

**A Trip to Northern Ireland
for the 2008 International Computer Music Conference
at the Queen's University of Belfast**

Peter Hulén

**Saturday 23 August 2008
Maggie May's Restaurant, Belfast**

Maybe it's being older that makes intercontinental travel more exhausting, or maybe being older just makes one more in touch with how one feels. I'm tired, but that's all right. The day and night and day of flights from Indianapolis to Detroit to London to Belfast went smoothly enough, losing a bottle of contact solution to British security notwithstanding. Too many ccs. Lost track of the number of security checkpoints at Heathrow. They even took digital mug shots of everyone at one point. 'Biometric security.' 'James Bond kind of stuff.' Heathrow is so labyrinthine. Who designed that place?

There were a lot of families with kids on the planes, some shallow, on holiday, some seemingly well developed and attentive to their kids. Felt homesick. Heard a forecast of rain for Belfast this morning at Heathrow, where it was sunny at the time.

On the shuttle to Indianapolis, in the terminal, on that flight, and in a bar in Detroit, I read the first 9 books of *The Odyssey*. Getting ready to help sophomores discuss it in class this fall. Bet I do the same on the way home. I like the motivic structure. Made me smile in Detroit, all those rosy-fingered dawns.

On the long haul I put my blanket over my head like on a train in India and tried to sleep. Probably slept more than I thought, though it sounded like a one-note symphony of flight attendant call button chimes.

The express bus from the airport, and the hot-pink and white double-decker metro busses around Belfast are easy. At the reception desk for my digs, there were various nerdy Americans standing in line chatting about music-related topics, so I figured they must be here for ICMC, too. Recognized David Wessel from CNMAT at UC Berkeley. Anyway, it was easy to strike up conversations.



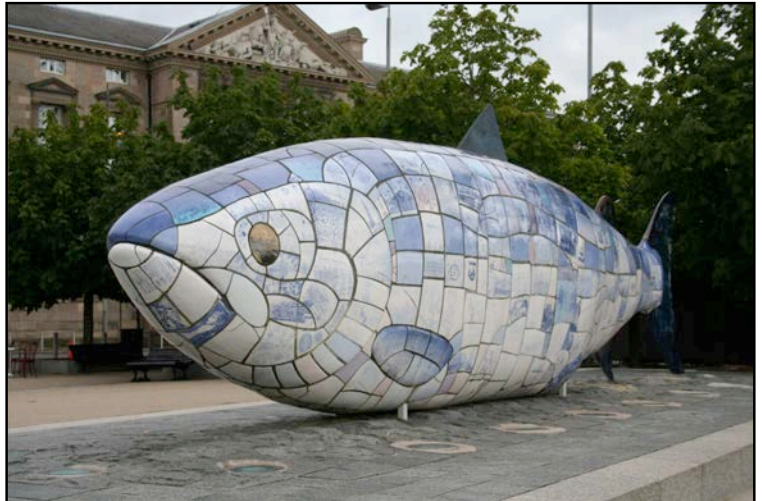
The ensuite dorm room is new, modern and cheap.

The ensuite dorm room at Queen's University is modern, brand-new, clean, Spartan, European, and cheap (no students; the term doesn't start for another month). Ditched everything but camera, umbrella and guidebook and headed back to the city 'centre' whence coming laden with bags and poster in a tube. City Hall looks like a European 19th-century city hall. They have a miniature London Eye towering hard by one side of it—the Belfast Wheel. No comment.

Hoofed it from there to St. George's Market, a massive Victorian covered market that still operates Fridays and Saturdays. Lots of organic produce and meat, fresh fish, artisan cheese and bread, jewelry and other crafts. All kinds of food cooking—it smelled great in there. I bought an

outrageously yummy fish curry in coconut milk and ate it for lunch.

From there to the old dockside, which is rapidly redeveloping. Cranes everywhere, like Beijing or Shanghai in the late '80s. Before all the new buildings and public spaces, they built a weir—a fish ladder—across the Lagan River. Together with dredging and aeration it helped change the Lagan from an open sewer to a living river that is in pretty good shape. Took photos of the enormous new ceramic sculpture of a fish with tiles made of historical documents and memorabilia rendered in chunks of blue-on-white porcelain.



Enormous new ceramic sculpture of a fish.

Bought a ticket for the Titanic harbor tour and waited. It started to rain so I sat on a stainless steel bike rack under the pedestrian ramp going up to the walkway across the weir. A gaggle of teenage girls came and did the same, sitting behind me. One of them, a girl with long, curly red hair, referring to my leather jacket, asked, “*Is yer ja-et real lea-er?*” I turned my head and nodded. She said, “*Ooh, that’s high quali-y; yer airring is noice, tue.*” She reached over and poked at my earlobe. Another girl said, “*Don’t touch ‘im!*” then said to me, “*I’m sorry for her; she’s a _____.*” It was slang I don’t know, and I didn’t quite make it out, but I think it connoted problems with the girl’s reputation. The other girls masked mortification with giggling and they all ran off.

It was pouring by the time I got on the boat for the tour. It had a full canopy with clear plastic windows, which were all fogged up. The guide agreed to roll back a couple of narrow sections so we could see out and take photos. It was a pretty drippy affair, but we saw ruins of the slip were hulls of the Titanic and sibling ships were made and launched, the gates of the dry dock where they were finished and fitted, several pertinent buildings, historic ships moored in varying states of restoration, newer dockyards, and construction on the massive development taking place around the harbor.

