



Shouldering down to the Irish Sea, gable-to-gable guesthouses line the promenade



in Douglas, port of call for the waves of tourists that surge each summer to the Isle of Man.

The Manx and Their Isle of Man

By VERONICA THOMAS
Photographs by TED H. FUNK

“YOU’LL BE PUTTING a sight on the Fairy Bridge soon now,” says Garth the taxi driver, a good-looking young man with dark curly hair. “We’re nearly there.”

The road we follow leads from Ronaldsway Airport to Douglas, the capital of the Isle of Man. It’s not a wide road and it twists a bit, but it’s the leafiest, greenest one I have ever seen. Tall trees with great curved trunks arch from either side, like a luxuriant tunnel.

“Is this your first time in the island?” Garth inquires. When I say it is, he asks what I know about Man.

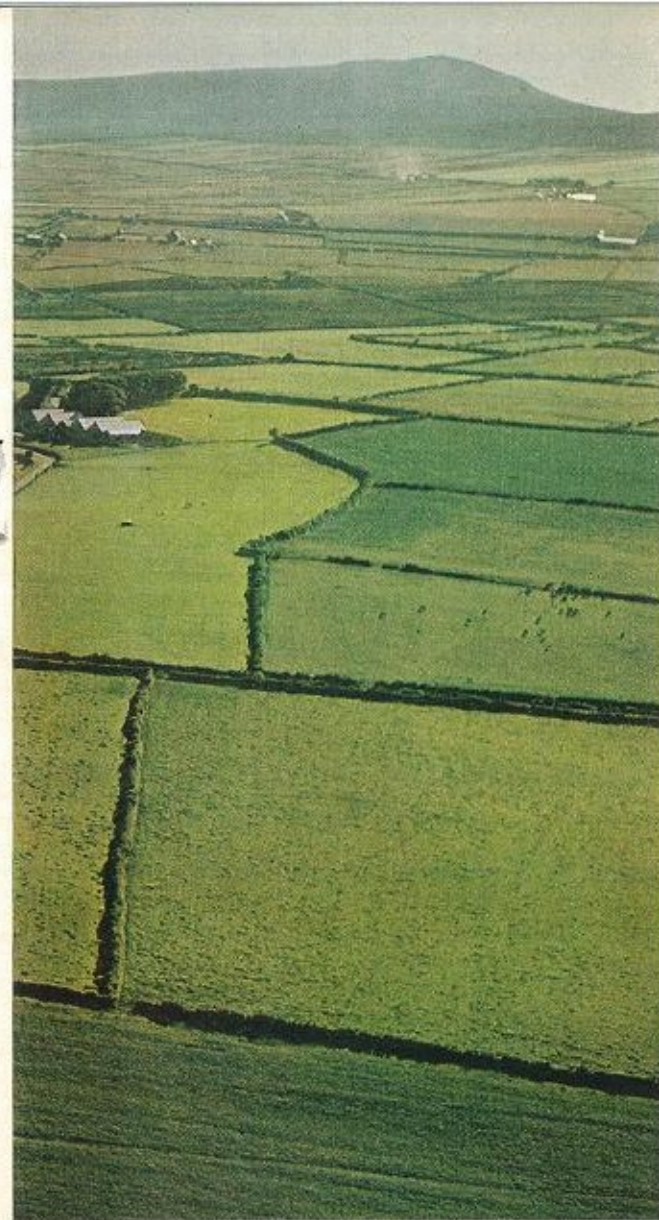
In fact, I know only what I have read: The Isle of Man, a largely self-governing community within the Commonwealth, lies in the Irish Sea, roughly equidistant from England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland (map, following page). From the top of Snaefell, its highest mountain at 2,036 feet, you can see the “six kingdoms”: England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland, Man—and Heaven. The island, 32 miles long by 13 wide, has 56,000 people,

mountains, glens, rugged coastal cliffs, and a climate mild enough for palm trees. The Manx people are said to be . . .

