

Leading agricultural journalist and broadcaster IAN HARVEY looks behind the scenes at rural community issues and how farmers are meeting the challenge of developing the farm business and supporting the farm family

rural reality



■ TIME TO RELAX: Time to relax! 'Rushin House Caravan Park', near Belcoo on the shores of Lough MacNea, seems like an idyllic stop for touring caravan families, with four star facilities. FW-1R.

HAVING FUN: Holidays are all about fun and children at 'Rushin House Caravan Park', the O'Dolan's on-farm tourist enterprise, have their own separate, enclosed play area with a variety of out-door activity equipment. FW-1W.

■ GOOD IDEA, BOOK NOW: Cathal O'Dolan has discovered quite quickly that his on-farm, 'Rushin House Caravan Park' is proving so popular that he has had to turn holiday-makers away, who haven't booked in advance. FW-1J.



today doesn't give us too many options."

Brenda added, "When we pulled out the old plans for the caravan park, we decided to re-apply and drew up new plans in 1999 with early ideas of starting up our dream business, since we're on the main south western tourist route and our land runs right down to the lough shore.

Cathal chipped in, "This area has so much going for it culturally, historically and for sheer choice of outdoor things to do and places to visit.

"There are terrific award-winning restaurants locally, like MacNea House & Bistro in Blacklion; there are golf courses, nature trails, outdoor activity centres, museums and famous caves.

"In fact the list of exciting places to visit and things to see is endless.

"Not forgetting our own local history," Brenda reminded him.

"Yes, the ancient church you saw on the edge of our land as you drove in off the main Garrison Road was knocked down by Cromwell's army centuries ago.

"Across the road is a famous Holy Well and place of annual pilgrimage, called St. Patrick's Well, since he is said to have carried out Christenings there.

"It's reputed to have the coldest water in Ireland and the local people

were furious when Cromwell ordered a road to be built which cut off the church from its well.

"A wooden road bridge was built over the water supply for the well and the locals pulled the bridge down in protest.

"The townland here is called 'Rushin', which I'm told means 'the little forest', although there's not much sign of the indigenous trees today."

Perhaps they were cut down and used to build the bridge, I thought!

"At any rate, to us, this seemed like the perfect place to attract touring caravans, as dad had originally intended.

"There's a dearth of touring caravan parks, not only locally, but throughout the whole of Northern Ireland, so we have filled a much needed gap and everyone locally, including our neighbours have been all for it.

"I approached the Fermanagh Local Strategy Partnership and obtained an EU funded P & R. grant through the Natural Resources Rural Tourism Initiative.

"I have to say, that without the EU funding and help from DARD we couldn't have built the caravan park to its present high standard.

We opened on the 14th March this year in the cold wind and snow and

all of ten souls braved the conditions to book with us and would you believe it, but all of them have re-booked.

"All the restaurants and guest houses locally tell us that the numbers of new visitors is increasing each year and we can believe that because we had to turn away 150 people at Easter because we were at full capacity."

Brenda added, "We went to a Holiday Trade Show at the RUAS Kings Hall, under the auspices of Fermanagh Tourism, rather reluctantly at first, because Cathal had silage bales to put in.

"We got there about 11.00am and I had to go into Belfast on an errand.

"When I got back to him (there wasn't much room on the stand to begin with), I found him besieged by people and he was taking bookings.

"In fact there was so much interest that we decided to return on the following day, which was a Sunday.

Lough MacNea is not one of the better known Loughs in Fermanagh, but it's surprising how popular it's becoming.

"We followed that up with a successful visit to the Holiday Show at RDS in Dublin.

"What we're looking forward to now, is our promotional stand in the Nugent Hall during the RUAS

Balmoral Show, so if you are interested in touring holidays or just want to get ideas, do stop and talk.

Cathal threw in, "There is room for more caravan parks, so if you're a farmer with ideas somewhere else in the province, do call and talk to us.

"We received enormous help and advice from Ballyness Caravan Park, near Bushmills and we have forged links with others.

"The point is we can all help each other, because we complement each other facilities.

"Touring caravans and campers do just that, they move from place of interest to place of interest and they are always looking for proper caravan sites to cater for their needs.

"We have no desire to go down the static caravan route and I expect we won't become too big either, because it sort of spoils the friendly, homely atmosphere.

"We are really only custodians of our surroundings but it would be nice to make a success of what we are doing and do it well."

For more information contact:
'Rushin House Caravan Park',
Belcoo, Fermanagh. Tel: 028 6638 6519. Int: 0044 28 6638 6519
www.rushinhousecaravanpark.com or mail to:enquiries@rushin-housecaravanpark.com

Did you know?

■ The word 'torc' signifies 'a boar', explains PW Joyce in 'Irish Names of Places', 1898 edition. Hunting the boar was one of the favourite sports of ancient Ireland. 'Turk' is one of the more usual modern forms of 'torc', but, by the aspiration of 't', the genitive form, 'tuirc' becomes 'hirk', as in 'Drumhirk', a name of frequent use in Ulster.

■ 'Drumhirk' represents the Irish 'Druim-thuirc', 'the boar's ridge' and when the 't' is changed to 'd' by eclipse, the termination 'durk' or 'nadurk' is formed; as in 'Edendurk' in Tyrone, 'the hill-brow of the boars'. Another termination is 'nahirk', such as 'Gilnahirk', Dundonald.

■ There are two words in common Irish use for 'a dog', 'cu' and 'madadh' or 'madrath' [madda, maddrá]. They often form the terminations 'namaddy', 'namaddoo and 'namaddrá', meaning 'of the dogs', as in 'Ballymaddoo' in Cavan and 'Ballynamaddré' in Cork and 'Ballynamaddy' in Antrim, 'the town of the dogs'. 'Annagh-na-maddoo', 'the dogs' marsh'.

■ Finally, the other word for 'a dog', 'cu', used to signify 'a fierce dog'. Joyce says that this term is often founding in the beginning of names. The parish of 'Connor' in Antrim, is explained as originally being, 'Doire-na-con', 'the oak-wood of wild dogs'. 'Conlig' in Down, signifies 'the stone of the hounds' and 'Convoy' in Donegal, 'the hound-plain'.

Useful contacts

- Rural Development Council 028 8676 6980
- Rural Community Network 028 8676 6670
- Rural Support Line 0845 606 7607
- Family farm Development Ltd 028 8076 1719
- DARD Grants and Subsidies Division 028 7131 9900
- Post Office Customer Helpline 08457 223344
- Health Action Zone 028 8772 9017
- Farming Families Bureau 028 7930 1003

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