As we putted back I told the guide about Cyrus, on whose behalf I took the tour and photos. He remarked that kids can be especially fascinated, and knowledgeable about all the details. He said they’re ‘Titaniacs.’

Back in the room I unpacked, got the temporary internet access working, sent some e-mails, then set out again, coming here to Maggie May’s. Had breakfast for dinner—an Ulster fry: thick bacon, sausage, eggs, toasted soda bread, fried potato bread, cooked mushrooms and a grilled tomato. Took a photo of it.

Sunday, 24 August
Gourmet Burger Bank, Belfast

The location for this section shows how the lunch scheme went downhill and ended. The place I planned to go turned out to be closed Sundays. The alternate was *supposed* to be open. The famous Victorian-era institution, the Crown Liquor Saloon was too packed to get a seat quickly (workshop to go to). The Indian joint by the workshop venue was also *supposed* to be open by lunchtime Sunday, too; so, here I am. I wonder if all this journaling will get done in restaurants.



Breakfast for dinner—an Ulster fry.

whatever world the babies would face. At communion they just handed each person the chalice. That was different. The anthem was after communion: Mozart *Ave verum corpus*. It was okay. The choir was good enough for the institution it was in—countertenor altos and boy sopranos. Very little crossing of selves went on; political issue here. From there to the lunch odyssey. It is suddenly pouring, just in time for departure to the workshop a block away.

Room 106, Building Ash 14, Elms Student Village Queen's University of Belfast

Boy am I steamed. Had an appointment to chat with Jenny and the kids and the computer won't connect to AIM through iChat. I even downloaded AIM and tried to connect with that. Last night I tried to transfer some files and that wouldn't work either. Had to e-mail them to myself. I think their stupid server isn't configured to handle Macintosh protocols; if that is so, this institution needs to be downgraded to a daycare center. Grr. Will see if I can get it fixed tomorrow.

The workshop on networked performance was okay. He had video chat set up with a guy from CCRMA at Stanford and showed how to open a connection and log onto that computer's command line from here and set up CD quality audio streaming using the open source software they developed and a \$300 hardware interface built by some Silicone Valley company. The audio was pretty clean, and only the slightest bit of latency. He also set it up so that his voice coming out of the speakers and reverberating in the much larger space in California were picked up by a mike there and sent back, thereby using a space 6,000 miles away to create natural reverb for a signal being generated and then amplified in the same little classroom in Ireland. Then some German engineer with a bass guitar played a real-time jam session with two bandmates on piano and drums in Lübeck, Germany. Pretty cool. Hey, if he had iChat going on his Mac during the Stanford demo, why can't I get it to work on mine? Will find out tomorrow, no doubt.

Sunny morning, sprinkly noon. Went to Choral Eucharist at St. Anne's, the Belfast Cathedral (Church of Ireland). Romanesque architecture. The introit was *Victoria Jesu dulcis memoria* and was beautiful and moving. A couple of baptisms added a boring touch, but it was nice to see families celebrating, anyway. The hymns were crap. Never thought I would sing "Seek ye first" in a cathedral. A generation arose that knew not Joseph, etc., all the way to Moses' maturation as adopted son of the Pharaoh. Psalm 124 *chahnted rahther* nicely. Paul told the Romans how to act and have divers gifts. The sermon was beastly—pitched too low. Self-esteem, bad hymn texts, traditional values, and church as the only cause to believe in were presented as a panacea for



Too packed to get a seat quickly.

After the workshop I met Ron Herrema who had just arrived from Leicester. We registered for the conference then went to eat at the same Indian restaurant that was closed lunchtime. After that we went to the opening concert in a big, old auditorium. Two moderately interesting pieces and eight also-rans. The also-rans were just typical. How many decades will people continue to write and teach their students to write nothing but multiphonics, fluttertongue, string portamentos, and *col legno battuto sul ponticello* before these “extended techniques” are identified as the tired clichés they are? Then my chat wouldn’t work! Things will look brighter in the morning.



Multiphonics and fluttertongue.

Monday, 25 August Dorm Room

After a sprinkly morning it got sunny this afternoon. I ate the dorm breakfast of corn flakes, toast, fruit and yogurt, and then headed to SARC to check out an installation. On the way past the dorm reception building I called IT services at the uni

and asked about file transfers and chat. Was told those functions are blocked university-wide. “*Doan’t want studnts abusin’ the netwerk, now.*” Ron says institutional systems in the UK are much more restrictive.

The installation consisted of speakers above the drop ceiling in the lobby of SARC playing a cool Bourges-style piece. It gave me an idea for a collaborative project with a colleague in the art department. I snagged some laundry soap at the Quick Stop and on the way back ran into Ron. His B&B has pokey bedsprings and greasy fry-ups, so he was looking to check into the dorm. He came up and bounced on my bed to check it out and checked his e-mail on my machine. While he went to check out of the B&B I went in search of one of the galleries with installations in the city centre.

Down a back alley and up the stairs, the installations were far from together, even though it was past opening time. Three guys from Friesland still yet to arrive with their laptops. Typical for these complicated things. Will check back tomorrow. They had a polyhedral framework you stand inside and listen to 20-channel pieces, but the computer control for it just hadn’t arrived.



A polyhedral framework you stand inside and listen to 20-channel pieces.

