

Kingdom of Meteorology

Irish Met Society Field Trip 2010

By Dr Emily Gleeson, Secretary, Irish Met Society

Valentia Observatory October 2010

Words and imagery cannot fully describe the events of October 8th-10th 2010 when the town of Caherciveen, Co. Kerry was swarmed by a group of weather enthusiasts. People of varied backgrounds, from ages 4 to 90, made their way from all corners of Ireland to the meteorological mecca of Valentia Observatory. So how did all of this come about?

Evelyn Cusack came up with

the idea for the field trip in October 2009 when she realised, while reading Brendan McWilliams' Weather Eye book, that 2010 marked the 150th anniversary of weather observing in Valentia. The Society was delighted when the director of Met Éireann, Liam Campbell, and the Head of Instrumentation and Environmental Monitoring, Eoin Moran, gave them the go ahead to bring a group to Valentia Observatory, which is not normally open to the public. Within days of advertising this event, it became clear that it was going to be spe-

cial.

The Irish Met Society spent 6 months organising the field trip but of course it would not have been possible without the help of a lot of people, in particular the staff of Valentia Observatory who were truly outstanding. Not only did they guide the guests through a weather balloon launch and scientific tour of the Observatory, they also ensured that the Observatory grounds were in perfect condition and helped with traffic and crowd control.

"Just after the Rain"

Photograph taken by
Paul Whiteley



"St. John's Point Lighthouse"

Photograph taken by
Carol Ann Peters



Group photo at the weather balloon launch, Valentia Observatory. Photograph taken by Alan Landers.

The Met Society is extremely grateful for all of this extra work carried out by Mike Crean, Mike Donegan, Andrew Garvey, Mike Gill, Noelle Gillespie, Feilim Hanniffy, Keith Lambkin, Bing Li, Leo McCarthy, John Murphy, Aoife ní Bhríon, John O'Connor, Mary O'Sullivan, Shane Ryan, Robert Slattery, Claudia Stroie and Brian Walsh - it was clear to everyone how proud they are of Valentia Observatory.

Friday October 8th 2010

8am on Friday October 8th marked the 150th anniversary of the first weather observation recorded in Valentia and gradually throughout the day people began arriving in Caherciveen for their weekend of meteorology. The registration desk was busy from late afternoon, and Créidhe O'Sullivan and Dean McCarthy, NUI Maynooth, kept guests entertained with their physics tricks, including

cloud in a jar, tornado in a bottle and inseparable books!

The table quiz kicked off shortly after 8pm and it was overwhelming to see over 100 people taking part, even though it clashed with a Republic of Ireland soccer match. Sinéad Duffy, Evelyn Cusack and Emily Gleeson were quiz masters for the night. Dominic Foley and Kieran Commins



Top left: Kieran Commins and Dominic Foley (quiz adjudicators). **Top right:** Young weather enthusiasts, Rebecca and Laura Coyle, with their mother Maureen. **Middle left:** Suzanne Mulholland, Ciara McTeigue, Teresa Comiskey, Jessie Butler and Teresa's son Shaun. **Middle right:** Emily Gleeson, Morgan Geraghty and Sinéad Duffy organising the table quiz. **Bottom left:** Irish Met Society table quiz winners: Sarah McMonagle, Dermot McMonagle, Evelyn Cusack (IMS), Patricia Hamilton and Phyllis McMonagle (the McMonagles are voluntary weather observers from Cavan). **Bottom right:** Winners of the novelty weather round: Richard Griffith, Stephen Burt, Marie Doyle, Colette McCarthy and Clare Norris.

were busy as bees with all the correcting and Morgan Geraghty, who compiled the quiz, oversaw the event. The McMonagle family (Phyllis, Dermot and Sarah) from Co. Cavan, together with Patricia Hamilton, Met Éireann, took the overall prize and seemed pleased with their Galileo thermometers and Met Society membership certificates. Marie Doyle, Colette McCarthy and Clare Norris, along with Stephen Burt and Richard Griffith from the Royal Met Society, won the novelty weather round. It was ironic that Stephen actually won a book which he co-edited!!

Saturday October 9th

RTÉ's CountryWide team kindly accepted an invitation to broadcast their show from Caherciveen to coincide with the Met Society field trip. Guests on the show included Mike Crean, Evelyn Cusack, Mick O'Connell (footballer), John Falvey (coast guard), John O'Sullivan (Valentia Island) and local musicians. By 8am a considerable crowd had gathered to watch a radio show in the making.