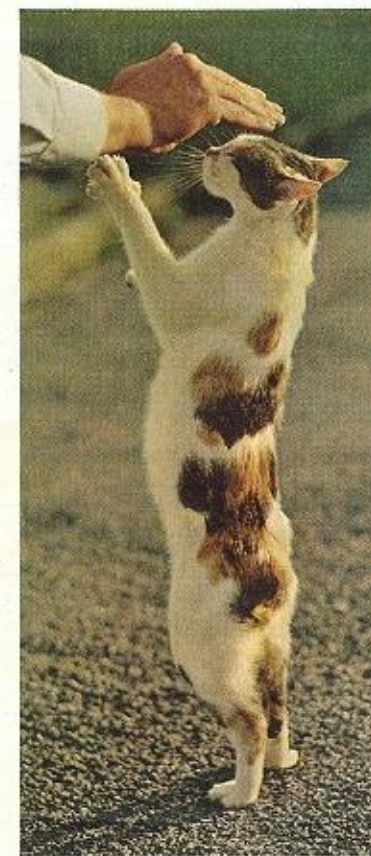
“Fairly superstitious, we are,” says Garth, as if reading my thoughts. “Especially Manx fishermen. If one of them put a sight on you now—you being a woman and red-haired as well—he’d likely go straight home again and not go fishing at all.”

He slows the taxi and announces, “There’s the Fairy Bridge now. Don’t forget what I told you—nice and loud!”

A stream trickles beneath the little bridge



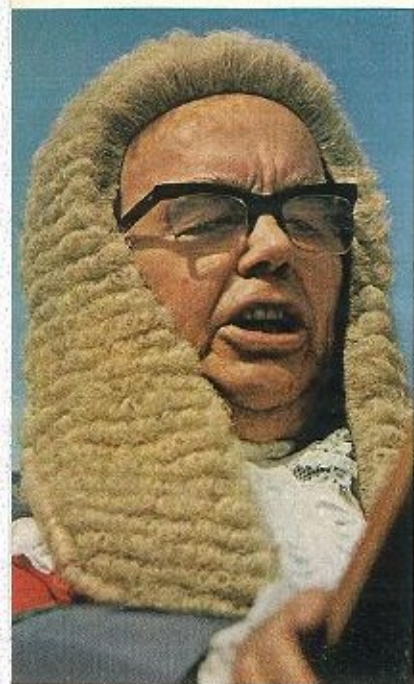
Emerald as Ireland, hedgerowed as England, Man wears a pattern of lush pasture. Through intensive farming, the island yields an abundance of meat, vegetables, and dairy products. The warm Gulf Stream brings a gentle climate.



Tailless trademark, the Manx cat (above) had become so scarce eight years ago that officials set up a cattery to propagate the breed. Now 30 to 40 pure Manx kittens a year purr off the reproduction line.



Island oddities, Loaghtan sheep graze on the Calf of Man (left). One ram sports four horns; occasionally the breed produces a six-horned animal. Only last-minute efforts saved the sheep from extinction.



With pageantry born of pride, the Manx proclaim their laws. Each July 5 the island parliament gathers at the village of St. John's. After prayers in the church, the dignitaries proceed between resplendent honor guardsmen to Tynwald Hill—an artificial mound. The open-air assembly traces its origins to the island's Viking past. Two judges known as Deemsters recite the measures passed that year (left), the first reading in Manx Gaelic and the second in English. Only then can the acts be signed into law.



pure Manx kittens a year," Mrs. Violet Holroyd told me one morning when I visited the cattery. "Unfortunately, not all of them are born tailless; in a litter of six kittens from two tailless parents, as many as five may be born with tails.

"On the other hand," she added, "you can take a long-tail from here on the island, breed it with another long-tail, and you may get a perfect Manx."

Tourists Ride in Open "Toast Racks"

Not far from the cattery, the Douglas sea-front, with its sunken flower gardens and two-mile-long promenade, borders the bay in a colorful crescent. Behind the promenade, like a gaily painted seawall, stand rows of houses and hotels in pastel shades of lemon, pink, green, and blue (pages 426-7).