Headed back to the uni, double-checked in person about chat and file transfers at the IT office, then headed to the noon concert, this one in the Sonic Arts Research Centre’s fantastic performance space. It’s a large, square room with black acoustic treatments and a stage. It has a steel mesh floor with the concrete slab of the basement a floor below. That way, speakers can also be placed under the audience. There is a flying gantry system for speakers and lights, and the sound system supports 48.6 channels. Looking forward to the rehearsal for my piece and configuring it to surround the audience.

There was a cool multi-channel piece with a male dancer whose gestures coincided with the start and stop of sound and its whoosh around the room. There were sequenced DSP pieces for sax and then for piano, and a multi-channel video piece that knocked me out. It was outstanding. I'll leave it there. Ron, the chair of music at Northeastern (Tony DiRitis), David Wessel from UC Berkeley (the organizer of the first ICMC—when I was eleven), and I had lunch at that burger place. I had a venison burger that was outstanding, but not as outstanding as that video piece.



The Sonic Arts Research Centre's fantastic performance space.

quadrangle inside. Some of the continuous prez pieces were better than many on the concerts. There's no accounting for it, of course.

Sent some e-mails over wi-fi in the conference registration area, and Ron and I chatted with a colleague. We came back to the dorm for Ron to check in, then headed to the opening reception. I had a rip-roaring headache. Between the ibuprofen and several glasses of champagne I was soon restored to health. Pretty good canapés, too. The place was thronged and you couldn't hear yourself think due to some very live acoustics. Nice sunshine in that glass-walled room of the student union, though. We chatted with people (loudly). During his remarks, the chair of the Northern Ireland Arts Council observed that conference delegates looked like such a young group...and sort of kinky, too. Loud laughter. We got out of there, crossed the street, and stood outside the evening concert venue chatting some more. Chatted with Michael Pounds, a colleague from Ball State.

It is law in the UK that a recorded announcement about the number and location of exits has to be played before every concert—like on an airplane. Someone had gotten hold of one of them, done some serious surgery on it, and welded it into a short, swooshing, multi-channel piece. As you could still basically understand the announcement, they got permission to play the new version instead. Fun.



A cool multi-channel piece with a male dancer.

There was one really cool piece for bass clarinet and live DSP. The composer/computer performer was a real pro at MAX/MSP. It was funky. At the interval I chatted with a bit older composer from Iceland I recognized from ICMC in Sweden. The guys from the workshop yesterday did an improv piece with a tenor sax, manipulating the delay time of the signal between here and Stanford and back. The guy in California was



A high paneled room with paintings of all the presidents.

projected on a big screen. He bowed and gestured to the performers here at the end. The rest of the pieces were forgettable but I snapped the most photogenic ones.

Ron and I went to a swanky pasta place for dinner. Had a pizza with spicy shrimp and spinach. Bedtime.

Tuesday 26 August Dorm Room

Ron had a piece in the continuous presentation room today. He wanted to go check it out early to make sure the automated mixer was set properly (there is a sound engineer at the board

all day watching things), and of course, I wanted to hear his piece. We were to meet at breakfast in the dorm cafeteria. He didn't show so I asked at reception if they would give me his room number. Was reminded as we are in different buildings my key card won't open his building door. Back at the cafeteria I remembered he had given me his mobile number, so I went back and used the phone. He was asleep. When he got to the cafeteria he shared some of the muesli he bought at the store yesterday.

They were just finishing his piece when we got to the venue, but since we both wanted to hear the whole program through, we settled in for a listen. It was a better experience than the concerts. For one thing, we weren't sitting in the dark; we could read the program notes and composer bios. Some electronic musicians insist closed eyes are essential for listening. My imagination works fine with my eyes open, thank you. The concerts arbitrarily impose a darkened temple of reverential awe on everyone, which I consider BS. If people want dark, they can use their own damned eyelids. I'm pro-choice on the matter. For another thing, many of the pieces were of a comparatively high quality to many chosen for the concerts. It was a better experience overall. We finally got round to Ron's piece again; I got to hear it and Ron got to set the mixer the way he wanted.

That made us late for the first piece on the noon concert in SARC, but we had our tickets and there were exactly two seats left in the packed room. All the pieces today were tape only—no instruments. There was one really interesting piece among the eight or so, last on the concert. I feel confident my piece will be received well. Talked with the engineer afterwards and found out how the board was configured in preparation for the rehearsal tomorrow morning. For the 48.6 channels there



A grossly Tudor edifice with a greensward out front so green it hurts your eyes.

are 8 speakers in a ring under the floor, 8 around the room at head level, 8 in the same positions high on the wall, a ring of 8 in the ceiling, 8 pointed out into the high corners, 8 into the low corners below the floor, 2 subwoofers down there, 2 on the main level and 2 mid-high. She explained the board and it helps me know what I want to try in my rehearsal. Looking forward to it.

Ron and I went to a highly recommended seafood bar for lunch. Best oysters on the half shell I've ever had—really—and a 'bramble' (gin, lime, sugar, blackberry liqueur). Apparently, in Irish culture people are very outgoing with strangers. I think that must have been the case with the two middle-aged women at the next table who struck up a conversation about my cocktail, but it seemed like flirting to me. Red pepper calamari. Grilled salmon, wild mushrooms, bacon chive mashed potatoes and a chardonnay. You can really tell the difference with hyper-fresh seafood. It was probably the most expensive meal either one of us will eat here. Sticky toffee pudding and café Américain.