Damien O'Reilly, CountryWide, with Evelyn Cusack, John Falvey, Mick O'Connell and John O'Sullivan.

At the same time, Ken Bond, an entomologist (insect expert) had attracted attention outside the Ring of Kerry hotel as he emptied the contents of his moth traps.



Ken Bond, UCC, with his moth trappings.

There was a great buzz about the place and Aodhagán Roddy, President of the Irish Met Society got the main meteorological proceedings underway at 10am. Mike Crean set the scene with an historical overview of Valentia Observatory and Keith Lambkin followed with an introduction to all of the scientific programmes in Valentia and the site's importance on the world stage.



Dr Aodhagán Roddy, President, Irish Met Society.



Valentia Field Trip participants seated in the Ring of Kerry Hotel.



Mike Crean, Chief Operations Officer, Valentia Observatory.



Keith Lambkin, Chief Scientist, Valentia Observatory.

Shortly before midday all participants made their way to the Observatory, for the first time, to see the midday weather balloon launch. Keith Lambkin did a wonderful job in setting the scene and ensuring that the participants knew the significance of what they were about to see. The easterly wind and turbulent atmosphere meant that the balloon almost hit the ground a few times before embarking on its 10 km journey through the atmosphere.



Midday balloon launch at Valentia Observatory, October 9th 2010.



Top left: Máire Murphy holding a seismograph trace. **Top right:** A group in the phenological garden, Valentia Observatory. **Bottom left:** Groups scattered around Valentia Observatory. **Bottom right:** Noelle Gillespie with a half-inflated ozone balloon.

One of the highlights of the field trip was the tour of Valentia Observatory on Saturday afternoon. There were 11 stages to the tour, each one manned by a Met Éireann scientist. Participants were split into groups, each with a group leader, and they found out about seismology, phenology, weather observing and ozone as well as many other interesting topics. Guests left the Observatory in high spirits but hungry for more. The Met Society would like to thank all group leaders,

in particular Dónal Black, James Brady, Ruth Coughlan, Colm Faherty, Jim Hamilton, Emilia Main, Dean McCarthy, Aoife Murray, Créidhe O'Sullivan and Michael Walsh.

On their return from the Observatory guests were welcomed by Liam Campbell, director of Met Éireann. Evelyn Cusack took to the floor shortly after that to take the audience on a weather tour which started with the Big Bang

and looked to the future.

The Irish Met Society was delighted to have 15 children taking part in the field trip. Each child received a booklet of weather puzzles, including a quiz to complete during the Observatory tour. The prize ceremony for this quiz followed Evelyn's lecture, with Liam Conaghan, Calum Nolan, Rebecca Coyle, Ciarán Clifford and Ronan Clifford taking the spoils.



Left: Calum Nolan, Ronan Clifford, Ciarán Clifford, Emily Gleeson, Liam Conaghan and Rebecca Coyle - Valentia Observatory quiz prize winners. **Right:** Ronan Clifford and Rebecca Coyle with Evelyn Cusack.



After a day of lectures and tours, 130 participants joined the Society for a meal in the Ring of Kerry hotel and the party lasted well into the night. The manager of the hotel, Maura McCarthy, and all of the staff were absolutely brilliant throughout the entire weekend. Their organisation and helpfulness really added to the occasion.

Sunday October 10th

After a very late night it was amazing to find a crowd of 110 people waiting to board 2 coaches to Valentia Island at 9.30am on Sunday morning. The Society is extremely grateful to Tom Horgan (Met Éireann retired) for recruiting Sheila Burns, Eithne Garvey and Pat O'Shea and himself (Iveragh heritage group) as tour guides on Valentia Island. It was fantastic to learn about the history of Valentia Island and the Telegraph Cable from them.

The tour also encompassed the Skellig Experience museum (John O'Sullivan kindly accepted the Met Society's booking and opened especially for the occasion) and the Valentia Island Heritage Centre. The Heritage Centre is run by 5 volunteers: Anita Guiney, Marie and Richard Williams and Pam and Michael Twentyman. They kindly offered to open their museum for several hours, and guests were treated to a wonderful lecture by geologist David Howard. The Heritage Centre houses a replica of the Tetrapod Trackway (footprints of a Tetrapod, an amphibian which survived in the area 390 million years ago) as well as impressive displays on all aspects of Valentia Island including the first transatlantic cable, the slate quarry and meteorological observing. Valentia native, Michael Egan, also provided invaluable help and guidance to the Met Society and recruited Micheál Lyne and Richard Williams to speak about the Slate Quarry and Protestant Church while

he himself enlightened the groups on the Altazamuth. It would not have made sense to leave Valentia Island without seeing the ruins of Revenue House, the original meteorological observatory. John Lyne, site owner, hopped onto each bus in turn to set the scene.

