



# WIN A SPOT In The IBEROSTAR Golf Team Championship

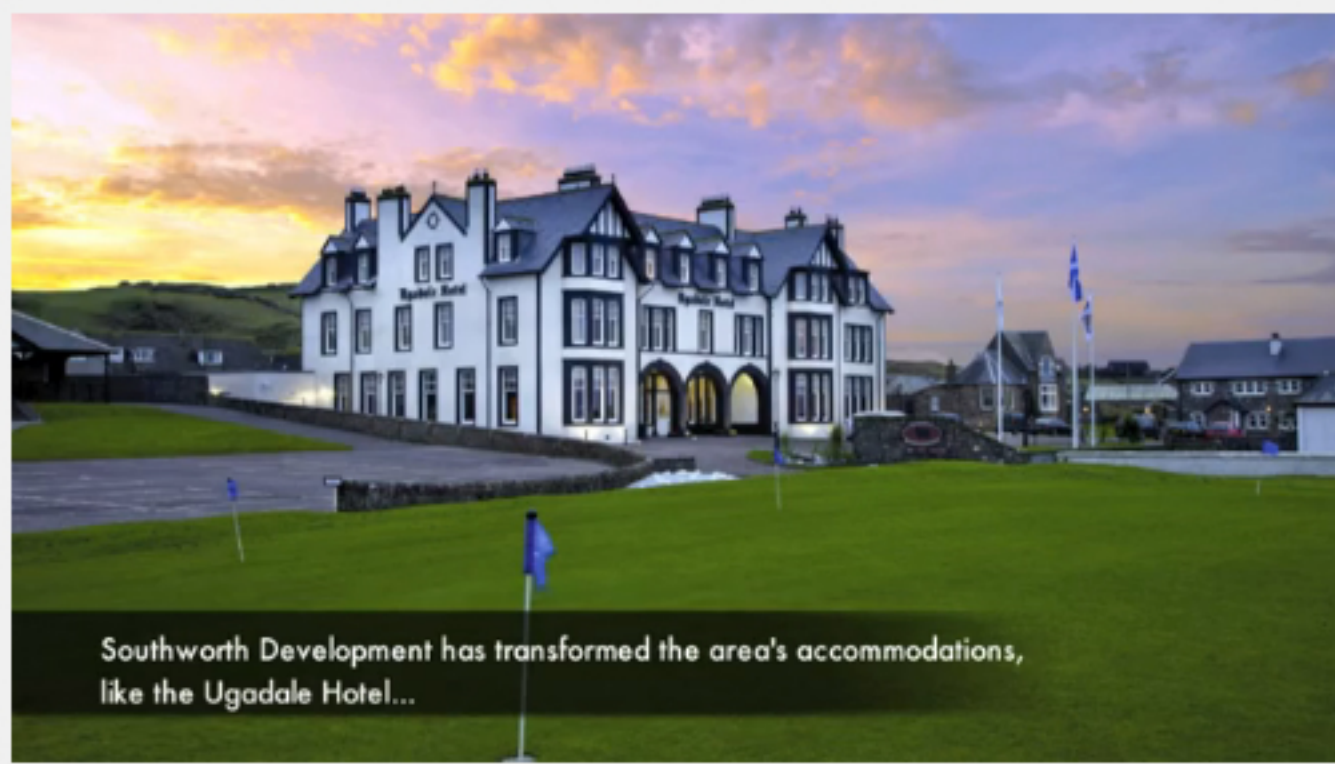

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## LINKS100 Video of the Month: Machrihanish Dunes

Golfers have to travel a long and winding road to get there, but a visit to this wild and wooly links is well worth the trip

By: *Thomas Dunne*



Southworth Development has transformed the area's accommodations, like the Ugadale Hotel...

Machrihanish Dunes from outandback on Vimeo.

The creation of Machrihanish Dunes, the first links built on the west coast of Scotland in 100 years, did not come about easily. Situated on the remote Kintyre Peninsula, original developer Brian Keating and current owner Southworth Development clearly hoped to capitalize on the presence of LINKS100 stalwart Machrihanish Golf Club, just a short drive up the road. Despite the fact that Kintyre's principal burg of Campbeltown, a once-thriving seaport, had spent the past few decades in a slow-motion skid, David Southworth saw a rare real estate opportunity. "When you think about World Top 100 courses," he told me in a recent interview, "The land adjacent to them—especially oceanfront land—is usually sold by the square inch."

Golf courses from high-profile designers often have a way of sparking renewed interest in a region, too. David McLay Kidd was presented with a heaving, rugged parcel of linksland—one which he knew well, from boyhood summer holidays in Machrihanish—but it came with a catch. The coastal property, as one of the last remaining homes of the endangered "regal pyramid" orchid, was a site of special scientific interest (SSSI) and therefore one of the most protected patches of land in Europe. Kidd was obliged to operate under the most stringent of environmental restraints.



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The resulting golf course might best be described as "ultra-minimalist." If you've ever driven by a swath of prime golfing terrain and imagined laying holes on top of it without any earth-moving at all, that's pretty close to the reality at Mach Dunes. Only seven acres out of the entire 275-acre site were disturbed—mostly for nothing more than the leveling off of tee boxes and shaping of some greens. Whether it be a blind shot or an awkward landform, there are plenty of places where it's easy to envision most architects (Kidd included) making some kind of intervention to create something a bit more accessible.

A few years ago, when the minimalist layouts of Tom Doak, Coore & Crenshaw, and others were becoming all the rage, a friend made a prediction. "Someday," he said, "minimalism is going to ruin a world-class property." That didn't happen at Mach Dunes, but during the course of my round, it was hard not to feel as if the architect could have gotten more out of the site had it not been so heavily protected. In some places, the routing doesn't feel quite right; in others, the sheer wildness of the terrain threatens to overwhelm the golf hole (I'm skeptical about the playability of the 8th, for example). Mach Dunes gives the impression of a course that is likely to evolve considerably over time. Early reviewers, for example, reported being put off by thick, ball-eating rough, but the course's management has slowly been gaining the trust of Scottish Natural Heritage, who allowed the crew to thin the marginal grasses in places. I didn't find the chance of a lost ball to be any higher than it would be on a typical links.



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We can probably expect further moves to enhance playability in the future, but in the meantime, Mach Dunes still makes a worthy complement to the famed Machrihanish. It's often completely crazy, but a great deal of fun, as well. Holes barrel over and around the rumpled landscape, while greens are often tucked away in natural hollows. Capricious links bounces around—it's a course that should be approached in a spirit of adventure, rather than with the card-and-pencil mentality.

At the height of Beatlemania, Paul McCartney purchased a farm in the area as a place to get away from it all—it's said the song "The Long and Winding Road" was inspired by the trip down the Mull of Kintyre. Fortunately, those making the pilgrimage to play Machrihanish Old and the Dunes will be rewarded with some of the finest new accommodations in the U.K. Southworth Development went to town in its renovations of the Ugadale Hotel (across the street from the Old's first tee) and the Royal Hotel in Campbeltown. Plush, stylish rooms, great showers, and excellent food await. Both accommodations also feature lively watering holes for an apres-golf dram or two. These new additions should satisfy even the most demanding of travelers, making a visit to one of Scotland's most under-the-radar golf destinations all the more tempting.