We waddled out and went for a walk to see West Belfast in an important area related to 'the troubles' along part of the peace line, which has now stood longer than the Berlin Wall. Took photos of the many murals, which not only have Irish republican themes, but also solidarity themes, with the Palestinians, with U.S. American slaves in the old south (a great Frederick Douglass mural), with the Basques, and even with the Cubans. There were some rather scathing anti-George W. Bush murals, too. It was raining and windy on the first part of the walk, but it passed toward the end and was just muggy. Passed Sinn Féin headquarters and the restaurant in front of which Bill Clinton shook Jerry Adams' hand in '95. It was a rough, working-class area of town, and we agreed that we felt stared at and ill-regarded as outsiders. Definitely a high-rent area around the university.



A great Frederick Douglass mural.

I encountered some difficulty or other. After a bit of murmuring and conversation, we quieted down again, only to faintly hear the Macintosh F# Major reboot chord. Everyone laughed. After a bit the MC called an early interval and we all filtered out. I assumed the composer would figure out the problem and we would hear the piece after the interval. Met and chatted with new acquaintances outside. After we went back in, the concert continued without the cello piece, and I felt bad for the composer because of the otherwise good-natured laughter. For some, the stakes are high at an event like this. What a disappointment for her. Found out later she is experienced at having pieces on concerts like this.

I enjoyed one piece by a newly-met colleague from the University of South Alabama for piano and tape (he played the piano for it, rather virtuosically), and I absolutely loved the piano-tape piece that ended the concert. The first one I could really cheer for. It was a post-minimalist piece, which is still a rarity in this arch-modernist crowd; but, the old guard *will* eventually fade. The fact that the mean age of delegates is so young portends well.

Ron and I certainly had no need for a big meal afterward. We went back to the little place where I got the breakfast fry the first day here. Had a bap with egg and sausage (after taking a photo of it). A bap is a small, round loaf of bread—like a large, floury sandwich bun—made with a mixture of wheat, potato and bean flour.

They date from the famine when they were a way to stretch staples and make less expensive bread. It was yummy. Now to turn in and rest for the rehearsal early in the morning.

Wednesday 27 August

Peter Froggatt Centre, Queen's University of Belfast

Had the now-standard breakfast and headed off for rehearsal. Having learned about the board yesterday I spent time last night thinking and planning how I wanted to mix and diffuse the piece so there was a plan this morning and I could just spend the 40 minutes tweaking it. The time went fast, but there was enough of it to practice and be comfortable with what to do. Walking over to the main campus I had a philosophical conversation with Cynthia Grund, editor-in-chief of *The Journal of Music and Meaning* (also here for the conference). She is a U.S. American philosophy professor at the University of Southern Denmark. Had first met her at the workshop Sunday. After we talked she encouraged me to write for the journal.

Now sitting here on a couch in the hangout area by the conference registration tables. Just plan to take it easy this morning, do some light work for work, and catch up on e-mail. Got a message from Jenny last night asking if I was okay, and to call if there was a problem with e-mail. Oops. Just going from one thing to the next wall-to-wall and not taking time to rest or touch base. By the time I've returned to the room and gotten organized for another day it has been really late. I'm already going on less sleep than I need. Sent a message apologizing to Jenny for spending time writing this journal but not writing home.

Little less than an hour before the keynote address, the author of which is sitting opposite making last minute edits and being interviewed by the faculty member here who will introduce him. After the keynote is the noontime concert with my piece. Just congratulated the pianist from the piano-tape piece at the end of last night's concert that I liked so much. We had a good chat about it, and about the state of electronic music in general.

PFC @ QUB

Back on a couch for a bit. The next poster session starts in a few. So pleased to diffuse my piece on that system in the SARC. Unlike some of the other concerts, this one was great overall, as several of us agreed. The theme and variations on the exit announcement continued. There was a great piece with an oscilloscope projection of the sound, another good multimedia work with a female vocal soloist, and then my piece. Started it in the ceiling speakers (plus the main-level corners for effect and the sub-woofers), brought it down through the mid-highs, then through the main level, then to the array below the floor, back up to the main level, then slowly added the other levels and the sub-floor corners, one level at a time. By the middle it was playing on all channels and I could just pay attention to the overall level. Didn't want to hurt anyone. The rest of the pieces were good. Ron, Tony and I had lunch *al fresco* at the burger place. I had an aioli burger and chips (big fries). A drunk came by showing everyone his protestant organization badge.

I'm out of clothes. Back in the room I stuffed all the dirty clothes in my bag, got some change, and threw a box of soap in the bag, but I won't have time to wash until after this poster session.

Dorm Room

After the poster session I went to the laundry room to start that laundry. Met a colleague down there from Bowling Green State (Ohio) named Mikel Keuhne. Got the laundry done and just made it back to catch the charter bus to the banquet. It was fun enough. It was held in a transportation museum with lots of funky old cars, trams, busses, motorcycles, bicycles, and even four entire locomotives. Remarks before the banquet. The organization of this conference has been top-notch, and it has run really smoothly. The organizer here at QUB is

also a really nice guy. We all ate roast pig and the rest. The wine flowed freely at our table, which included Cynthia Grund and her husband with a strange Danish name, Ron, a collection of young North Europeans, and myself. Afterward, Ron and I headed to basement of the Students Union for the late-night concert, but then decided to give it a miss and get some rest. Knocked off some e-mail for work and took care to e-mail Jenny, who had asked how my piece went.

