



# PAN AM<sup>®</sup>

MARCH 1986

## Clipper

*Ireland*

**FORTY SHADES  
OF GREEN**



*Italy*

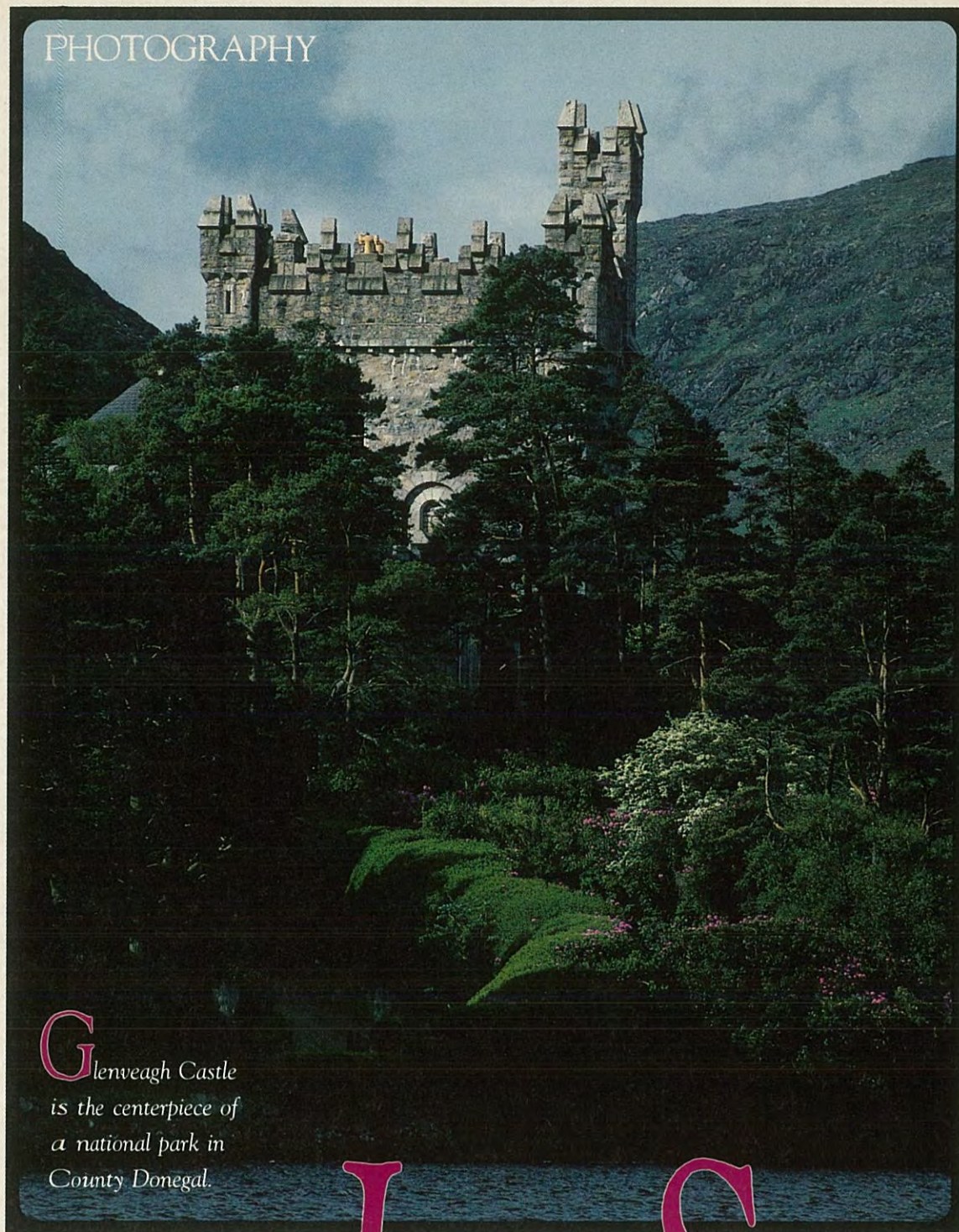
**SPANNING THE  
STRAITS OF MESSINA**

*Belgium*

**GARDEN OF ENDIVE**



PHOTOGRAPHY



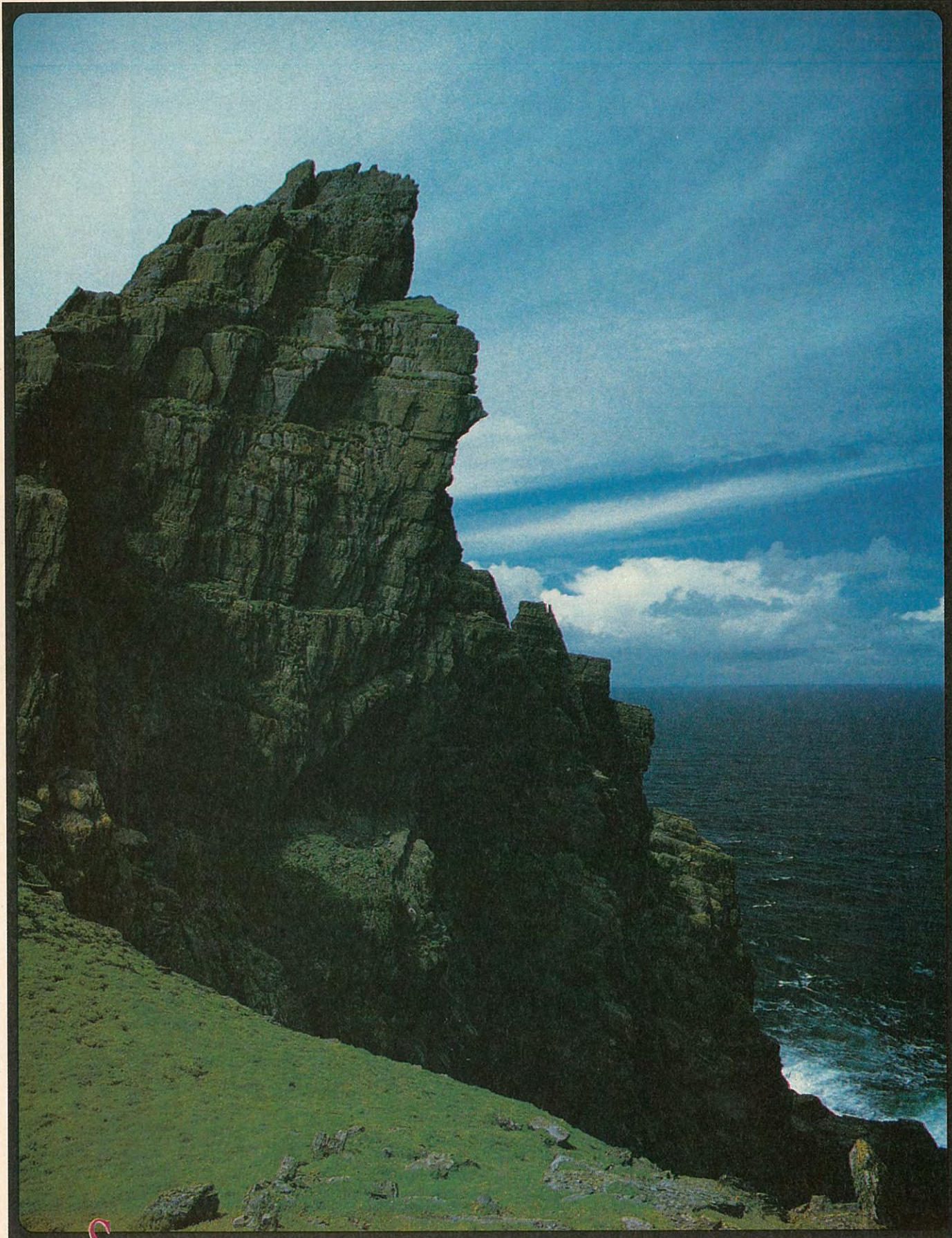
**G**lenveagh Castle  
is the centerpiece of  
a national park in  
County Donegal.

# THE IRISH SPRING

In the season of pervasive mist and fleeting sun,  
Ireland wears its green most gloriously.

TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL GEORGE





*S*kellig Michael is seven miles off  
the coast of County Kerry.