To me, the promenade is a Victorian watercolor come to life. Scarlet-and-white horse trams clomp up and down the boulevard. Passengers tour in the open carriages known as "toast racks" because of their bench seating.

"I always put me old mother on the tram," a vacationist from Manchester told me on the promenade. "Let her go up and down from half past ten to lunchtime. Oh, she luv's it, up and down the prom! Sees all kinds of people, gets the air, and it doesn't tire her."

Twice a year the tranquillity of Douglas,

and much of the island, is shattered by a different sort of vehicle: the racing motorcycle. In June several hundred contestants come from abroad to enter the "T.T."—the International Tourist Trophy Races—over a grueling course that tests men, machines, and sometimes the patience of the islanders (pages 434-7). A second, smaller race takes place in September, the Manx Grand Prix.

"Two weeks of crowds," my hotel receptionist sighed, as the first of the cyclists and their machines arrived by ferry from England for the T.T. The invasion swelled to 40,000, including wives, children, and racing fans.

The entire island seemed swept up in a frenzy of speed. Motorcyclists careened, skidded, and maneuvered over the course at speeds as high as 150 miles an hour. After a fortnight the results were reviewed: trophy winners in eight separate races; several major injuries; uncounted minor mishaps; and two drivers killed—one of them a garage mechanic and part-time racer named Brian Finch, aged 24, with a wife and baby.

I happened to witness Brian's leave-taking from some of his friends just before the accident. I had joined a group of motorcyclists for lunch at a refreshment tent in the grandstand area when it came time for Brian to start his race. Donning his crash helmet, he stood up at a nearby table. "Be careful,

now," one of his companions said, half joking.

Brian laughed and made a thumbs-up sign.

Twelve minutes afterward he failed to negotiate the curve at the Ballacraigne Hotel and slammed into the pub's stone steps.

Despite such grim events, the T.T. has a festive air, and moments of gallantry mixed with humor. They tell the story of a woman who lived in the village of Ballaugh, along the racing route. Every morning during the practice runs she stood at her window in a white dress watching the riders pass. One day a rider sent a bouquet of flowers addressed simply to: "The White Lady, Third Gear Change Past Ballaugh Bridge."

Strange Sheep Survive on the Calf

I turned from the T.T. to a quieter side of island life, a tiny bird sanctuary and nature reserve on the Calf of Man. The islet's name comes from the old Norse word for calf, *kalfur*, which also means an islet located next to a larger island. The 616-acre islet lies southwest of Man across half a mile of treacherous tidal rip called Calf Sound. The Calf has a resident population of three lighthouse keepers and—from March to November—the sanctuary warden and his assistant. There are no roads and, besides the lighthouse, only the warden's stone farmhouse.

After crossing Calf Sound by hired motor

launch, I hiked to the farmhouse. There in the small garden I found a bearded man standing amid freakishly tall purple foxgloves. Without a hint of surprise he said, "Welcome to the Calf. I'm the warden, Malcolm Wright."

From that moment on I was Malcolm's welcome guest. We entered his house, above whose front window I noted a sign in Latin, *Parva Domus Magna Quies*—Small House, Great Peace. Malcolm explained that the house had belonged to a wealthy Manx family who built it in the 19th century.

"Now there's just my assistant, Bob Smith, and myself," he added. "You'll meet him later. First, let's have a spot of lunch. Where are your provisions?"

Provisions?

Malcolm sighed. "Didn't they tell you over on Man that you're supposed to bring your own food?" He grinned. "Never mind. Let's see what we can find in the pantry."

We shared some baked beans and tomato soup and then set off around the Calf, across rolling fields of wind-streaked grass, onto a ledge overlooking the sea. Tucked along the rock were dozens of birds' nests. Malcolm reached into one and handed me a herring gull chick, a fluffy ball of speckled gray as light as a powder puff.

