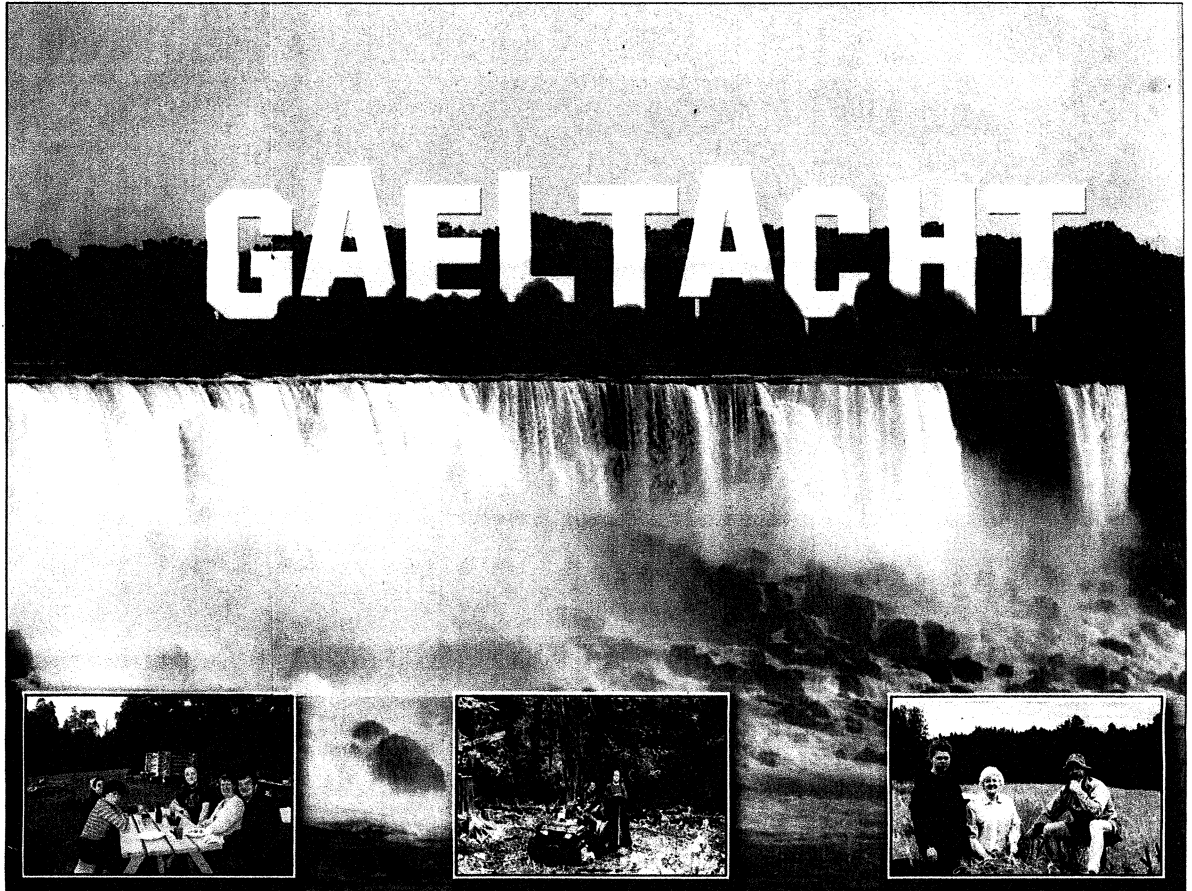


AboutUs

Irish at home in Canada

A determined military officer is planning to build a 60-acre Gaeltacht in Ontario to help keep alive a centuries-old Irish language tradition, writes Seán O'Driscoll



very ambitious project, admits Pat Scott, a Kerry-born creamery scientist now living in Ontario.

He speaks French and Irish at home with his daughter, a linguist who has become an expert on the relative clause in the Irish language.

He has, he says, a clear picture of what many people think of the language. He recalls that the former dean of St. Patrick's College in Ottawa told him that studying Irish was "a complete waste of time" whereas learning French would open up high theology and greater learning.

"I was taken aback," recalls Scott. "I told him that Irish was the purist of the Indo-European languages, but he didn't listen."

Scott sees the Gaeltacht as a natural link to the Irish-speaking history of Newfoundland, where up to 10 native speakers still live, according to the 2001 Canadian census.

Niagara Falls (main photograph) and, from left, volunteer workers take a break; Isaac Davis and Donovan Conlon working on the Gaeltacht site in Ontario, Canada; Aine Scott, Anne McConnell-Strong and Araft Mac

America where there is a strong Irish American identity. We never really escaped the British empire and there isn't a globally defined Irish-Canadian identity."

THE DESIRE TO assert that identity has led 17-year-old Kingston high-school student Madison Scott to volunteer to clear away brambles at the Gaeltacht site and cut out a path to the bordering river, where young Gaelgeoirí go swimming in the summer.

She has been studying Irish since she was aged 13, finding the addition of extra words before a noun the most confusing part.

She speaks Irish at home with her Galway-born grandmother and Dublin-born grandfather, both of whom are fluent speakers.

When she goes to college, she says, she wants to study architecture and volunteer with the design at the new cultural

like their comfort when they go abroad - I don't know if they're going to put up with that," said one fluent speaker.

Madison laughs if off. "I worked to clear the site over there - there's a few mosquitoes and bees but it's really nothing much."

One person who definitely won't be making a trip to the Gaeltacht is Pat Clarke, a Dublin-born insurance clerk who hangs out at the Black Sheep pub in Toronto.

"No bloody way," he says when asked if he would attend the Gaeltacht. "I wish them well but I had enough Irish in school."

He describes Irish speakers as "Peigers", (a reference to Peig Sayers) but emphasises again that he has nothing against them.

"I envy them in some ways," he says. "I'd love to be able to say something that Canadians don't understand because they