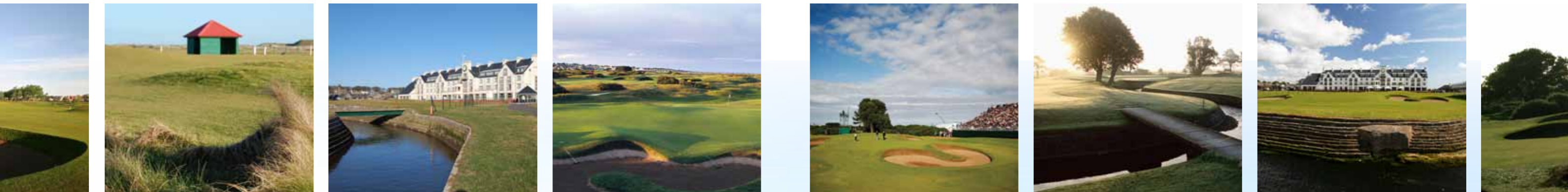


Carnoustie Country

Words and pictures by David J Whyte





Ah, the East Coast of Scotland!

The Crucible of the game!

Where golf was conceived and cast into its present form.

Most consider St Andrews the first port of call on golf's historic trail but there's lots of evidence of the game getting started in other parts.

Even the Fair City of Perth, slightly inland from Scotland's eastern shores records early action in the days of King James IV.

Wherever or whoever devised this pleasant pastime, nay compulsion, we agree they did us all a good turn and we're only too happy to walk in golf's historic footsteps.

The City of Discovery

There's so much history in Scotland, you need to pick on one place and dig into it. You also need to pick a place to lay your head of an evening and the City of Dundee is pretty well ideal.

Crossing the Silvery Tay from the Kingdom of Fife, Dundee stands like a fairytale citadel, a city with few rivals for striking approaches. 'Dundee's setting is

probably more extraordinary than any other city in Scotland or Britain. It is about as ideal - ludicrously ideal - as any city setting could be.' Stephen Fry comedian, author, actor and former Rector of the University of Dundee.

The City of Discovery as Dundee's often dubbed is in pole position if you want a good base between St Andrews and Carnoustie.

It has plenty of pleasant hotels and a vibrant nightlife, custom-built for those that might want a little more 'après golf' atmosphere.

Dundee Country

St Andrews is 12 miles south and Carnoustie about the same in the opposite direction.

Along with these two Open Championship venues comes more Open Championship qualifying courses within a 30-minute radius of Dundee than you can shake a full set of sticks at!

Downfield Golf Club is the outstanding example, one of the finest parkland courses you'll find!

If you're only here to hit the links, I can understand - but - you'd be in danger of missing out on a rare treat.

Situated at the back of town, over recent years Downfield has come into its prime and you are bound to enjoy its luxuriant fairways and testing turns.

Sharing the same leafy estate is one of the town's former municipal courses now in the care of a Trust.

Camperdown Golf Course is cheap golf at less than £30 but it's well worth including.

With the right team at the helm, I predict Camperdown will rise to take its rightful place as a keen, crafty 18-holes of precision golf.

Carnoustie Country

Moving up the coast only a few minutes north-east of Dundee are two great examples of courses that sit just below the radar in terms of golf coach-tour traffic but like a good whisky they are there to savour for those that appreciate authentic Scottish golf.

Another Open Final qualifier, Monifieth is actually a combination of links and heathland.

There are a fair few trees anyway which in my book shouldn't really be on a links course - but that's the way it is and not a problem once you get the measure of the place.

The main East Coast railway line comes perilously close to play on the first and again at the fourth and fifth holes.

Since the Open Championship came back to Carnoustie in 1999, the standard of care lavished on Monifieth has brought out its best features.

Literally next-door is Panmure Golf Club!

This once slightly starchy members club has softened its attitude of late and is a bit more visitor-friendly.

"A tailored jacket and tie are required in the main lounge and dining room," states their website.

