for a massive installation like those in outdoor sculpture parks throughout the world - what we find is one called *One*, a cylindrical hunk of metal about three feet tall and about three feet in diameter - very unimpressive.

The Dubuffet work is extraordinary. According to the museum's web site, it is constructed of "concrete, glass fiber, reinforced epoxy resin, and polyurethane paint" and it is huge. Approaching it, one sees a curvy white wall behind which there are white objects, outlined in black, rising up. There is a door through which one can enter; up a set of stairs, one emerges through another door onto a surface that looks like a landscape that has been rocked by a recent earthquake. Everything is white with black outlines - and there is not a single straight edge anywhere. Children are having a ball running through it, trying to keep their balance. Words cannot convey the beauty and strangeness of this "playground" so please look at my online pictures or at some of the images posted online at <http://tinyurl.com/8s25l32>

PUN ALERTS:

- Lee: "We're supposed to see a Serra." Ron: "Maybe it's coming later. As they say, 'Que Serra, Serra.' "
- As we are leaving the sculpture garden and walking back to the museum building, Lee says "We need to go past the Dubuffet," to which Ron replies, "You've never been known to pass da buffet in your entire life."

My 2018 legs are rebelling after walking through the sculpture garden, so as was true in 2015, we stop in the museum's café for cake and coffee (for me) and soup and cake (for Lee). In a departure from the 2015 trip, we drive through much of the park before exiting in the town of Otterlo for picture-taking. As we drive back to the hotel, we pass through regions of heavy rain along with fog and mist. We arrive at 3:30 and, mercifully, the rain has stopped.

We leave the hotel, on foot, at 5:15, but head in the opposite direction from last night. According to Wikipedia:

Another landmark is the old centre and the canal structure in the inner city. The Oudegracht is a curved canal, partly following the ancient main branch of the Rhine. It is lined with the unique wharf-basement structures that create a two-level street along the canals. The inner city has largely retained its Medieval structure, and the moat ringing the old town is largely intact.

We take lots of pictures of these two-level structures, then walk past the alms houses that date from the 17th century. Originally occupied by the very poor, they are now the property of well-to-do. As we walk around, once again we need to dodge bicyclists who come whizzing at us at surprising angles, not paying attention to one-way street signs nor to traffic lights, and often quite silently. We walk toward the hill at the top of which is Sonnenborgh, a museum and observatory. My legs tell me not to climb the hill, so I stay at the bottom while Lee hikes upward. Without warning, the sky turns dark, the winds pick up, and we are inundated with huge rain drops, a torrential downpour, lightning, and hail. For protection, I stand under a tree (not the brightest thing to do when there is lightning) while Lee ducks into the observatory. It lasts only about 15 minutes, but we are both quite drenched by the time it stops.

We walk through puddles to our restaurant for the evening, Corfu, a Greek restaurant not far from the hotel. It is on a narrow street, across from the canal. We get salad from the salad bar. I order Mousaka and Mythos Beer; Lee has Odysseus Schotel (pork skewers and minced beef with Tzatziki and flatbread). With two coffees, the bill came to only €50.

We return to the hotel at 7:30, avoiding (as much as possible) the many puddles. To make walking extra difficult, we also need to avoid tripping on the cobblestone sidewalks. After struggling with the internet and doing some reading, we retire at 10:30.

THURSDAY, MAY 9

Again, a somewhat sleep-deprived night: I awaken at 4:30, stay in bed until 5:00, then get up to read, try sleep at 5:30, fail, get up and read until the alarm sounds at 6:30. It's a bright sunny morning, not too cold - can it last? We have breakfast for the third time in the huge dining room (for me: cold cereal, cheese, meat, rolls, juice, coffee) and we check out of the hotel at 9:30.

We're heading to Lanaken (in Belgium) but stop, *en route*, in Nijmegen. It's about 85 km east of Utrecht, not far from National Park de Hoge Veluwe where we were yesterday, and very near the border with

Germany. With an unpronounceable name (Wikipedia provides a sound clip but it's impossible for an American to mimic it), Nijmegen has a population of about 175,000. We park in an underground garage*

*Unlike the very modern, well-lit, nicely painted underground garage in Leiden, this one is gloomy, poorly lit, with narrow spaces for the cars. But, we discover when we exit that there is no need for us to insert the payment card in a machine; instead, the gate opens as we approach. My guess is that a photograph was made of our license plate when we entered and this information was relayed to the exits. The same was true in Leiden's parking garage.

near the museum Het Valkhos, which we will visit shortly. But first we walk up Valkhof Hill, which "features a Carolingian chapel (eighth, ninth century AD) and a small remainder of an imperial castle that was demolished in 1798" (according to Wikipedia).

Het Valkhos (all signage in Dutch, no English) features many artifacts (pottery, stone slabs, etc.) from the Roman period, but what interests me more is the display of modern art. There are four works by the American-born Shinkichi Tajiri entitled Machine No. 1 (or 2 or 3 or 4) which are made up of diverse metal parts that, when assembled, make the work look like a weapon. The main display involves works by Ceija Stojka (1933-2013), an Austrian Roma, who was imprisoned by the Nazis and survived stays in Auschwitz, Ravensbruck, and Bergen-Belsen. Her art, primitive in style, depicts scenes from her internment. It is a chilling exhibit. Leaving the museum, we take pictures of the fanciful Hotel Credible, across the street, with its multi-colored walls and huge depiction of a stag on its side.

Following a brief stop for coffee and cake, we walk along Burchstraat, a busy commercial street, to see Stadhuis (city hall) and Waagebouw (the old weighing house). Before returning to the car, we want to find an ATM to get some euros. Much to our surprise, there are no banks or ATMs on Burchstraat. Lee uses her iPad to locate some banks which require heading down side streets, getting lost, asking directions, and finally finding an ING Bank on Mariënborg, not far from Burchstraat.

We drive some 140 km south to Lanaken (Belgium), population 25,000, very near the Netherlands border and close to the city of Maastricht. In fact, over the next couple of days, we'll cross the Netherlands-Belgium border many times as we drive to various destinations. Our goal is to reach *Domaine La Butte aux Bois* ("the hill in the woods" or, as I prefer to translate it, "the dominatrix's butt for the boys"), our "home" for the next three nights. <https://www.labutteaubaixbois.be/en/>

OBSERVATION On the drive south, we note the excellence of the roads (both the major motorways and lesser highways) and the clear signage, although there were some "tricky" moments through Nijmegen's traffic and several roundabouts. We are also impressed by the excellence and courtesy of the drivers (most of them, that is).

To get to the hotel, we drive south on the N78 (a nice four-lane highway) through town and we turn right on Paalsteenlaan (note the multiple vowels!). This proves to be a narrow road (with speed bumps) through a high-rent area (large, expensive, modern homes); the road narrows to a true single track as we approach the hotel, where we arrive at 4:15. Our room will be in the Villa, to the left of the road, but the main part of the hotel plus spa are to the right, so we go there to check in. The person who greets us insists that we take a seat in the modern lobby and drink the champagne and eat the *amuses-bouches* that she offers. (If only everything would be so elegant for the rest of the stay.)

Our room is very modern, but small. The lighting is poor and the air conditioner is not working. I call the desk and am told that a technician will come to check on it. Nobody shows up so I walk across the street to the lobby to make my request in person. There is no maintenance man (he has gone home) but a man at the desk says that he'll come to our room in five minutes. Perhaps clocks run differently in Lanaken, but after 20 minutes nobody has showed up. So I call the desk again. The man from the front desk arrives, pushes all of the buttons on the thermostat, sometimes two at a time (just as I had done) but is unsuccessful. It is now 5:50 and we need to get to dinner for a 6:30 reservation. The man confirms that

the maintenance man has gone home, but he will call him and will be sure that he'll get here in 30 minutes, even if we're not here.

We head across the road and before going to the restaurant, I stop at the desk again. There is yet another clerk who has no idea if maintenance has been called. We insist that we be given another room if the A/C is not fixed (in fact, we have not even unpacked our bags, assuming that we'll be moved) and we ask that we be notified in the dining room, *Le Bistrot*, if progress is made. At 6:50, the front desk man comes to our table and says that the A/C is working, that the unit had not been turned on yet because "it's not cooling season, yet." We disagree. He says that after we finish dinner, he'll go with us to the room to check on it.

Le Bistrot is the more casual of the two restaurants (we'll eat at the other one tomorrow). Lee and I share goose liver paté. I order *sole meunière*, deboned* (expertly) at the table by our server, salad, and French

*As we are finishing our meal, Lee asks me "No bones?" and I reply "No," only to find a bone in the last mouthful.

fries. Lee has lamb loin with white asparagus, morel foam, polenta balls on green pea puree. Of course we each have wine and, after dinner, coffee with a nice array of sweets. The bill is a hefty €160, which is pretty pricey but a pale shadow of what we'll confront at dinner tomorrow. After dinner, I try to find the man who said he'd accompany us to the room. He's gone, but one of the female check-in clerks offers (grudgingly) to go with us. As she is young and strong and very tall, she walks across the street and to The Villa much faster than we can (pant-pant) and she takes the stairs while we use the elevator, but finally (finally!!) we are all in the room and ... the A/C is working. Hooray. So we can unpack.

Alas, there is no washcloth (this is a fancy hotel?) and only *one* small square of soap (for sink, for tub, and for shower - this is a fancy hotel?). In contrast, Karel V did provide a washcloth and large bars of soap, replenished every day. Fortunately, we have packed a washcloth from home *and* Lee has "stolen" a bar of soap from Karel V, so we are set. After unpacking, we finally get to bed at 11:00.

FRIDAY, MAY 10

Sleep problems again - I awake at 3:30 and can't get back to sleep, so I get out of bed at 4:30 and read for an hour. I return to bed and actually sleep until the alarm sounds at 7:00. Breakfast is in *Le Bistrot* and features a more extensive spread of hot and cold choices (meat, cheese, rolls, bread) than Karel V did. Sadly, the only cold cereals (in boxes) are sugared: Frosted Flakes and Cocoa Puffs, for example. But like Karel V, I can enjoy small packets of peanut butter. A welcome feature (and a surprise) is that a small pot of coffee is placed on the table and it features regular black coffee, not Americano. The quantity is sufficient to refill our cups several times. (SWMBO devotes nearly a full page of her journal to descriptions of the eggs, rolls, jams, fruit, cold cuts, and cheeses that are available. I refuse to copy them into this account.)

As we walk to and from the restaurant, we encounter some heavy rain. Most of the path to the main building is under cover, but one is exposed to the elements when crossing the street and, also, near the entrance to the hotel. We are pleased that the air conditioner in our room is still working! But the room lighting is still very poor. And although the bathroom features new and modern shower, sink, and tub, there is no separate room for the toilet (as in Karel V) nor is there even a true door to the bathroom - instead there is a sliding semi-opaque glass.

At 10:15, we ignore the rain and drive to Liège (population about 200,000), some 40 km due south. The route passes through Maastricht, busy with traffic. We'll try to avoid the city the next few times. We also cross the border between Belgium and Netherlands two times, hardly aware of it*; I wonder if there were

*Well, not quite. Whenever we cross, a robotic female voice comes through the car's audio system to announce (in one or another foreign language) that we are entering a new country.

once passport controls that protected the crossing places. By the time we arrive (11:15), the rain has stopped and the sun has come out. In contrast to the area around Lanaken, Liège is quite hilly and has some ugly factory areas that we drive through. Our destination is *La Boverie**, an art museum that is

*Wikipedia's description: "La Boverie is a museum in the city of Liège in Belgium. It opened in May 2016. It is housed in the former Palais des beaux-arts de Liège, built in the Parc de la Boverie for the Liège International in 1905. The building previously housed the prints and drawings collections (1952-1980) of the city's Musée des Beaux-Arts and the Walloon art collections of the city's Académie royale des beaux-arts (1970s-1980), before becoming the Musée d'art moderne (later known as the Musée d'art moderne et d'art contemporain or MMAC) from 1980 to 2011. MMAC was merged with the prints, drawings and Walloon collections in 2011 to form a new single collection known as the 'musée des Beaux-Arts'.

located in Parc de la Boverie, a lovely expanse of green that is on an island with the River Meuse split on either side. Because there is (according to online reports) no parking on the island, we find a large shopping center, Médiacité, with a vast underground garage. We wind our way up and down aisles before finding a parking space. It is only after we are safely parked that we notice that there is a light above each space that is either green (vacant) or red (occupied). Doh! Had we noticed the lights, we could have avoided driving down some of the aisles.

Upon exiting the garage and shopping center, it's a bit of a hike to get to a bridge that crosses the river and leads to the museum. But we persevere and arrive at the park where we make two finds: (1) there are many geese along the walking path that are oblivious to the picture-snapping tourists and (2) there are many cars parked on either side of the path (although I'll grant that it might have been hard to find a vacant space in which to park).

The museum plan is very helpful in identifying which sections celebrate 17th- 18th century art from Liège or modern artists (not all of them Belgian) including a Picasso (that doesn't look, at least to my untrained eyes, like a Picasso) and a Gauguin. But the main focus is on artists from this country (and nearby) such as René Magritte, Rik Wouters (whose works resemble Renoir's), Karel Appel (a founder of the CoBrA Group signifying Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam), and James Ensor. There is a lower floor that has most of the works of Ensor and Wouters, but when we attempt to use the elevator to get there, a guard stops us and operates the elevator himself. Properly chastised, when we return to the main floor we do so by a staircase.

