**An Interview with The Real McCoy**

By “golftripper.com” blog 2012

I may call myself The Itinerant Golfer, but when you get right down to it I’m not even fit to carry the shoe bag of Bob McCoy.  Not only does Mr. McCoy have more hair than me, but he may be the ***original*** itinerant golfer. Bob was busy golfing his way across the globe decades before I ever started this website and had capped off the Top 100 in the world list before I was out of junior high school.

After playing hockey in his youth Bob switched to golf after college and since then has built a travel resume that is simply incredible. He has played the Top 100 in U.S., Top 100 in the world and even pulled off an epic trip in 1997 where he played the entire Top 100 in the world in 100 consecutive days. Simply amazing! As you may have guessed, Bob is still at it and keeps a very busy travel schedule that has him carting his golf clubs to all the far reaches of the globe. It’s my pleasure to have made Bob’s acquaintance and I’m grateful that he was able to share some time with me to chat about his life as a traveling golfer.

**TIG: Clearly traveling is a big part of your golf life. When were you first bitten by the travel bug as it pertains to golf?**

**McCoy:** In the mid 1970’s I was a sell-side equity analyst for a Wall Street brokerage firm in New York City and had to do a lot of traveling, both in the U.S. and around the world. At that time Golf Digest had a list of America’s 100 Greatest Courses. I had played a few of them and had even been a member at Oakmont from 1970-1972. I simply got the idea that I could take my clubs along on business trips and spend an extra day or two playing one of the Golf Digest listed courses. So golf travel really started for me as an extension of business travel.

**TIG: So, you’ve been globetrotting for almost 40 years now, that’s incredible. I have to guess that you’ve seen an extraordinary number of courses over the years. If you’re anything like me I know have a document tucked away somewhere with all your golf travel data on it. I’d love to hear exactly how many different courses you’ve played in your life.**

**McCoy:** As of today I’ve played 987 different courses. By November of this year I should go over 1000.

**TIG: Wow, that is amazing. Are there ANY courses you haven’t played yet and are just dying to see??**

**McCoy:** There are a couple of courses on my schedule for this year that have me pretty excited. Let’s see . . . In September there’s the new Trump course in Scotland. Then in October I’ll be visiting Los Angeles and will get to see both the remodeled L.A.C.C. North as well as some minor changes to Riviera since I last played it in 1997. In November I’ve got a trip to the far east and will play Stoneforest and various Misson Hills courses in China as well as some new courses on Hainan Island. From there I’ll head to Tasmania where I will get to see Coore & Crenshaw’s Lost Farm. That November trip will also include a visit to Diamante in Mexico. Next year I’ve already got a trip to the Dominican Republic scheduled for May. I’m also am looking forward to returning at some point to South Africa as well as playing in Switzerland for the first time. I’ve played a lot of courses, but there are still a lot to play!

**TIG: Your biggest and most impressive trip came in 1997 when you played the Top 100 in the World in 100 consecutive days. What on earth made you decide to do that??**

**McCoy:** In November 1988, while on a trip around the world to complete playing the Golf Magazine Top 100, I began to wonder what to do for an encore. After completion of the Top 100 the obvious sense of accomplishment was mixed with a sense of disappointment that there were no more worlds to conquer. The fun of planning and executing the various trips was like a drug; once a high had been reached something more powerful had to be tried to hit an even higher high. Furthermore, I had a group of friends around the world that I wanted to visit again. During the November 1988 trip, while being interviewed for an article in a Japanese golf magazine, I was asked what I was going to do after completing the Top 100. I casually said I was going to play them in 100 consecutive days. Over the next few years I kept looking at the list and realized such a trip was doable because several courses were close enough together that I could play two of them in one day. So around May 1996 I started planning and 15 months later the trip was finished.

