

Saturday Continued

We arrived at the National Trust Campsite at Castle Ward late afternoon. The campsite was a nice woodland retreat, set within the grounds of Castle Ward. It's extraordinarily popular as castle ward farmyard is now famously known to Game of Thrones fans as Winterfell.

We enjoyed a lovely Kung Po chicken for tea but our evening became disturbed as we be-

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gan getting marginally annoyed at the people staying in the nearby “hobbit huts” who had absolutely no understanding of campsite etiquette where you don’t traipse across someone else’s pitch as a short cut to the loo (and who needs to go to the loo every 15 minutes anyway!); you definitely don’t come so close to your van that you stand on their electric cable. And you absolutely 100% do NOT let your kids (or accompany your kids) so close to someone’s back window at 9pm and look through the window with their nose touching the glass that you nearly give the person inside a heart attack. Sadly despite a polite request that this was indeed our pitch and could they possibly walk the extra 10 steps around us, it was ignored so we closed our curtains and went to bed to the sounds

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of gravel crunching outside.

Sunday

This morning we were so fed up about the people endlessly using our pitch as a cut through we requested to move pitch. An hour later, having packed everything up and moved, then reset our stuff out, we enjoyed beans on toast for breakfast and watched as the annoying family packed their car up and left the site. Note to self – if ever in this situation again, perhaps before requesting to move we should ask when they are staying until! Massive face palm ☹️



Trying to make light of the fact, we decided

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we preferred our new pitch anyway, and Keith unloaded the bikes as despite the wind still howling, we were going for a bike ride around the estate of **Castle Ward**. We followed the boundary trail, a very well marked out trail, which hugged the shores of Strangford Lough, through “Winterfell” before heading inland across the estate and towards the National Trust mansion.



The trail was scenic and enjoyable and although we found bits hard going as we are unfit lol, we enjoyed it nonetheless.

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At the property, we had a quick cuppa, sausage roll and a cake – I tried the **fifteen cake**, which is a local NI recipe containing digestive biscuits and marshmallows and coconut; it was delicious. We took it in turns to go inside – however sadly only got to see the basement as renovation works were overrunning so the rest of the house was shut still.



Back at Ruby, we had some soup to warm us up as we'd got rather cold before indulging in a duvet afternoon. The wind was blowing and it was quite chilly outside so we had no desire to be outside anymore. For dinner we fired up the Remoska and cooked a fabulous local joint of roast beef, which was incredible and only took 1 hour, before retreating into

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a food coma and an early night.



Monday

Monday soon arrived and it was time to pack up and move on from our Castle Ward campsite. We'd enjoyed the activities here but found the campsite very dated. The facilities need a massive overhaul, and at £25pn, considering this was just a pound a night less than Ballyness, it wasn't great value for money other than location, in our opinion; the showers despite being hot and good pressure were housed in an old outhouse and the doors didn't lock properly.

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We decided to take the small ferry across Strangford Lough rather than retrace our steps back the way we'd come and worked our way up the east side of the Sea inlet Lough.



We pulled in for an impromptu stop at **National Trust Mount Stewart** house and gardens. Happily the grounds were dog friendly, so we had an enjoyable walk around the formal gardens and lake, before taking it in turns to do the house tour



One of the most fascinating things inside the house was the fact that the entrance hall was done out in what appeared to be marble, but actually was wood! 

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After our house tours, we had a very quick lunch in Ruby before making our way to the Titanic museum. We had ummed and ahhh-hed about the best way to approach visiting this given that we were travelling with our dog. Should we go on public transport and take it in turns, or should we drive and leave Jazz in the van. This was the option we took, it made sense as we could stop there on route to the campsite and due to Ruby's fabulous 1.9m height we were able to get into the museum underground parking, so Jazz wasn't far away. It is worth pointing out that for units bigger than 1.9m in height, you may struggle to park in the nearby vicinity however public transport is very good - there is a bus to the front from City Hall.

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The **Titanic museum** was wonderful. You could easily spend the day here- it was fully interactive and had some of the best 3 way projections I'd ever seen. We rushed round but saw it all in 2 hours, aware that we didn't want to leave Jazz too much longer. We saw original artefacts such as the Boatyard gates, Table wear and china from the White Star line ships, an original Titanic lunch menu, and much more.



We also saw the slipway in which the Titanic was launched and the boatyard where it was built. We did however not realise that if we had carried on walking beyond the slipway you can get to the actual dock that Titanic sat in. We vowed to return to this tomorrow

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on foot.



