

Travel Writing Extracts

By Martin Kelly

A July Trip To Zero Limits with Deadly Denis

Guys! Just imagine being registered as blind or vision impaired and having the opportunity to drive a car independently around Mondello Car Racing Track.

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Just imagine! Having a crash helmet fitted to your head before entering a car and then being strapped into a bucket seat and secured in place. Comparable to a convict on death-row confined in his electric chair. The good news is that everyone returned safely after their thrilling experience.

Dancing with a difference (ballet and equestrian!)

Now it's time to pirouette to the quadruped, Nijinsky, who emerged from the school of the master, Northern Dancer - one of the most famous dancing stallions standing today in Canada's Horse Racing Hall of Fame. Northern Dancer's agile, intricate steps were handed down the family bloodline in the shape of the brilliant Nijinsky. Combined with the skilled tutoring of Vincent O'Brien, Nijinsky achieved the Triple Crown. And, like his human counterpart, they both excelled due to maximising their natural physical abilities coupled with their fantastic fleet of foot.

An unforgettable SÚIL Lines of Longitude Trip

A timely reminder of the character of John O'Brien (JOB) and his unending love for the great outdoors. On this memorable occasion, John O'Brien (R.I.P.) and myself headed for Rathlin Island, situated off the Antrim coast, to join a band of fellow enthusiasts and participate on another of Clare McLaughlin's SÚIL Sensory Island Walks.

After a break, following the COVID hiatus, it was all systems go once again for the devotees of the SÚIL Island Series to embark on the creation of yet another art project. On this occasion, a cross-border adventure, everyone made their way independently to Rathlin Island.

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The Manor House is located only yards from the Church Bay landing area so the soothing atmosphere coming from the rolling waves coupled with a cacophony of bird sounds were a constant sensory reminder of island life. Moreover, you could set your watch by the ferries as they crisscrossed the water, arriving and departing like clockwork.

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(For whatever reason, JOB couldn't resist the temptation to indulge in a sea-swim regardless of the location or the prevailing water temperature!)

An Island Laced With Lasting Memories

The pace was very slow and deliberate to allow everyone to embrace the prevailing sensory experiences across the terrain. We travelled across one relatively steep hill but, given the slow

pace, it was a very comfortable climb for the fifty or so participants. The slow, silent pace was designed to allow for the creation of a memorable and permanent sculpture of the entire walk. Formed by Clare tightly folding a rope as we moved forward.

There was total silence as we moved, at a snail's pace, along the guide rope. Moving softly, en route from the North to the South Harbours, all experienced in a heavy island mist, coupled with the rocky terrain and the incomparable flora and fauna. This event was truly an inspiring and ever-lasting occasion.

On reaching the North Harbour, the event ended with the rope coming together into a sculptural mind-map representation of the morning's sensory SÚIL. Finally, everyone was presented with a short piece of the guide rope as a keepsake.

Reflections on the Delta Gardens

The Sensory Delta Gardens are located near an industrial estate, on the outskirts of Carlow Town. The gardens were originally developed as a designated calming space to stimulate the five human senses: Touch, Sight, Smell, Sound and Taste. The extensive garden area covers 2.5 acres and comprises sixteen distinctive but interconnected themed gardens.

Many of the gardens are specially cultivated to encourage specific responses. The texture of plant leaves and herbs can be sensitively touched or gently sniffed. There are even dedicated areas with specific features that - when touched - can emit sounds.

This special amenity was originally planned as a peaceful oasis designed to assist in the rehabilitation of clients attending the adjacent special needs resource centre. But the Delta Gardens was to prove one of Ireland's most exceptional and interesting visitor attractions.