



Montana delegation visits Allihies museum

BEARA & DISTRICT

ONE of UCC's key strategic partners in the western United States, the University of Montana (UM) in Missoula visited UCC last week. The high-level delegation was being led by UM President, Prof George Dennison, who was accompanied by his wife Jane, and included Prof Katie Kane, Director of Irish Studies, and Prof Traolach Ó Ríordáin, a UCC graduate who teaches at University Montana. This institutional relationship continues the historical links between Cork and Montana established in the 1800s when most of the Irish who emigrated to Montana came from Cork. They worked in the copper mines of Butte, which was once one of the most prosperous cities in the US and was nicknamed 'the Richest Hill on Earth'. At the turn of the last century, one quarter of the population of Butte was Irish, a higher percentage than any other American city, including Boston. A particular concentration hailed from the Beara Peninsula, an area familiar with copper mining through the Allihies mines that operated from 1812 to 1962. These West Cork mines employed 1,500 people at their peak in one of the remotest parts of rural Ireland but claimed the lives of many due to the dangerous working conditions, a story that is told in the Allihies Copper Mines Museum. West Cork names such as Lowney, O'Sullivan, O'Leary and Harrington are still very common right across the state of Montana.

Comparisons between Missoula and West Cork continue today with the attraction of their renowned scenic landscapes for artists. Co-operation between UM and UCC has been growing since 2004. It now spans many disciplines, including History, Irish, English, Law, Geology, Life Sciences, Drama and Theatre Studies, and Mathematics. During the current academic year, 11 students from UM are studying at UCC and 12 UCC students are in UM. Staff exchanges have also occurred between the universities. One of the most innovative developments is the new BSc in International Field Geosciences through which UCC and UM collaborate with a third partner, the University of Potsdam in Germany. This programme, whose UCC coordinator is Dr. Pat Meere in the Department of Geology, allows Irish students to study in all three institutions with financial support from the EU/US ATLANTIS project. Currently, four UCC students are studying abroad at the UM under this programme and two UM students are at UCC. While at UCC, the group was received by UCC President, Dr. Michael Murphy. Both presidents signed a Memorandum of Understanding to strengthen the partnership between the two institutions. During their two-day visit, the delegation met with the International Education Office, and members of the College of Arts, Celtic Studies and Social Sciences, the

College of Business and Law, and the College of Science, Engineering and Food Science. The group availed of the opportunity to meet the UM students studying at UCC during their Junior Year Abroad. On Saturday last the Montana delegation, accompanied by UCC Professor Sean O Coileain, Emeritus Professor of Irish, Dr. Caroline Crowley of the International Education Office, UCC, and Ms Louise Tobin Director of International Student Recruitment, UCC, visited the Allihies Mining Museum. They were welcomed to Allihies by Museum Committee members Charlie Tyrell, Tadhg O'Sullivan and Theo Dalke, and by Connie Murphy of Beara Historical Society. After a lunch in the museum café the distinguished visitors were given a tour of the museum, as well as the story of the copper mining venture set up by the Puxley family in 1812 which employed up to a thousand miners and surface workers until the mining ended in 1884. Many of the miners then emigrated to the mines in Butte, Montana, where some of their descendants still live. The Montana delegation was highly impressed by the layout of the museum and the working models which explained the mining techniques in use in the 1800s. Walter Harrington, a San Francisco property developer whose ancestors hail from Castletownbere, has purchased the historic Silver Bow Club, once the meeting place of the Butte Miners' Union, with a view to establish an Irish-American Cultural

Centre in Butte, Montana, to showcase the Beara-Butte connection. This will build on the Silver Bow Public Archives of Butte that document Cork-Montana/ Irish-American history and lore. This venture will also add to the growing interest in the Irish diaspora of Montana already exhibited by the Montana Gaelic Cultural Society, which promotes the Irish language and culture and has engaged with West Cork historians Riobaird O'Dwyer and Tadhg O'Sullivan, and by the abundance of Irish dance schools and festivals throughout the state. For those who emigrated to Montana, their story has been captured by UM Professor David Emmons, one of America's best-known specialists in Irish-American Diaspora Studies, in *The Butte Irish*. This seminal study details the economic, political and social fortunes of an urban Irish community at the intersection of eastern and western American culture. Professor Katie Kane, in the current UM delegation, has also drawn on the experience of the Irish, through their own history of colonisation, to help explain the strategies used to wipe out Native American culture. Since 2001, Professor Traolach Ó Ríordáin has instructed UM students in the Irish language. Both Professors Kane and Ó Ríordáin were honoured this month at the American Irish Historical Society in New York City as two of the nation's top 100 education professionals of Irish descent.

Saturday, 31 October 2009

Page: 3

Circulation: 14155

Area of Clip: 46249.00mm

Clip ID: 466382



Visitors from the University of Montana, Missoula, and University College Cork at Allihies Copper Mines Museum.