As part of our ticket we were able to visit the SS Normadic which transported many of the passengers that boarded in Cherbourg from the port to the Titanic. It's the last remaining White Star line ship to remain.



We thoroughly enjoyed our visit and thought that the £19 ticket price was good value. We can see why the attraction is listed as the number 1 thing to do in Belfast.

We made the short journey to our final campsite of the trip, **Dundonald Touring Park**, a Campsite situated on the outskirts of Belfast,

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and right on the number 4 bus route into the City Centre. There is also an off road cycle track called the **Greenway** which links the campsite to the city centre.



For dinner we enjoyed a homemade macaroni cheese. It's no secret, it is one of my all time favourite dishes, yet I've never been able to make one in Ruby due to not having an oven. Now owning the Remoska, it's opened up being able to cook dishes like this and I couldn't wait to sample it!

On our journey to Belfast earlier we stopped at **McKee's farm shop.**

☒ Good job it was the end of our holiday, we'd

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have blown our budget here in one go! To accompany our Mac n cheese we picked up some home baked soda bread and some chilli chicken pieces and the finished result was delicious, even if so say so myself! I made a video which is below:

Tuesday

Sadly the weather turned during the night and we actually had some rain – not that we could complain as its the first we've had all the time that we've been away.

As the weather was poor we decided to have a rest and a duvet morning, before heading out to Belfast on the Midday bus. Just a note

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about the bus incase you find yourself at this campsite. Firstly its the number 4 bus and not the number 19 that is printed on the campsite leaflet. To get to the bus stop you need to go out of the campsite gate, turn left and walk up the ramp to the main road. The bus stop for Belfast bound buses is across the road and about 300 yards to the left. The bus stop exactly by where the path comes up onto the road is where you get off. This wasn't very clear so we ended up missing a bus because we were in the wrong place. ☐ A day return was £4.40 each and Jazz was allowed on the bus.



We got off the bus at City Hall, and picked up the yellow Titanic trail which took us from

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the main memorial in the city centre all the way to the pump house and dock which we missed yesterday. It was well signed and took us past some interesting sights including The Albert Memorial Clock, which is like a mini Big Ben, the Big Fish and much more – including a dog friendly pub, hurrah!



At the end of the walk and after our visit to the Dock and Pumphouse – we couldn't get in as it was closed sadly – we caught the Glider bus back to the city centre (£1.20)



We then visited the Cathedral Quarter and the very interesting St Ann's Cathedral with its very unusual and unexpected spire.

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I hated it at first but then it grew on me in the end. The reason that the spire is so *different* stems from the need for it to be lightweight as the ground the cathedral sits on is basically a river bank and it just can't take the weight. Inside the cathedral you can actually see the floor sinking.

During the day we passed some pretty impressive Murial Walls (Graffiti art is a big thing here) including a 3D one where we got glasses from the pub!



We managed to find a couple more dog friendly pubs, including the amazing and rather historical Dirty Onion where Jazz was

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treated to a homemade doggy treat.

☒☒ We also both managed to rather embarrassingly have our first Guinness!

☒ We also managed to find our first fish and chip lunch courtesy of Fish City. They were posh fish and chips but were absolutely gorgeous and fantastically cheap at just £7.15 pp.

☒

I've since found this amazing doggie friendly Northern Ireland map which is vital for anyone travelling with their furry friends - I just wished I had seen it before we went!

Dog Friendly Northern Ireland

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After a full day and 7.5 miles walked, we made our retreat back to the campsite for our final evening before heading home tomorrow. Dinner was sausage and mash, once again done in the fabulous Remoska Electric Oven which we enjoyed whilst reminiscing about our fantastic trip to Northern Ireland.

Wednesday

Wednesday arrived and it was sadly home time. We set our alarm for 8am, and had a slow but thorough pack up of Ruby, stripping the bed and doing a full floor clean etc. Our ferry from Belfast Port was at 11.30 and ran to time, arriving into Cairnryan just before 2pm. We hit the road East and then South and East again - A75, M6, A66, A1, A14 and

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had a good smooth run, until we got to Cambridge of course and those hideous road-works. We took it in turns driving and arrived home just before 11pm. 450 miles, 3 countries, 1 ferry, and only half a tank of fuel to get us home.

We had absolutely adored our time in Northern Ireland - it completely and utterly exceeded our expectations and would recommend it to absolutely everyone we know.

Thankfully we don't have that long until our next adventure - just 2 weeks - yippee!

So, Until Next Time

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