Thursday 28 August Café Conor, Belfast

Slept a bit later this morning. Took in 4 video pieces in the SARC multimedia room. One of them, a short work, was pretty interesting. Stopped by a computer lab at the uni to e-mail Jenny. The 12:15 concert at SARC was another good one. One video work and the rest purely electronic music. It was typical acousmatic stuff, but it was well done. Makes me wonder where I can get funding to build an 8-channel setup in the studio at Wabash. It could happen. Slipped to the back of the space during the last part of the concert to get a photo of SARC with a full audience when the lights went up between pieces. Now at this café with a large skylight. It was once a local artist's studio. After lunch I'll go mount my poster and stand there chatting with people about it and saying some of the same things over and over for a couple of hours.

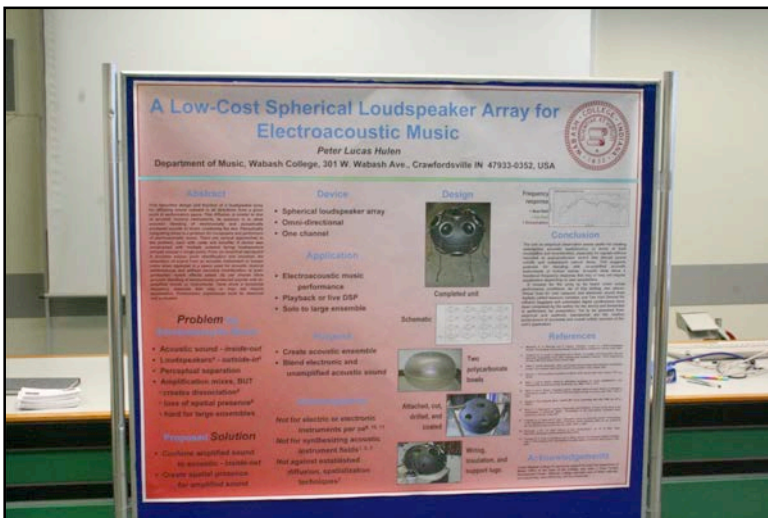
Café Conor

Lunch was good. A salad with warm mackerel and roasted potatoes with lemon dressing and a sauvignon blanc.

Room 209 PFC @ QUB

Got the poster mounted and got a chair for slow moments. The throng hasn't arrived yet. It's warmer today and muggy, though still cloudy as usual. Sitting here cooling off in the air con... People are starting to come by and ask questions... Still presenting. True to expectation, those interested in or excited by it are performers and composers—musicians first—and younger, not so bound by convention.

Beatrice Kennedy's, Belfast



Mounted poster.

All alone in a fancy restaurant. Ordered a sautéed beef salad with caramelized onions and Roquefort cream, medallions of monkfish with sea scallops, roasted potatoes and asparagus with a lemon cream sauce, and a Chilean sauvignon blanc. I guess this is Fish and Blanc Day.

Ron came by at the end of the paper session. He wanted to go into the city 'centre' to look for some boots for our hike tomorrow. I gave my poster tube to one of the registration workers who agreed to store it in a closet so I could pick it up later. I've since realized that we are leaving too early and coming back too late on the final day of the conference for me to

pick it up. I even looked in on the way over here, but that particular building closes at 5:00. I'm going to e-mail the conference coordinator and ask her to identify someone staying in Elms Student Village who would take it

on their way back there and leave it at the reception desk, which is open 24 hours. There are a lot of us staying there.

Ron and I took a bus and then walked around until he located an outfitter he had seen before. The salesclerk asked if he would use the boots a lot in Ireland. Ron said no. He asked if Ron had a pair of trainers with him. Ron said yes. The clerk said he had hiked several times where we are going and that trainers would be fine. He said, "I realize I'm losin' a sale." What a nice guy.

The salad was made of rocket and split grapes. The beef on it was a bit gristly.

Ron had done some gift shopping earlier and had cased a couple of places. He offered for us to go to one on my behalf so we did and I bought a couple of things. We were near the harbor area where the tour was on Saturday. The ticket kiosk had some Titanic souvenirs and memorabilia (for Cyrus). We decided to skip some of the evening concert and walk over there instead. Ron could see the area that way. The kiosk was closed. At least it wasn't raining this time. On the way back we decided to skip the rest of the concert and rest in our rooms before dinner.

The sweet oat bread served with the salad is lovely.

Ended up scrambling to send a work e-mail that was on the do-list and answer what had come in. Ron had eaten a huge lunch. When we met to head for dinner he said he was really tired and just wanted to go to bed, so I headed out on my own. It was still a little light, and pleasant, but I felt bummed about losing my poster, and feeling homesick, to boot. Thought of a girl named Nikki Hedgecock from high school 30 years ago, an exchange student from Belfast, and wondered where she was now. Felt better once I thought of what to do about the poster, and got over being here at the restaurant alone and enjoyed writing this. The server asked if I was a writer.

The monkfish was quite good; so was the green salad that went with it. Now a 10-year-old tawny port for dessert.

Friday 29 August

Train 3 Belfast to Londonderry

Didn't turn in as quickly as I thought. There was a fiasco with more than one of us at work sending all-college e-mails with conflicting information. And on a night with the need to get to bed before an early morning. I felt pretty steamed, because I had to send the correction even though the miscommunication was not my fault, but I had to look like a doofus. Rrr.