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**F**or the photographer who has a sense of history as well as an eye for beauty, Ireland has to be one of the most photogenic countries in the world. One reason it may be particularly alluring is that "the country enjoys the freshness and mildness of spring all the year round."

So wrote Giraldus Cambrensis in his *Topography of Ireland*. This 12th-century Norman-Welsh cleric also observed, "There is such a plentiful supply of rain, such an everpresent overhanging of clouds and fog, that summer scarcely gives three consecutive days of really fine weather."

In any event, the 20th-century visitor to Ireland knows better than to tour the country without a plentiful supply of warm, waterproof gear. Thus equipped, the traveler may enjoy the things for which the country is justly famous.

The fabled "forty shades of green" are a product of Ireland's mercurial Atlantic weather. In the season of rebirth and renewal these colors are at their most intense.

Ireland in the spring is a veritable garden of earthly delights. The countryside after the rain and lit by late sun is matchless in its loveliness. Hillsides blaze with the yellow of gorse, hedgerows in May are awash with

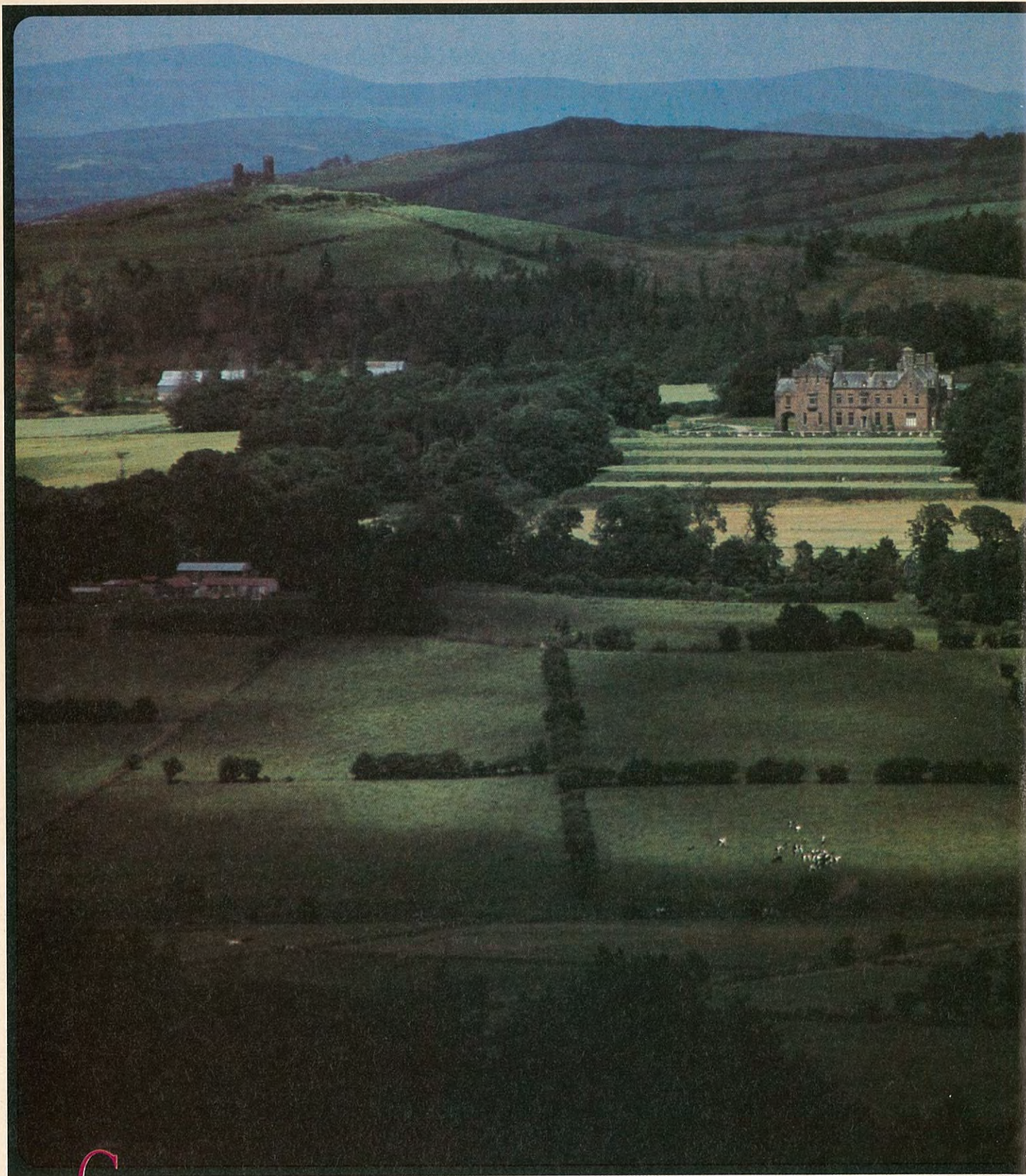


**A** sea of heather engulfs a beaten path on Great Blasket Island.



**M**orning mists shroud Glanmore Lake and the Cahra Mountains beyond.





*C*astle Oliver stands in the Glenasheen Valley, County Limerick.

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white hawthorn, and the woodlands are stained mauve by the pervasive ponticum. Later, the lovely fuchsia makes its brilliant contribution to the Irish palette. But Ireland in springtime is not by any means the sum of its pleasures and diversions.

Perhaps my being a refugee from the Celtic fringes of the British Isles—I am a displaced Welshman—makes me more than usually susceptible to its charm. At any rate, when I first visited Ireland in 1982, I was struck by the similarities in topography.

If, as we Welsh like to think, a taste for the sublime is implanted in us at birth, how much truer must this be of the Irish, given their natural heritage? In what is still, to an astonishing degree, a country of unspoiled loveliness, there are any number of poignant reminders of the past: Neolithic tombs, Celtic round towers, Norman-English castles, and the glorious houses of the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy. Ireland is filled with the tangible evidence of its checkered history. And it is this layered quality of the visible world that gives Ireland its undeniable appeal to the photographer.

Indeed, from the photographic standpoint, Ireland may be considered as a series of images. On my first visit, I was fortunate in having as my guides George