Almost instantly the mother gull swooped
(Continued on page 438)



Glory and bedlam descend on Man each summer when snorting motorcycles invade the island. Simultaneously come swarms of racing fans, who perch along normally peaceful roads to watch riders jockey their shrieking steeds. At peak season thousands of cycles thunder over the island, briefly dividing the Manx into those who favor tourism and those who prefer tranquillity.

Most frenetic is the "T.T."—the International Tourist Trophy Races—when normal traffic is officially banned from a 37³/₄-mile course (map, page 428). While a helicopter ambulance stands by, groups of two and three throbbing machines rocket out of Douglas, reaching speeds as high as 150 miles an hour in races that go as many as six laps.

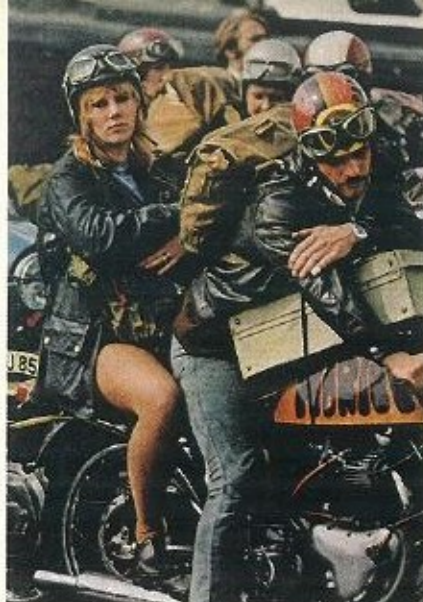
Death sometimes draws the finish line for drivers, and injuries stop others. Biting a towel to blunt the pain of a broken leg, a race casualty rides a stretcher toward help (lower left). But next year he and the other contestants probably will be back, pulled like moths to the flame of cycling's fame and danger.



Once a champ and still a fervent fan, Englishwoman Marjorie Cottle won motorcycling fame in the 1920's and '30's. Here she enters the Vintage Rally on Man, where cycle buffs show off vehicles of yesteryear.



Pampered hybrid between car and cycle, a 1927 English Morgan three-wheeler parades at St. John's in the Vintage Rally. Such automobiles enjoyed some 40 years of popularity because they were taxed less than conventional cars.



Emotions spent watching the T.T., a weary couple laden with camping gear await a ferry to Liverpool. Their fashionable "leathers" protect against the elements and skin-scraping spills. Only spectators arrive and leave on their motorcycles; race drivers carefully transport their charges in vans.

Nostalgic veterans parade in the Vintage Rally, riding a 1930 sidecar model.



Tackling a tricky curve, a driver and his passenger lean to the inside for balance during a T.T. sidecar race. Spectators crowd this turn at Creg-ny-Baa, where hurtling cyclists must brake from speeds of 125 miles an hour to 30. To minimize accidents, the course is closed to traffic during practice periods so that racers can test the run's many hazards.



low over me, making frantic, scolding cries like mirthless laughter. Malcolm returned the chick safely to its nest. We scrambled farther down the cliff toward a detached rock called the Burroo, Gaelic for "round hill."

"Look! There's a seal!" Malcolm exclaimed, pointing to smaller rocks offshore. "And two more," he added, passing me his binoculars. I trained them on the rocks, and saw three gray seals, their mournful eyes staring up at me. We left the seals to their rocky lounge and walked toward the lighthouse. I had a sudden inspiration and asked if I could stay overnight. "Yes, if you'd like. We can give you supper and a room," Malcolm said. "The lightkeepers have a radiotelephone, and you could call your motor-launch captain on Man and ask him to come for you tomorrow."

Within minutes it was arranged. We left the lighthouse and followed a trail through fertile meadows. Suddenly we came upon a little flock of Loaghtan, rare Manx sheep with coarse brown wool. A ram looked straight at me, his four beautifully curved horns reminding me of a Viking's battle helmet (page 430). Apart from these sheep, Malcolm commented, the Calf has no domestic animals—no dogs, cats, horses, or cows.

"In 1969 a few Loaghtan were moved over here, where they wouldn't interbreed with other types of sheep. Like the Manx cat, the pure Loaghtan was dying out on Man. The idea was to help preserve the strain. We have a dozen pure Loaghtan now."