I don't mind that, in fact it makes the day more of an occasion if you decide to stay for a meal, for instance.

Otherwise there are two lounges you can use without getting all tushed up! Panmure, like Monifieth, has trees on some holes but there's more of a linky flavour throughout.

The sixth is a blinder of a par four, probably one of the trickiest to par in this part of Scotland.



The World's Toughest Course

Five minutes further along the coast is the golf town of Carnoustie.

As a town it's not by any means as fantoosh as St Andrews.

Golfers tend to come here for the golf - and that's about it.

Maybe it's because they're taking on 'the toughest golf course in the world'.

That's what they dub Carnoustie's Championship course!

Over the past dozen years since it reappeared on the Open Championship rota, Carnoustie has reaffirmed its reputation as the 'bad boy' of the Open Championship, a bruiser that can reduce the world's top players to blobs of blubbery jelly.

Small wonder it's held in such awe!

But us mere mortals must keep in mind, it's only mean to the elite.

On a reasonable day, off the yellow tees, with not too much wind, Carnoustie's as tame as your average wildebeest.

If you play your cards right and plot your way around the course, it is manageable! I've shot one of my best scores at Carnoustie.

Off the visitor tees there's room, especially and if you can relax and establish an easy rhythm, you could be in for a pleasant surprise.

The turf is tight and vibrant; you get a satisfying 'thump' from your iron shots - and the greens are large and accommodating.

You occasionally need a bit more length off the tees but keep it on the short stuff and those firm, rippling fairways will scoot you forward another 50 yards.

It's a great experience!

Having said that, there are some holes that are downright scary!

The terrible trio that terminate the round are amongst the most demanding in the world.

Carnoustie's 'Sting in the Tail', 16th, 17th and 18th is a great finale.

Wind, of course will make the entire course much more of a challenge!

Golf's been going on around the links of Montrose for at least 500 years.

Like Carnoustie, it's essentially a municipal run by the people for the people, artisan golf designed to give the butcher, the baker and the microchip-maker their daily diversion.

This undulating links, sprinkled with a sprig or two of gorse, has been hiding its light under one of its many gorse bushes.

Montrose doesn't have the international clout of Carnoustie or the upscale eminence of nearby Royal Aberdeen but they do welcome us average Joe's and give





a considerable run for not-so-much money!

Ben Crenshaw said of it: 'a magnificent stretch of marvellously natural ground which depicts how the game was born.'

Montrose Medal is gnarly; a grizzled grapevine, a twisting, curmudgeonly shillelagh of a golf course.

This is what makes it such a joy to encounter.

Heaps of History

There's history galore, both golf and otherwise in this part of the world.

Bobby Jones' mentor, Stuart Maiden came from Carnoustie as did dozens of young professional golfers who, as the game caught on, took their trade to all parts of the world, particularly the US and Australia.

The county of Angus stands at the heart of the Pictish Kingdom, those wild, wode-painted warriors portrayed by Mel Gibson in 'Braveheart'!

The area is peppered with their iron-age message boards, Pictish Standing Stones.

The Declaration of Arbroath was signed at Arbroath

Abbey in 1320, asserting the case for Scottish independence and centuries later greatly influencing the formation of the US Declaration of Independence.

More importantly for some at least the father of Walter and Arthur Davidson (co founders of Harley Davidson) hailed from Netherton Cottage near the village of Aberlemno in Angus – a village also renowned for some of the most outstanding Standing Stones.

But the best historic titbit from Carnoustie Country is found in the 'Wee Red Toon' of Kirriemuir where legendary rebel rocker, AC/DC's Bon Scott was born.

I always thought there was a bit of a wild Pict about that fellah!

Moving On Up!

Climbing higher in Carnoustie Country, there's a swathe of inland courses, most of which are well worth an encounter and all surrounded by stirring scenery.

Edzell Golf Club is a fine example, a great test, one of James Braid's finest in fact! By the second you're in the thick of it with a long par-four by the road with its green hidden from view.