300 people took part in the Met Society's 2010 field trip and each helped to make this field trip a success. Hundreds more had to be turned down such was the popularity of the event. Valentia is special and the Irish Met Society is proud to have been involved in the 150th anniversary. Here's to the 200th anniversary!

Quote of the weekend:

"Do not worry if your job is small and your rewards are few. Just remember that the mighty oak was once a nut like you"



Top left: A group at the Altazamuth Stone, Valentia Island. **Top right:** Dominic Foley, Créidhe O'Sullivan and Dean McCarthy at the Tetrapod Trackway, Valentia Island. **Bottom left:** Anita Guiney, Pam Twentyman, Evelyn Cusack, Marie Williams and David Howard at the Valentia Island Heritage Centre. **Bottom right:** Dermot McMonagle and Emily Gleeson at the Telegraph Field, Valentia Island.

What you said....

"Thanks again for organising the very interesting weekend in Caherciveen." JJ. Keating

"Just another thank you to yourself, Morgan, Sinead (the organisers I met) and all the others for a very informative and well organised weekend. All the lectures were fantastic and Evelyn was brilliant and it was great seeing the Observatory. I would like to thank ye all for the help ye gave my mother too during the weekend - it was very good." Hannah Cronin

"Just want to say a big thank you for a great weekend. I live quite close to Valentia Observatory and didn't realise it was of such important significance plus we learned so much about it and the hugely important work that these wonderful people do. Thank you for organising this great event and for keeping us informed and updated with the details and arrangements. I'm sure everyone had a great weekend as it was organised so well. Well done. " Eileen O'Driscoll

"Thank you and the co-organisers and all the contributors for an absolutely great weekend. We all both benefited greatly from it and enjoyed ourselves as well." Prof. Michael O'Connell, NUI Galway

"It was a simply marvellous, marvellous weekend and a great celebration! With much appreciated friendly, warm and enthusiastic atmosphere throughout the proceedings, thanks to you and your colleagues. I think the new Director of Met Eireann is very fortunate to come in to head such a wonderful, efficient and enthusiastic team who all obviously enjoy and take a great interest in what they do. I certainly feel very lucky to have been among you all at this momentous event!" Antoinette Madden

"I am sure you know how much we appreciated all you did to make the week-end such a success. It was a huge task and everything worked like clockwork. We really enjoyed it all and learned a lot. A big thank you from David, Ivan, Mary & myself." Valerie Freeman

"It was a fantastic weekend. well done! " Noirin Sheldon

"Just a quick line to say well done on the Valentia Field Trip. The organization was spot on and everything ran smoothly – at least from the view point of the participants! Both myself and Liam really enjoyed it and he was delighted with his prize of the weather station – I caught him in the process of assembling it at 10pm Sunday night! " Karen Molloy

"Thanks so much for arranging the event, I thought the organisation was first-class and I enjoyed meeting lots of friendly people (always the case in Ireland, of course). Once again, many thanks for a memorable event." Stephen Burt, Royal Met Society

"Just to say thank you (and to all on the committee) for organising what was a fantastic weekend. Both I and the students really enjoyed the outing. I hope there will be a repeat next year!" Rowan Fealy

"The weekend was very good. A great effort was put in by all concerned and all events were very well put together and enjoyable. The weather played its part too!" Kevin Barton

"just a note to say congratulations and thanks for a very professional, interesting, informative and enjoyable meeting/field trip in Cahirciveen last weekend." John Treacy

"Just want to thank you for all your hard work in organising and overseeing the weekend in Cahirciveen. We thoroughly enjoyed it and the detailed organisation was obvious! We found the talks very interesting and whetted our appetites for more!" Phyllis McMonagle

"We thoroughly enjoyed the quiz, the lectures, the tours, further lectures, dinner and the Valentia tour. Everyone we met was also in agreement that it was a great success organizationally.....SO WELL DONE" Brigid Liddy