

MACHRIHANISH
DUNES IS ONE OF THE
MOST REMARKABLE GOLF
DEVELOPMENTS OF THE
MODERN ERA

Machrihanish, on the Kintyre Peninsula, is one of the last, great undiscovered corners of Scotland. Stretching out into the Atlantic, the peninsula is surrounded by stunning scenery; to the west are the isles of Isla and Jura and south-west the shores of Northern Ireland. To the east is the striking outline of the Isle of Arran and all around is pure peace.

Like any Shangri La, it's not the easiest place to get to. And yet legions of golfers make their way here year after year. What's the big attraction? For nearly a century and a half, the links of Machrihanish GC, laid out in the late 1870s by Old Tom Morris, have seen golf pilgrims traversing The Long and Winding Road to the Mull of Kintyre. (If you are wondering how those songs came about, Paul McCartney also discovered Kintyre many years ago and still owns a remote farm to which he retreats regularly).

'Is one links course worth such a journey?' I hear you say. What if there was a complete golf resort with 54 – or even 72 – exceptional holes of golf either on the doorstep or a short distance away? Add to that several first-class accommodations options, fine dining, a spa and some of the best, jaw-dropping scenery Scotland can muster and I think you are getting the picture.

The opening of Machrihanish Dunes in 2009, along with The Village at Machrihanish Dunes

MACHRIHANISH DUNES

"MY DESIRE IS ALWAYS
TO BE HERE..."

BY DAVID J. WHYTE

Machrihanish Dunes should be on
any golfer's 'must play' list

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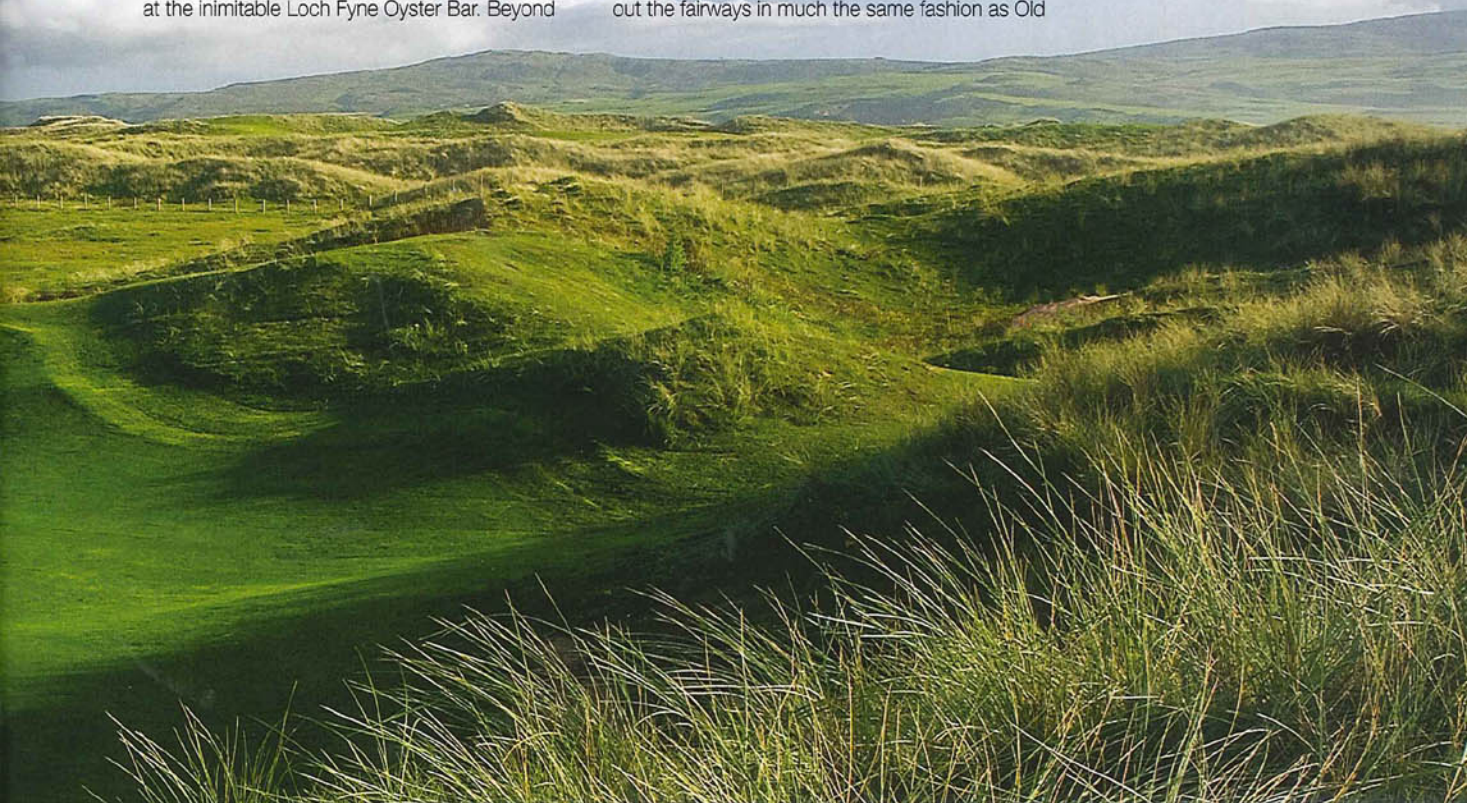
with its first-class accommodation and amenities, heralds a new era for this delightful area, a complete golf destination with everything you could hope for including the above mentioned majestic scenery and soul-reviving serenity thrown in at no extra cost.