I asked about the origin of the extra horns. "Nobody really knows," Malcolm said. Possibly the Vikings brought the Loaghtan sheep from Iceland, where some rams also have more than one pair of horns.

Isle's Peace Appeals to a Londoner

We started back toward the farm. It was that lovely time of day when the sun mellows to honey and the shadows stretch long and inky on the grass. Only the occasional scurrying of a rabbit broke the stillness.

Bob Smith, a young Londoner doing his first tour of duty on the Calf, greeted us at the farmhouse. I asked how he liked the islet, and he answered, "It's good here—peaceful. Mind you, it's a far cry from London."

That night in bed I listened to the distant sea. I thought about the wild birds, the seals, and the Manx sheep—all of them safe and free to be themselves.

The next day my motor launch picked me

up at the Calf and took me to Port Erin on Man's southwestern coast. From there I traveled to Douglas on the picturesque 19th-century Isle of Man Victorian Steam Railway. Turning northward, I set off for "Royal Ramsey," the charming port town where British kings and queens have detoured to avoid the Douglas mist.

Manx Bride Arrived on the *Mayflower*

There are better reasons than fog for visiting Ramsey, and one is George Quayle. At 76, a good-natured wiry man with scarcely a line in his face, he boasts an inexhaustible knowledge of island customs and history. His reputation is such that he receives letters from abroad addressed simply: "Keeper of Folklore, Isle of Man." And he is the only person I have ever known who grows blue, not scarlet, pimpernels in his garden.

Mr. Quayle lives alone in a small cottage a few miles from Ramsey. He used to live up the road at Ellanbane, which island tradition identifies as the house where Myles Standish met his first wife, Rose. She sailed with him on the *Mayflower*, but died childless the first winter in Plymouth. Some Manx believe that Myles's second wife, Barbara, whom he married in 1623, was either a sister or a cousin of Rose. If so, the couple's six children were the first of Manx blood to be born in the new colony.

When I called on Mr. Quayle one afternoon, he sat me down beside a hedge of wild white roses. Beyond the hedge the hills blended into a haze of violet.

I mentioned my encounter with the four-horned ram on the Calf. Mr. Quayle shook his head sadly. "We used to have a number of animals that were special to the Isle of Man," he said. "There were ponies called Manx garrons, very surefooted on the mountains. And there were Manx cattle, too, with down-swept horns." He lit his pipe. "There are still some hens without tails—'rumpy hens' we call them. But the ponies and cattle have all died out."

Fortunately, some Manx traditions survive, such as "tying up the bride."

"It was a sort of ransom affair," explained Mr. Quayle. "When a bride was on her way to the church, neighborhood children would stretch a rope across a road. Custom demanded that the carriage stop, and the bride's father or her escort would throw coins to the 'highwaymen.' Sometimes a bride would run

into two or three roadblocks, and the children would collect quite a haul!"

In country areas the custom lingers; later I saw a young bride in the northern parish of Andreas being "held to ransom."

Other Manx traditions related to marriage were less joyful.

"We were a rock-ribbed people. The church took a hard view of illegitimacy," said Mr. Quayle. "Back in 1713 there was the case of poor Katherine Kinrade. She came from a nearby parish. Kath was a simple-minded country girl who bore three illegitimate children. As punishment, the bishop ordered her dragged through the sea behind a fishing boat. She survived, mind you, but it was cruel for a young girl who was only simple, not evil."

In the old days nearly every islander believed in witchcraft. "Our church records are full of the accounts of trials," Mr. Quayle said. "But there is only one record of a witch being put to death. Punishments were generally mild, and the most common one involved

standing before the church on Sunday morning dressed in a white sheet for all to see."

Monique Wilson doesn't wear a white sheet, but she is avowedly a witch. She and her husband, Campbell, are high priestess and high priest of a coven, or assemblage of witches, in Castletown, on the southeast coast of the island. I visited them at the Witches' Mill, their home that adjoins a 16th-century barn containing a museum of witchcraft.

