

St. Joseph's P.S. outing to the Ulster History Park

Our day out 2

OUR SCHOOL outing was to the 'Ulster History Park' at Gortin near Omagh on Thursday, 18th June, 1992. We went in a big yellow bus and left Poyntzpass at about 9.30 a.m. We went through Markethill and Armagh. It was a lovely day.

We arrived at Gortin at about 10.45 a.m. We were the only school there that day, so the guides had plenty of time to show us round. We were divided into three groups to go round the park. The Ulster History Park traces the story of settlement in Ireland from the Stone Age to the Normans. There are many full-scale models of homes and monuments through the ages.

The first settlers came to Ireland about 7000 B.C. and lived by hunting and fishing. They hunted wild pigs, grouse, pigeons and fished for salmon, eels and trout. They also gathered wild fruit, berries, nuts and seeds. There was a very realistic model of a stone age man fishing in the stream. At first we thought he was real!

These first people in Ireland lived in huts made from hazel saplings bent over and held together and covered with deer skins. They could be quickly built but didn't last very long.

The very first farmers lived in Ireland between 4000 BC and 2000 BC. They stayed in the same place for a long time and so they built more permanent houses. Their houses were built with wattle and thatch and some animal skins. Wattle is made by weaving thin sticks in and out through each other. Hazel rods were good for this. Some of these houses had two walls with the space between packed with ferns to keep out the draught.

These people buried their dead in tombs which were sometimes marked with standing stones or dolmens. There were models of different sorts of tombs.

There was a crannog, in the middle of a lake. We weren't able to go to it, because the bridge was being repaired. On the shore of the lake there were several dug-out canoes — we got into them but not on the water.

We were shown how to read the Ogham alphabet on an Ogham stone. You read from the bottom up, and across the top.

Next we visited the monastic settlement. This consisted of a church, a round tower, a holy well, monks cells all surrounded by a wall.



In an 'Iron Age' house.



Diane, Sheena, Gemma and Aisling at the Holy Well.

Everything was made of stone, even the monks beds. The walls were all very thick. The round tower was about 30 metres high and the door was four metres above the ground. They were used as bell towers and for storing valuables or as places to hide if the monastery was being attacked by the vikings.

We then went to visit a Norman Motte and Bailey Castle. It was up a very steep hill. The hill was surrounded by a high wooden fence. There was a strong building on top of the mound. There was a good view of the whole history park from there.

We then went to the picnic area for our lunch.

We enjoyed our visit very much, the models were really excellent and the guides were very friendly and helpful. We would really recommend a visit as an interesting historical day out.

From Gortin we then went to the Ulster-American Folk Park at Omagh just a couple of miles away. It was crowded and we hadn't a great deal of time but we still had a great deal of fun. We were back in Poyntzpass around six o'clock. We'd had a great time.



Some of the buildings in the Early Christian Monastery.



Colin has a 'go' at grinding the corn.



On our way to the Norman Motte and Bailey Castle.



On the emigrant ship at the Ulster/American Folk Park.