

## **Ciara Cullen, Clare Island, Co. Mayo**

Ciara Cullen and Christophe Mouze have been running the Clare Island Retreat Centre for the past three and a half years. The centre runs mostly yoga courses—though Ciara and Christophe have plans of extending the range of courses—and has proven itself to be highly successful. While the couple agree that they had no extensive plan at the outset, they are both happy with how the place is developing, which is in keeping with their commitment to sustainable and holistic approaches. In addition to the yoga courses which run mainly during the summer as well as over Christmas and the New Year, there are shorter courses combining yoga with vegetarian cooking (using their own organic produce from the gardens and polytunnel). Courses in Permaculture as well as eco-building sessions (including lime/hemp and cob) are planned for 2008, and they are interested in having more involvement from the local island and mainland based schools.

Ciara, originally from the US but living in Ireland since the early '80's, has had a long history with Clare Island. Having lived with Michael Joe O'Malley on the island for eight years when first in Ireland, and inheriting his cottage and farm on his death in 1989, she spent the following decade in Galway, studying in NUI Galway and pursuing a PhD in sociology. It was only in 2002, with the birth of their son, Theo, that she and Christophe decided to move back to the island full time.

“Unlike most newcomers to the West, I have had a long history of learning the nuances and subtleties of living within a small community, and more particularly, an island community. What may seem like substantial challenges to some—for example, how to organise our stocks for feeding up to 25 people per day during the summer (all our food is either produced by ourselves or is bought from an organic wholesaler based in the UK) has become second nature to us. You learn how to handle the logistics. On another and perhaps the most important level, it is simply a fantastic place for children to grow up in.”

Christophe is French, though he has lived in Ireland for some twenty years. His background is in both the tourism industry, (he managed a number of sailing schools both in France and Ireland) as well as IT. He continues to conduct a small but significant amount of IT work part-time, managing a few high profile websites. A key element to their success is the availability of broadband on the island.

“Islands have a unique drawing power. Certainly our yoga centre has benefited from being situated on an island. For many, the idea of getting away from it all on an island is extremely attractive.”

Both Christophe and Ciara are keen to develop their centre so as to make it more sustainable, energy efficient and productive. The couple agree that islands have long held the public imagination because of the resilience of the local populations. Islanders have, in the past, been able to create a unique culture from utilising local resources. With the aid of new ideas, techniques and technologies, they hope to expand and build upon this rich island heritage.

## **Michael Early, Árainn Mhór, Co. Donegal**

Visiting my birthplace of Arranmore in the year 2000 while attending my Mother's funeral, I had no notion of returning to live there. However after 33 years in Australia I was struck by the change in the standard of living that I remembered in the 60's and started to seriously consider my Uncle's suggestion that I consider moving back permanently.

Returning to Oz I thought long and hard about what it would mean to start again. I decided on a more relaxed way of finding out and returned for a holiday the following year. I found that I hadn't really been deceiving myself and determined that I would give it a Go in the true Aussie tradition. I made a conscious decision to return in the winter to see if the weather made any contribution and arrived in November 2002. The next few months were spent getting to know my own people again and also meeting more of the locals who, surprise surprise were in one way or another related to me.

At the time there was a Call Centre operating on the Island and I subsequently gained employment there which provided me with a sense of learning something new. The days were filled with exploring the surrounding area both hill side and seashore and the evenings involved classes in woodwork, oil painting and learning the Irish language. I also involved myself with voluntary work taking the position of Secretary of the local Soccer Club and being appointed Chair of the Care of the Aged Committee, at a time when I thought I was the aged. The Drama Group also provided another outlet where I became involved with 2 productions which were well received locally. When the Call Centre closed the opportunity to work from home in similar conditions was taken up and I continued until the contracts dried up. I subsequently found employment with the local Coop where some 2 years later I am still employed. I was also chosen to go on a fact finding tour of the Scottish Isles involving alternative energy which gave an insight into the lives of fellow Islanders.

The move for me has been a good one in many respects. It has given me a challenge at a time of life when many people would be considering winding down and has also reconnected me with my roots and given me an appreciation of where I come from. I particularly enjoy the closeness of the community, the changing seasons and stress free life style. The availability of the Internet means that Island life is less constricted and with Broadband on the horizon will make working from the area an achievable prospect. The recent addition of a Fast Ferry service also opens up a way of commuting to the mainland whether it is for business or pleasure. With Carrick Airport a short trip away I can leave the Island at 7am and be in Dublin by 9am with the option of returning the same day if I wish. The availability of an education including Secondary school makes it an attractive draw for families wishing to relocate or return. All in all I would recommend to anyone thinking of returning or relocating that they give serious consideration to a move in this direction. The opportunities are limited only by our imaginations.