

5 days golfing in Scotland

There is much anticipation and excitement when you plan, organize, commit to 5 days of golf in Scotland. This trip did not disappoint.

4 guys, 5 days, 6 nights plus one day of travel before and aft. I met my golfing compatriots in Edinburgh airport on the Monday. I had travelled in the night before from Arizona. The three came from California, Vermont and an ex patriot living in London.

We rented a big blue van, designed for eight but perfect for four guys, four golf bags, and four pieces of luggage. Our London resident elected to be the designated driver as he was most familiar with the left side of the road. I have experience of that but was glad to hand the wheel to big Jim. Chuck and Phil helped with the navigation from the back seat. 75 minute drive north east to the famed golfing destination of St Andrews. The evening was beautiful, low 60's, allowing us to snap some pictures on the Swilken Bridge, Road hole and 18th of the 2015 Open Championship site



The home of golf

Also to stay in tradition, we ate fish n' chips at the Jigger Inn situated overlooking the Road Hole #17 of the Old Course. Be sure to sample the local brew, St Andrews ale which was smooth and cool.

Staying at a private hotel 10 minutes away, called Rufflets, where Jack Nicklaus chose to stay during his 1978 Open Championship victory. A small quaint hotel, boasting a beautiful garden and surroundings, offering good service and food, especially the generous full Scottish breakfasts.



Rufflets hotel, St Andrews

We were aware that the Old Course was closed so we chose to play one of the six St Andrews Trust courses, called Jubilee. This was actually my first and recommended by the caddies that Boulders Member Bruce Hambro and I had used on our trip in 2013. Coincidentally the same caddy was in my group this year- and he remembered me from 2013! Astonishing as the St Andrews caddies are full time, looping some 180 rounds each year, Jubilee is an 1878 course and perhaps the truest links course of them all. It was in good condition both fairways and greens. It is advisable to stay out of the notorious fescue rough, the long wispy straw looking jungle. However the caddies are uncanny finding the stray drives and their stories and personalities add to the flair and enjoyment of the whole Scottish golfing experience. The Jubilee is a good test, longer but slightly wider than the New course. Believe it or not the Old Course is less penile, with exception to the bunkers! If you can't get on the Old course I highly recommend either the New or Jubilee.

St Andrews is a lovely town, full of vibrant college kids attending the University, and a lot of the many visiting tourists, offering several good restaurants. We went three for three picking good evening eating spots. There are plenty to choose from.

Day two took us to Kingsbarns, the American owned and developed on an ancient golfing site. This links only opened in the 90's but hugging the coastal line providing some dramatic views

gives you the feeling you are on hallowed ground. This week we found the course to be hard and fast with very slick greens. Add a 20 mph wind and it proved enjoyable but certainly challenging. We played the forward green tees that the starter recommended and it was a good decision. 6300 yards at sea level; in a cool breeze is plenty of golf for most. Yours truly included. The caddies were younger; two were ex college players, one pursuing his Tour card in the U.S. All were very well trained and knew their stuff. Don't let the price of the sticker shock you away from Kingsbarns. It is a first class experience. As we were leaving the property I bumped into a member and student of mine from Crystal Downs, Michigan. He was making the same golfing pilgrimage as I, playing for a week with his son and extended family. Golf makes the world small. On a side note the European PGA Tour played the Dunhill Cup the following week using the Old course, Carnoustie and Kingsbarns. The overall winner was 18 under over the four rounds, but some Swede shot 62 on Kingsbarns one day, which to me is amazing. Did he only play 16 holes?



Kingsbarns and caddies

You may have never heard of Crail, 11 miles east of St Andrews. But, put it on your map. One of the world's oldest golf clubs, Crail Golfing Society was founded in February 1786 and initially comprised membership of 11 local golfers. The club's original home was located at Sauchope just outside the picturesque fishing village of Crail and it was not until 1895, with the help of Old Tom Morris did they relocate to their present home at Balcomie Golf Links. Situated on a peninsula jutting into the bay of Firth, which is the North Sea, it is as scenic as a Pebble Beach, reminding me of a course called Brora situated some 200 miles north in the utmost Highlands. Bruce and I had played it in 2013 and like Crail came away with great reviews. Plan on playing a short windy course, only 6000 yards but voted the 'best' by all four of us at the end of the week.

After Crail we motored an hour north to Carnoustie to stay at a modernized large house providing luxurious Bed & Breakfast, and within walking distance of the other Open Championship site. The St Andrews cadies call Carnoustie, 'Carnasty'. Although Ben Hogan mastered the course in 1953. It is by far the most difficult course, long and tough James Braid design. It is a good course- just difficult! It is also known for the 1999 Open when the suave Frenchman Jean Van der Velde collapsed on the last hole, took a seven to blow a three stroke lead. I think we had a couple of sevens on the card somewhere during the day!



Carnoustie's spectacle bunker

Our fifth day presented a pleasant and balmy day. The breeze took a day off, lay down and showed us an Open qualifying course, Monifieth, just a few miles south of Carnoustie. Although the opening holes aren't the most scenic (a rail line runs down the right side of the first five holes). For me, it didn't deter from a good links course, rolling fairways, beautiful and receptive greens, smooth and true. Do you guess I played my best round of the week? Adding to the fun was a friend of a friend host who is an LPGA player who grew up on Monifieth. She went on to

play college golf at University of Arizona, a couple of years ahead of Annika Sorenstrom, and became the first Scottish lady to win on the LPGA Tour! She was home visiting family following her assistant captain role at the Solheim Cup in Germany the week earlier. Kathryn Marshall shot a smooth 73 and pushed me all the way. Close by Monifieth we ate and visited Borough Ferry, a delightful seaside village much preferred to the gray and drab Carnoustie town.



Monifieth host

LPGA Kathryn Marshall with our team Jim, Phil, Doon, Chuck

After we had all compared our notes, scrutinized the scorecards, and shared our stories, we came to an overwhelming agreement. All the courses we chose were very good. We enjoyed every one of them and would return to Scotland to do it all over again. Crail provided the best overall golfing experience, based on several criteria, scenery, playable course, friendly local caddies, and dollar value. My guys thought Kingsbarns was the best course and service.