



# What a wonderful Spey

**Steve Killick follows a road less travelled in the Highlands and discovers the Speyside whisky trail. He even manages a few holes between tastings**

Pictures courtesy of David J Whyte © Linksland.com

ONE of the abiding mysteries of Scotland to the outsider is just how many wonderful courses it keeps to itself. Without expert knowledge it is all too easy for the unwary visitor to drive through towns and villages where there are most wonderful and historic tracks to be played for a fraction of the price charged in southern Europe or, indeed, southern England come to think of it.

This month's tour takes us to Speyside in the Scottish Highlands, on the trail of delicious whiskies and equally tasty courses.

While we shall bypass some of the grand old names of Highlands golf we shall be unearthing some tough, some charming, many spectacular but all of them fascinating local clubs that make the journey well worthwhile.

So, having left the airport, we head east from Inverness but this time drive past Nairn, now rather grandly calling itself 'The Nairn', and look forward to playing it again at some later date, for our destination is where many of those fighter jets that

roar overhead are aiming for, namely Lossiemouth and the sublime links of Moray.

Tom Morris senior designed the wonderful old course at Moray, known to all who play it simply as 'Lossie' and there is much to remind the visitor of his masterpiece further south at St Andrews.

The first and last holes end in the town, which is the same hue as 'the Auld Grey Toun'.

The welcoming old clubhouse is fashioned from grey stone too, and overlooks the 18th green. There is also a New course, shorter, tighter and with smaller greens but still an excellent test.

And just like St Andrews, which way the wind is blowing can make all the difference between hitting a 3-wood or a 6-iron into the immaculately maintained greens. The undulating fairways sweep their way down through banks of yellow gorse and deep, riveted pot bunkers for 6,995 yards off the back tees.

As well as St Andrews there is also a touch of Turnberry as one plays down 11 towards the shining white Covesea lighthouse.



History abounds at Moray



A view down Moray's 1st



Moray's clubhouse



The liquid gold lined up at Benromach distillery

Any nett score approaching the par of 71 comes extremely well earned and richly deserving of the 10-year-old single-malt Macallan that is this most welcoming of club's home tipples.

And if the sound of those jets booming overhead finally gets to you then Sunday is the time to play when RAF Lossiemouth shuts down operations.

Reluctantly we must bid farewell to 'Lossie', noting it as a venue to return to again and again, and make the short journey south to Elgin.

Opened in 1906, and 17 years Old Moray's junior, Elgin is a different course entirely to the wind-blown links although a breeze can, and often does, blow fiercely across this heathland layout.

Elgin does not look that tough from the outset with wide, lush fairways winding their way through pine woods but the first three holes measure nearly 1,300 yards and all of them par 4s.

There are no par 5s, but eight long and tough par 4s of over 400 yards and some equally testing short holes.

There is some respite on the back nine before we

hit the Stroke Index 1 14th, at 464 yards, a par 5 in everything but name for all but the very best. Like so many of the courses around the Highlands, Elgin is in first-rate condition with a comfortable clubhouse to relax in after what will never be an easy round.

Having played both Old Moray and Elgin in the same day it was a weary group that finally decanted itself onto the minibus to head for the splendid accommodation to be found at the Knockomie Hotel just outside Forres.

Set in a grand country house, extremely comfortable rooms, great cuisine and a huge selection of single malts make this the perfect stopover, especially if you have just played two courses in a day.

Forres, just a short drive away is the perfect antidote to a hard day's golf and possibly even a hard evening spent tasting malts. Kept in superb condition by head greenkeeper, Ross McLeod, the course is a treat.

A parkland design created by Open winners of





Knockomie Hotel



Front of house at Benromach

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Picturesque Forres



Fine fare at Granttown

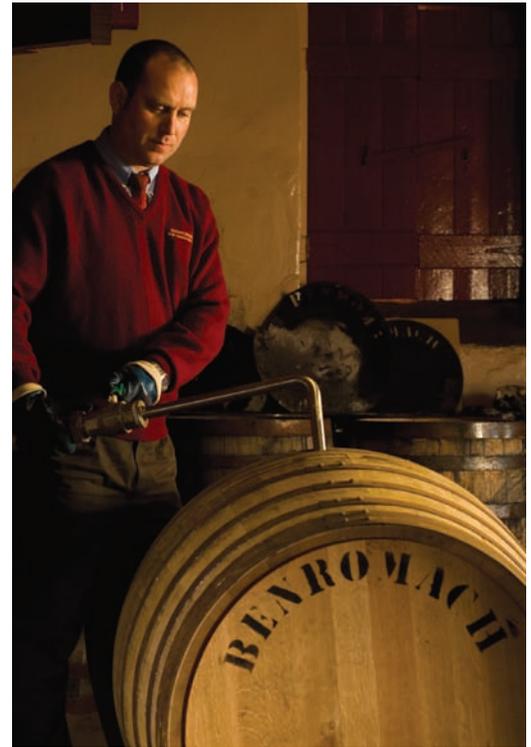


A tour of the distillery



Journalists sample a malt

**FACTFILE**  
 Steve Killick flew with Easyjet ([www.Easyjet.com](http://www.Easyjet.com)) from London Gatwick to Inverness Airport and travelled The Speyside Golf Whisky Trail. For more information on Speyside packages contact [www.golfvacationscotland.com](http://www.golfvacationscotland.com) or for general information on golf in Scotland contact [www.visitscotland.com](http://www.visitscotland.com)

yore, James Braid and Willie Park, Forres offers a really warm welcome. From Sandy Aird the professional, secretary Dave MacKintosh and all the staff in the clubhouse, everyone seems to want you to enjoy your day here.

With views over Findhorn Bay and the Moray Firth that is certainly not difficult and make sure to sample a glass of the delicious local Benromach single malt afterwards however your game went.

Our final journey is into the Scottish Alps (which has enjoyed a snow-laden winter), the Cairngorms National Park, to two beautifully designed courses. The first, at Granttown on

Spey, offers some of the finest locally prepared food to be found at any golf club in the British Isles and some grand scenery to boot.

This is not a tough course, and the opening six holes on flat parkland are unlikely to set the pulse racing but the next six that sweep down and back up the Spey valley are stunning with views across to the Cairngorm range and the Cromdale Hills.

This wee James Braid-designed belter really cheers the senses and offers opportunities for a good score too, especially if you sensibly navigate those testing middle six.

And lastly we come to Boat of Garten, named

after a long-defunct ferry and possibly one of the most beautiful courses to be found anywhere. The opening par 3 gives no clue as to the wondrous delights and perils to come as the fairways sweep up and round mature pine woods with snow-capped mountains soaring in the distance.

Word of mouth brings many visitors to the Boat, another of Braid's wonders, and not one to be missed. At under 6,000 yards this is a course that needs to be thought through to achieve anywhere near its par 70. But enjoy it, as indeed you should enjoy all these Highland delights in this most special part of Scotland. 🍷

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