Machrihanish is a three-hour drive from Glasgow but don't let that put you off. The 'road less travelled' takes in Loch Lomond, Loch Fyne, Inveraray and the glittering fishing village of Tarbert. The A83 is one of the most attractive, entertaining routes in Britain and you can stop along the way at Inveraray Castle or have lunch at the inimitable Loch Fyne Oyster Bar. Beyond

Tarbert are miles upon miles of open Atlantic shoreline. The journey to Machrihanish is almost as invigorating at the destination.

Machrihanish Dunes is one of the most remarkable golf developments of the modern era. Built upon a site of Special Scientific Interest, the lofty ambition was to create the world's most ecological golf course – naturally evolved and sensitively managed.

Keith Martin, Machrihanish Dunes' director of golf, explained: "The architect, David McLay Kidd, went out with a bunch of sticks and staked out the fairways in much the same fashion as Old



A warm welcome is guaranteed at the Ugadale Hotel

The ninth green is typical of the large, undulating putting surfaces at Machrihanish Dunes

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COURSE
7,175 yards, par 72

GETTING THERE

Flybe.com/Loganair operates daily flights from Glasgow International Airport to Machrihanish from as little as £64 return, including taxes. Packages including transport of golf clubs are available via Loganair, with day trips to Machrihanish Dunes – including green fee – from £119.

You can also take the car ferry from Ardrossan, in Ayrshire, across to the Isle of Arran and from there on to Kintyre. For more information visit www.calmac.co.uk



Tom or James Braid. We then went out with strimmers and Flymos and gradually, over time, established the fairways. There were no bulldozers or shapers used here."

I played Machrihanish Dunes in its first year and found these unfettered links a mighty challenge. The problem was the rough: vast swathes of thick, tangled jungle, cheek by jowl to most fairways. Natural Heritage Scotland wouldn't allow mechanical thinning because of the rare plants found within the grasses. Flocks of sheep were introduced over the winter months but the matted, course grass proved too much even for those woolly eco-mowers.

Alongside Scottish Natural Heritage, tests were carried out, counting plant varieties and numbers that existed in the rough. They discovered they were actually losing diversity as the rough was becoming too course and thick. Trial plots demonstrated that by introducing mechanical thinning, the existing six plant types blossomed into 28 different species, showing that proper management of the rough actually encouraged growth of native species. Scottish Natural Heritage was, naturally, delighted.

They continue with sheep grazing through the winter which reduces the thatch and the active 'rough' management programme has brought the wild areas back to how they should be – a diverse, wispy grassland. From a playing perspective, the

difference is delectable. You can now get round, on occasion, with the same ball you set out with. There is plenty of room off the tee and acres of firm, fast-running linksland that is a joy to play off.

Machrihanish Dunes is a wonderful compliment to nearby Machrihanish. The two courses are quite different, the Dunes being more undulating and, dare I say, even more scenic. The first is a superb starter. You stand on the tee and look straight towards the Isles of Islay and Jura. The second takes you right along the shoreline. There are six holes that run parallel to, and only a few yards from, the beach. The third is a great hole – as is the spectacular 14th with the newly refurbished Ugadale Hotel standing out in the distance across the bay.

A classic journalistic segue into the excellent accommodation options there... Well, you don't want for creature comforts at The Village at Machrihanish Dunes. There are eight luxurious seaside cottages, modern apartments kitted out with all mod-cons along with awesome outlooks across the Atlantic. Next door is the oh-so-handy Old Clubhouse pub serving great pub food.

The Ugadale Hotel is next door to that. Once regarded as the pinnacle of luxury accommodation in the west of Scotland, the Ugadale has been restored to its former glory. Twenty-two stunning guest rooms and suites offer modern amenities alongside historic charm. There's a well kitted-out fitness suite and a full-service spa with treatments for golfers or for those in need of pampering. It is soon to be joined by its sister hotel, the Royal Hotel, which has also been restored to its former grandeur, around five miles away overlooking the harbour at Campbeltown.

Besides the magnificent links of Machrihanish and Machrihanish Dunes, you can also play the unique 18 holes of Dunaverty GC, a few miles away at the southern tip of Kintyre. Dunaverty is a short but vigorous test and, as you would now expect, surrounded by stunning scenery. You can also organise a day trip to The Machrie GC on the Isle of Islay. Machrihanish Dunes' shuttle service will take you to the Kennacraig ferry port and collect you again in the evening.

The Village at Machrihanish Dunes also provides shuttle services between its two hotels and other local golf courses. If you arrive by plane from Glasgow Airport – a spectacular 40-minute flight – you can arrange for shuttles to collect you.

So you see, it's really not so difficult to reach this wonderful sanctuary. You should actually plan to spend a week at the Village at Machrihanish Dunes – you'll need it to fully enjoy the great variety of superb links golf, the fabulous hotel facilities and the lasting serenity that such a wonderful place is guaranteed to bring you.

Miss the green at your peril on the sixth hole