Witches Dance for Their Neighbors' Good

Monique, a pale, intense woman of French origin, has penetrating luminous eyes and a fondness for witches' jewelry—heavy silver bracelets and a wide silver necklace shaped like a collar (below). Her collection of horned masks, swords, amulets, and other charms fascinated me. I noted a skull, a broken crucifix, a doll with its lips pinned together, and a silver hand encrusted with turquoise, agate, and moonstone.

"We practice white witchcraft, never black



The isle's good witch, Monique Wilson reigns as the high priestess of a 13-member coven that includes her husband. The coven uses its purported supernatural power for white magic instead of black, healing the sick and performing other good works. The Wilsons' curio-crowded home is attached to a converted 16th-century barn that houses a museum of witchcraft and magic—one of Man's many tourist attractions.



Luminous as the soft Manx sun, heather and yellow gorse paint a 200-foot

magic," Monique said. "It's all a matter of purpose. When the 13 members of our coven dance naked in the witches' circle, we concentrate on a single constructive idea, such as helping a sick person get well."

Fishermen Take a Red-haired Risk

One day skipper John Swindlehurst, a deep-voiced bear of a man, agreed to take me fishing. Manx hospitality had won out over superstition; he and his three-man crew were willing to risk having a red-haired woman aboard their 47-foot boat *Tonn Vane*—Manx Gaelic for "White Wave." As John put it, grinning, "We'll see if you're lucky."

John fishes for "queenies," shellfish similar to our deep-sea scallops. We left Douglas harbor at sunrise, bound for a spot six miles out in the Irish Sea.

The Swindlehurst family has produced

generations of Manx fishermen, and the sea is John's great love. "It's good to be up this time of day to see it!" he exclaimed, as we steered eastward on a calm sea. Ahead, the new sky was streaked with pale gold.

"We'll be shooting the gear soon," he told me. "Once we start, there won't be time to eat, so we'd best have breakfast now." Turning the wheel over to Peter Griffiths, the youngest crew member, John soon had bacon, sliced potatoes, and eggs frying on a small stove. I wandered aft where an older man, also named Peter, knelt on deck mending a net with a white plastic needle. Ian, the third crew member, dispensed mugs of strong tea, and we had breakfast.

Soon it was time to prepare for the first haul. John stopped the engines, while the two Peters and Ian lifted the heavy dredge nets over the rail. John got underway again, and



headland. Yawning fissures called the Chasms cleave the bluff beyond the cottage.

the cables rushed out as the dredges sank to the sea floor, 100 feet down.

A long hour would pass before the dredge nets were to be hauled. Then I would learn whether I was lucky or had jinxed their catch. John laughed at my impatience. "*Traa-dy-liooar*," he remarked—"There's time enough."

At last John stopped the engines and with a clatter of chains raised the nets. As the catch spilled out, I sighed in relief: Several thousand glistening queenies, streaked with yellow, pink, red, purple, and orange markings, poured onto the deck.

"Not too bad," said John, turning to me. "These will come to about five bags. Last year we averaged double that to a haul, but the queenies are getting fished out."

In late afternoon, after several more hauls, we steered for Douglas with some 30 bags of queenies worth about \$156.

Earning a living from fishing is not easy. "It's often a 14- to 16-hour day," young Peter told me as we entered the harbor, "but there are worse ways to spend your life."

While queenie fishing supports many families, the real Manx king of the sea is the *skeddan*, or herring, which islanders process into world-famous kippers. In the town of Peel, on the west coast of Man, I watched a herring fleet glide into the harbor with their catch.

About 20 boats—mostly Scottish and Irish—lined up three and four abreast beside the quay. Sea gulls screamed and swooped close as wicker baskets brimming with silvery fish were winched up and deposited on the pier.

After an auction the catch goes by truck to kipper houses near Peel harbor. A driver gave me a ride to one of these, where I saw the herring split, cleaned, and soaked in brine. Then they were strung on long rows of hooks,

to be smoked over smouldering hardwood chips in 25-foot-high brick kilns.

