CELTIC TRAVELER: AN ONLINE MAGAZINE

Stephen Jendraszak

May 6, 2005

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ABSTRACT

*Celtic Traveler* is an online magazine targeting Americans who are interested in Celtic and Early Christian travel and history, particularly in Scotland, Ireland, and Wales. The "proof of concept" issue I produced is for March 2005. Because of St. Patrick's Day, March is the magazine's annual issue that focuses on Ireland exclusively.

The site includes a cover, contents page, editor's note, letters to the editor page, three "destination" travel articles, a how-to article, a book review, and a review of a travel gadget. Each article has text, of course, but many have photos, explanatory graphics, videos, or audio content as well. The site is built as though a subscription is required to access content, but of course, that is not the case for this "proof of concept" issue.

I created this site as my individual project for a seminar at the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry. The class spent two weeks doing research in Ireland and created a 10-part radio documentary that aired on Indiana Public Radio.

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I would like to thank all the members of the Consuming a Nation seminar for making a semester of work and two weeks of traveling in close quarters an incredibly enjoyable experience that I will never forget.

Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends, the Honors College, and Ball State University for everything they have done that made my college career the best years of my life so far.
AUTHOR’S ANALYSIS

When I signed up to spend my last semester at Ball State studying at the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry (VBC) and producing radio shows for Indiana Public Radio, I knew that my personal area of expertise would be unused for most of the semester. Graphic design isn't particularly helpful on the radio. However, I didn't want to get rusty, so I chose to make my required personal project design-driven.

In the fall before I began my studies at the VBC, I took a course in magazine design. My partner and I created a print magazine called *Wayfarer*. *Wayfarer* was intended to provide news and travel information to young Americans living in Europe. I enjoyed that project very much, and decided to expand on the idea. Of course, I would need to focus more firmly on Ireland so I could use what I was learning in class and my travel experiences from the VBC. Because of trends in the print media industry, I decided to try my hand at producing a magazine designed to be viewed on the internet.

*Celtic Traveler* was born.

We began our semester at the VBC reading extensively in tourism studies and learning about interviewing and writing for radio. We also took a crash-course in Ireland, although I already had some background from taking History 476 (Modern British History). Because of the sheer quantity we read, it is hard for me to call out particular works that had a significant impact on the outcome of my project. However,
two major ideas did influence the work I did. One was the simple thought that we ought to think critically about the places we visit and the act of tourism itself. Normally, we don't spend much effort on that kind of analysis when traveling. Trying to be conscious of the way I behaved as a tourist profoundly influenced the way I thought about the sites I visited in Ireland, including the ones I chose to review. The second idea that influenced me was that tourists have a profound impact on the places they visit, and therefore ought to be careful to make sure that impact is positive. I tried to subtly include that idea in the articles I wrote for *Celtic Traveler*.

While we were trying to become conversant in tourism studies and the other areas that would be important to our work, the class also began planning both the stories we would look to tell and the path we would take in Ireland. We chose places to visit that would help us to encounter people we wanted to interview, particularly tourists and tourism industry workers at particular kinds of sites. We also chose places to visit that would help us with our individual projects, so I worked to make sure that sites that would be appropriate for *Celtic Traveler* were included in our discussions.

We left for Ireland in late February and worked in the country for two weeks. We visited several sites that would have fit in with the focus of my magazine, including the Skellig Centre, Dun Aengus, the Hill of Tara, and several castles. A classmate and I also took a day trip to Downpatrick, the supposed burial place of Saint Patrick. I intended to write only three travel articles, so I knew I needed to choose the only the best of these sites to cover. The Skellig Centre was eliminated because we were
unable to visit the islands the Centre explains. The weather in March makes the ferry ride impossible. Without photos or the experience of seeing the islands first-hand, I didn't feel I could do them justice in a story.

I cut all the various castles from my list also, mostly due to the fact that they weren't old enough or unique enough to capture my interest the way the other sites did. That left Downpatrick, Dun Aengus, and the Hill of Tara. I decided to include a site called Newgrange in the Hill of Tara story, because although it technically falls outside the scope of the magazine (the site is so old it predates the arrival of the Celts in Ireland), I thought it would be of interest to any member of my target audience who had already made it as far as Tara.

Everywhere we went in Ireland we interviewed tourism industry workers, fellow tourists, and natives. I used some of those interviews — particularly the one with Joy Wilkinson at the cathedral in Downpatrick — in Celtic Traveler. I also used some of the video Kevin Head took of the places we visited.

Upon our return to the United States, we began the work of writing, voicing, and editing our radio shows. That process was consuming, but at the same time, we began to work on our individual projects. Celtic Traveler began as sketches in my notebook, diagraming how each page would look and how they would link to each other. I designed the navigation scheme and site to be simple and easy to follow, using colors to identify different parts of the site. I tried to avoid a stereotypically "Celtic" design,
thinking that would turn off members of my audience with a healthy disrespect for Irish "kitsch." Avoiding overt Celticism also made it easier to keep from slipping into gaudiness.

I designed the site logo, the navigation system, and the cover page in Adobe ImageReady. The rest of the site was assembled in Macromedia Dreamweaver. I designed the site using the principles I have learned during my four years studying design in the journalism department. Each page has several "points of entry" where readers can be drawn into the page. Colors and photos were chosen carefully to achieve a clean, dramatic look. Of course, the site was also designed to be easily viewed on any modern computer and easily navigated by any reader.

