

*The 165-yard par-3 fifth hole at Machrihanish Dunes, with the Village of Machrihanish Dunes in the distance.*



*The Ugadale Hotel in the Village of Machrihanish Dunes is directly across the street from the Machrihanish Golf Club.*



# *A Day in the Scottish Life*

At the southern tip of the Mull of Kintyre on the western fringes of Scotland, you will find heaven in The Village of Machrihanish Dunes

by Blaine Newnham

AS WE BOARDED THE LATE AFTERNOON car ferry and began a two-hour trip across the Firth of Clyde over to the mainland, I wondered if this day as well as this trip to Scotland could ever be matched.

We just finished three days on the Mull of Kintyre, having driven down Paul McCartney's long and winding road to the village of Machrihanish Dunes.

Three days could have easily been five or six, but the extra time we did have had enabled us not only to recuperate from our travels from Seattle but let us play the ancient Machrihanish Golf Club twice as well as the new Machrihanish Dunes course once.

This was heaven.

Heaven because of our accommodations at the refurbished but still venerable Ugadale Hotel just a wedge shot from the first tee of the old course. Heaven because the first shot on the old course is a gambling launch across the Atlantic Ocean.

Heaven because Campbeltown and the vestiges of its flourishing whiskey business are only a few minutes away.

On this, our final day in heaven, we played in our shirt sleeves, warmed by a September sun. When it couldn't get any better as we made the turn home, a squadron of RAF jets did a colorful flyover of the area. Sporting red, white and blue vapor trails, it seemed just for us.

The golf had been more than memorable. Many of us who love golf know of Machrihanish, but so few will get there.

Those who don't are left to wonder about the words of golf novelist Michael Bamberger who wrote, "If I were allowed to play only one course the rest of my life, Machrihanish would be the place."

Or Old Tom Morris's assessment of the landscape of the course as "specifically designed by the Almighty for playing golf."

How special is it?

Certainly more than ever with the 2009 opening of another course nearby, David McLay Kidd's Machrihanish Dunes.

Getting there is half the battle. And the fun.

Our pilgrimage to this little-known holy land began with a three-hour drive from Glasgow even though it was only about 40 miles as the crow flies.

You can fly in or take the ferry, or skip the place altogether. There's plenty of great golf in the rest of Scotland. But so magical and mystical is the old course that I spent the first day passing through the dunes looking for Michael Murphy's Shivas Irons. Not that you expected to see Old Tom Morris in the local pub, but I did see someone who looked like him. Could it be?

Machrihanish remains in the hearts of some as Old Tom's best preserved work, dating to 1879 when he took the course, which opened in 1876, from 10 to 18 holes.

The dunes are magnificent, the stretch of holes from No. 4 to No. 8 an entirely exciting trip over hill and dale, every hole offering heaving fairways, a few blind shots, and playing surfaces both smooth and quick.

I loved it.

In so many ways, Machrihanish will bring out the best of you, the punch bowl greens cuddling, not rejecting, incoming shots, the course not too long, not too

demanding, just about right.

Even though it measures only 6,473 yards from the tips and has a par of 70, it has remained in most "Top 100 in the World" rankings.

The opening tee shot – at one point voted the best opening hole in golf – is across as much Atlantic Ocean as you want to take on. I took a conservative route and twice found the fairway. I liked the fact you have to wait for beach walkers to clear the way and hope they shared in your accomplishment.

As our car ferry headed to Argyshire on the mainland, we mulled one day and looked for the next where we would make visits to the relatively new Dundonald, and old favorites Glasgow Gailes and Western Gailes, and finish the day with a round at funky but fantastic Prestwick, ancient home of the British Open.

Down the road was Trump's remodeled Turnberry. And we passed Royal Troon on the way. Special places, yes, but we'd already seen the most special at Machrihanish.

*Blaine Newnham is a former sports columnist for The Seattle Times and Eugene Register-Guard. He loves links golf, and will stray only occasionally.*



The 373-yard par-4 third hole at Machrihanish Golf Club.