# An Irish Business Trip

By Tom King

In the early 1980s, our company had two operations in Ireland, a manufacturing facility in Waterford next to the famous glass factory, and a software engineering facility in Cork about 125 km away. Arriving one evening in Waterford, I had dinner at a reputedly fine restaurant after which I was looking forward to some jet lag recovery. The wine steward pretended to be French, complete with a phonied-up accent, even though he was as Irish as the day is long. The meal came with a side of potatoes – fixed six different ways (au gratin, mashed, baked, and a few others), so I knew I was in Ireland.

The next morning after my meetings with the manufacturing folks, I asked the manager, Paddy McCarthy, for directions to Cork since I planned to drive there the following day. His complex directions included many right and left turns with landmarks in place of street names; I dutifully wrote this all down.

Commencing in the pre-dawn darkness of a rainy next day (the hotel receptionist said, “Tis a soft mornin’.”) and driving on the left side of the road in a car whose controls were strangely all on the right, I made quick progress on the deserted highway until I caught a glimpse of a dark mass in the middle of the left lane a kilometer or so ahead. Closing rapidly, I was dismayed to see that the mass hadn’t moved, so I endeavored to swerve around it. Performing this evasion caused the car to slide unexpectedly. Catching the slide, I made it around what turned out to be a large pile of sweet potatoes whose dirt had spawned the muddy slime that had oozed across the road in this soft mornin’. Whee. Irish farmers own their roads.

Entering the rather large town of Cork, I followed Paddy’s instructions faithfully only to find myself lost. Returning to my original entrance into the town, I more diligently followed the written instructions in those pre-Google, pre-GPS days. This time, I became lost in the same manner. By then, I was in the rush hour traffic I had hoped to avoid, and so, puzzled and now somewhat distrustful of my own note taking abilities, I thought I might switch one or more of the instructions from right to left or vice versa. However, no combination of directional reversals yielded any better results, and, with no cell phones in those days and no likely pedestrians to accost with my idiot colonist questions, I threw up my hands and decided to reverse EVERY right and left. That tactic took me directly to my destination, the Cork software engineering facility. Pulling in there, I was blocked by a policeman who told me the Taoiseach (i.e., the prime minister of Ireland) was visiting and so I needed to park elsewhere. The policeman was nice enough to tell me there was a parking area just down the road 300 meters through a gate on the right. I drove 300 meters down the road and turned left through a gate into the parking area.

When I met with the English director of the software engineering group and told him of my directional misadventures, he said, “Paddy’s a Corkman.” I said, “So what?” The director said, “It’s well known that Corkmen don’t know their right from their left.”