I paid special attention to designing the magazine as a "proof-of-concept" that could one day actually be published monthly and make a profit. Because Celtic Traveler would need to make money from subscriptions, it would need to make its content only available to subscribers. I didn't build the whole infrastructure that would require, but I did make a cover page that asks for a username and password. For the purpose of my thesis, though, the page will accept whatever is typed in those blanks as valid.

Were Celtic Traveler actually published as a money-making venture, the cover would be the only page visible to a casual surfer. Therefore, it was designed to convince potential subscribers that the content inside is worth the cost of access. Of course,
many readers would want to check out one issue before committing to an annual subscription. To that end, the cover also includes a link that would allow a casual surfer to request that a free username and password good for one month only be mailed to his or her home address. A free username and password would only be sent to the same address once in a given period of time — perhaps one or two years.

Once the skeleton of the site was built, I began adding content. I had known from the beginning that I wanted to include multimedia on the site. The stakes are higher online than in print — surfers aren't satisfied with just text and graphics. They expect you to take full advantage of the potential of the medium. Therefore, I cut together short audio clips for the story on Downpatrick, a short movie for the story on Dun Aegnus, and another movie for the story on the Hill of Tara.

I also began to choose photos and write captions, the text that explains the stories, and the shorter stories. These short stories are called "departments" in print magazines, and they are the sections that appear every month. In my case, I wrote an editor's note, fabricated letters to the editor, reviewed a book (How the Irish Saved Civilization by Thomas Cahill), and discussed the new iPod shuffle as a travel companion in the Downtime department. Downtime was an idea for a department that I carried over from my older Wayfarer project — it's a page that gives readers ideas about what to do when they have downtime traveling: riding on a bus, waiting for a plane, or just relaxing in hotel rooms. The idea is recycled, but the content is new.
With the departments complete (as well as pages like the table of contents), I finally moved into composing the longer "feature" stories. The first was the easiest — I wrote a "how-to" story about taking great photos on vacation. This story was taken from my work in a previous class, with some modification. The other stories were all new.

The Dun Aengus story is about an ancient fort on one of the Aran Islands off Ireland's west coast. The Downpatrick story is about the burial place of Saint Patrick and the nearby interpretative center. The Hill of Tara story is about the seat of Ireland's ancient high kings, the conservation issues that surround the site, and the nearby tomb and astronomical observatory at Newgrange.

Once revisions were complete, I loaded the site onto my Ball State web space. This project stretched me to think about content in new ways and kept my graphic design skills fresh during a semester when they got little other use. It allowed me to explore a topic I find fascinating — namely, Celtic and early Christian history — and to expand my technological areas of expertise. It was a wonderful capstone to my college career.
DESTINATION
Discover the seat of Ireland's high kings

HOW TO
Take digital photos worth showing off

DESTINATION
Visit the remarkable fort at Dun Aengus

This magazine was created by Stephen Jendraszak for the Virginia Ball Center for Creative Inquiry and the Honors College at Ball State University in 2005.
Editor's Note
Our editor explains the annual "Focus on Ireland" issue and discusses a recent trip to the Emerald Isle.

Dun Aengus is an ancient fort seated at the dividing line between land and sea, at the far edge of Europe.

In honor of St. Patrick's Day, we take you to the burial place of Ireland's patron — Downpatrick.

Letters to the Editor
You talk back. We listen. Read about how we choose which aspects of a destination to discuss and how American currency is faring in Europe.

Destination
The Hill of Tara and Newgrange are two of Ireland's most ancient attractions, both located in the Boyne Valley.

How-to
When you return from a trip, everyone wants to see photos. We show you how to shoot to impress.

Books
How the Irish Saved Civilization by Thomas Cahill reviewed.

Downtime
Apple's new iPod shuffle is light, rugged and cheap — an ideal travel companion.
Destinations

This section of the magazine typically contains one story about a Celtic or early Christian site each for Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This month, in honor of St. Patrick's Day, all three destinations are on the Emerald Isle.

DUN AENGUS
This ancient stone fort stands on the far western edge of the largest Aran Island — Inishmore. With its jagged rocks and high stone walls, it was clearly built for defense. Once upon a time, the Aran Islands were of great strategic importance. However, the fort may also have been the site of religious rituals because of its place at the end of the earth and the beginning of the sea. There is no defensive wall on the back of the fort, because it isn't necessary. A cliff ends the land as decisively as a period ends a sentence.

DOWNPATRICK
This small town in Northern Ireland claims to be the burial place of not only Saint Patrick, but also Ireland's two other patron saints: Brigid and Colmcille. Other cities — notably Armagh — dispute the claim, but Downpatrick has put its money where its mouth is, building the elaborate and modern St. Patrick's Centre to welcome visitors and tell the story of the saint. A gravestone to Patrick and a beautiful cathedral are only a short walk away, and the town is surrounded by other important sites related to Patrick.

THE HILL OF TARA AND THE BOYNE VALLEY
The Hill of Tara is the spiritual seat of Ireland's sovereignty. In ancient days, it was the seat of Ireland's high kings. In modern times, it was the launching point for rebellions against British rule. Saint Patrick is said to have confronted a high king here, and from the hill you can see the remains of a monastery founded by Colmcille.

The nearby passage tomb of Newgrange is one of many impressive ancient sites that dot the valley.