We conclude our visit with a stop at the museum's café where I have coffee and a piece of chocolate cake but Lee indulges in coffee and a bagel(!) slathered with goat cheese, tarragon, grape halves, hazelnuts, and honey. At 1:40, we re-do the slog to the parking garage and drive to a famous chocolate factory in Eupen, 40 km due east. In an industrial section amid various warehouses we find Schokoladen Museum located inside Chocolaterie Jacques. Although we arrive at 3:00, we are informed that the museum has just closed, but a nice woman allows us to wander inside for a short while. There are, of course, displays of all sorts of chocolates (from this chocolate maker and others) plus views (from a catwalk) down into the factory (where nobody is making chocolate because it's past closing time). What a disappointment. Lee does buy some chocolates for us and as gifts.

We leave the museum at 3:30 and drive into Eupen (population about 20,000), a town that is 15 km from Aachen (in Germany) and from the border with Netherlands. German is the primary language. This is very close to the Ardennes, a forested region mostly in Belgium and Luxembourg, where battles raged in both of the 20th century's world wars. We drive to the nature center of the High Fens where Lee gets out of the car to take pictures; I remain in the car. From there, we drive a short distance to the Botrange Nature Center.

On the return to Lanaken, we make several wrong turns (courtesy of the navigator, MOI!). The iPad, which we are using to follow the route, is running out of juice and we're trying to keep it closed as much as possible. Finally a savior arrives - Lee discovers that there is a charging port inside the car's ashtray - it's slow but at least it keeps the iPad juiced up. We get back to the hotel and head to a 6:30 reservation at the fancy restaurant, the two-Michelin star *La Source*.

According to the hotel's web site:

The gourmet Restaurant La Source holds two Michelin stars and a Gault&Millau score of 17 out of 20 points, and is one of Belgium's 40 best restaurants. Chef Ralf Berendsen serves the finest haute cuisine creations to prove that opposites attract, and that global culinary influences can come together in perfect harmony. Gourmets make regular pilgrimages to the two Michelin star restaurant in Lanaken to indulge in the chef's signature dishes such as Trio of Langoustine with Tandoori Masala, Miso and Couscous, and French Foie Gras with Chinese Yuzu Tangerine and Belgian Ginger Beer.

There is a five- or seven-course menu available, but also the option of ordering à la carte. Either way, it is very very very expensive. The two menus are, respectively, €130 and €150! We add to the insanity by ordering single malts (Dalwhinnie for Lee, Lagavulin for me). And, of course, milady wants to have two different wines with her meal. The service is elegant to a fault with many different people playing different roles. The meal starts with a champagne glass filled with foam and a "fake olive" made up of an apple/fennel liquid (how can one describe it?). I eschew (gesundheit again!) the black powdered olive. During this, horrid music is being piped in - it sounds vaguely like Steve Reich's *Four Organs* with flute sounds. There are two *amuses-bouches* which are "explained" to us but I fail to write it down: one was mushroom-based but with an unrecognizable taste and the other is a messy, gooey concoction of oysters and pig's ears.

At this point, I'm going to use Lee's journal entry in its entirety. This is the last time, I promise, that I will do so. But her notes are so complete and her descriptions in such purple prose that I can't resist. Ready?

"We settle for a Dalwhinnie and a Lagavulin to drink with our four(!) *amuses-bouches*. The scotches are €22 each. Ron orders à la carte, so wine for him would be €40-50, so he nurses his single malt throughout the meal. Lee will have the 5-course tasting menu (not the 7 or 9!), so her two (small pour) glasses of wine are "only" €12.5 each. The entire meal costs €314 - easily 20 Syren's Grille meals plus a few weeks of Saturday afternoon mixers.

"We are attended to by a phalanx of servers, male and female, who offer endless explanations and advice (don't eat the fingertip towel, which is truly wee!). There is an entire category of staff who bring food from the kitchen and then stand at attention, awaiting the servers/explainers!

"So first the *amuses-bouches*: ● In a Martini glass, a blob of sheep's cheese/finely chopped black olives/a 'green olive' fabricated of something else, filled with apple/fennel juice. ● A mushroom tart with a 'glassine' crust. ● A ball of paella topped with octopus and various greens. ● A pork broth made with 'ears' and 'tails,' filled with fresh herbs and a lightly poached oyster.

"Ron ordered a starter of *foie gras* 'two ways' - first, logs of paté between wafers (Lee would have this as her last course) and then a large piece of sautéed liver with *foie gras* 'ice cream,' a foam of some sort, and some yuzu poured around it. Sauces in wee pitchers figured prominently throughout the evening. For his main, he had Anjou pigeon (bright red!) with artichoke and asparagus.

"Lee had: (1) Veal tongue (2 ways): (a) a kind of mousse with green goo plus jalapenos in a langoustine shell on black pebbles; (b) cubes of tongue with fish?? (2) Turbot fillet with smoked eel, white asparagus, and a foamy sauce with goose liver. (3) Red mullet with octopus (now called sepia), edible wildflowers, and some sort of citrus salt. The whole thing looked a bit like "eye of fly" as seen in van Leeuwenhoek's early microscope. (4) Veal loin(?) with sweet potato, carrot edible flowers, and a delicious red currant

sauce with anise. (5) Ron's goose liver logs between "wafers" - forgot to say that this has foie gras ice cream on top.

"We have plain coffees, no bites of sweets accompanying as in *Le Bistrot*. However a trolley of sweets arrives later, which we decline."

Did she leave anything out? Well, yes. Here's an entry from my own notes: To the table is brought a piece of toast (at least, that's what my notes say) followed by a basket of sour dough bread and butter. The two men and two women involved in bringing and taking away are all wearing black gloves. (Are they afraid of the food?) Oh, yes, there is a complete change of silverware for every course. The contrast between this evening's meal and tomorrow's could not possibly be more dramatic. *Vide infra*, as we say in the chemistry biz.

We are back in our room at 9:00. Lee refuses to tell me the cost of our two meals. That's probably an excellent decision. After doing some internet work, we head to bed at 10:45.

SATURDAY, MAY 11

This is getting repetitious - I awake at 3:45 and, unable to return to sleep, get out of bed and read until 4:30. I return to bed and sleep until the alarm goes off at 6:30.

We go to *Le Bistrot* again for breakfast. This time I succumb to the sugared cereal: the Kellogg's Frosted Flakes are called "Frosties" but still sport a picture of Tony the Tiger. I also have a bowl of fruit, then juice, coffee, and toast. When we leave for today's adventures at 9:45, the weather is misty, rainy, and cold (9-10°C).

We are heading to Herbeumont, 170 km to the south. I begin driving, then stop for fuel at 10:45 at which time Lee takes over. We arrive at 12:45. The rain has become stronger and is threatening to ruin our day. Lee hikes up a hill to see Le Chateau de la Roche at Herbeumont, but I opt to stay in the car and remain dry. She concludes, "Totally worth it!"

My notes are now vague, but she writes in her journal: "We drive northwest on a minor road along the Semois River Valley - beautiful hills and managed forests under active logging. At Dohan, we cross the river and find a charming, tiny square with a modern metal sculpture of a wild boar, next to a classic sculpture of a winged angel holding a wreath aloft."

From there, it's only 25 km to Bouillon (we are very near the border with France) where we visit the Château Fort de Bouillon whose origins are in the 11th century. On the walk to the castle, we take pictures of the town below us, then enter the castle gate. (There is a group of eight 20th century men on Segways being instructed on how to use them without falling off.) As we wander through this great stone heap of a structure, we find ourselves in a large courtyard where there is a man and his assistant who are putting on a show involving large birds, all of them raptors I think. The repartee is in French (which I can't follow) but the bird man is obviously humorous (everyone in the crowd, except us, is laughing) as he shows the hijinks of a fierce-looking eagle and other ferocious birds. They are well trained and fly from their perches to his arm or shoulder (both well padded) or back and forth between him and his assistant. He recruits a young woman from the audience, places a metal "hat" on her and a protective sleeve on her right arm (held straight out) and he then calls for two of his birds to land on the hat and arm, to the obvious discomfort of the woman. Throughout this, a light rain is falling. As we leave the courtyard, we walk over to the far wall to see the variety of other birds (owl, hawk, whatever) of prey that are sitting on their perches, apparently placidly.

There is a small restaurant across the parking lot from the castle, so we stop there for a snack: ice cream bar and coffee for Lee, coffee only for me. We leave at 2:30 for the 180 km drive back to Lanaken. Lee

had noticed an American-looking 1950s diner on the highway quite close to *La Butte aux Bois* called (in English) *The Filling Station*. Well, after two evenings of "fancy" dining, not to mention very *expensive* dining, we decide to take a chance. First we return to our room, rest a while, then set out for dinner.

It's but 2 km from the hotel to the restaurant. The flamboyant exterior is matched (and then some) by the

paintings, life-size figures, U.S. license plates, and on and on and on and on. We are seated next to a plastic life-sized bathing-suit clad Rita Hayworth in front of busts of Mick Jagger and Elvis Presley. In other directions are a Superman torso, a motorcycle, a life-



-sized Big Boy plastic statue, a gold-plated Fleetwood Mac LP, a rocket ship, a psychedelic VW bus, and a full-sized Marilyn Monroe whose skirt flies up when there is a gust of air from the grate below. I've included two pictures (one of the building and one of Rita Hayworth) but I recommend that you explore the picture gallery at the restaurant's web site <https://www.fillingstation.be/> to get a greater sense of what this place is like.

By the way, the food is very good - it's a typical hamburger, steaks, fried fish, pizzas, etc. kind of place, much like home. And the cost, in stark contrast to last night's extravaganza, is but €32. Our coffee cups bear "inspirational" messages. Lee's: "You should not wait for love - you should go on towards it." Mine: "He who has the divine gift of passion ages, but never gets old." Hmm - I have the gift, but I've also gotten old.

In our earlier travels, the only place that bore any resemblance to this was Bone's Real American Restaurant in Koldingfjord, Denmark (see <http://web.utk.edu/%7Eermagid/Europe2010.pdf>, p. 44-45) which was filled with baseball memorabilia (pictures of Jackie Robinson and Stan Musial, among others), a baseball catcher's mitt and chest protector, autographed baseballs, pictures of John Wayne and Elvis Presley, license plates from various states, and, of course, a full-sized Big Boy plastic statue.

As we return to the hotel, the weather has changed: it is rainy and cold (9°C), and windy. We get to bed at 10:45.

SUNDAY, MAY 12

As has been my recent habit, I awaken at 3:30 but unlike the previous nights I'm able to fall back to sleep until the alarm sounds at 6:30. On looking outside, we note that it is overcast but unlikely to rain. As we walk to breakfast, we hear a wide variety of bird calls, bringing to mind the loud bird calls in Inverness last year and the relative absence of them back home. *Le Bistrot*, in addition to having its buffet for breakfast eaters, seems to be set up in an adjacent space for either a large conference or a wedding or both. This was also true yesterday morning and the day before. I eat sugared cereal again, scrambled eggs and bacon, bread, juice, and coffee but no cheeses or cold meats today.

We are amazed at the number of languages the serving staff in the dining room, the host or hostess, the clerks at the front desk, etc. speak. Of course they are fluent (and need to be) in French, Dutch, and Flemish but they also speak freely in English, German, and who knows what else.

By the time we check out of the hotel, the overcast skies have given way to bright sun. We are heading to the car rental return at Amsterdam's Schiphol Airport, some 215 miles away. Stefan had tried to convince SilverSea to transport us from the airport to the downtown hotel, but they refused,* so we need to

*In 2015, we began our trip with a Tauck cruise of the Adriatic followed by a car trip through Germany's black forest. The final phase of that journey was a Uniworld cruise on the Saône and Rhône rivers from Lyon to Avignon. As with SilverSea, Uniworld refused to meet us at Lyon's airport unless we were arriving on a scheduled flight. Stefan and I tried to convince them that we'd be arriving at the airport by car and we could guarantee an arrival time with more accuracy than any airline could. But they were not persuaded. So, we lied (such a harsh word!) to them and pretended that we were traveling on a KLM flight from Amsterdam, arriving in Lyon at 1:15. We figured that if we could get to the arrivals lounge somewhat earlier than that time, we could pretend that we had indeed just arrived by air. And so it came to pass. As I wrote in my 2015 travelogue, "We make our way to the arrivals hall and wait for the Uniworld representative to arrive. And arrive she does, at about 1:00. I walk over, greet her, and give her our names. She looks at the electronic arrival board then at her clipboard and says, 'But your plane is not supposed to arrive until 1:15!' 'We're tricky,' I reply. And so we do get free transportation to the pier

complete the journey on our own by renting a taxi. (I suppose that we *could* have taken the train from the airport to the central train station (close to the hotel) as we did in 2013 when we stayed at an Amsterdam airport hotel for two days at the end of a Rhine cruise, but on that earlier occasion we weren't weighted down by luggage.

OBSERVATIONS

- There are very few SUVs in this part of the world and even fewer pickup trucks. Most cars are moderate-sized sedans or hatchbacks.
- The highways are very crowded with Sunday traffic. There are also numerous construction projects going on. An amusing sight was a work-pause (who knows how long?) with highway workers leaning against their shovels and checking cell phones.
- At one point, construction workers in fluorescent jackets were on motorcycles and using flashing blue lights to herd five lanes of traffic very slowly. Shouldn't this be a job for the police?

As we approach the airport, we fill up with fuel for the third time. We have driven just over 1000 km and have averaged (assuming that I can convert, correctly, kilometers to miles and litres to gallons) around 38 mpg. Not bad. We return the car to an underground garage. The Hertz people call for a taxi which arrives (after a while) inside the garage. An online web site suggested that the ride would cost about 45-€50 but, in fact, it cost over €80, probably because the driver took a circuitous route to avoid construction and traffic due to a sporting event. Indeed, the last 10 minutes involved his maneuvering down very narrow streets with lots of pedestrians and bicyclists serving as obstacles to get us to the NH Barbizon Palace where we will stay tonight.