Ron and I are en route to the coast where we'll spend the day hiking along the cliff tops above the sea and end up at Giant's Causeway, an interesting geological formation on the north coast. In the hilly countryside outside the train, the fields are divided with hedgerows, and sheep (lots of sheep) and black-and-white cows are grazing in them (not together, though). We ride an hour and 20 minutes to Coleraine with 20 minutes to lay over and catch a 40-minute bus to the village of Ballintoy, our destination. Not a bad itinerary. The train is new and nice. We snagged coffee and a croissant in the Belfast Central Station and sat opposites at a table on the train, which is fairly empty. We're about to arrive and get off in Coleraine.

Train 3 Coleraine to Belfast

Wow, are my feet tired! We hiked about 10 miles today, much of it steep, or long, slow rises. Exercised hard. What an experience! Even though we've only seen a short section of the coast, we were right there on the

ground, the views were spectacular, and I feel like I've seen Ireland. What greens! Wind-swept, green-topped sea cliffs with sheep grazing on them.

We took a bus from Coleraine to a stop on the coast beyond the village of Ballintoy. We first headed to the 20m-long rope bridge across to Carrick-a-Rede Island, 100ft above the sea. It's a tiny island rising high on sea cliffs opposite the cliffs on the mainland, creating a chasm that has a rope bridge with wooden cross-treads across it during the warm (less windy) months. A bridge has been put up there every year for 200 years by and for fishers who use the island as a salmon fishery. Now the National Trust cashes in on it by charging admission across.

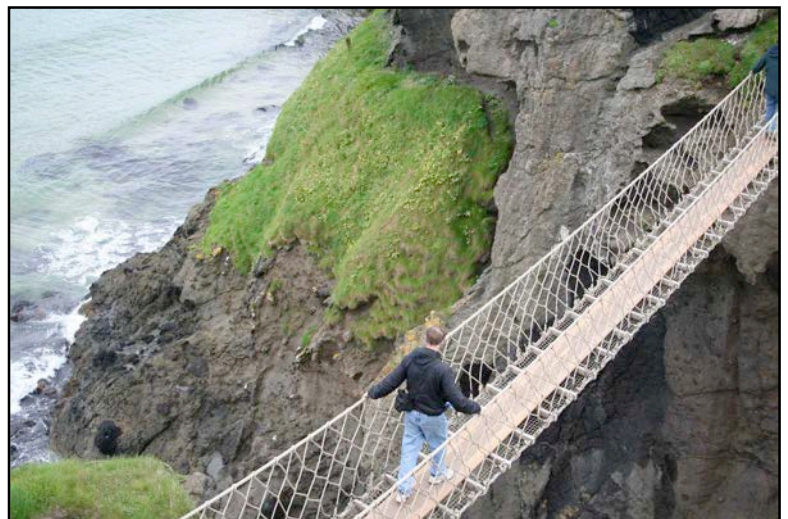
Saturday 30 August **Gourmet Burger Bar, Belfast**

The Carrick-a-Rede bridge opened just as we finished the 1km walk down the narrow road to get there. During the walk we started snapping photos of the cliffs and the tiny green-topped islands off the coast. It wasn't open yet when we started out, but they told us in the little tearoom at the start that we could pay to cross it when we got there. Around where we started, at the gravel parking lot, there were black basalt cliffs above us with scree below them. As we followed the curve of the bay, the foreshore we walked along rose up on limestone cliffs that we photographed before us, and looking back; I photographed Sheep Island and other small islands. There were brambles (blackberries) growing along the way, and we ate some.

The chap at the bridge said we could pay back at the start when we were done, and radioed back a description of us. The bridge wasn't as scary as it was made out to be. It swayed a little with the rhythm of walking, but the sheer scale of the cliffs made its ten-story height seem less. We snapped views from the bridge and photos of one another on it. There was a trail going a short distance up on the island and ending with a closed access gate. Back across the bridge, the way back looped around to the road we walked in on. The bloke at the bridge said be sure and go that way for the "picture-postcard views" of the bridge and island. We did pay when we got back.

This last meal in Belfast just now was good. A substantial plank of dense bread with olive oil, melted mozzarella, and minced tomato, onion and basil. Also had a side of chips with salt and vinegar and a corona with lime.

When we got back to the tearoom we bought lunch to carry on the trail. I had a little red nylon backpack Jenny had used in college. Got a boxed sandwich made with grated white cheese, tomato and red onion, a bag of 'Tayto' crisps—supposedly quintessentially Irish, but they're just potato chips—and a couple bottles of water.



The bridge wasn't as scary as it was made out to be.

We set out from there and could see cliff-sided, green-topped Sheep Island rinsing from the gunmetal gray water. It was cloudy and pleasant, and the sea breeze cooled us as we walked. The trail ran inland, and we could see the village of Ballintoy across a field at the base of the hills. We came to the little white Ballintoy church with its yard full of headstones old and new, and turned back down toward the harbor on a narrow, winding paved road with rose hips growing along it. Past Ballintoy Harbor along the grassy foreshore and rocky tidal zone there were columnar stacks of dark basalt. Those that rose from the tidal zone were covered with green-gold and orange lichen. There were arches among them,



Cliff-sided, green-topped Sheep Island.

and we passed a limestone cave in the side of a hill.