*B*lue ceanothus and China roses grow against a cottage in County Wexford.





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Mott and Brian de Breffny, who have published several books on Ireland. George has an extensive file of photographs of Irish abbeys, castles, and houses, and with a lack of territoriality singular in our profession, he generously led me to some of his most rewarding subjects.

Together we explored the almost lunar area known as the Burren, in

County Clare, where herds of feral goats and passing clouds seem to be the sole possessors of the "limestone pavement." We voyaged to the Hook of Wexford to photograph the oldest lighthouse in Europe. We set up our tripods opposite the handsomely lettered storefronts that are such a feature of the Irish hinterland. And we crawled under barbed wire and tip-

toed between cow pats in order to capture at sunset the most romantically sited of Ireland's great shrines, the Rock of Cashel in County Tipperary.

At that time, I recall, George had a grant to make photographs in black and white that were intended as a visual accompaniment to the poetry of some of our Irish contemporaries. It was in this quest for relevance that he developed an affection for bathtubs that had been left out in fields to rust, whereas I, on my more recent excursions, discovered a photographic affinity for the junked cars that provide an ironic grace note in the landscape of Ireland's sonorous southwest.

Photographing in color in Ireland, as I now have done on three separate occasions, I have sometimes wondered whether I may not have missed a particular resonance only possible in black and white. Perhaps, I say to myself, the haunted look of the country cannot be captured on my preferred Kodachrome 64.

Be that as it may, my advice to the photographer traveling in Ireland is to buy film before leaving home and to have it processed only on your return. It is possible to buy film (pronounced "fillum") in Ireland. And, indeed, if you should run low in the vicinity of Cork City, I can recommend MacSweeney's Photo Shop, at 91 Patrick Street, only you must be prepared to deal with the murderous traffic conditions of the second city in the republic.

The chances are good that when your flight lands in Ireland, it will be raining there. Do not be surprised by this circumstance. It rains a lot.

For the visiting photographer, of course, omnipresent clouds and constant precipitation can prove to be a source of great frustration and irritation. Here, then, are a few hard-won tips.

Wellington boots (hereinafter "Wellies") should be purchased immediately upon arrival. Since they are a staple of the agricultural mode of existence, they may be purchased in any village store selling cupcakes and string. My own pair, bought in Castletownroche in north Cork, cost less than \$10.