The room is hotel-modern, but satisfactory. We manage to get all of the lights turned on except for one floor-standing lamp which seems to be bereft of a switch anywhere. We call for help and an employee shows us the foot-activated switch on the power cord some distance from the lamp. The most distinctive feature of the hotel is an entire wall divided into some 50 squares, each of which has an "inspirational" message such as "What is feel?" and "To feel is to provoke" and "To feel is to be inspired" ... well, you get the idea.

We stop at the SilverSea desk in the lobby and learn that our suitcases need to be tagged and put outside the room by 8:30 am tomorrow and that we are to show up in the lobby before noon for transportation to the ship. Because I'm developing one of my migraines (aura only, no pain), we stop in the coffee shop off the lobby for a coffee. It is ridiculously expensive, €10, accompanied by dreadful music. I ask the concierge if there's a nearby ATM and if she can recommend a good local restaurant with typical Dutch food.

The ATM is at the Hotel Victoria, a two-minute walk from our hotel past the adjacent canal. I then retrace my steps back to the Barbizon Palace (and discover an even closer ATM - too late!) and now walk past the train station in an effort to find Restaurant Loetje Centraal in the lower level beneath the Visitor Center and across from the train station. I ask to see a menu and deem it "just right" so I make my way back to our hotel room to report my finding.

At 5:00 we walk to the restaurant <https://centraal.loetje.nl/?lang=en> It is very crowded and we have to wait for a table which we do from the bar area. It is a down-to-earth place with a menu that features steaks, burgers, fish, etc. in large portions. The decor is fascinating, lots of blue-white Delft pewter tiles on the walls (some with modern themes such as a peace symbol). I order schnitzel and Lee has a steak, both of which are accompanied by a large salad and frites, which we share. We also each have a local wheat beer. The food is in such large quantity that we are forced to leave a significant amount on our plates. Best of all, the total bill was only €55. We return to our hotel at 6:30.



The music piped into the coffee shop in the afternoon was reminiscent of what we heard at *La Butte aux Bois*. It's difficult to describe, but it seems to feature one or more organs or accordions, accompanied by other instruments. It seems to be *de rigueur* in the sound systems of Dutch and Belgian restaurants.

We return to the SilverSea desk, but find the two women who are staffing it to be useless. First, we asked them to confirm our cabin number (526) but they had no record of who was assigned to what. Then we asked for luggage tags, as SilverSea had mailed us only two and we have four suitcases to place outside or door. They have none.

Back in our room, I have a flash of inspiration: perhaps the hotel staff can provide the two additional suitcase tags that we need. And indeed they can, as the friendly concierge hands them over. In our room, the lighting is adequate for reading, but why oh why is the internet so slow? It was painfully slow at the hotels in Utrecht and Lanaken, but I would have expected much better from a luxury hotel in Amsterdam. Oh, well, perhaps this is just getting me ready for what will probably be poor connectivity once we're at sea.

MONDAY, MAY 13

We arise when the alarm sounds at 6:45. And now to address the space-age control of water in the tub-shower combination. The first problem is getting my ancient legs over the very high side of the tub, but I conquer this and am ready to address the shower controls. There are two shower heads: a rain shower in the ceiling and a flexible wand. I would have preferred to use the latter, but I could only get water to exit through the central nozzles rather than the full wand. So I'm forced to use the rain shower. The temperature control is fairly straight-forward and holds its setting, which will also be useful when Lee uses the bathtub.

The casual restaurant is where the breakfast buffet is set up. Accompanying the food is, of course, the ghostly piped-in music which, in my notes, I describe as "low organ notes serving as a *basso continuo* under the melody by one or more guitars and one or more saxophones. Occasionally, human voices can be heard. Most of the words are in English but some are in an unrecognizable language. And the tempo

is unmistakably Latin ... or is it Greek ... maybe Italian, French, whatever." It's intrusive and painful to my "delicate" constitution. I help myself to scrambled eggs, two slices of cheese, two small rolls, juice, and coffee.

It's a bright sunny morning, although we won't know the temperature until we step outside. But first, we need to close up our suitcases and put them in the hall, which we do at 8:15, well-ahead of the announced pickup at 8:30.

OBSERVATION If there's any doubt that the Dutch are very very very tall, the height of the peep hole in the hotel door will dispel it. Even on tiptoes, I can't see through it.

According to Google Maps, it is a straight-forward walk of about 11 minutes to get from the hotel to Rembrandt House. Alas, I make the mistake of asking the concierge for directions and he suggests a different (more confusing) route. As a result, we get "lost." My traveling companion is not amused. But with the use of her iPad, we get re-oriented and find the building. <https://www.rembrandthuis.nl/?lang=en>

According to Wikipedia:

The Rembrandt House Museum (Dutch: Museum Het Rembrandthuis) is a historic house and art museum in Amsterdam in the Netherlands. Painter Rembrandt lived and worked in the house between 1639 and 1656. The 17th-century interior has been reconstructed. The collection contains Rembrandt's etchings and paintings of his contemporaries.

The building is modern on the outside, as is the lobby, but the interior still requires mounting somewhat treacherous spiral wooden staircases as we observe his art (and that of his students), his studio (with some of the things that inspired him, such as Greek and Roman busts). The special exhibition (from February 1 to May 19, so we're just under the wire) is Rembrandt's Social Network. Here is how it's described in the museum's web site:

With the staging of Rembrandt's Social Network, The Rembrandt House Museum marks the beginning of Rembrandt Year 2019, 350 years after the artist's death. The focus is on Rembrandt's relationships and the role they played in his life and work—because even a great artist like Rembrandt was not a solitary genius. Like any good networker, he actively and deliberately used his social network. He had family and friends who helped him, who bought his works of art, who lent him money and challenged him artistically.

Rembrandt's social network is explored through a number of key figures, like his old friend Jan Lievens, the connoisseur Jan Six, his saviour Abraham Francen, artist friends such as Roelant Roghman and of course his wife's family, the Uylenburghs—his 'blood relatives'. The paintings, drawings and prints, including work by Rembrandt that has never or rarely been seen in the Netherlands, are striking in their informality.

The temperature is perfect for the walk back to the hotel. We take pictures of several spiral staircases (seen through glass walls); of the numerous Chinese, Vietnamese, and Japanese restaurants and medical clinics; of the stores that dispense marijuana and sex; and of the canals with the variety of boats on them. We reach the hotel at 11:30, collect our belongings (the large suitcases are, indeed, gone - we hope that they're on the way to the ship), and check-out of the hotel at 11:45.

A bus takes us to the pier where the Silver Cloud is docked, about 15 minutes away. The embarkation is very slow, laborious, and inefficient, a surprise because the Amsterdam terminal is large and modern and because the ship has fewer than 300 passengers (less than half the size of the Regent Seven Seas ships we've sailed on). We take an escalator to the second level where our names are checked off a list (hooray - we worried when the SilverSea



people at the hotel had no list) - we're told to take a seat because we won't board until the second group (at 1:00). So we sit and get to know some of our fellow passengers.* When our group is called, we get on

*Lee, who is more discerning than I about such things, senses that there are distinct cliques involving the many-time SilverSea travelers, and that it is nearly impossible for newbies to break into the fold. She refers to "the insufferably snobby SilverSea veterans." She cites several examples of imperious behavior, both today and later in the cruise. I'm not as sensitive to such snubs as she is, although I do note that the "veterans" do make a point to chat up the expedition team by name, as they have all sailed before.

the rear of a very long line at the end of which we turn in our reservations sheet and health questionnaire and are given boarding cards. From there, we pass through security - for some reason, I keep setting off the magnetic sensors, even though I think that I've emptied my pockets of all metal (keys, coins, wallet, watch, belt). We finally enter the ship and stand on a slow-moving line to reach the desk where our pictures are taken and our passports are stolen away (with the promise that they'll be returned ... eventually). It is now 1:55.

Because the staterooms are not available yet, we go to *La Terrazza*, the casual restaurant* on Deck 7,

*Aside from the outdoor pool grill, the ship features three restaurants: *La Terrazza*, which is buffet-style at breakfast and lunch but features an Italian-themed table service carte at dinner (reservations recommended but not required); *The Restaurant* (such an imaginative name!), the main restaurant, featuring table service at breakfast, lunch, and dinner; and *La Dame*, a French restaurant with a six-course set menu and the only one that charges (\$60 per person); reservations are mandatory. Is *La Dame* worth the extra charge? The answer will appear in the May 15 part of this travelogue.

which will also be where we have nearly all of our breakfasts (and three dinners). I fill my plate with green salad plus veggies (corn, rice), and seafood (shrimp, calamari). We have coffees and dessert.

At 2:30, there is an announcement that the suites are ready, so we make our way to Stateroom 526 only to discover that three of our four suitcases have not arrived. We meet our butler (Adolf Zanduetta, from Philippines) and housekeeper (Spiwe Chikwengo, from Zimbabwe). SWMBO spots her carry-on being wheeled down the hall (to where?) so she stops the "thief" and recovers it. When we have a chance, we check the excursion tickets in our envelope only to discover that two tours that we had booked are missing: the Garrison tour in Tresco and the tour to Innis Mór. We head to the excursion desk where things (and staff) are quite confused. (Lee calls them "just plain rude," but I'm of the mind that one shouldn't attribute to malice what is really incompetence.) We are issued new tickets for Innis Mór but are told that the Tresco tour is cancelled (no explanation given). It will turn out, a day or two later, that it is not cancelled and that we are still on the reservation list, so tickets will be printed for us. On leaving the excursion desk, we head down the hall to the elevator lobby where we discover the two missing pieces of luggage, our large suitcases.

Compared to the Regent Seven Seas ships on which we've sailed, shelf space and storage space are more limited but still passable. The bathroom has a tub/shower combo and a single sink; it is also rather small, but we don't intend to spend a lot of time in it. Our butler, Adolf, returns to show us the details of the room and offers to help us unpack. "No, thanks," say we. We do request an extra drinking glass for the bathroom (there's only one) and for a bath mat, and we ask him to find out if we can purchase a single malt scotch. After all, we do have a \$300 shipboard credit from AmEx.

I try to connect my cell phone to the ship's WiFi, but discover that I need a user name and password. Presumably the same will be true for the laptop and Lee's iPad. We have a map of the ship in the laptop's Firefox bookmarks, but can't log on to see it; and we can't find a map anywhere in the room. If there is an IT person on board, we're unable to find his/her office.

Our initial overall impression is that this ship is definitely down-market when compared to Voyager, Explorer, and Navigator on Regent Seven Seas,* but one plus that it does have: there are battery-powered

*Among Lee's complaints, "There are marble flakes on the bathroom floor and both drain covers are broken. In the cabin, the baseboard carpet edges are frayed, the bedspread is also, and the sheer curtains are filthy!"

devices (called QuietVox) with attached ear buds that will be useful on excursions. (Perhaps Regent has adopted such devices by now, but they did not have them on our earlier voyages. In contrast, Tauck does use such things.)

At 5:00, we are directed to assemble in the Panorama Lounge for the mandatory lifeboat drill. Because the elevators have been turned off, we (and our bulky orange life jackets) ascend by stairs from Deck 5 to Deck 8. The Panorama Lounge, it turns out, is grossly inadequate for the number of passengers - many of us (the Magids, included) are forced to stand during the demonstration. And, of course, the volume of space occupied by each passenger is magnified by the bulky orange life jackets that we've donned. I ask a ship's officer why they didn't do two separate gatherings, but he said "It's always like this when we do the drill" (which describes the situation but doesn't explain it). When I ask why this isn't held in the larger auditorium, the answer is that it's important that the crew be able to access the lifeboats quickly, right outside the doors to the lounge. This is a reasonable answer, *except* that no crew member goes outside through any of the doors during the presentation. Oh, well.

The daily newsletter is called *Chronicles* and today's reminds us to set our clocks and watches back one hour as we sail westward. We eschew the "Sail Away Cocktails" on Pool Deck 8 as we leave Amsterdam at 6:00 but we do make it to the Pool Deck at 6:30 for "A Taste of Things to Come" featuring Expedition Leader Schalk Botha and Social Director Moss Hills. Botha, originally from South Africa, now lives in Australia and claims to be quite jet-lagged as he introduces the rest of the expedition team (naturalists, historians, photographers), the Zodiac-operators, the kitchen staff, the butlers and housekeepers, the cruise consultant, and the people who staff the various desks and offices. Hills, from Zimbabwe, began his sailing career as an entertainer (guitar, keyboards, saxophone); he now lives in England. He will relate a fascinating (and harrowing) story when we have dinner with him on May 21.

At 7:00 we go to dinner at *The Restaurant*. Because we express an interest in sharing a table, we are seated with: mother-and-daughter Jude and Paula (the latter, a librarian in Washington, DC); Ray (a medical administrator) and Esther from south of Sydney; and Tom and Payton, both lawyers from Miami. Two interesting tidbits from the dinner conversation: (1) Ray was asking a question about something or other and Paula chimed in with the answer. He: "How did you know that?" She: "I'm a librarian. I know how to find things." (2) When the topic of global warming came up, Payton (who was, perhaps, somewhat jet-lagged) said "We've already lost the battle. There's no point in trying to stop the warming. The Earth is going to flush us." In fact, she used the verb "flush" several more times, even when I quizzed her about finding her Miami lawn under water and asking about how her kids feel about doing nothing. "The Earth is going to flush us."

Oh, yes, our food: I have mushroom soup, a mesclun salad, scallops with mashed potatoes, and chocolate gelato. Lee orders Danish meat balls and duck, the same scallops as I have, and a chocolate cream puff. We drink a Spanish white wine. And we finish the dinner with coffee.

