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Long, winding road on Scotland's Kintyre Peninsula now delivers top golf: Machrihanish G.C., Machrihanish Dunes

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By *Brandon Tucker, Senior Writer*

MACHRIHANISH, Scotland -- The long, winding road from Loch Lomond to Machrihanish is world famous, yet sparsely trafficked.

The drive, which evoke the vivid images painted by Paul McCartney in his 1977 ballad "Mull of Kintyre," takes about three hours if you're a timid, American motorist gripping the steering wheel with white knuckles like myself. A83 begins on the northwest side of Loch Lomond and steers west through mountain passes and small fishing villages tucked beside lochs before turning south at Inverary and heading down Kintyre.



The final leg runs besides the peninsula's western coast, where the sun shines down on seaside farms and cottages. You can see Scotland's Hebridean islands, Gigha, Jura and Islay, where you can see snow-capped mountain peaks and ferry boats transporting residents back to the mainland in between.



The journey ends in Machrihanish, a tiny story-book village four miles west of Campbeltown. It's beauty led McCartney to record the unofficial anthem of Scotland's rural southwest, and word has it he can still be spotted on the streets of Campbeltown when visiting his farm.

Machrihanish Golf Club

If you catch the right morning like I did, mist may very well roll in from the sea onto the dunes of [Machrihanish Golf Club](#), just as McCartney describes in his tribute.

Golfers have sought out Machrihanish, founded in 1876, for more than a century. Old Tom Morris came to these remote dunes in 1879 to offer his design expertise, while J.H. Taylor came and Sir Guy Campbell added their impressions to deliver [its current form](#).

Early in its history, word spread of one of the most famous opening holes in links golf -- "Battery," a long par 4 that invites golfers to bite off as much of the dogleg as they wish by sailing a tee shot over the beach.

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But what ensues beyond Battery are 17 holes that offer one of links' best varieties and green complexes. Holes are both straightforward and trickier, requiring shots over aiming stones, hit-and-hope approaches to elevated greens and pins tucked behind nasty bunkers. Perhaps it was the similar chilly wind and mist draping the dunes, but the course reminded me a lot of Ireland's Lahinch Golf Club.

Machrihanish Dunes Golf Club

For more than a century, Machrihanish had been a castaway as the only pure links around for miles. But sandy dunes lie all over this part of Kintyre, and in 2008, a new neighbor finally came to the block, [Machrihanish Dunes Golf Club](#).

David McLay Kidd was tasked with finding a golf course amidst the dunes without moving a pale's worth of sand. Sheep graze the grounds from October to April (a rare orchid that blooms in the spring is cause for the sheep to be kept off in the warmer months). A Site of Special Scientific Interest, his team found tees and greens and plotted out rough-and-tumble fairways and natural sand bunkers in between. Some greens sit on exposed, high ground in view of the sea. Others are sandwiched between dunes to create partially blind, bowled surfaces.

The expedition experience at Machrihanish Dunes opened to critical acclaim. Its mission was widely praised, while many golfers found the hike long and the course too penal for their tastes. But club staff, however, have continually improved playability. The high, thick fescue rough has been thinned, some tees have been raised and walking paths improved to promote straighter paths to fairways.

So for the 2012 season, the harmony between pure links golf and new world sensibility is closer to being struck. But what's in place will continue to always be one of the more extreme and exciting layouts in Scotland for many years to come.

Stay and play: The Village at Machrihanish

Before Machrihanish Dunes opened, it was all too common for groups to make the journey to Kintyre, play one round of golf and be back on their way. Now with twice the links, plus recent investments into area accommodations, the allure to stay in this part of the world a little longer has never been greater.

Mach Dunes is the centerpiece of the Village at Machrihanish, an initiative by investment group Southworth Development L.L.C. In addition to the new course, it also purchased and renovated the 100-plus-year-old Ugadale Hotel, across the street from the first tee box of Machrihanish Old.

The hotel reopened in February after extensive investment into its 22 guest rooms, spa, bar and restaurant. Next door, they refurbished the Old Clubhouse, once the clubhouse to Machrihanish, and built a small collection of cottages ideal from golf groups.

And this summer, the Royal Hotel will also open in Campbeltown, the main town of the peninsula about four miles from the links.

More golf in Kintyre

If two championship links aren't enough to convince your group to make the trip to Kintyre, once you've played a morning round on both, head about eight miles south of Campbeltown to Southport, home to [Dunaverty Golf Club](#).

This is a casual, little local club that dates back to 1889, where the clubhouse isn't staffed every day of the week and an honesty box asks visitors to pay 28 pounds. The course -- merely a par 66 and 5,500 yards -- is comprised of many holes about 250 yards in length, but it's a scenic, most casual walk with a handful of splendid links holes.

Additionally, golf tour operators can also set up rounds on nearby islands at [Machrie Bay Golf Club](#) on the Isle of Islay, and [Shiskine Golf Club](#), located to the east on the Isle of Arran.

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Getting to Machrihanish

There are a myriad of ways to make the trip to the Kintyre Peninsula and the Village at Machrihanish Dunes.

There's regular air service into Campbeltown Airport on Flybe. Ferry service from Ayrshire and Arran via the Caledonia MacBrayne ferry. The Kintyre Express fast rib can whisk you straight into Campbeltown Harbour from Troon or Turnberry in an hour flat. West Coast Motors provides reliable and comfortable bus service. And you can even arrange for transit by seaplane from Loch Lomond, Prestwick or Northern Ireland on the Golf Links Express seaplane.

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Brandon Tucker, Senior
Writer

Brandon Tucker is the Managing Editor for Golf Channel Courses & Travel. To date, his golf travels have taken him to over two dozen countries and over 500 golf courses worldwide. While he's ... [[read more...](#)]

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