We came to a white limestone crag jutting from the hillside that we had to pass by climbing over the rocks below, between it and the surf. I had checked a tide prediction a couple of weeks ago and was pleased to see low tide at midday. That allowed us to get around the crag without having to go inland and walk on the road, missing some of the scenery. When we got around it, the 2km sandy crescent of White Park Bay stretched before us. It was easy walking on the firm sand next to the surf. Halfway around the bay there was what looked like a white mansion high on the vertical brow of the grassy hillside. Approaching the far end



Little, white Ballintoy church with its yard full of headstones.

of the bay midway up the hillside was a homestead with colorfully painted pale yellow and red buildings. The guidebook says the yellow one is a youth hostel. The hills gave way to high limestone cliffs at the far end of the bay just before the village of Portbradden, which was visible at the extremity of the bay during our walk across.

We had to climb over boulders at the far end of the bay just past the limestone cliffs, then the trail brought us to Portbradden. At high tide we would have had to climb the hill to the road. In Portbradden, St. Goban's Church is said to be the smallest in Ireland. I believe it. There was room inside the tiny blue-trimmed white structure for about 4 people. Across the little road from it was an older man in a blue fisherman's cap sitting at a little table



The 2km sandy crescent of White Park Bay.



More sheep as the trail ascended and descended.

and came to Dunseverick Harbor—3 houses and a boat ramp—and stopped for lunch. There was a picnic table there and we sat down facing the harbor. While we ate Ron and I talked about handling anger in relationships, one's own and that of one's partner.

The terrain was more hilly and grassy beyond Dunseverick Harbor. We saw more sheep as the trail ascended and descended the steep hillsides (there were steps) and crossed the grassy foreshore at flatter places. Rather than walking below the hills next to the shore as we had since the port at Ballintoy, we were now walking *on* them with the rocky shore below as the land began to rise. At one point we walked past a herd of cows and stopped to photograph them in varicolored repose. Every time the trail came to a fence there was a stile to climb over.



Cows.



On top, along with the ruin, was another herd of sheep grazing.

overlooking the sea eating his lunch. In true Irish form he started up a conversation with us. He was clearly well educated and widely traveled. He talked our legs off for maybe 15 or 20 minutes, but it was fun.

George Best Belfast City Airport, Gate B

By this time I was beginning to feel a little concerned about the distance we had come and the time we had left to make it to the end. Past Portbradden we saw shorter cliffs of black basalt. At one point the trail went through a tunnel—really just a deep arch in the rock. We began to see sheep grazing on the grassy hillsides above the rocky tidal zones. We walked a short distance on a narrow paved road

We came to a low, branching waterfall flowing down the hill. The trail turned up and inland and went over a wooden bridge across the creek that fed it. A little further on we came to the ruin of a 16th-c tower on the ancient site of Dunseverick Castle. The ruin sits on a flatiron-shaped, green-topped bluff pointing inland over the downward sloping, green backside of an outcropping sea cliff. On top of the bluff, along with the ruin, was another flock of sheep grazing. This was roughly the halfway point of our walk.

British Midland Flight 93 Belfast to London Heathrow

So, Dunseverick Castle was roughly the halfway point, but we had used more than half our time, and there was still the Giant's Causeway to see at the end of the hike. From this point we were making for Benbane Head, the highest and most northerly point on our walk. We had been able to see its square profile jutting above the shore since we walked out of Portbradden.

We realized we needed to start making better time just at the point where the trail started to rise steadily and continuously and the sun came out. Soon we were walking real cliff-tops, rising all the time. The terrain on top was meadowy, and inland from us grew a scrubby evergreen that vaguely resembled some kind of yew or miniature spruce, but was very stiff and prickly. Each time we reached a new point at the end of an inward curve on the scalloped shoreline it was higher than the last, and we could see over to the next one, which was even higher. I kept hoping the next point was the highest, only to find another higher one beyond. We stretched out our strides and breathed and sweated hard. It was great exercise. If I gained anything eating so well, I lost it yesterday. I have no idea of our elevation, but the heights became spectacular and dizzying. We were headed west, and the views backward of the ever-higher cliffs we had covered behind us, lit by the afternoon sun, were truly beautiful. There were no railings, of course, just the shaggy edge of the grass, God knows how high up. It would be a hell of a leap, and a hell of a way to go out.

We finally reached Benbane Head. The scale of the cliffs can't be captured in photos. We sat and rested at a point where an 18th-c amateur geologist who first wrote a description of the coast's geology used to sit. An East Asian woman and an Italian man hiking together asked how far to the Giant's Causeway. We reckoned 4km—about 2 ½ miles. It was an 'oh, no' moment for them, but we all decided we would make it back before the last bus.



Views backward were truly beautiful.

Northwest Flight 101 London Heathrow to Detroit

Now the points ahead were successively lower, and it was the forward view that was spectacular; but, it was too hazy looking into the sun to photograph well. I took a photo of the heather. The remainder of the walk seemed shorter than 4km, more like 2, probably because we were going downhill. The halfway point of that 4km, which came sooner than expected, was the gate to steep steps going down the cliffside to a separate parallel path approaching the Causeway down along the shore from our side of it. Our decision was made for us, because the gate was closed.

Just a bit further we could look down on the whole Causeway—3 little peninsulas of hexagonally cracked basalt. Soon we could see the visitors 'centre' and busses shuttling people back our direction to the Causeway on a road down below. Inside the visitors centre Ron snagged a bottle of water and I went for a bottle of sweetened lemon tea. He waited in line to pay for both while I went to ask about the location of and distance to the bus stop. I got our tickets when we boarded the shuttle down to the Causeway, and made short work of my tea.

