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Golf on the Kintyre Peninsula and Some Other Places

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The second green at Machrihanish Dunes. Islay is in the distance.

Not too long ago a friend asked me the often-repeated golf question, "if you could play in a foursome with anyone, who would you choose?"

He was more than a little surprised when I said, "Old Tom Morris, Young Tom Morris and Willie Park, Jr."

The caveat is that I would also want to play in their world, not the modern one. I would delight in experiencing golf as they did on the courses they designed and loved. I can't do that but there is a wonderful alternative, I can golf on the courses of Kintyre Peninsula and the island of Islay.

The oldest and most famous course is Machrihanish Golf Club, an Old Tom Morris design with one of, if not *the*, greatest opening tee shot in golf, in which the bold line is over ocean and shoreline.

I love how almost all the holes at Machrihanish seem to have tee shots that play down to fairways that meander through the dunesland. Many approach shots are to elevated and very interesting greens that allow for the ground game. Throughout the round, long views of the ocean are interspersed with the feeling that you are the only golfers on the course.



All the rooms in The Royal Hotel have a great view of Campbeltown

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The newest addition to Kintyre is the [Machrihanish Dunes](#) golf

course that borders Machrihanish GC. The David McLay Kidd design is constructed on an extremely environmentally sensitive land so no pesticides or fertilizers are allowed on the fairways (just tees and greens) and less material was moved to build the course than is needed for a backyard flower garden.

The result is a layout that must closely resemble what courses were like when built with horses and drag plates.

The design is wonderful, challenging and fun, with spectacular views and fits seamlessly into the other layouts in the region.

On Islay is the Machrie Golf Links. This 1891 Willie Campbell design has nary an irrigation head on the entire course. What Mother Nature delivers is what the layout gets. The Machrie often plays extremely firm and there are more blind shots than almost any other course, but I love the feel of the place, like I'm back in time.

I also like the fact that on the island are the distilleries of the Islay whiskies. They are all worth a visit.

The fourth course is the little-known Dunaverty, 4,799 yards of pure quirky fun. If the fourth hole isn't one of the greatest punchbowl green of all time, then I want to see the ones that beat it out. As Old Tom might have done, the putting surface was merely set at the bottom of a *deep* natural bowl.

After the fourth, it's a series of up, down and over holes that challenge all the shot making skills you have, with the ocean just a mishit 8-iron away on many occasions.

While I am enthralled with courses that hark back to the early days of design, I want my lodging and restaurants to have all the modern day amenities.



The Ugadale Hotel, with the cottages to the right, as seen from the first green of the Machrihanish Golf Club.

The opening of the [Ugadale Hotel and Cottages in Machrihanish and The Royal Hotel](#), a few miles away in Campbeltown, is a wonderful happening. Next to the cottages is the Old Clubhouse Pub, the former clubhouse of Machrihanish GC, a delightful place to enjoy a great meal and a few drinks. Southworth Golf Development out of Massachusetts manages both properties, as well as

the Machrihanish Dunes course.

My stay was at the Royal, with its enchanting views of Campbeltown Harbor from every room. It also has the best shower I've ever experienced in Scotland, yes, serious water pressure.

The food in the restaurant is wonderful and located in the hotel is the Black Sheep Pub that is already a favorite for many locals. The day I played Machrihanish GC, I met a threesome I had played through that morning and we shared pints and a wee dram in the Black Sheep well into the night.

Speaking of which, when in Campbeltown, lovers of single malts must journey to the Ardshiel Hotel. Within its charming confines is a small whisky bar that had at last count a selection that numbered somewhere in the neighborhood of "are you kidding me?" To be more precise, about 600 bottles line the shelves.

I think if Old and Young Tom and Willie Jr. ever found themselves in Southwest Scotland, they would be delighted with the golf and all that comes with it. I hope they invite me to join them.

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