

We Are the Land: Ireland

Leslie Lee

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We Are the Land is a unique and evocative Irish travelogue.

In her travel memoir *We Are the Land*, Leslie Lee ventures to the country of her ancestors: Ireland.

Deciding it was time to see where her family came from and eager to share the experience, Lee invited her two sisters and a cousin to accompany her on her trip to Ireland. This book, an amplified version of the journal Lee kept as they traveled, describes their extensive road trip and all that happened along the way.

With the family's genealogy assembled as much as possible, the women compiled plans, itineraries, and "must do" lists that factored in the histories of meaningful locales and sites. Early chapters are an interesting and accessible overview of early Ireland. As the trip goes on, more bits of history float to the surface, always presented in a fresh, interesting voice and woven into the women's touring experience.

The book reveals its spirit of adventure early on. The day Lee is to meet up with her companions in Ireland, she experiences a serious bout of food poisoning. Rather than remain in bed or, at the very least, within feet of a bathroom, she gets up and soldiers on, determined not to miss a moment of the trip she long planned and prepared for.

Lee notes every meal, ancestral revelation, and abandoned castle in polished, lively writing, if descriptions are overreliant on terms like "beautiful" and "spectacular." While many individual incidents are not distinctive, some stand out. A disappointing visit to a town's archives is balanced by villagers who are repositories of local lore and provide more helpful information. There are delightful stops at random inns, an unappreciative hostess, and driving delays caused by cattle blocking roads. Lee and her companions are rewarded for any troubles with the satisfying, grounding experience of walking hills and roads their ancestors traversed.

Extracts from Lee's poetry introduce each chapter with personality. Charming pen and colored ink illustrations—of the sisters consulting a map, fiddlers in a pub, a half-fallen stone cottage—are included, and hand-drawn illustrated maps shed light on everything from practical information to Ireland's demographics circa 1000 CE. An enticing calendar-style prehistoric timeline is loaded with notes and tiny sketches of artifacts.

Several reproductions of original journal pages, bearing both illustrations and hand-written entries, are included, as are dozens of full color pictures taken of and by the four travelers. Thanks to the high quality of the book's paper, both the artwork and the pictures are displayed in clear detail.

We Are the Land is a unique and evocative Irish travelogue. It's an inspiring guide for making the most of any trip, combined with a how-to for journaling in a way that will result in a family treasure.

SUSAN WAGGONER (March 18, 2019)

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