

From Here

to Serenity

Scotland's East Lothian and Highlands regions allow you to experience the subtle pleasures of some of the world's best outposts of championship golf

BY RAY TENNENBAUM

The most copied hole in golf looks as enigmatic as the Sphinx. From the tee of this par three on the coastline of suburban Edinburgh, all but a sliver of green is concealed by a hill set with two gaping bunkers, like eyes in the head of a whale. That's only the most obvious part of the defense system devised by its long-forgotten designer. Should you carry the moatlike valley behind the mound, the deeply channeled green is apt to funnel all but the very best shots off into bunkers short left and long right.

Welcome to Redan, the devilish par-three 15th hole at **North Berwick**, one of a handful of must-play courses in the county of East Lothian, where superb links in sublime surroundings are as common as seashells. Just a few miles east lies **Muirfield**, whose very exclusive club, the Honourable Company of Edinburgh Golfers, drew up the first known Rules of Golf in 1744, ten years before the Society of St. Andrews Golfers was founded. Just a stone's throw from Muirfield are the three charming courses at Gullane, where golf has been played since at least 1650, and two dozen more lie within a 25-mile radius of Gullane Hill, including Tom Doak's brand-new Renaissance Club.

Fortunately, it's possible for anyone with a Handicap Index under 20 or so to enjoy the splendid variety of these courses, since private clubs in the UK welcome visiting golfers as unaccompanied guests. And nothing against St. Andrews, but if battling the crowds looking to secure a tee time at The Old Course or the brand-new Castle Course strikes you as a daunting task, consider starting your next golf trip to Scotland here, in East Lothian. Only

Muirfield presents a truly arduous effort to gain a tee time: Despite a £160 (\$340) greens fee, the waiting list is very long, partly because it's only open to visitors on Tuesdays and Thursdays. However, the experience is more than worth the effort.

The landscape at Royal Dornoch is memorable for its character and isolation.



OPPOSITE: COURTESY OF ORIENT EXPRESS; RIGHT: RAY TENNENBAUM

Ride the Rails

After a lot of golf I needed to put my feet up without sacrificing any scenery. I'd arranged a journey on one of the great trains of the world, the Royal Scotsman, now operated by Orient Express, with two- to five-night excursions beginning and ending in Edinburgh. My choice was the three-day Western route, heading to the outskirts of Glasgow, then north to Mallaig.

I checked my golf clubs at a hotel and hailed a cab to Waverley Station, smack in the middle of town below Edinburgh Castle. A host cheerfully welcomed me and my bags before leading me up to the first-class lounge to join thirty-five other passengers waiting for boarding. As we assembled at the station's ground floor, a piper took up "Scotland the Brave" and led us to a velvet rope before the train entrance, where our host, Michael, assisted by several staff members, offered glasses of champagne as we boarded. Within minutes the train was off and we were cheerfully sitting inside a plush observation car, buzzing with

anticipation. With plenty of time before dinner, we made our way to our sleeping cabins: snug but comfortable, with quite serviceable private showers (plenty of hot water), surprisingly ample closets, and a small writing desk set in front of a window.

The next morning the train breezed north through a rugged golden valley below brilliant early-autumn blue skies. After a perfect breakfast, many of us retreated back to the large-windowed observation car, decorated with velvet sofas, teak- and walnut-inlaid walls, and fresh-cut flowers, to watch the lochs and streams whiz by. By mid-afternoon the peak of Ben Nevis, the highest mountain in the UK, came into view, and we disembarked for an excursion to the beach at Mallaig, with a view of the Isle of Skye.

The following day's journey brought



us via bus to the Isle of Bute, just west of Glasgow, to a tour of Mount Stuart. This isn't your standard castle walkabout: Mount Stuart embodies a spirit of riotous piety with odd mixture of Byzantine architecture, elaborate pre-Raphaelite decor, and old-fashioned scholasticism. A Scottish dance recital by colorfully-dressed young ladies in

the cold gray family chapel downstairs was a cheery cap to the afternoon.

No murders to speak of on this romantic train. The only crime seemed to be in the idea of returning to Edinburgh on Monday morning: the anticipation of return mixed with the pleasure of new memories—idle hours peering out into epic scenery, late nights sipping single malts and trading tall tales. Might have to be a twice-in-a-lifetime trip. For more information, visit www.royalscotsman.com. --R.T.