At 9:30 we're back in our room. We dutifully set the watches and clock back one hour. Using the ship's internet actually was faster than what we encountered in our three hotel rooms, a welcome surprise considering how slow the ship's internet connection was on our Regent cruises. An unwelcome surprise is that Lee has a message from AT&T that she has incurred more than \$100 for messages. She writes that "she blithely assumed before dinner that as we were leaving Amsterdam, she was still picking up land-based call towers for the iPad connectivity - AT&T global passport, no problem. Nope - the ship has cellular service and that has no agreement with AT&T. (I don't understand the preceding sentences - I'm

merely the unwitting scribe for her complaint.) The ship is rocking a bit, but not too bad. We head to bed at 10:30.

TUESDAY, MAY 14

Today is a day at sea as we travel 415 nautical miles* from Amsterdam to Guernsey which we will not

*"What is a *nautical mile*?" I hear you ask. Well, you should have learned the answer to that one from my travelogue on last year's Regent cruise. So should I! But I confess that I've forgotten. So here is the answer, "purloined" from the 2016 Japan travelogue:

Wikipedia gives this extremely "clear" description: "A nautical mile (symbol M, NM or nmi) is a unit of distance that is approximately the length that spans one minute of arc on the surface of the Earth, measured along any meridian. By international agreement it has been set at 1,852 metres exactly (about 6,076 feet)." Now aren't you glad you asked? Perhaps it would be clearer if I told you that 1 NM is 1.1507794480235 mile? (The laptop's conversion calculator doesn't know about significant figures, does it?) I think it would be safe to say, simply, that a nautical mile is a bit longer than a mile by about 15%. Now some smarty-pants is going to ask "What is meant by a *knot*?" Well, my children, one knot is a speed of one nautical mile per hour. Right? Right. That's 1.852 km per hour or 1.151 miles per hour.

reach until 8:00 tomorrow morning. Thus, we need to entertain ourselves throughout the day. Well, not completely. There is a lecture that we'll take advantage of plus a mandatory demonstration on Zodiac procedures.

I had an excellent night of sleep, waking just before the alarm at 7:00. And best of all, not only is the ship no longer rocking but we have a brilliant sunny day. The small bathroom requires military-like planning to get a shower or bath while one's partner is at the single sink basin. At least the side of the tub is not as high as it was at the Barbizon, so my old legs swing over it fairly easily

At 8:00, we go to *La Terrazza* for breakfast. Upon leaving our room, we encounter Spiwe who gives us each a big hug. Will this be our greeting every morning? The dining room features a self-service buffet. I have scrambled eggs, beans, sausage, and bacon (a very English breakfast) along with some cheese, toast, juice, and coffee. Tomorrow (and subsequently) I'll be less indulgent in the morning. In fact, they do have small boxes of unsweetened cold cereals from U.S. manufacturers. A curious feature on this ship: every chair in this dining room (and the other two) can be connected by a metal cable to the floor. Most of the time, the cable is hanging loose, but it is still a bit of a hazard when one gets up from the chair.

OBSERVATIONS From our table, we see the white cliffs (presumably of Dover) which go on for quite a distance. And at the next table, a couple is simultaneously eating breakfast while playing a card game that might be gin rummy. In fact, they will do this at subsequent breakfasts as well.

At 9:30, we go to the Explorer Lounge (Deck 6) for a lecture by historian Damien Sanders on "The English Channel: Defensive Moat and Gateway to the World." It is excellent and he is a fine speaker, but the slides are difficult to see. He covers the history of this region of the world from the Ice Age to the present, touching on the mindset of the English throughout history that leads inexorably to Brexit. Lee takes extensive notes, but I'm content to listen. We hope that presentations by other members of the expedition team will be as good as this one, but (spoiler alert) they won't be.

At 11:15, in the same location, Expedition Leader Schalk Botha does a long presentation on the procedures for traveling from ship to shore via the Zodiacs. In our room are small blue life jackets (not the bulky orange ones from yesterday) and they *must* be worn. Also in our room are backpacks whose use is optional but must be worn outside the life jacket so that they can be quickly shucked off if one is in the

water. Of course, we are also urged to dress warmly, preferably in layers. The good news (from my point of view) is that the Zodiacs* will *not* be used tomorrow. Instead, the people in Guernsey insist on using

*Despite the assurances of Botha that getting onto and off of the Zodiacs is a simple matter and there are strong-armed men to assist us, I remain dubious. Sitting next to me is Paula (from last night's dinner) who has sailed with SilverSea before and assures me that I have no reason for concern. She's quite overweight and walks with a cane, so I figure: if she can do it, so can I.

their own tenders to get people from the ship to the shore and back. Following the details about the Zodiacs and tenders, Botha spends time talking about the several tours in Guernsey and showing pictures of what we will encounter on whichever tour we've chosen. Finally, another historian (Spencer) spends about 15 minutes on the history of Guernsey. He is much less proficient than Damien.

At 1:00 we have lunch at *La Terrazza*. (I have no notes on what we eat, but I'd suspect that it was a green salad followed cold cheeses, cookies, and coffee.) The afternoon is spent catching up on magazines: I read the April 22 issue (out of order) of *The New Yorker* with three excellent (and very long) articles plus the February/March issue of *The Progressive*. I also go, alone, to the Panorama Lounge on Deck 8 for a coffee. On the phone with Adolf, we order a bottle of Talisker (at an amazingly low price of \$55). We hope it will be delivered today before dinner, but that hope is in vain.

When we filled out forms months before the cruise, we made dinner reservations at *La Terrazza* for May 14 (tonight), May 17, and May 22. Described this way at the web site, "*La Terrazza* offers buffet restaurant for breakfast and lunch with indoor or al fresco seating and is transformed into an intimate Italian restaurant for dinner." We ask for a shared table and are seated with Trish and Dudley from Gulfport, Mississippi. They are pleasant companions and good conversationalists. As it turns out, we'll be joined by them two more times during the cruise. We are offered an antipasti board from which we take a few nibbles. My dinner consists of lentil soup, lasagna bolognese,* beef filet, and lemon sponge cake.

*This was one of several choices on the appetizer part of the menu. There was no way of predicting the enormous portion that was served in a large individual baking pan. I finish only half of it.

Lee orders seafood salad, ravioli with walnut sauce, osso bucco, and hazlenut gelato. I drink a Soave, she a Valpolicella. At a nearby table are three men and one woman, all relatively young, who are intrusively boisterous, undoubtedly well fueled by wine or hard liquor.

Following dinner, we return to our cabin and get to bed at about 10:45.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 15

We arise at 6:15 to get ready for what is described as an "important face-to-face immigration inspection" in the Explorer Lounge. The ship comes to a halt at 7:15 (45 minutes ahead of schedule) and we make our way to Deck 6 (although our instructions are to enter *via* Dolce Vita on Deck 5). As the line moves forward, members of the crew return our passports to us which we show to immigration officers at the next desk. They paste a sticker on our key cards after which the ship's crew snatches back the passports. (Aye, passports, we hardly knew ye.) The process goes much more smoothly than will another such face-to-face meeting later on the cruise.

At 7:30, we're in *La Terrazza* for breakfast. I have Corn Flakes, bread, juice and coffee. As before, the room is very crowded and very very noisy. In fact, we have to wait for a table today. (Breakfast is also available in the formal dining room where one has table service. We'll partake of that later in the cruise.)

Guernsey is one of the Channel Islands, just 30 miles west of the northwest coast of France and a considerable distance from England. Nevertheless, its status is as "a self-governing British Crown

dependency." We are anchored off St. Peter Port, the capital of Guernsey (population just over 60,000). At 9:00, we assemble and are delivered by tender to the shore. It is a bright sunny day, but the waters are a bit choppy, making the tender trip somewhat bumpy. Arrival on land is at 9:30.

According to Wikipedia:

From 30 June 1940, during the Second World War, the Channel Islands were occupied by German troops. Before the occupation, 80% of Guernsey children had been evacuated to England to live with relatives or strangers during the war ... The occupying German forces deported over 1,000 Guernsey residents to camps in southern Germany, notably to the Lager Lindele (Lindele Camp) near Biberach an der Riß and to Laufen. Guernsey was very heavily fortified during World War II, out of all proportion to the island's strategic value. German defences and alterations remain visible, particularly to Castle Cornet and around the northern coast of the island. The island was liberated on 9 May 1945, now celebrated as Liberation Day across both Guernsey and Jersey.

We board a bus (our guide is Eric) that takes us on a brief scenic drive of the area before arriving at La Valette Underground Museum <http://www.lavalette.tk/> Inside is a collection of artifacts from the German occupation of the island: medals, guns, uniforms, proclamations, photos, etc. depicting life for both the citizens and occupiers during the war. I had no idea that locals were forced labor camps on the island which the Germans also populated with "undesirables" like Eastern Europeans, Jews, Russians, and others.

The museum's collection is quite repetitive (that is, how many display windows of war medals can one stand?) and we are there too long. The QuietVox that we take from our room needs to be programmed so that it receives signals from the tour leader's microphone. This is done by having one of the ship's crew activate a particular number on the box. Nevertheless, it is hardly used at all. On the bus, Eric uses the bus's communication system. And off the bus, we are largely on our own.

We leave the museum at 10:30 and re-mount the bus for a scenic drive through the countryside, eventually reaching The Little Chapel at 11:15, about 6 km away. (The island itself is quite small, 25 sq miles.) Wikipedia informs us:

The chapel was originally built by Brother Déodat in March 1914 (measuring 9 feet long by 4.5 feet wide). After taking criticism from other brothers, Déodat demolished the chapel. He finished a second chapel in July 1914 (measuring 9 feet by 6 feet). However, when the Bishop of Portsmouth visited in 1923, he could not fit through the door, so Déodat again demolished it. The third and current version of the chapel started soon after the last demolition, and measures 16 feet by 9 feet. Déodat went to France in 1939 and died there, never having seen his chapel finished.



At 11:45 we are back on the bus and are transported back to the ship by tender at 12:30. I say "we" but I mean "I" because Lee stays behind to do some shopping in St. Peter Port. I pass the time on board by reading on my Kindle. When she returns at about 2:00, we go to *La Terrazza* for lunch (salad, veggies, rolls, cookies, cheeses, coffee for me).

This morning we had reported that the bathtub had two problems: it didn't drain properly and a section of the side of the tub had come loose. A maintenance man comes to do the repairs. Adolf shows up with our long-awaited bottle of Talisker, accompanied by a bowl of nuts and an overflowing bowl of potato chips. At 5:00, the Silver Cloud sets sail for the Isles of Scilly.

At 7:00, we go to a reception for first-time travelers on SilverSea and are "treated" to a sales pitch by the cruise consultant about how to sign up for future voyages. A half-hour later, we go to *La Dame** (Deck 4)

*I suppose that we should be suspicious when reading the purple prose that the company employs in describing this restaurant: "... indulge in an evening of palette pampering, where fine wines are complemented by a set bespoke menu of regionally-inspired dishes in an intimate, elegant setting. An extraordinary six-course experience celebrating the world's most distinguished wine regions complete what is surely the finest dining at sea."

where we have a dinner reservation. The room is small as are the tables, so there is no opportunity to share a table with other passengers. I have goose liver paté plus Granny Smith apples; an intermezzo (lemon ice which has too strong a citrus taste); then sole meunière (which is excellent and comes deboned); and finally mixed fruit for desert. Lee starts with lobster salad, the intermezzo, duck (ordered medium rare but it arrives well-done, and a Grand Marnier soufflé. Our coffee comes with a plate of little cakes. The "presentation" mirrors the over-the-top one that we encountered on our first Regent Seven Seas voyage:* the plates are brought to our table (three of them - one for Lee's meal,two for my fish and

*On its various ships, Regent gives different names to its "fancy" French restaurant. We are delighted that the pretentious dome-lifting practice has been abandoned by Regent on later cruises.

veggies) under metal domes and, simultaneously, the domes are lifted to the accompaniment of *Voilà!* Lee orders a special bottle of Sancerre (at \$55!) which I don't much like. Even though we'll not eat at *La Dame* again, the bottle will be delivered to whichever restaurant we are in. This price on top of the \$60 per person fee for dinner dampens our enthusiasm (already muted) for this venue.

Following dinner, we return to our cabin. I read my Kindle. We are in bed at 10:45.

THURSDAY, MAY 16

We are up at 6:15. The ship drops anchor at 7:00. Because we have an early excursion (scheduled for 8:15), we go to the Panorama Lounge for a quick breakfast (juice, sweet rolls, coffee). The day is cool, windy, and overcast but Lee, the eternal optimist, steps outside on our balcony and claims to see patches of blue sky.

We are assigned to Zodiac Group 1 (for every excursion) but today, (*Gott sei Dank*) we will be using a local tender, not the fat rubber thingie. But all is not well. Unlike yesterday's tender, this one is not enclosed. Pictures at google photos will show some very unhappy wind-blown, water-splashed passengers. Because we are anchored a considerable distance from shore, the unpleasant ride takes about 15 minutes. And, once the tender reaches *terra firma*, there is a steep set of stone steps (some 25 of them, quite shallow requiring one to plant a foot sideways) to mount. Fortunately, there are many helping hands to assist passengers in exiting the tender and getting to the steps. Oh, well, luxury is not to be expected on an "expedition cruise," as this one is designated.

Lee writes,"We have competition today from the *MS Marco Polo*, a decidedly down-market repurposed Russian vessel full of clueless, low-class Brits. They seem to be after shopping and beer." The woman is so judgmental, doncha think?

Wikipedia informs us about the Isles of Scilly:

The Isles of Scilly are an archipelago off the southwestern tip of Cornwall. One of the islands, St Agnes, is the most southerly point in England, being over 4 miles (6.4 km) further south than the most southerly point of the British mainland at Lizard Point.

