

Illini in Ireland



Photo courtesy, Kirsten Keller

Melissa Deneufbourg and
Kirsten Keller

Kirsten Keller, (senior in Journalism), participated in the Marching Illini's trip to Ireland from March 13–18 and detailed the exciting opportunities and the hardships that the group experienced.

Hundreds of thousands of revelers crammed around barriers that separated the performers from the spectators. Green-clad youth hung off elevated statues, claiming the best views of what lay before them. Green, white and orange-painted faces smiled as they soaked up the festivity of the day.

And in front of them marched the 280 member-strong Marching Illini in the 2014 Dublin St. Patrick's Day Parade.

But the road to get to that point was long and winding.

Less than a week before the Marching Illini was to fly out to Ireland, Aer Lingus, an Irish airline, announced that it would go on strike on March 13 and 14, the former of which was the band's departure date. Thus, a mad rush commenced to reschedule what was supposed to be three flights into 35 separate flights.

As few as three students were on some flights, while others had seven-hour layovers in Paris. Some didn't arrive until Saturday evening, a day after the rest of the band.

But, one way or another, the whole band was eventually reunited in Limerick, Ireland.



On our first full day in Ireland, we eagerly loaded the buses for the Cliffs of Moher. The green, rocky cliffs extend hundreds of meters above the Atlantic Ocean, making for breathtaking views that were enhanced by those daring enough to creep to the edge of the cliffs. The sea-salt wind blew life into our Illinois weather-worn faces and we were reminded what lush, green grass looks like when it's not covered by mounds of snow.



Photos courtesy Illinois Bands

Post-parade adrenaline rushed through all of us as we finished the parade route and excitedly started to talk among ourselves, our tongues tripping up our thoughts as we struggled to put our emotions into words of what we had just experienced.

Luckily, we had another outlet for this leftover energy: the Guinness Storehouse. A short bus ride took us to the sprawling brewery, which produces Guinness supplied to the entire world. Still in uniform, we were ushered in the back entrance. The Storehouse is a cylindrical, multi-level open area, and different sections of the band took their spots on different levels. We looked down to the main level to see the drum majors and Professor Houser conducting, and soon the first note of Revised Entrance rang throughout the building—the note that we strive to perfect during the football season and the sound that defines the Marching Illini. Immediately, tourists stopped what they were doing and smiled with wonder at this huge, sonorous band.



The day we eagerly anticipated soon arrived—St. Patrick's Day in Dublin. This was Marching Illini's seventh appearance in the Dublin parade, but the first time in six years.

The two-mile route felt much shorter as we marched, played, and took in the sights of Dublin. The previous day, we had casually perused these streets, touring St. Patrick's Cathedral, stopping to taste Irish cuisine, and browsing Grafton Street, a shopping area where many street artists and musicians entertained passers-by. On St. Patrick's Day, those streets had been turned into a stage on which the performers couldn't believe their luck to be a part of one of the largest and most renowned parades in the world.

Phones and cameras were thrust in our faces as we marched by, playing "Illinois March" and Bruno Mars' "Runaway Baby." The crowd had not tired of the music, even though other bands had come before us, including Louisiana State University and an eclectic band from Germany.

As the band broke out of attention to greet and high five members of the crowd, we were met with compliments about our energy and enthusiasm—two things that members of the Marching Illini certainly do not lack.

Our final night in Ireland commenced with a hearty dinner, which many followed by returning to the city to experience nightlife in Dublin on St. Patrick's Day—even though they had to be back at the hotel at 3:30 a.m. to catch buses back to the airport.

While the trip may have been short, it was packed with memories that we will carry with us for years. Music is a common language that people across the world can share and enjoy together. For this reason and others, we were presented with the opportunity to share our love of music with the people of Dublin on its most well-known day of the year. And based on the smiles we brought all those spectators—those hailing from Ireland, the United States, or wherever in the world—I think we were successful.