One of the most celebrated and difficult courses on the British Open rota, Muirfield's fairways are tough to hold even on a calm day, much less when the wind is up. The intricate green complexes present a breadth of challenges—downhill chips from thick rough to

speedy putting surfaces, for instance, and treacherous escapes out of six-foot-deep bunkers. The setting is almost spooky, thanks to the moor-like feel of the grassy landscape as well as the club's fabled formality—should you elect to play again in the afternoon (alternate-shot only) after a morning round, you change into a coat and tie for lunch, then change back into golf clothes for your second round. Still, you don't see anyone complaining, nor should they.

A good match in the breeze is one of the great pleasures of golf, and you're apt to find it at delightful Gullane. At first glance, the holes look to be comprised of nothing but blonde links woven over a hill overlooking the sea. However, that all changes when you actually walk the fairways and play the shots, as the subtle challenges and striking scenery combine for an enjoyable round—or if you're lucky, rounds—of golf. Of the three courses here, No. 1 is the oldest and also the hardest, an elegant path of fairways with an unusual scope of elevation changes.

A few miles east is Craighelaw, designed by Donald Steel's firm and completed in 2002. It has a regular site for Open Championship qualifying, and is an entertaining lowland links with difficult, turtle-backed greens and ruthless pot bunkers—not superbly conditioned, but still lots of fun.

As the site of 15 British Opens, Muirfield has a history to match its challenge.



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Left: FootJoy Fairhaven, Mass.



Right: Hammock Beach Palm Coast, Fla.

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East Lothian and the Met Area

Many of the figures who helped bring golf to the Met Area a hundred years ago hailed from East Lothian. Musselburgh Links produced the great British Open champion Willie Park whose son, Willie Jr. (pictured), can be fairly called a father of modern golf and a seminal architect, creator of Sunningdale, Maidstone and Woodway.



The great Willie Anderson, winner of two U.S. Opens, was the first pro at Baltusrol, a job he also held at Apawamis—his father Tom became pro at Montclair Golf Club from 1903 until his death in 1913, when Willie's brother Tom, having already worked at Oakmont

and Inwood, took over. At the 1901 U.S. Open at Myopia Hunt Club, which he won, Willie refused to eat in the kitchen, anticipating Walter Hagen's rebellion some years later—like Hagen, both Willie and Tom Anderson were known for their sartorial displays. Seaton writes, "at the 1912 U.S. Open, Tom Anderson decked himself out in a pure white silk shirt adorned with red, blue, yellow and black stripes, a natty bow tie, pleated white flannel pants with the cuffs rolled up, just one turn, a bright red bandana looped casually around his neck, a blinding plaid cap and gleaming white buckskin shoes with thick red-rubber soles and wide white laces."

On the other side of the East Lothian peninsula, **Dunbar** is as unpretentious as it is delightful. After the first three holes, the course stretches eastward along the coast, like twin slender ribbons of fairways on the rocky shoreline. It's full of the kind of gentle char-

acter traits a golfer can grow quite fond of—an ancient ruin greets you after your blind approach shot to the seventh green, a rocky retaining wall holds back a forest from the ninth fairway. The fabulous sunken green complex on the 377-yard 13th is unforgettable—the putting surface occupies the upper part of a bowl, with a pot bunker offering trouble to the left. The inward holes bring Dunbar village back into view—playing alone on a Sunday afternoon, I eventually caught up to a four-ball of locals putting out on the par-three 16th for the match, lifting caps and shaking hands.

Duly energized by the golf in East Lothian, I set forth for Inverness, five hours north of Edinburgh, for the pilgrimage to **Royal Dornoch**. The days when Dornoch was considered off the beaten path (the great golf writer Bernard Darwin apparently never made it up here) are long gone. This corner of the Highlands has become a very popular destination, though the countryside is still relatively spare—the residents are a bit rougher, their brogues somewhat more impenetrable.

Only St. Andrews and Leith are older than these links where golf has been played since at least 1616. As Pete Dye observed once after

Tall fescue grass and hillside views of the Firth of Forth highlight the golf experience at Craighielaw.