The population of all the islands at the 2011 census was 2,203. Scilly forms part of the ceremonial county of Cornwall, and some services are combined with those of Cornwall. However, since 1890, the islands have had a separate local authority. Since the passing of the Isles of Scilly Order 1930,

this authority has had the status of a county council and today is known as the Council of the Isles of Scilly.

We are docked at St. Mary's, the largest of the islands and the most populated. We are greeted at the pier by the first of three local guides. This one bears a striking resemblance to Judi Dench. We are signed up for the Garrison Walking Tour. Let's emphasize the word "walking" because there is a great deal of it, seemingly all uphill, on cobblestones, gravel, dirt, rocks, etc. - it's a miracle that I don't trip and fall. (I do confess to asking my traveling companion to hold my hand, from time to time, so that I don't fall when stepping over the rocks.) We trudge to the Garrison and Star Castle. According to Wikipedia:

Star Castle is at the centre of a fortification system around the west side of St Mary's known as the Garrison. The walls of the castle take the shape of an eight-pointed star. It comprises an outer wall around the outcrop of Hew Hill, protecting the town and the castle, with strategically placed gun batteries at regular intervals around the outer wall, allowing covering fire at all angles. A redundant windmill was converted after 1831 into Garrison Tower as a lookout tower for HM Coastguard.

The Star Castle was built in 1593 by the Surveyor of the Royal Works and mapmaker Robert Adams (d.1595), under the direction of Francis Godolphin, following the Spanish Armada of 1588. Fearing another Spanish invasion, in May 1593 Queen Elizabeth I ordered the construction of a fort and two sconces as a lookout for any intruder ships.

In 1740 Master Gunner Abraham Tovey transformed the Garrison building walls with gun batteries, including Colonel Boscawen's Battery, in a circular shape following the coast line of The Hoe. Star Castle is now a hotel.

Throughout the walk to and from the garrison, it is quite windy and cold, but after a while the sun breaks through and the winds die down. Nevertheless, the wind is sufficient to make the QuietVox boxes quite useless. The return to the pier is mostly downhill (gasp! gasp!) but we still have to navigate the 25 narrow stone steps to reach the tender. Well, we don't fall down the steps nor do we drown on the tender, and we are back to the ship at 11:00.

We head to *La Terrazza* for lunch, but it is a zoo! No tables being available, we are seated outside the doors on the deck, where it is windy and quite cool. I have a salad, veggies, kufta (too highly seasoned for me), cold meats, cookies and cheese, and coffee. The only positive news is that by the time I return for the cookies and cheese, the long lines have disappeared and the approach to the buffet is easy.

Although we have tickets for this afternoon's tour of the Abbey Gardens on Tresco, another of the Scilly Isles, I choose not to go. Lee does go (using the same tender but heading in a direction away from St. Mary's) and finds it delightful, devoting nearly three pages of her journal for the description. I use the internet (again, surprisingly fast) and read until her return at 4:30. We partake in a wee dram of Talisker, but ask Adolf not to bring more nuts, only potato chips.

At 6:00, the ship departs for Wales. At 6:45, we go to a talk that is a re-cap of today's tours and a preview of tomorrow's. We then go to *The Restaurant* for dinner and ask for a shared table. We join (or are joined by) Mimi (from Sydney, Aus), she with bright orange hair and, alas, suffering from rheumatoid arthritis; Elaine, a pleasant woman from Manchester; and Gwen and Richard (from Orlando), he a lawyer, a boor, and a self-proclaimed wine connoisseur. Lee says that "he has no off button." For my meal I have mussels, mesclun salad, chicken and veggies, chocolate ice cream, coffee. Lee has veal marsala, and pistachio gelato. With Richard's eager assistance, the bottle of Sancerre from yesterday is finished off. We are in the restaurant from 7:15 to 9:15, not too bad. Following that, we return to our room and are in bed at 10:30.

FRIDAY, MAY 17

We arise at 6:15. As before, it is a cloudy, rather cool day. What makes *this* day different is that it will be my first experience in a Zodiac. (Be still, my beating heart!) Also, two days ago Lee began getting a head cold (sneezing, coughing, loss of voice) and I may be coming down with it today. Maybe I can use this an excuse not to ride the Zodiac? Nah.

At 6:30, the ship anchors off Milford Haven, Wales (our one visit to the UK until we reach Northern Ireland on May 22). We eat a fast breakfast so that we can leave for our tour of Picton Castle at 8:15. Yes, yes, I know that you're waiting to hear my review of the Zodiac* trip. Well ... it wasn't as bad as I expected. Yes,

*Why does the tongue-twister "rubber baby buggy bumper" come to mind?

there were strong-armed crew members to assist passengers onto the floating rubber band, although my loss of balance (an increasing liability recently) made it a challenge to go down the couple of steps into the "boat" itself. SWMBO and HWO sit on the edge of the inflated balloon with nothing to hold onto (aside from a rope that I discover later). The ride starts slowly, but the driver soon accelerates and we are bumping and careening across the sea while getting splashed a bit with water. When we arrive, there is a steep ramp leading up to the pier.

We are greeted by two musicians who are playing an accordion and a violin. We meet our guide, Paul, and our bus driver, John. Paul bears a strong resemblance to Jeff Barish, not that that will help you. In other words, he is slender and impish, but well-informed about Wales and the place that we'll be visiting. After a drive through the countryside, we arrive at Picton Castle and Gardens a little after 9:00. We are in southwestern Wales, not far from Fishguard where we had arrived from Ireland by ferry in 2009. We are told that the bus will return to the pier at 10:30. A well-dressed men with an upper-class British accent comes on the bus and tells us about what we're about to see. He is also our guide inside the castle.

According to the web site <https://www.pictoncastle.co.uk/>

Picton Castle is a most unusual ancient building being as it is a fully developed medieval castle that was transformed into a stately home in the 18th century.

From the outside with its four symmetrically spaced half round towers and gatehouse entrance flanked by two narrower towers it is based upon patterns of Irish castles of the period and is the only one of this type in the mainland UK. As soon as one enters inside it is revealed not to have an inner courtyard and keep but rather a series of finely planned rooms typical of the grand country house that it is. There is no other building quite like it in Britain.



Picton Castle was constructed in 1280 at the behest of Sir John de Wogan who was Justiciary of Ireland circa 1295 – 1313. It was the centre of his estates. The castle and lands went by inheritance to the Dwnn family and the estate devolved upon one Joan Dwnn "The Golden Daughter" in the 1460s. In 1491 Joan married Sir Thomas Philipps of Cilsant in Carmarthenshire. Thus since the 1490s Picton has been the centre of the Philipps family's estates. In 1611 James I wanted to raise money to meet the cost of keeping his army in Ireland and he hit upon the idea of selling baronetcies. Sir John Philipps bought one at the cost of £1,095.

Throughout the 17th and 18th Century the Philipps's* of Picton Castle were the most powerful family

*I don't know what the etiquette is when quoting a source, but I can't let this *incorrect* apostrophe stand. If the writer intends to describe the Phillipps family, the correct plural is Phillippses.

in Pembrokeshire exercising both tremendous political, social and economic influence over all aspects of local life. They had vast estates were prominent philanthropists (being particularly supportive of the charity school movement). They were also Patrons of the arts and for generations supplied

Pembrokeshire with Sherriffs, Justices of the Peace, Lord Lieutenants and MP's.

The castle remained the centre of the Philipps family's operations in Pembrokeshire up until the end of the 20th century. The Honourable Hanning Philipps and his wife Lady Marion Philipps were that last members of the family to live in the castle and they were the ones who gifted the castle, its collections and gardens to The Picton Castle Trust in 1987 (Registered Charity No 519693). The charity created by this generous gift is charged with preserving this important part of our heritage and with encouraging access for the benefit of the people of Wales.

Well, there you have it. Now you don't have to visit to see for yourself. And you can avoid riding in a Zodiac. We wander from elegant room to elegant room, and admire the art, the furniture, the silver, yadda yadda yadda. The rooms are crowded with people not only from our bus but also from another that arrived almost simultaneously. Stern-faced guards/guides are present in every room to admonish guests who touch, fold, spindle, or mutilate items on the desktops; or who dare to touch or sit on an aged chair.

An unexpected event occurs when we ask one of the guides what an old device on one of the tables was for. She says that it looks like a stamp press, so Lee and I each insert a piece of paper and the guide presses down twice. Sure enough, it produces two images: an embossed impression saying "Picton Castle Haverfordwest" and another embossed depiction of the family crest. Little do we know that the guide who gives permission does not work for Picton Castle; in fact, she is the SilverSea guide from the other bus that transported a different group from the ferry. The result: she is scolded severely by one of the dour official guides. Such drama!

Following our time inside the castle, we wander through the gardens with their wide variety of bushes, plants, flowers, and trees, all of them clearly identified by signs. According to their web site:

Boasting one of the best plant collections in Wales, including an important collection of conifers, roses, medicinal herbs and Rhododendrons, the Estate is also historically and horticulturally important. Recognised by the Royal Horticultural Society, the gardens are now part of their Partner Gardens access scheme.



Exotic trophy plants co-exist with native flora: Bluebell Walk and nearby Peep-In-Walk provide magnificent colour from April onwards. May peaks with the flowering of masses of Rhododendrons, many unique to Picton (including Salomon Jubilee and Picton Maid). However whilst the display is at its best in May and June, summer and autumn bring woodland walks among the massive oaks and giant redwoods and the Jungle Garden, one of the largest in the UK, is still magnificent during October. With an ever changing pattern of colours and scents throughout the seasons, our Gardens never fail to enchant the visitor.

While strolling through the garden, I have an interesting discussion with Paul about Brexit and about the likelihood that Scotland will separate from Great Britain. He replied that Wales is very different from Scotland in that the residents are much less nationalistic and only a few speak Welsh. As a result, Wales will certainly keep itself attached to England. Scotland, on the other hand, may well secede, as the Brexit vote was overwhelmingly negative within its borders. He worries that Theresa May will fail to secure a Brexit agreement and that Boris Johnson (for whom he has disdain) will become Prime Minister. (As we now know, his worries have come to pass.)

We return to the pier at 11:15 and, carefully, make our way down the steep ramp to the Zodiacs. As earlier, the traversal is bumpy (and a bit scary) although we are splashed less than we were earlier. The real problem is that when leaving the big rubber ducky (and this was true on both legs of our journey), my weakened leg strength (plus lack of balance) make it difficult for me to take the big step from Zodiac to

pier.

Lunch at *La Terrazza* is typical: salad, cold cuts, potato salad, cookies and cheese, and coffee. The alert reader may ask why I always lump cookies and cheese together. It's because they are side-by-side on a platter: different types of cookies (my favorite are butterscotch) and several varieties of cheese. In fact, cheese and cookies make a delicious combination. While we are eating lunch, the ship departs at 12:45 for Skomer Island (still in Wales, a few miles off shore). Kayak exploration of the island is cancelled (the water is too rough) but a few Zodiacs do put out with some intrepid passengers on board. There are no fatalities (at least none that we hear of).

At 2:00 we go to Botha's standard lecture: a re-cap of today and a preview of tomorrow's tours. He is followed at 3:30 by a lecture by Chris Harbard on "Coastal Birds of Britain and Ireland." The presentation involves some superb color photos of birds. We then read and use the internet. I finish the April 1 issue of *The New Yorker* (not much in it) and begin reading Jon Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven*, a history of Mormonism in the U.S.

At 6:30, the ship sets sail to Ireland's Skellig Islands. We have a 7:30 reservation at *La Terrazza*. When we ask for a shared table, we are led to one with Archer, a fairly recent widower from Rhode Island. He allows that he's still eager to have female companionship. I am about to generously offer Lee's services, but think better of it. He says that he has a "girlfriend" in Phoenix, and that he welcomes our company because it keeps predatory female passengers from accosting him. Do I believe this? Not a chance! For my meal, I have pansotti pasta, lentil soup, prawns with spelt (which is not misspelt), chocolate gelato, and coffee. Lee has mesclun salad, the same prawn dish (i.e., her own portion, not pirated from my plate), pappardelle with red meat sauce, hazelnut gelato, and coffee. I have white wine, she has red - we fail to record the varieties.

SATURDAY, MAY 18

The ship did a lot of rocking and rolling during the night. We arise at 6:30. The ship's motion continues to cause some discomfort, but this will cease when we drop anchor off Skellig at 9:00. At 8:00 we have breakfast at *La Terrazza*: corn flakes, rolls, juice, coffee.

Today is Lee's wedding anniversary. Mine too. What a coincidence.

The Skellig Islands are off the western coast of Ireland. Wikipedia informs us:

The Skellig Islands (Irish: Na Scealaga), once known as "the Skellocks", are two small, steep, and rocky islands lying about 13 km (8 mi) west of Bolus Head on the Iveragh Peninsula in County Kerry, Ireland. The larger of the two is Skellig Michael (also known as Great Skellig) and, together with Little Skellig, are at the centre of a 364-hectare (899-acre) Important Bird Area established by BirdWatch Ireland in 2000. Skellig Michael is also famous for an early Christian monastery that is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The smaller of the two islands is Little Skellig (Sceilig Bheag in Irish). It is closed to the public, and as well as being Ireland's largest northern gannet (*Morus bassanus*) colony with almost 30,000 pairs. It is also one of the world's largest, and is of international importance. The island is 134 m (440 ft) tall and is approximately 1.5 km (1 mi) east-northeast of Skellig Michael.

Also known as Great Skellig (Sceilig Mhichíl in Irish), this is the larger of the two islands, with two peaks rising to over 230 m (750 ft) above sea level. With a sixth-century Christian monastery perched at 160 m (520 ft) above sea level on a ledge close to the top of the lower peak, Great Skellig is designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.