Percy Moore, the owner, spoke with me inside his 85-year-old smokehouse. We were surrounded by sacks of hardwood chips that spilled out on the floor, palely golden like breakfast cereal.

"Manx kippered herring is the most natural food you can get," Mr. Moore said. "All natural. They use red vegetable dye across the water. Over here it's the slow smoking process that turns them that red color. Nothing has been added." He smiled proudly.

Joyful Fete Reenacts an Old Disaster

The sea was not always so bountiful to Peel; once upon a time it brought death and destruction to the small village in the form of a Viking raid in A.D. 798. Peel commemorates this raid every summer with a stirring Viking festival featuring a reenactment of the battle.

For the occasion the beach at Peel becomes a stage, complete with an early Celtic village consisting of a log stockade, tiny chapel, and clusters of thatch-roofed huts.

When I arrived shortly before sunset, a large crowd of spectators was beginning to fill the viewing stand overlooking the beach.

"You can't go on the beach like *that*," a Viking official exclaimed, shaking his horns at my short-skirted cotton dress. Fortunately, one of the festival-committee ladies took me in hand. Soon I was the image of a Celtic woman, in a long saffron cloak and sandals.

I joined the cast members, copying their actions. We knelt as three black-robed priests intoned prayers. I was still kneeling after the others stood up—I'd lost my pen in the sand.

Suddenly a large signal fire blazed near the water's edge, and the cry went up: "The Vikings are coming!" In actual fact the Vikings were already there. For some time I'd seen the four longships with dragonhead prows rowing not far out in the sea. The battle began, swords clanged, and horned helmets flew. The women and children fled shrieking to the stockade; I hid behind a large pile of kindling. Victorious Vikings were storming the stockade, which fell with a splintering crash. Soon nearly every Viking had a kicking Celtic woman over his shoulder.

I was thinking the spectators were certainly getting their money's worth, when a Viking pounced on me from behind.

"I'm going to carrrey ye away!" he announced, in a decidedly Scottish accent. It



History and high jinks mark a spirited reenactment of a Viking raid on Man. Each summer the town of Peel, where the Norsemen struck, erects a log village and stockade on the beach. During the festival townfolk mill around on the waterfront, impersonating the Celts. Suddenly horn-helmeted Vikings in longships charge ashore. The defenders slay the Norse chief, but the Vikings storm the stockade—which collapses—and swoop up laughing Celtic maidens (right). Then, escorted by torchbearing Valkyries, they carry the body of their leader to a longship (above).





Giving hard-earned pennies a last pinch, tourists challenge an automated card game at Summerland, an entertainment center in Douglas. With charming versatility, the Isle of Man draws legions of elderly pensioners with low-budget pleasures, while simultaneously offering zestier night life to their juniors.

was then I remembered the Viking ranks had been supplemented by volunteers from the 71st Scottish Engineer Regiment, conducting summer maneuvers on the Isle of Man.

"Let me go, I'm working!" I shouted indignantly. My captor was determined. In the struggle, one of my sandals fell off. He put me down to retrieve it. Suddenly we were caught up in the funeral of the Viking chief, who had been killed in battle. A boat bearing his effigy was pushed out to sea and set afire, while white-robed young girls sang a lament in the flare of torches.

Finally the festival ended, and my beaming captor shook my hand. "Cowboys and Indians, eh?" he said, removing his horned

helmet and wiping his brow. "Good show all round."

Before leaving the island soon afterward, I commemorated my visit. For one British pound, visitors to the Isle of Man may have a tree of their choice planted, with a small inscribed plaque. On Peel Hill stands a sycamore with a plaque: "Owen James Gordon Thomas. New York City. Summer 1971."

Owen is my 4-year-old son. It is my hope that one day, when both he and the tree are grown, Owen will visit the spot and see his sycamore. I could have chosen another type of tree, but I'm keeping in with the fairies. You see, sycamores grow especially well by the Fairy Bridge. □

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