

## A taste of Scottish Links

Inspired by Tom Coyne's Book "*A Course called Scotland*", 4 of us, Cobus Thesnaar, Dick Knight, Wynand Deyzel (Devon Valley) and myself, embarked on a tour of a few lesser known courses in Angus, Aberdeenshire and Moray in the North-Eastern part of Scotland. The initial plan was to play 11 courses in 9 days, but being Scotland, we were met with some rain and unplayable conditions. We had to settle for walking 8 courses in the 9 days.

We started off in St Andrews just to get everyone acquainted with the feel of links courses and how to handle Gorse(!!)

<https://www.liveabout.com/gorse-on-golf-courses-1560865>

"Gorse" is nasty stuff when you encounter it on a golf course: A prickly shrub that can gobble up golf balls and the hopes of golfers. It is well-known to golfers because many British Open courses have stands of gorse in their rough.



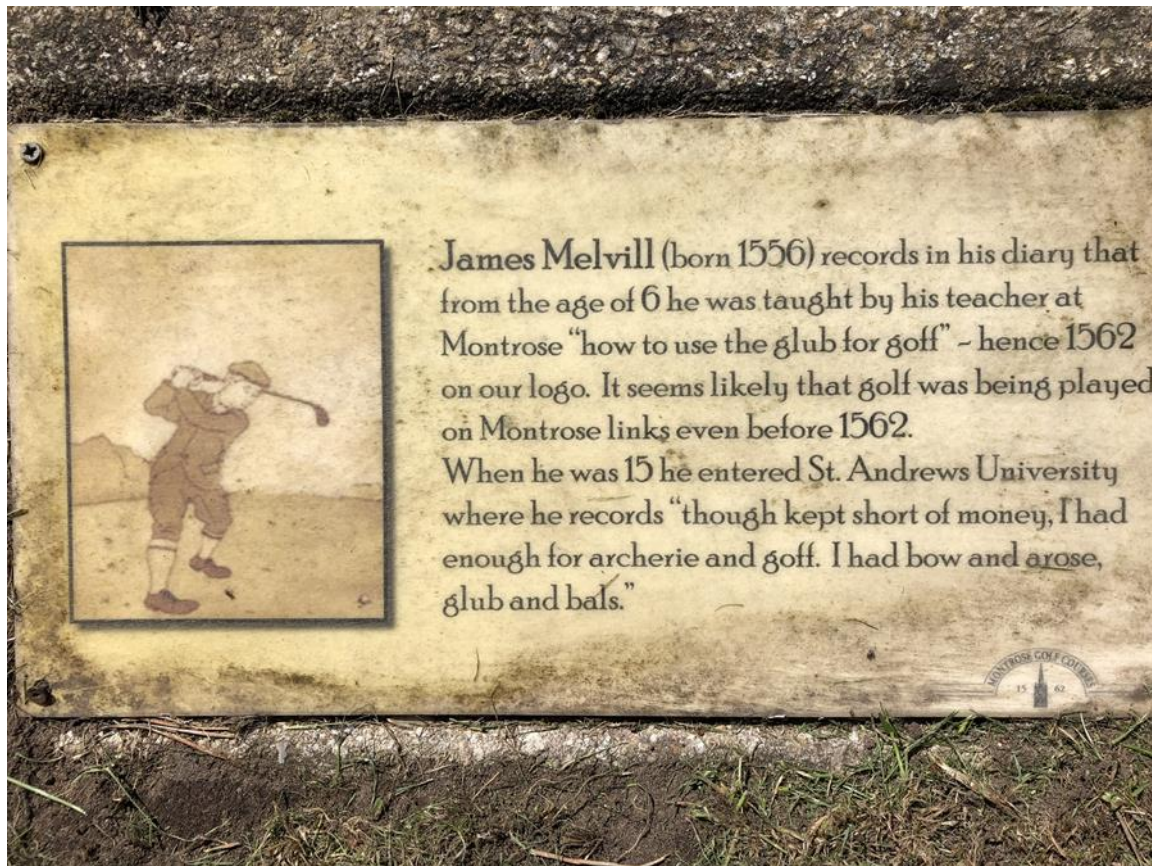
Dick negotiating some Gorse

We played one of the more affordable St Andrews Links Trust courses, the Eden Course. Not a walk in the park. Perhaps it was being in close proximity to The Old Course and the ever presence of the skyline of The Auld Grey Town that made for scores no one would boast about. We experienced the latter more often than not during our tour. The inevitable picture pose on the Swilcan Bridge was done.