Stray and you're in the hay. Edzell's rough - even the semi is usually verdant and very hard to escape.

Kirriemuir and Brechin are two delightful heathland/parkland courses nearby that are popular for day outings.

Both are short in length but surprising tests especially around the greens with the added benefit of super Scottish scenery.

Forfar Golf Club is quite remarkable!

The fairways are so undulating you'd swear you were playing on a links course! Rumour has it that rows of flax were laid out to dry on this land before it was a golf course, building up rucked-up ridges for all the world like a links.

Awkward lies are therefore common.

Forfar is truly a heathland though with stands of pine, heather and broom lining the fairways and a tremendous variety to each of its holes.

It's a tremendous little course, definitely worth including.

A Town Like Alyth

Alyth intrigues me!

It's just a quaint little village with about 2000 residents.

And yet it offers no less than 61 golf holes – three 18's and a nine-holer.

Best of the three has to be Alyth Golf Club, built by James Braid in the early 1900's. The other two, Strathmore and Glen Isla are relatively new and quite appealing.

As if that wasn't enough, just five miles along the road is Blairgowrie Golf Club's Rosemount course, long considered as the premier heathland course in this part of the world and golfers worldwide come to pay homage.

Once again, the great James Braid had a hand in winding a tactical route through gorgeous stands of Pine, Silver Birch trees and heather.

This is a genuine five-star test where decent drives are rewarded with a good line into fast, firm green.

It's roomier than you might think but the overall effect of the tree-lined fairways is thrilling from start to finish.

Neighbouring Landsdown course is even more exacting so if you have time, play both and make a day of it - you'll sleep well that night!





Golf Deals

There are discount deals available such as the Carnoustie Country Dream Ticket - play Montrose, Monifieth, Panmure (all Open Qualifiers) and Carnoustie Championship, for £285 (1 April to 31 October 2011).

There is also the Carnoustie Country Golf Pass giving you a choice of three courses from only £77. Find out more by visiting www.carnoustiecountry.com.

Carnoustie Golf Links offer a great combination ticket playing Carnoustie's three courses for only £160 – not bad when you consider the Championship course is £135 on its own. Check it out on ... www.carnoustiegolflinks.co.uk

Where to Stay

Apex City Quay Hotel in Dundee is handy for both St Andrews and Carnoustie as well a host of courses surrounding the city. www.apexhotels.co.uk

If you'd like something smaller in Dundee's West End yet handy for the pubs, try the Shaftsbury Hotel www.shaftsburyhotel.net

If you fancy something different out of town, try a night or two at the very swish Brucefield Boutique 5-star B & B in Arbroath – www.brucefieldbandb.com

Off Course (Fact Box)

- Great Eskapes is a novel way to explore Angus's resplendent glens and sites of historic interest, in an eight-

seater Asquith reproduction limousine.

www.thegreateskape.com

- Dundee's West End (Nethergate and West Port) is the premier spot for pubs, clubs and a surfeit of great restaurants.

- The Doghouse is Dundee's best Music Venue – see facebook.com/dundeedoghouse for who's on.

- Glamis Castle is the outstanding stately pile, birthplace of the Queen Mother, worth a visit for its grand gardens and ghosts.

- Climb the plug of a volcano (actually you can drive up). The views from the top of Dundee's Law are fabulous.

- Angus is peppered with Standing Stones, Pictish status symbols often at the side of the road – see some of the best at Aberlemno north of Forfar.

- Dundee Contemporary Arts is the city's cultural hub complete with cinemas, exhibitions, workshops and its own groovy bar/restaurant.

- RRS Discovery was built in Dundee for the British National Antarctic Expedition lead by Robert Scott and Ernest Shackleton. The ship is now the centrepiece of a fascinating visitor attraction on Dundee's waterfront.

- Angus and Dundee is home to such delicacies as Arbroath Smokies, Forfar Bridies and Dundee Pehs (pies) as well as playing its part in the production of Aberdeen & Angus beef.