The ship circles the two islands. My camera is barely good enough to capture pictures of the northern gannets that are circling. Lee's iPhone has a better camera - she gets some excellent images by taking pictures from the outside deck. At 9:15, the ship picks up speed and we head toward Valentia Island, a considerably larger body of land (although 7 mi. long by 2 mi. wide) than the Skelligs and connected to the mainland by a causeway. Its year-round population is about 650.

I read more of the Krakauer book in the Panorama Lounge. When we return to our cabin at 11:00, we are surprised to see it decorated with four colored balloons (in the four corners of the ceiling) proclaiming Happy Anniversary, four more balloons in a little planter on the table, and a large HAPPY ANNIVERSARY banner strung above the windows. Now how did they know that this was our anniversary? Easy answer: when we were filling out information for the cruise many months ago, one of the questions asked if there was a special occasion during the voyage. Lee told them about our 50th anniversary. I admonished her at the time, fearful that the restaurant's servers would make a big production of it, as they do on Regents Seven Seas, where they assemble and sing "Happy Birthday" for the person of honor or "Let Me Call You Sweetheart" if it's an anniversary,

We arrive at Valentia Island around noon, three hours earlier than planned. An announcement on the PA informs us that all of the scheduled tours will depart earlier than scheduled. At 11:45, we have lunch at *La Terrazza* where I have the usual selection of food. At 12:15, while I remain at the restaurant table, SWMBO goes down to the Explorer Lounge for another "face-to-face inspection," this one with an Irish immigration agent. She promises to return for dessert, but at 12:45 she's still not back. Another passenger tells me that it will probably be a long time before she returns because the procedure is *exceedingly* slow and the line is *depressingly* long. At 1:00 I tell the restaurant *maitre d'* that I'm going down to stand on line, but to please save a place for Lee when (if!) she returns.

The line to reach the Explorer Lounge (Deck 6) begins in Dolce Vita (Deck 5), just as it did on May 15. However, unlike that earlier time, this one is really painfully slow (as the passenger in *La Terrazza* had warned me). Indeed, as I join the rear of the line, Lee emerges (finally!!) from the front of the line, a good 45-60 minutes after she left the lunch table. While on line, I chat with a couple from Toronto who tell me that they usually cruise on larger ships than *Silver Cloud*. I tell them that small ship cruising can be a delight if they sail with Tauck (and I bore them with details of our Tauck adventures in the Adriatic and Japan). Behind me is another person from Canada (whom I mistake for a First Nations member but who is, in fact, anglo) who is talking with a person from the U.S. They are agreeing that Canada's immigration policies are vastly better than the U.S.'s, especially in the Trump regime. I couldn't agree more! In fact, the American says that our policies can actually be quite lenient, if the immigrant "drops three anchor babies," as Ivana did, or if she has the body and face of super model, as Melania does, who then brings her parents from Slovenia on a family-based policy derided by The Donald as "chain migration." A Trump Hater! Good.

As before, our passports are handed to us by members of the ship's crew and we present them plus our room card plus ourselves to the immigration officer. And now it's clear why the thing is taking so damned long. The officer (just one woman, no second person as on May 15) is meticulous beyond what is needed. She looks at my face, checks the passport picture, looks again, checks again, and then not only stamps the passport two times but also writes something under one of the stamps. Well, one can never be too careful, I suppose, not when a high-end cruise ship might be harboring ISIS terrorists.

At 1:30, we decide to cancel our planned trip to Derrynane House, not that it sounded all that interesting. Besides, Lee is not feeling very well: her chest cold (or whatever it is) is acting up. She thinks she's running a fever and she's feeling light-headed. I really do wish that I can convince her to go to the ship's medical unit.

According to the website for Knightstown:

Knightstown itself is one of the few 'town-planned' villages of Ireland. The village of Knightstown was

laid out by Alexander Nimmo in 1830-31, but it wasn't built until the early 1840's when the quarry was greatly expanded and the works were moved to Knightstown. Nimmo envisaged a bridge when he lined up the main street (Market Street) with Renard Road across the channel on the other island.

The village was planned in a grid pattern like many towns in Europe at the time. The houses in the slate yard were built for slate workers in the 1840's. Both Jane Street & Peter Street (named for the then Knight of Kerry and his wife) followed at a later date, along with the house which was formally known as Reidy's shop.

Derrynane House is of interest as "the ancestral home of Daniel O'Connell, lawyer, politician and statesman. Situated on 120 hectares of parklands on the scenic Kerry coast, the House displays many relics of O'Connell's life and career." I suppose that this description will have to satisfy us. Instead, we call Adolf to bring more potato chips to the room.

I spend the afternoon reading more of the Krakauer book; and I start reading Richard Russo's *That Old Cape Magic* on the Kindle. Lee takes a nap. I'm worried that she has more than just a chest cold - and I urge her to go to the ship's clinic. At dinner (*The Restaurant*), we take a table for two because Lee doesn't feel up to having company. I order potted shrimp, mesclun salad, roast chicken with red cabbage and potatoes, chocolate gelato, and Riesling. Lee has salmon cakes with Thai chili sauce, spring pea/mint soup, Rogan Josh* (too spicy!), lemon meringue tart. and red wine.

*I had never heard of it either, but Wikipedia informs us that "Rogan Josh consists of pieces of lamb or mutton braised with a gravy flavored with garlic, ginger and aromatic spices (cloves, bay leaves, cardamom, and cinnamon), and in some versions incorporating onions or yogurt." And whence cometh this strange name? Again, "...the name Rogan Josh is derived from the word 'Rogan' meaning 'red color' (the same Indo-European root that is the source of the French 'rouge' and the Spanish 'rojo') and 'Josh' meaning passion or heat." Oh.

At an adjacent table are Daryl and Andrea. He's the one whom we've seen almost every day, wearing a cap with a cable from something under his clothes to the back of his head. He speaks slowly and it's difficult to understand him. When he goes to the bathroom, Andrea tells us has a glioblastoma with a prognosis of not much longer to live. (He's already outlived the 1.5-year prognosis from when the tumor was diagnosed.) He is a mechanical engineer (on the faculty at Cal State LA) and she a professor is in teacher education at Cal State Fullerton.

When we return to our room, there's another anniversary surprise. A white tablecloth has been laid across the table. There are two candles (battery-powered, of course), two place settings (plate, napkin, cutlery), and a large piece of rich-looking cake with strawberries on top and sitting on a plate on which Happy Anniversary has been dribbled with chocolate sauce. Our tummies are full from dinner, but we feel obligated to eat some of the cake. The remainder we put outside the door, hoping that it will be taken away. We head to bed at 10:30.

SUNDAY, MAY 19

We arise at 6:15 because the ship is supposed to be alongside the Cliffs of Moher at this hour. According to Wikipedia:

The Cliffs of Moher are sea cliffs located at the southwestern edge of the Burren region in County Clare, Ireland. They run for about 14 kilometres. At their southern end, they rise 120 metres (390 ft) above the Atlantic Ocean at Hag's Head, and, eight kilometres to the north, they reach their maximum height of 214 metres (702 ft) just north of O'Brien's Tower, a round stone tower near the midpoint of the cliffs, built in 1835 by Sir Cornelius O'Brien,] then continue at lower heights.

From the cliffs, and from atop the tower, visitors can see the Aran Islands in Galway Bay, the Maumturks and Twelve Pins mountain ranges to the north in County Galway, and Loop Head to the south. The cliffs rank among the most visited tourist sites in Ireland, with around 1.5 million visits per annum.

Because our cabin is on the port side of the ship, we don't expect to have a view of the cliffs as we sail to the north. So Lee throws on some clothes and goes to an observation room where she can take pictures. I stay behind and take my shower. When she returns, I open our curtains and, *wonder to behold*, we have a wonderful view of the cliffs. The captain must have turned the ship around so that the port" side is

* On a Regent Seven Seas cruise some years ago, the captain and first mate held a question-and-answer session about their careers at sea. A passenger asked the captain, "What's the dumbest question you were ever asked?" He replied, "A woman came to him with a complaint. She said that she had deliberately booked a cabin on the port side, but when the ship docked at the pier, her cabin was on the side away from the port."

toward the cliffs. (Or, perhaps, the cliffs were moved from their original location to this? Not likely.) So I get many pictures from our balcony in the quarter hour before 7:00 am.

At 7:30, we opt for a change of pace and go for breakfast not to *La Terrazza* but to *The Restaurant* where we order from the menu. I have juice, fried eggs, bacon, an English muffin, and coffee. Lee has orange and grapefruit slices, muesli, and big, dry buckwheat pancakes - yuck! At 9:00, the ship anchors off Galway. At the same time, we attend a presentation on tomorrow's excursions.

The excursion that we signed up for was supposed to occur in the afternoon, but a change of plans put it at 10:00. I brave the Zodiac ride, about 4-5 minutes, to the mainland. As we climb the stairs from the dock, we are greeted by the town crier, splendidly dressed in colorful regalia and swinging a large bell, who loudly proclaims a greeting from a large scroll. Neat!

We mount a bus with guide, Gerd, and driver, Jerry, and are driven through the countryside, arriving at 11:00 at the ruins of Dunguaire Castle, "a 16th-century tower house on the southeastern shore of Galway Bay in County Galway. The name derives from the Dun of King Guaire, the legendary king of Connacht. The castle's 75-foot (23 m) tower and its defensive wall have been restored, and the grounds are open to tourists."



Our visit is a short one (20 minutes) and we are off again, arriving at Rathbaun Farm at 11:45. <http://www.rathbaunfarm.com/> Because we are all in dire need of sustenance, not having eaten for some four hours, we are invited inside the farm house and offered a treat of tea or coffee plus homemade scones. We then head to the barn where sheep of every variety are housed, each in its own enclosure with a sign indicating the breed (Beltex, Rouge de l'Ouest, Suffolk, Cheviot, and Galway - the only native Irish breed). Several of the stalls have lambs that can't be more than a few weeks old. The owner (wearing high boots, work pants, a vest, and a cap) tells us that the wool of these sheep is of little value on the market, as it is much coarser and less comfortable to wear than wool from Merino sheep.

We are then led to an outdoor corral where a sheep dog demonstrates how he herds three sheep, not by nipping them but by merely running toward them. The owner keeps up a steady commentary during the event. Following the demonstration, we go back to the barn where some of the very young sheep are brought out and a few lucky visitors have the pleasure of bottle-feeding them.

The bus returns us to Galway where we stop for about a half-hour at Galway Cathedral (with a most unusual official name), described by Wikipedia:

The Cathedral of *Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and St Nicholas* (Irish language: *Ard-Eaglais Mhaighdean na Deastógála agus Naomh Nioclás*), commonly known as Galway Cathedral, is a Roman Catholic cathedral in Galway, Ireland and one of the largest and most impressive buildings in the city. Construction began in 1958 on the site of the old city prison. It was completed in 1965, making it the last great stone cathedral to be built in Europe. It was dedicated, jointly, to Our Lady Assumed into Heaven and to St. Nicholas.



Well, whaddya know! Here's a touristic stop to visit a structure that was built in our lifetimes. During our brief stop, we get a chance to explore the interior of the cathedral and to take some pictures. Lee and I are reminded of the lamentation by a tour guide on our Rhine cruise who said that after a few days of tourism most visitors are complaining about ABC (which can be interpreted as *Another Bloody Cathedral* or *Another Bloody Castle!*)

We return to the dreaded Zodiac and are delivered to the ship at 2:20 where we have a late lunch at *La Terrazza* (salad, chow mein, gelato, cookies and cheese, coffee). Back in our cabin during the afternoon, I read both the Krakauer and Russo books, the latter on Kindle, the former in an old-fashioned dead tree format. Lee is still feeling weak and congested. I discover that our thermometer won't work because its battery has died (so much for preparation!). She still refuses to get professional advice at the ship's clinic.

At 6:30, she goes to the Explorer Lounge to hear a local group called "The Shamrock Tenors," but she returns, disappointed, because what they performed was essentially a duplication of a CD by The High Kings that she listens to regularly. Well, that's hardly a fair criticism - others in the audience (maybe most?) were probably unfamiliar with this other source. While she's at the concert, I stay in the cabin to read.

OBSERVATION There are many differences between the English spoken by Americans and the British. Aside from the obvious spelling variations (color vs. colour); parts of a car (trunk vs. boot); etc. there are also differences in word choices. For example, if asked the question "Have you done it?" an American would answer "Yes I have" but the Brit would say "Yes I have done." What brings this to mind, here, is that Expedition Leader Schalk Botha, despite having grown up in South Africa, employs the British variant. Perhaps this comes from his living in Australia now.

We go to *The Restaurant* for dinner and are seated with Trish and Dudley from Mississippi (see May 14's entry), Shirley and David from Brighton (she's a landscape gardener and he is a museum director in Brighton), and Jodie and Jim* from western New Jersey. For dinner I have shrimp cocktail, clam

*Lee describes them as "very wealthy, conservative, snooty - they clearly find Ron and Lee not quite up to snuff." I've got to wonder - if Lee is this vitriolic in her journal, what do others say about us? I'd prefer not to know.

chowder, cod, chocolate gelato, and coffee.

The ship had been scheduled to depart Galway at 11:00 pm, but the captain announces on the PA that since we need to travel only 20 miles to Kilonan, we'll stay here overnight and travel to our destination in the morning. After reading for a while, we get to bed at 10:30.

MONDAY, MAY 20

I have made an irrevocable decision! I'm not going to do any more Zodiac trips from the ship. Yes, I don't "enjoy" the bumpy ride and the spray of water, but the real reason is that it's very difficult for me to enter into the inflatable bathtub toy or exit from it, as detailed on May 17 and 19. We are signed up for two excursions today: one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Because Lee is still going on the tours and

since the first departure is at 7:15, we get up at 5:45. It's a sunny day today but still relatively cool. We have been very lucky on this entire trip to encounter temps that are neither much too high or much too low and to avoid (for the most part) rain.