TOP: USGA ARCHIVES; LEFT: RAY TENNENBAUM

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The inbound holes at Dunbar are framed by the charming village.

playing here, “If an old Scot in a red jacket had popped out from behind a sand dune, beating a feather ball, I wouldn’t have blinked an eye.” Yet there is something extraordinarily modern about it—scarcely any shots are blind, and there is a sense of separation from other golfers that other old courses lack. And Dornoch has influenced countless designers, most famously Donald Ross, a native son who worked as the greenskeeper.

After the relatively easy par-four first hole, you’re faced with a medium-length par three with a long, narrow, elevated green placed on a mound largely obscured by a big grass-covered dune—an opening between two giant bunkers offers one a way in, though a couple of big humps will escort an off-line or short run-up into either bunker. On the other hand,

in a crosswind, the slender green is extremely difficult to hold with a lofted shot. It’s a simple but effective hole which schooled not just Ross, but architects like Pete Dye, Tom Fazio and countless others.

From the second green, you walk through an opening in the hedgelike gorse and emerge into one of the great views of golf—a hummock-strewn lowland with fairways leading through corridors of rough and ancient gorse. Three superb par fours set your heart racing, and without thinking, you take in countless details: the seamless interplay between fairway and gently raised putting surfaces; the modulated threat of pot bunkers—just as you have cheerfully forgotten about them, you’ll plunk into one, very possibly on the 180-yard par-three 13th, surrounded by seven of the little buggers. Even the nature of the routing—the fairways on the back nine open up as the holes lengthen. It’s one of the great experiences in golf, and the only regret you’ll have walking off the course is that you don’t get to play here every day.

Dornoch has some very good company in Scotland’s northern region. Two very reasonably-priced courses where you’re apt to enjoy an excellent, leisurely round lie within an hour and a half drive of Dornoch. **Nairn**, laid out by Old Tom Morris with later contributions from James Braid and Ben Sayers, is a muscular challenge in the wind, requiring low

shots to thread through craterlike bunkers and ravines and over gorse and heather. It was the site of the 2003 Walker Cup matches, and the outward linksland nine gives way to several holes set in a forest of brush and pine. **Brora**, another Braid design, which like many Highland courses doubles as a grazing pasture for cows and sheep, makes the most of its unusually rolling linksland terrain—a wee bit short (6,110 yards), but shallow greens with looming sandpits make for an effective test.

Don’t be fooled by the charm of the Royal Scotsman and the ancient feel of the links courses dotted around the country—Scotland is a place where modernity still has a place. In fact, a number of noteworthy new courses will make their debuts in time for a trip in 2009. Besides the aforementioned Renaissance Club in East Lothian, another newcomer is Castle Stuart, on the shore of the Moray Firth just outside Inverness. A creation of Kingsbarns developer Mark Parsinen in partnership with Gil Hanse, the course—the centerpiece of a planned resort and fractional-ownership development—follows the shoreline of the Firth on a shelf just above the sea before turning inward, yielding inspirational views.

The juxtaposition between new and old

Pound-wise

While travel to Scotland has never been cheap, and the dire exchange rate has made golf trips even more costly, economizing is a challenge. Whatever else you do, plan to plan ahead: Muirfield’s waiting list can stretch to 18 months. Many clubs now offer online booking, but a courteous letter, if need be followed by a polite phone call, might not be a bad idea.

Since practically everyone in the UK seems to drive a stick shift, you’ll pay a premium for renting a car with an automatic transmission. While the prospect of shifting on the wrong side might compound your healthy fears about left-hand lane driving, after a few miles it becomes second nature—especially as you think of the money you’ll be saving. Traveling in a small group in a van can help save.



across the landscape of Scotland is part of what makes a trip there so memorable. Combine of full slate of golf over some of the world’s most celebrated links with an unforgettable journey on one of the world’s great trains, and you have an itinerary that cannot be duplicated. ☺

Ray Tennenbaum writes from his home in Brooklyn, New York.

Fast Facts

Where to Play

North Berwick; www.northberwickgolfclub.com; green fees from £30 to £85

Muirfield; www.muirfield.org.uk; green fees from £160 for one round and £200 for two rounds to £90 in winter

Gullane; www.gullanegolfclub.com; green fees from £70 to £150

Craigielaw; www.craigielawgolfclub.com; £52 to £75

Dunbar; www.dunbar-golfclub.co.uk; £50 to £60

Royal Dornoch; www.royaldornoch.com; £52 to £82

Nairn; www.nairngolfclub.co.uk; £50 to £75

Brora; www.brora-golf.com; £35 to £40



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