Our next stop was Montrose. (En route, we popped in to Carnoustie to look at the burrrn where Jean van de Velde lost The Open Championship in 1999. The fossilised tears can still be seen there if you look carefully.) What made Montrose attractive, was the fact that the Montrose 1562 course was played over 25 holes, 90 years before Jan van Riebeeck landed in Cape Town. The 5<sup>th</sup> oldest golf club in the world. To add to the charm, we were met by a Golf Ambassador on our arrival! Quite an exceptional experience to be personally welcomed and introduced to all that can be had at Montrose. Again, the Scottish Links proved to be a different experience to parklands golf. A thoroughly enjoyable, albeit painful lesson. We also played the Broomfield

Links that is intertwined with the 1562 Course. It is supposed to be the easier course. Not so. Links golf is a different animal!



Montrose History



Four happy golfers about to take on 1562.



Montrose town in the background. Gorse rules!!

And then, off to Murcar Golf Club. To quote Allan McAllister Ferguson in his book *"Golf in Scotland"*: "Murcar is plain fun, with lots of memorable holes.....I had the distinct feeling of playing golf inside a pinball machine." We were in awe as to where the course designers saw the possibility of golf holes. This was natural dune land and no earthmoving machinery was employed to shape the course. A truly magic experience. One of my three top courses of the tour.

Murcar Links 3rd "Fairway". Not very fair one should say.



Murcar 5<sup>th</sup>, Par3 152 yards. Green in back centre, behind the clump of gorse.



We were rained out on Stonehaven, but a day's rest was really needed for the top course of the tour: Cruden Bay. Ferguson put it thus: "...In these post-trip (Scottish) evaluations, Cruden Bay rarely ranks lower than #2. Usually it is #1--- and that is compared to Carnoustie, Dornoch, Turnberry, Troon and all the courses at St. Andrews." It was something none of us have ever experienced or could ever have imagined. Our thoughts were in the line of: Who, in his right mind, could ever have dreamt up a hole like this?? A 195 yard blind par 3. To get to the green, you have to draw the ball around a hill. Wynand managed to do this! The course lies amongst dunes, created millions of years ago. And Old Tom Morris had the vision to lay out a course in that moon landscape. Pure magic and most certainly a do-over and a must-play for anyone playing in that area. This course dictates what links golf is about. We added the 9 holer, Cruden Bay St Olaf, snuggled into the main course, after our round. A day and course to remember.

4 Golfers dressed for the cold, taking on Cruden Bay



Town of Cruden Bay. Yes. There were a few dunes around.



Dune land



Playing right next to the North Sea.



Next in line was Cullen Links. Again, we were left breathless. "Cullen is FUN. This short par 63 is everything that Scottish links golf should be." An 18 holer with 10 par 3's, each of which felt like a par 4. A true gem of a course and most certainly a do-over. How did the designers think out these holes?? Playing a blind par 3 between two little hills and hoping for the best. Cobus made the best recovery shot of the tour to finish with par. When I think back on our tour, the first course that jumps to mind is Cullen. Loved it!! We sadly had to give Covesea a miss due to inclement weather.



Cullen. The elevation is something to behold.



Cullen is in the shape of a horseshoe. Part of it plays at an elevated level and part at sea level.



So on to Nairn. After I was incredibly impressed by the likes of Cruden Bay and Cullen, I found Nairn Championship Course rather pedestrian. But I was the odd one out, since Wynand made an Eagle 2 on the par4 9<sup>th</sup>!! A truly exceptional achievement. The Moray Firth is ever present and a nice sight to behold. Nairn Dunbar was also rained out, but I shall return to catch all the misses!!

Thoughts on the trip:

I love Scotland and the Scots. Very friendly and hospitable.

Scotland was cold and windy. We had some rain and the temperatures were below 10° C. And this was their spring season! Luckily it was easy to dress accordingly. I would do it again in a heartbeat!

Gorse is a beautiful shrub. However. Do not put your hand in the bush to retrieve a ball. A chainsaw is needed to cut off your arm to get yourself unstuck.

We played 4 courses for a "Claret Jug". Montrose 1562, Murcar, Cruden Bay and Nairn Championship. Wynand won with 115 Stableford points! The average of 28.75 points a round is an indication of the difficulty of the courses. We could see the effect on our handicaps once we entered the scores!

And the Champion Golfer of the Tour is.....



Golf in Scotland is not cheap, but it is an unreal experience. One does not need to play The Old Course at £190 to experience Links golf. There are many hidden gems that offer magic golf.

I am going to do it again!!

Leon Serfontein