We have breakfast, as usual, at *La Terrazza*. And I learn that I've made an incorrect identification of a server's ethnicity. The serving staff seem to be assigned, from time to time, to each of the restaurants and to serve all three meals. The majority of them, mostly men but some women, are probably Samoan or Philippine. One, however, stands out from the rest: with his stocky build, bald pate, and substantial moustache, I'm convinced that he is a Bulgarian wrestler. Wrong! This morning, I take a look at his name badge - he is Fernando. Probably not Bulgarian.

Regardless of his country of origin, he did us a favor yesterday. Usually at lunch or dinner, the only coffee that one can get is Americano or espresso, but at breakfast simple drip coffee is available. So, at lunch yesterday, he brought cups of the morning-style coffee to our table. When I ask if the morning coffee is always available at lunchtime, he assures me that it is. He says that the code is to ask for "natural coffee." We'll test this later today.

The three Aran Islands, of which Inis Mór is the largest, lie just off the western coast of Ireland at the mouth of Galway Bay. The biggest town is Kilronan (population 300). According to Wikipedia:

Inishmore or Inis Mór (Irish: *Árainn Mhór*) is the largest of the Aran Islands in Galway Bay in Ireland and has an area of 31 km² (12 sq mi). Inis Mór has a population of about 840, making it the largest of the Aran Islands in terms of population and largest island off the Irish coast with no bridge or causeway to the mainland. The island is famous for its strong Irish culture, loyalty to the Irish language, and a wealth of Pre-Christian and Christian ancient sites including Dún Aonghasa, described as "the most magnificent barbaric monument in Europe" by George Petrie.

Lee departs for the Inis Mór tour at 7:00. I return to our cabin, but forget to remove the Do Not Disturb sign from the door. Thus, Spiwe enters the room and sees me, you should excuse me, "expressing" myself on the toilet. She is very embarrassed but I assure her it is my fault. I escape to the Panorama Lounge, carrying a book and USA Times. I help myself to coffee, then return to our room at 9:00. A short while later, Adolf, thinking that we are both on an excursion, enters the room without knocking because he needs to check the mini bar.

Lee returns at 9:45, very displeased with the excursion. The Zodiac ride was uneventful, but she thinks that I would have had trouble on the walk, as it involved many steps, steep ascents, and very uneven rocks and stones. Furthermore, the information center in town was closed when they arrived on shore with no indication of when (or if) it would re-open. And the Aran sweaters, for which the island is famous, were not worth the high price asked for them. She was intrigued with a local treat (seaweed pesto and goat cheese) but the stores that sell this "delicacy" are all closed. Well, that's what you get for a town with a population of 300, but one would have thought that arrangements would be made for the many people brought into town from our ship. Finally, having lugged the QuietVox with her, they were not used at all.

During her absence, I accomplish four things: I resume reading the Krakauer book; I surf the internet; I work on a NYT crossword puzzle; and I solve yesterday's NPR Will Shortz puzzle. We go to *The Restaurant* for lunch. Lee is tired of the fare at *La Terrazza* and is eager to have a hamburger. Alas, such an unusual item is not on the menu, but she orders it anyway and it does arrive, probably from Room Service. We both have lentil soup. I have beetroot salad, apple crumble, and coffee. This morning's unpleasant experience firmly in mind, Lee decides to bag the afternoon excursion to Clare Island

A complaint about the ship's operations: during the time that Zodiacs are being boarded, there are continuous PA announcements, unavoidable in the public rooms or cabins, about which group is now permitted to go to the Zodiac deck; and reminding us of all of the upcoming re-caps and "pre-caps" that we'll want to attend. And, indeed, we do attend Schalk Botha's talk at 2:30. He brings the joyous news that tomorrow, we'll actually be at the dock in Killybegs, which means that I'll get to do another excursion.

Alas, it will be back to Zodiacs on May 22, so I'll have to forfeit my visit to the Bushmills Distillery. Following Botha's presentation, there are two talks: a good one (by Damien) about cetaceans (whale, dolphin, or porpoise) in the area followed by a poorly delivered one (by Spencer) about history and society, as was the case on May 14.

We return to our room at 3:45 where I resume reading the Krakauer book and the Kindle. I also work some crossword puzzles.

In Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven*, I come upon a fascinating passage (pp. 306-307) about a psychological affliction condition called NPD (*narcissistic personality disorder*). He applies it to one of the extreme Mormons in the book, but the behavior bears an amazing resemblance to the actions of one Donald J. Trump. It is characterized by "a pervasive pattern of grandiosity (in fantasy or behavior), need for admiration, and lack of empathy." There are nine specific character traits, among which are "an exaggerated sense of self-importance; believes that he or she is special; requires excessive admiration; selfishly takes advantage of others; etc." Amazing!

We go to *The Restaurant* for dinner where we are joined by Colin and Elizabeth* from Australia (he's a

*An experience SilverSea voyager, she informs us that crème brûlée and New York cheesecake are available for dessert even though not mentioned on the menu.

metallurgical engineer who worked in the U.S. for ten years; she's a person who after law school chose to teach chemistry); and, for the third time, by Trish and Dudley. I start with an onion/cheese tart followed by a mesclun salad, chicken in a pot with matzoh balls (really!) and veggies, and ending with cheese cake (see above) and coffee. Lee has the same tart, then halibut with smoked eel (overcooked!), and crème brûlée. We both drink a Sauvignon Blanc/Semillon blend. We are back in our room at 9:30 and in bed an hour later. Lee has a restless night with lots of coughing. It is violent enough to wake me up. And I have difficulty returning to sleep.

TUESDAY, MAY 21

We are awake at 6:30. The ship docks at Killybegs at 7:30. It is another bright, sunny day. Our luck is holding. I step outside on the balcony to take some pictures. Alas, the bucolic splendor is ruined by a nasty smell from the port (raw sewage?). The dining room is very crowded when we go to breakfast at *La Terrazza*. We are seated with Ed and Michelle from San Diego. He volunteers for U.S. Navy-related events and encourages us strongly to visit the museum on Battleship Midway when we're in San Diego. He gives me his card so that I can contact him for a free pass. Somehow, between the restaurant and our room, I manage to lose the card, so when we see him in the hall he gives me another.

As promised, we are docked at the pier. At 9:30, we leave for the excursion entitled "Wild Donegal & Glencolmcille." When Lee and I visited Ireland in 2009, we visited Glencolmcille and Donegal; ate dinner in Killybegs; and stayed nearby at Castle Murray House. The guide on today's bus is Eugene and the driver is Ben. Eugene's Irish accent is interesting: for example, he pronounces HOUSE as HOISE, SIX as SEX, and TOWER as TOIRE. The bus winds through the countryside past fields with sheep, some of whom skitter away when the bus approaches, others of whom are quite blasé about avoiding contact with the petrol-fueled vehicle.

We have a photo stop at 10:20, overlooking a broad beach with cliffs on every side and gloriously blue water. Although the sun is out, it is quite chilly. At 10:50, we've arrived at the Folk Village Glencolmcille - and it looks the same as it did in 2009. We are invited into the welcome center where we are treated to coffee or tea plus scones and are entertained by a fiddle player and a guitarist/vocalist. Outside the welcome center are three men demonstrating regional crafts: one is spinning wool, another is whittling, and the third is assembling crosses out of rushes.

A college student, with a very pronounced Irish accent, leads us to three different homes, each representing a different era in the life of the village. As described in the official web site, "Each cottage is an exact replica of a dwelling used by the local people in each of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and is equipped with the furniture, artifacts and utensils of its particular period. A reconstructed school house, fisherman's dwelling and tiny pub-grocer offer additional insights into rural Irish life in one of the most remote corners of the country." At 12:45, we are back on the bus and heading to the harbor where we'll re-board our ship.



But before leaving, allow me to insert some information from my 2009 travelogue about our visit to this region:

The area has been settled since neolithic times and was the residence for Saint Columba (6th century). According to Wikipedia, "Tradition asserts that, sometime around 560, he became involved in a quarrel with Saint Finnian of Moville over a psalter. Columba copied the manuscript at the scriptorium under Saint Finnian, intending to keep the copy. Saint Finnian disputed his right to keep the copy. The dispute eventually led to the pitched Battle of Cúl Dreimhne in 561, during which many men were killed. A synod of clerics and scholars threatened to excommunicate him for these deaths, but St. Brendan of Birr spoke on his behalf with the result that he was allowed to go into exile instead. Columba suggested that he would work as a missionary in Scotland to help convert as many people as had been killed in the battle. He exiled* himself from Ireland, to return only once again, several years later."

*His name and the account of his expulsion from Ireland reminded me that we encountered this gentleman during our Scotland travels. Quoting from my 2001 travelog about Iona, "Supposedly he chose this place because it was the first island from which he was *unable* to look back and see his homeland. He is a new-found hero of mine because he banned cows and women from the island: 'Where there is a cow, there is a woman, and where there is a woman, there is mischief.' How true, how true. No wonder he achieved cult status and eventually was made a saint ... Legend has it that the original chapel [on Iona] could only be completed through human sacrifice. Oran, one of the older monks in Columba's entourage, apparently volunteered to be buried alive, and was found to have survived the ordeal when the grave was opened a few days later. Declaring that he had seen hell and it wasn't all bad, he was promptly reinterred for blasphemy."

Outside the museum, I'm admiring a small lake when I notice that the man standing next to me is wearing a *hated* New York Yankees hat. I can't resist sneering, "Oh, another Yankee fan" to which he responds, in a German accent, "Is there something wrong with it? I bought the hat because it was inexpensive and I figured it wouldn't offend anyone in Ireland." Turns out he is a retired school teacher from Nürnberg who is sightseeing with some other Germans by tour bus. I try to explain to him that while the Yankees are by far the most successful baseball team in history, they are viewed by many of us as The Evil Empire Incarnate. Although his English is excellent (that's the subject that he taught in school), I'm not sure that I get the message across to him.

Two hours later, we are at a CD shop in Donegal where we find not only an excellent CD but also the German tourist from the Folk Village Museum. "Most suspicious," think I to myself. "If he shows up at our next stop, I'm calling the police." But he doesn't.

Back to 2019. On the bus trip back to the ship, we pass many fields with scurrying sheep and lambs. As before, the ewes, who have seen it all, are oblivious to the motorized vehicle approaching them. We stop

at 12:50 for a final photo op, but I don't bother to take advantage of it. At 1:10, we are back on board. Lunch at *La Terrazza* is my regular: salad, rolls, cookies and cheese, coffee. I'd love to report that the advice that Fernando gave us about how to get regular drip coffee later in the day (see May 20) doesn't work very well. Our female server is reluctant to provide us with anything other than Americano, but after delaying for an unseemly time, she finally delivers warmed-over, stale, drip coffee. Great!

We spend the afternoon in our cabin. After surfing the internet, I finish the Krakauer book, resume reading the Russo on Kindle, and read a *Yale Alumni Magazine* and an issue of *The New Yorker*. We dispense with the potato chips, today, although we do indulge in wee dram of the sacred brew. At 5:15, the ship departs for Portrush, Northern Ireland.

At 7:00 in the Explorer Lounge, we attend the "Captain's Farewell and Silver Cloud Crew Parade," the type of "spontaneous" celebration that all cruise lines put on at the end of a journey. Hosted by Moss Hills, everybody who is everybody is brought on stage: officers of the ship, expedition crew, guys from the engine room, dining hosts, dining room servers, butlers, housekeepers, entertainers, and ... (I'm sure that I've omitted some categories - I hope that they won't be angry with me.)

At 7:30, we go to dinner at *The Restaurant*. Earlier, we had received a card inviting us to eat with social director Moss Hills. We accepted, not knowing what to expect. As it turns out, the ship's officers and much of the crew are seated individually at tables scattered throughout the restaurant and guests are invited to eat with different staff. Also present at our table are: Graeme and Q* (from New Zealand);

*Her name is Querida, but she insists on being called Q.

Scott and Jacqueline Forman (from Greensboro, NC); and Elaine (from Manchester) whom we met at dinner on May 16.

My meal consists of lobster bisque, mesclun salad, Arctic char for me, beef tenderloin for Lee, cheese cake, and coffee. At dinner, Scott and I discover that we both have a New York connection; as a boy, he lived in both Brooklyn and Bronx. He recommends two books: *City Boy* by Herman Wouk (about a kid who had many adventures on the streets of the city) and *Electric October* by Kevin Cook, an account of the 1947 World Series. I've got the former on hold in the library and I asked the library to buy the latter - it proved to be wonderful, the story being told through the lives, both before and after 1947, of the two managers and four key players in that series.

But the highlight of the evening was a tale told by Moss Hills. In 1991, he and his wife were entertainers on a Greek-owned cruise ship, *Oceanos*. The ship was in very rough waters off the coast of South Africa. The passengers heard an explosion and all of the lights went out. Moss went to the bridge to find out what had happened and discovered that none of the officers were there. They had abandoned ship! With their luggage! So it was left to Moss, his wife, and the magician to organize the more than 500 passengers for evacuation. They got about 200 into life boats, but were unable to launch the remaining boats because the ship was listing badly, almost toppling over. They managed to radio for help and the South African military sent helicopters that airlifted passengers from the ship's deck. The helicopter crew would haul people up two at a time and when the cabin was full they'd take them to shore, then return for more. The last ones to be evacuated were the three entertainers. Shortly after everyone was on land, the ship sank. The story as told by Moss is horrendous. You can get some of the flavor of it from these news articles and video:

<https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1991-08-06-mn-471-story.html>

<https://www.nytimes.com/1991/08/05/world/over-500-are-rescued-as-greek-cruise-ship-sinks-off-south-african-coast.html>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCiuK7qcxU4>

Moss has to rush through his description because he's scheduled to perform (guitar and vocals) in the Panorama Lounge at 9:45. Everyone at the table thanks him and wishes him well.