At the Causeway, the basalt was cracked into contiguous hexagonal columns with rounded tops pushing up at differing heights. One could walk across the top of them out to the surf. I found them visually very interesting



The basalt was cracked into contiguous hexagonal columns.

and took a lot of photos. The East Asian woman we had seen was there, and we chatted about which bus to take and when. Bone tired. Got another bottle of tea back at the visitors centre and downed it. Ron got an ice cream bar, so I did too.

The bus stop had a meadow behind, and a cow pasture in front. The bus was right on time, and we headed for Coleraine where we didn't have to wait long for the train. On the train I started writing right away knowing there would be a lot to write about.

We would get back to Belfast at 9:00 p.m., which had been our dinnertime all week. We

decided to try our luck at the Crown Bar. It is right across from the train station to which we were headed. When we got there the place was absolutely packed—not even standing room—with people holding pints and talking loudly. There were diners seated in the cozies. We squeezed through to where there had been a wait station the Sunday before when I had looked into eating there (a server seats you). It was not there this time. I squeezed through over to the bar and asked a bartender about getting seated for dinner. He said with a friendly but matter-of-fact tone, *“Yer not eatin’ anything in here tonoight.”* We squeezed back out to the street and got a taxi to Molly’s Yard, a recommended restaurant that had been closed already the night we ended up at the ‘swanky pasta place.’ It was both the best and the most expensive meal I would have in Belfast. The place was tiny, with about a half-dozen tables, and the food was first-rate. Started off with an appetizer of chilled orzo with some kind of cream and dried cherry tomatoes on a bed of new greens. It was *very* good. The sirloin may have been the best cut of beef I’ve had in years. It had a slightly sweet whiskey sauce on the side, with thin green beans and the thick puck of a large potato cross-section, peeled and cooked. The salad with it was baby greens, julienne of celery, and slices of pear with a lemon dressing. Paired it with a cabernet sauvignon, and finished off with a Provence cheese plate and a glass of port. After all the sunshine, wind and exertion, it was a very appetizing meal.

Back at Elms Student Village I bade Ron goodnight and checked at reception for the poster. It was there. Back in the room I e-mailed the coordinator to thank her. This time there was no long list of e-mail waiting, and nothing to sort out at work, so I started getting organized and doing some preliminary packing, then fell into bed.

Ron and I agreed to meet for breakfast later than usual. He would be leaving to return to England right after. We lingered over breakfast and talked more about relationships. I’ll miss talking with Ron. It’s been good to see him. I packed up, checked out, stowed my bags at reception, and headed back to the centre for some final gift shopping.

The kiosk by the waterside was open this time, and another shop north of City Hall had what was needed to finish up. There was a Dixieland band playing on a portable bandstand back at City Hall—some kind of international aid fundraising event. Sat on a curbstone by the lawn, listened to several Dixieland numbers, and watched little children dancing with people in animal costumes and a pretty photographer photographing them. While heading out to the bus stop, along came a herd of Hare Krishnas around the square, chanting with drums and an accordion, and hauling an enormous painted wagon by a long rope. An Indian businessman in a suit smiled and chanted along with them as they passed. The traffic seemed really bad on the way back, then I

realized the Hare Krishnas were up ahead of our bus. They had a police escort on foot, which finally made them pull over to let the traffic pass.

Packed the gifts in the stowed luggage, took the journal, and set out for lunch. Lingered over it, writing in the journal, and finally went and snagged the bags and headed for the airport. Got to London about 9:00 p.m. and took a shuttle to the Heathrow Holiday Inn. Made the reservation for cheap 3 months ago through an online agent. The hotel had no record—I had to present my receipt. The clerk gave me a room upgrade for the trouble. The room was nice, and the bed very comfortable after a week on the dorm bed with one measly pillow, but the hotel was also a rip-off. There was no internet unless one paid 15 quid for 24 hours (about \$30). Never mind that the crappiest hotels in the industrialized world offer it for free. Stayed up late typing up the remainder of this. The wakeup call came all too soon. More rip-offs. Breakfast was not included in the stay, but one could hit the breakfast buffet. For £17.50. That's about \$35. I skipped breakfast and left. Slimeballs.

Guess I'm complaining now, but Heathrow really is a pain in the butt. Had to take the hotel shuttle to one terminal then take the airport train to the terminal from which the flight left. The electronic check-in kiosk didn't recognize my credit card, wouldn't scan my passport, and asked for a 13-digit confirmation number rather than the shorter alphanumeric code I had. The signs had memes not only for NWA—my airline, but for KLM and several others, too. Waited in the wrong line behind a slow-moving throng of late and irritated travelers until finding out I should have been in a line marked with NWA-only signs. That was likely the problem with the check-in machine, too. After having to ride the train to the right terminal, waiting erroneously for check-in, running the gauntlet of security, and hoofing it through the labyrinth, the flight was already starting to board. Was hoping to snag something for breakfast. Asked for extra pretzels on the plane, and the in-flight meal was a relief. It has been an uneventful flight. Watched the new Indiana Jones movie and wrote this last part of the journal.

I expect the rest to go smoothly. Have to pick up my luggage in Detroit, carry it through customs, and recheck it for the flight to Indianapolis. Looking forward to seeing the beloveds. The conference, with its state-of-the-art systems, unique pieces, and people to know; the fabulous food that I set aside enough per diem to enjoy by finding cheap digs; and the sights through which to experience Ireland have all been rich and rewarding, and have added another facet to the experience of being a specialist connected with peers and on top of a craft, and a traveler experiencing another new part of the world.