Wellies are good for almost all damp surfaces, i.e., the great land-mass of Ireland between airport and hotel. On slick rock, a pair of sensible,



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sturdy shoes is indicated. They are also the footwear of choice when it comes to navigating your rented car—stick shift being cheaper than automatic—through the timeless chaos of an Irish country town on market day.

Although an umbrella in the middle of the bog may look a bit out of place, it is, I have found, an essential item in the equipment of the itinerant pho-

tographer. A good quality, heavy-duty golf umbrella not only provides needed shelter for you and your camera while you are taking pictures, it also enables a long-suffering loved one or assistant to take cover while you are concentrating on that important shot.

Before we leave the subject of the weather, an at least two-thousand-year-old preoccupation of the Irish,

remember that it is always “a grand day.” Do not insist, however politely, that you have seen better. Metaphysics, not meteorology, is one of the Irish strong points. (Last year I did get the proprietress of a bed-and-breakfast establishment in County Meath to observe, with a sort of sinful pleasure, that the day was “desperate.”)

It seems only appropriate at this point to talk about another important topic: the highways and byways of Ireland. No doubt you will have learned all about the lure of the land from your travel agent. And on the basis of this briefing, you may have planned your itinerary and booked your accommodation. If your stay in the country is short and your determination to see the “sights” is strong, you may have opted, along with countless others, to confine yourself to the periphery of the country. In typical tourist fashion, you may trace the well-trodden path in the spectacularly rugged west of the country, from the Cliffs of Moher in County Clare, round the Lakes of Killarney, over the Iveragh Peninsula (via the famous “Ring of Kerry”).

As it happens, my favorite part of the country is the extreme southwest corner, where the splayed fingers of the gnarled Irish hand interlock with the Atlantic as if in some primordial embrace. It is there on the Healy Pass, a majestic mountain crossing linking Bantry Bay in County Cork with Kenmare Bay in County Kerry, that I have been excited and challenged by the photographic possibilities as I have been in few other parts of the country.

Photographing in such terrain naturally is fraught with hazards, and greatest care must be exercised by the traveling photographer at those particular moments when inspiration strikes. It is axiomatic that a car parked awkwardly on a deserted road of uncertain gradient will draw to it, in less time than it takes to say “Irish cheddar,” a veritable flotilla of tour buses.

If patience is considered a virtue, in a photographer it must be regarded as a duty. The day usually begins with the rain slashing and the wind buffeting your hotel windows. But invariably it will yield to twilight hours of golden enchantment, such is the volatility of the late afternoon sun. And where can a photographer hope to



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take better advantage of Ireland's legendary, lingering light than in a splendid garden.

Only an hour's drive east of Shannon Airport, at the center of Ireland, in County Offaly, lies the town of Birr. Landscaped and planted by successive Earls of Rosse, Birr today boasts one of the finest arboretums in the world. In springtime the park blooms with thousands of daffodils, and, a little later, the magnolias in the gardens that border the River Camcor are among the most impressive sights of the season.

Another garden at which I have spent much time contentedly photographing is south of Birr, in the folds of land that are watered by the River Blackwater and its tributary, the Awbeg. It is not far from the village where I bought my Wellies to the handsome, drafty Georgian house called Annes Grove. The remarkable garden of this property was recently described in the London *Sunday Times* as "quite simply one of the best in the whole of the British Isles." (The writer added, "It is here that the chilblain, made extinct elsewhere by the spread of central heating, is making a defiant last stand.") Since Jane and Patrick Annesley, the present occupants—and chief gardeners—are old friends, I have stayed at Annes Grove as their guest on each of my visits to Ireland.

To wander at will in the wild woodland garden lit and perfumed by the flowers of thousands of rhododendrons, many of them rare species originally raised from seed collected in Tibet and Nepal, is to lose all sense of time and place outside this Elysium. It is also entirely possible that you may have it all to yourself. Indeed, Ireland in the spring offers the resourceful photographer many such opportunities. ●

### TO GET THERE

*Starting April 27, Pan Am will offer direct service from New York to Shannon. Flights will depart JFK at 8:45 PM on Tuesdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays, arriving at 8:55 AM the next day. Return flights will leave Monday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday at 11:00 AM, arriving at 1:40 PM. As of June 1, Pan Am will provide this service daily.*