We get to bed at 11:00

WEDNESDAY, MAY 22

We arise at 6:30. Lee has had another restless night with lots of coughing. This persists after we get up. The good news is that it's another brilliantly sunny day. Amazing! At 7:00, the ship anchors off Portrush in Northern Ireland.

We discover that there is no cold water coming from the sink faucet. Fortunately, we can get cold water from the mini bar. I'll report this later. Another problem (related?) - the bath water is brown and sooty, not evident during a shower but very evident during a bath. (This was true a couple of days ago, as well.)

Breakfast is at *La Terrazza*: Rice Krispies, bread, juice, coffee. At 8:15, Lee leaves for the excursion entitled "Dunluce Castle & Giant's Causeway." According to the Daily Chronicle, this castle has been used in *Game of Thrones*, a program that Lee and I may be the only persons in the entire universe never to have watched.

"What," you ask, "Is the Giant's Causeway?" Here's Wikipedia to the rescue:

The Giant's Causeway is an area of about 40,000 interlocking basalt columns, the result of an ancient volcanic fissure eruption. It is located in County Antrim on the north coast of Northern Ireland, about three miles (4.8 km) northeast of the town of Bushmills.



It was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1986, and a national nature reserve in 1987 by the Department of the Environment for Northern Ireland. In a 2005 poll of Radio Times readers, the Giant's Causeway was named as the fourth greatest natural wonder in the United Kingdom. The tops of the columns form stepping stones that lead from the cliff foot and disappear under the sea. Most of the columns are hexagonal, although there are also some with four, five, seven or eight sides.[6] The tallest are about 12 metres (39 ft) high, and the solidified lava in the cliffs is 28 metres (92 ft) thick in places.

According to legend, the columns are the remains of a causeway built by a giant. The story goes that the Irish giant Fionn mac Cumhail (Finn MacCool), from the Fenian Cycle of Gaelic mythology, was challenged to a fight by the Scottish giant Benandonner. Fionn accepted the challenge and built the causeway across the North Channel so that the two giants could meet. In one version of the story, Fionn defeats Benandonner. In another, Fionn hides from Benandonner when he realises that his foe is much bigger than he is. Fionn's wife, Oonagh, disguises Fionn as a baby and tucks him in a cradle. When Benandonner sees the size of the 'baby', he reckons that its father, Fionn, must be a giant among giants. He flees back to Scotland in fright, destroying the causeway behind him so that Fionn would be unable to chase him down. Across the sea, there are identical basalt columns (a part of the same ancient lava flow) at Fingal's Cave on the Scottish isle of Staffa, and it is possible that the story was influenced by this.

I head to the Panorama Lounge, where I work some crossword puzzles, read Russo on the Kindle, and drink some coffee. At 10:00, I try to return to our cabin, but Spiwe is still working in it. This is still true at 10:25. But at 10:55 I can get back in. Adolf has pulled our suitcases from under the bed, as a reminder that we need to pack them and have them outside the door by 11:00 tonight. He leaves a card offering his assistance in packing. No thanks.

Lee returns at 1:30. One of the highlights of her excursion was viewing the Royal Portrush Golf Club where the British Open (known to locals, simply, as "The Open") will be held in mid-July. This course was last used for the tournament in 1951.

I have no record of our having had lunch, but I'll bet that we did. We pack our suitcases as completely as we can. I need to wait until after dinner before I can pack my sport jacket. We want to print boarding passes for tomorrow's flights, but this presents a problem - there is no business center onboard that offers printing. So Lee needs to do the check-in online in our cabin, then email the file (as an attachment) to the reception desk, where the clerk on duty opens the file and prints the passes. Sayeth SWMBO, "What a ridiculous waste of the passenger's time"

At 6:00, we go to a recap and farewell by the expedition team. There are presentations: by Chris about birds (essentially identical to the one on May 17; by (nameless person) about flowers; and by Spencer about history (about as awkward and poorly presented as on May 14 and 20). Then, there is a video (with sound effects and music) produced by Deis Elterman, the videographer who went on many of the excursions. A copy of this on DVD will be given to every passenger.

At 7:30, we have dinner at *La Terrazza*. We decide to sit at a table for two. I have vegetable soup, Pansotti pasta with walnut cream sauce, prawns with cognac, chocolate gelato and coffee. Lee has caprese salad, riboletta (a Tuscan soup), pappardelle with duck in tomato sauce, cassata (sponge cake moistened with fruit juices), and coffee. At 9:30 we return to the room where we finish packing and put the two large hard-sided suitcases outside the door. I finish reading Russo's *That Old Cape Magic*. Lee is continuing to cough badly. Now it's too late in the trip to go to the clinic, but I insist that when we get to JFK tomorrow she call for an appointment as soon as possible with her primary care physician. We go to bed at 11:00.

THURSDAY, MAY 23

I awaken at 2:30 and can't get back to sleep. What sort of idiot gets jet lag *before* going on a flight? Lee awakens at 3:45 with a severe coughing spell. Finally, I get out of bed at 4:15 to read on Kindle. I start Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods* about hiking the Appalachian Trail, all 2100 miles of it, from Georgia to Maine. Of course, circumstances arise that prevent his doing the entire trail, but he does manage a good portion of it, accompanied by a rather eccentric quasi-friend. I return to bed at 5:00 and don't awaken until the alarm sounds at 6:15. The ship arrives at Dublin at 7:00. The final issue of Daily Chronicle gives the distances for each leg of this cruise; the overall distance from Amsterdam to here is 1580 nautical miles. (If you need a refresher on what a nautical mile is, so to p. 20.)

At 7:00 we go to breakfast at *La Terrazza*, then to Reception (Deck 6) to recover our passports. While standing on line, Moss Hills gives us a flash drive with a video and still photographs related to the Oceanos mis-adventure. The sky is overcast, there is partial sun, and the air is cool. The luggage, placed outside the door last night, has a dark blue label signifying transfer to the airport. At 8:15, a PA announcement says that we may leave the ship. We locate our bags among the many that are gathered and wheel them to the bus. It's a relatively short drive to the airport. We arrive at 9:00.

We check in and leave our bags at the desk. And then it gets complicated as we go up two escalators to airport security where we are required to empty our pockets, remove liquids from the carry-ons, remove electronic devices (laptop, iPad, phone, camera), and remove my belt. We then do down another escalator and are directed to follow the American flags that are conveniently placed along the wall. This is for U.S. citizens only. Irish security not being intrusive enough, we now go through U.S. security where we remove liquids but not electronics and we do not have to empty our pockets. Lee, not 75 years old, has to remove her shoes. We then pass through a second duty-free store where we are assaulted by bright neon lights, rock music, and the aroma of cheap (or not so cheap) perfumes.

Now down yet another escalator (it seems to me that we must be back at the level where we started) and

we reach U.S. Customs and Immigration. Because we have Global Entry, we can proceed directly to computer terminals that instruct us to lay our passports on the screen. Lee has no trouble, but for some reason mine will not scan. All is not lost, however - I have the option of typing my name and birthday. We are issued receipts that we take to an official who asks a few perfunctory questions and waves us through. The customs officer takes our word that we are not importing any "nasties" but he really has no choice as we deposited our luggage at the Delta ticket counter. Apparently (and this turns out to be true), we have now cleared U.S. Customs and Immigration and will not have to do so again when we arrive at JFK. Amazing!

And now it is another long walk to Gate 426. (We stop to rest, several times, because Lee's illness is causing difficulties.) Our flight, scheduled to depart at 11:35, is delayed until 12:15 (with boarding to begin at 11:45). We can't find the Business Class Lounge (for Delta and other airlines), but discover that it is one level down, directly below the departure gate, but requiring a staircase that is a considerable distance from here. So we traipse to the stairs, descend one level, traipse to the lounge ... and discover that there is a fee of €39. Well! We then learn that this is for people who do not have seats in Business Class. For plutocrats like us, the fee is waived. In the lounge, the air conditioning is minimal (as is often true in lounges in foreign airports) but at least we can relax and enjoy some coffee and snacks.

Lee opens her iPad and discovers an email from Delta, early this morning, advising that they are trying to re-book us to a later flight because of the delay. (This is reminiscent of the 3:00 am message that BritishAir sent last year telling us that our flight from Manchester to London had been canceled.) Well, obviously this didn't happen because the check-in at the Delta counter showed us on DL 45, as expected. At 10:30, we check the display board in the lounge and it, too, shows departure at 12:15 (with boarding at 11:45).

When I finally cool down, I have a coffee and pastry. Lee, clumsy girl that she is, drops her pastry coated with jam on her clothes, so she goes to the loo* (love that word!) to clean up. At 11:40, we retrace our

*Isn't there a nursery rhyme that goes "skip to the loo"? Well, maybe not.

steps, but this time we find an elevator to avoid climbing the stairs. The plane is a 767-400ER, similar to the one that we flew from Seattle to Amsterdam. One minor difference: the lavatory is at the rear of Business Class rather than in front. We are seated in center seats 2B and 2C. Much to our distress, the seats in front of us are occupied by a young mother and her infant and, I assume, the child's grandmother. Across the aisle in Seat 1D is the father and a toddler son. We are fearful that the flight will be filled with screams from the infant, but in fact it is the older boy who fusses and cries from time to time.

We are offered juice or champagne. At 12:15, we "enjoy" the same safety video that we saw on May 5. Push back from the terminal occurs at 12:20 and we are air-borne at 12:40. We anticipate a flying time of about seven hours to JFK but the captain announces that he estimates six-and-a-quarter hours; if true, we'll have no trouble catching our Seattle flight. While sipping a Macallan (see p.3), not to my taste but one can't be too choosy, I read the Bryson book (on Kindle) and another issue of *The New Yorker*. Although it is too early in the day, we are offered a full dinner-sized meal: starters (shrimp cocktail, wedge salad, tomato bisque) followed by grilled salmon/potato salad/green beans; I pass on dessert.

At 2:20, I set my watch back five hours (for EDT) and proceed to work crossword puzzles and read the Bryson book. Because our destination is New York and not Seattle, I note that the flight path is south of Iceland and Greenland rather than across them. And the captain was correct in his estimate: we are wheels down at JFK at 1:52, three minutes ahead of the original schedule. In contrast to head winds that are often experienced in this direction, we must have taken advantage of tail winds.

When we emerge from the plane, we find ourselves in a domestic terminal, just three gates down from where our Seattle flight will leave. No immigration! No customs! I wonder if any (many?) other foreign airports offer U.S. Immigration and Customs. We (and everyone else) have experienced world-class delays when trying to clear immigration in Seattle - there are just not enough agents to handle the

overseas flights that seem to arrive at about the same time of day.

We have more than two hours before we need to leave, so we find the very large (and very very crowded and very very very noisy) Business Class Lounge. I guess I've been away from the Northeast for too long, but I judge my fellow travelers to be rude, loud, gruff, inconsiderate, and sporting ugly Noo Yawk accents (which, at one time, would have sounded mellifluous to my ears. Shame on me! (Or is it shame on them?) On top of this, they look so unhappy. Smiles are at a minimum. Everyone's face is drawn into a scowl, as if they experienced terrible hardships today and are expecting more before the day is done.

Lee goes into the hallway (away from the noise) to call Dr. Wingren's office. One appointment is possible tomorrow with Tia Ramirez, his RN. (Jumping ahead - I go with Lee to the doctor's office on Friday. The diagnosis is pleurisy. A chest X-Ray is ordered, so we go directly to St. Anthony's. When the result comes back on Monday of next week, it is pneumonia in the right lung. So I was right in urging Lee not to dismiss this as merely a chest cold; and I'm relieved that it didn't develop into something much worse, a virulent form of pneumonia that can result in hospitalization or, at her age, death.)

At 4:10, we board the plane, a Boeing 757 with 2-2 seating in Business Class. At last I have a window seat! While waiting for push back, it has started to rain ... hard! Huge puddles are forming - and the ground crew is rushing for cover. Even though this is an older and less elegant plane than the 767, we are surprised to discover that the seats are lie-flat. After a while, the deluge ends and the sun appears, but we are held at the gate because of storms in the area. Well, that's the "official" reason, but I think that the real reason is that the captain and co-captain arrive late because they were held up in city traffic, compounded by the storm. Well, our departure that was scheduled for 4:30 is now set for 5:20. The captain estimates a flying time of 5 1/2 hours (vs. the advertised 6 1/2 hours) so we might arrive approximately on time.

The flight path map shows, just south of Philadelphia, a place called Sicklerville. Why? Is this the captain's home? At 5:35, we've not made much progress: we've left the terminal but are just barely on a taxi strip. At 5:40, we're firmly on the taxi strip and are number five for take-off. There is still a light rain. Finally, at 6:05 we are air-borne. By 6:10 we are above the clouds and the pleasure of having a window seat is gone. Oh, well. Time to set my watch back three hours for PDT.

At 3:40, we have our second big meal of the day. I order chicken, veggies, salad, and a roll. I'm not very hungry (what a surprise!) so I eat only about half. During the flight, I read more of Bryson (on the Kindle) and work crosswords. We arrive in Seattle at 8:35, about 30 minutes later than scheduled.

SUMMARY OF READING ON THE TRIP:

Magazines: *TIME* (one issue), *The New Yorker* (five issues), *The Progressive* (two issues), *Yale Alumni Magazine* (three issues)

Books:

Kindle: Richard Russo's *That Old Cape Magic*, Bill Bryson's *A Walk in the Woods*, Kate Atkinson's *One Good Turn*

Hard or soft cover: Jon Krakauer's *Under the Banner of Heaven*