



## MACHRIHANISH

# Throwing his clubs in the boot, Sean Guthrie reacquaints himself with the dunes of Kintyre

**W**hen I was a tyke, Kintyre might as well have been Hawaii. Even from the family cottage on Arran – a mere three miles away as the crow flies – the long, kinked arm of Argyll afforded global, if temporary, renown by Macca and Campbeltown Pipe Band was a far-off land.

Who knows how many times that sense of distance must have been multiplied in the eyes of American businessmen David Southworth and Joe Deitch? Yet their firm, Southworth Developments threw many dollars at Machrihanish Dunes and the Royal Hotel in Campbeltown. The Dunes has, in spite of its youth, featured in lists of the top courses in Scotland/Britain/the world – is links to rival that of the original Machrihanish Golf Club, where my 54-hole, one-man mission to reacquaint myself with Kintyre begins.

I tee up on the blue championship tee at Battery, the quintessential opening hole in Scottish golf. After a clumsy clout I am convinced my dig has ended on the beach across which I aimed, but investigation proves I can add myopia to delusion and I locate my Srixon Z-Star on the fairway.

Moving swiftly on, I blend white and blue tees depending on how tough the hole looks – very, in most cases – and am grateful for the forgiving rough, which in a matter of weeks will devour anything not on target. I almost have the course to myself, so take the opportunity to hit mulligans and test the greens from all angles. Bliss.

A couple of hours later, I amble off the 18th green with a nominal 88 and cross the road to the Ugadale Hotel, which Southworth has brought bang up-to-date. A soak and a vodka and tonic is followed by a replenishing three-course dinner in the Kintyre Club restaurant.

At dawn I shake off my sluggishness with a cooked breakfast and fruit juice. The day promises 36 holes, and the forecast is not great. It's blowing a gale. Nonetheless, I make my way to Machrihanish Dunes.

At odds with the hype, the clubhouse is compact and functional and sits at the midway point in the round, handy for the euphemistic comfort break. I leave with my

course guide, Peter. Thanks to Peter's nous I navigate the outward nine, where blind shots are legion and undulations of the colossal variety, in a creditable two-over-par. With little if any earth-moving carried out on its creation on account of it being built on a Site of Specific Scientific Interest, you're playing in the maw of nature. A halfway stop prompts a relative collapse as I play 10 to 18 in a less admirable eight-over-par. Ten over for 18? I'll take it.

Following a carb-laden lunch at the Old Clubhouse Pub, between the Ugadale Hotel and Ugadale Cottages (two-bedroomed apartments to rent or buy a lifetime share in), I barrel down the peninsula to Southend and Dunaverty Golf Club, whose rascally charms fostered a lifelong love of the game in golf writer extraordinaire, Jock MacVicar. A 4600-yard par 66, this is more like the golf I grew up playing on Arran: short par-4s; ample par-3s; and a single, short, par-5. Dismal though the conditions are, I push on, focusing on reaching the wonderful par-3 10th (Mount Zion, no less) and par-4 11th (The Cleet), the respective tee shots comprising a dunt steeply uphill with an 8-iron to a shallow green and a supple, free-swinging bludgeon with a driver. It's unquestionably one of Scottish golf's best tees.

Plucking my ball from the 36th cup of the day, I tramp soggly back to the car with an 11-over-par 77 and consider it a solid total.

It's not so far after all, Kintyre. Throw the clubs in the boot, keep an open mind and step on to the tee. Aloha, Machrihanish.

*A round at Machrihanish Golf Club is from £62. [www.machgolf.com](http://www.machgolf.com). A Machrihanish Dunes round is from £56. [www.machdunes.com](http://www.machdunes.com). Dunaverty Golf Club charges from £28 for 18 holes. [www.dunavertygolfclub.com](http://www.dunavertygolfclub.com). The Village at Machrihanish Dunes has the Ugadale Hotel and Ugadale Cottages and the Royal Hotel in Campbeltown. Until July 31 spend two nights at the Royal including dinner, B&B and a round at Machrihanish Dunes for £99ppp night. One night at the Ugadale Hotel or Royal Hotel from £79pp with breakfast. Visit [www.machdunes.com](http://www.machdunes.com) or call 0800 151 3701.*