**TIG: What amazes me most is that you completed this Odyssey in 1997 when many of the modern technological conveniences we have today were not readily available. Did you even have a cell phone with you?**

**McCoy:** No cell phone. If someone wanted to get in touch with me during the trip, and knew the schedule, they would have to call and leave a message for me.

**TIG: That’s hard to fathom in the world of instant communication we live in today. What about getting to the courses? With no GPS system, did you have written directions to each course and lots of maps with you?**

**McCoy:** Because I had been to each course before I knew the best way to get from point A to B to C and used just a few maps.

**TIG: How about planning the trip? It’s so easy to make travel arrangements online now. Back in 1996 when you were planning were there any online travel tools or did you do everything the old fashioned way with travel agents??**

**McCoy:** I did all the planning the old fashion way with regular mail, fax, and land line phone. There was no internet in 1996 or at least I didn’t know how to use it and I don’t think any of the golf clubs had websites like they all do now. I planned the golf schedule and most of the lodging by myself and used PerryGolf for the airline itinerary and some of the lodging.

**TIG: Another amazing part of your story is that you flew commercial the whole way. How did you deal with unexpected surprises? Surely there were some canceled and missed flights. Maybe some bad weather forcing a reschedule? One missed cue and your entire itinerary could be thrown off. How did that part of the trip play out?**

**McCoy:** Amazingly, there was only one flight delay the entire trip. It was a two hour delay on the flight between Las Vegas and San Jose. Not a single missed flight or lost bag and no rescheduling for bad weather.

**TIG: You’re kidding me . . . so you didn’t have to tweak the itinerary at all once you started?**

**McCoy:** Well, not exactly. I did have to reschedule once for a Ladies Day shotgun start at Crystal Downs. The trip actually went so well that I could have finished in 97 or 98 days . . . I didn’t think 100 in 98 had the same ring as 100-in-100.

**TIG: You mentioned a Ladies Day shotgun start, what kind of problems did you have scheduling the courses? Did you have to work around things like Monday closings, member/guests and club championships? It seems like there were a lot of stars that needed to align for everything to run smoothly.**

**McCoy:** I had to know that Seminole closes after Mother’s Day and Augusta closes in early May. As for Monday closings, I was able to get special permission to play at The Country Club, Oakland Hills, and Merion on Mondays. The Open at Royal Troon caused a challenge as did the PGA at Winged Foot, and the Colonial Invitational at Colonial. In fact, I had to start the trip a day early and thus end a day earlier than planned because of Colonial’s guest play restrictions around the tournament. They are very strict that there be no guest play starting three weeks prior to the tournament. Luckily, I was outside of the U.S. for the month of June when most member/guest tournaments take place.

**TIG: As great as this all sounds, I’m sure it wasn’t always a picnic. Was there ever a time on the 100-in-100 trip that you thought you might not make your goal?**

**McCoy:** The trip went very smoothly and I never feared that I wouldn’t finish. There were some difficult days though.

The toughest weather I had was in London. Wimbledon was going on at the same time and it had been raining so hard that they hadn’t played tennis in two days. I had a 36 hole day that consisted of Sunningdale and Wentworth. Around the 12th hole at Sunningdale’s Old Course it started raining pretty heavily. I was soaked pretty good after my first round, but luckily had a friend who was a member at Wentworth and was able to visit his house between rounds. His wife made a nice lunch for us and put my rain gear in the dryer. From the time we teed off at Wentworth until we finished the rain never let up for a single second. By the middle of the round the greens had so much water on them that we had to chip to the holes. I pulled a trolley for both rounds that day and when I reached the 18th green at Wentworth the short uphill climb looked like the Himalayas. The very next day at Rye I had to make it through the 10th hole by 8AM in order to be clear of a one day member/guest event that would be starting on the 1st and 10th tees. Again, there was heavy rain coming down, but I still managed to hit my mark. Later that day I found out that 1997 was the wettest June in England since they started keeping records in 1860.

I also had to deal with a little weather at The Country Club in Brookline. I was only through 11 holes when a huge thunder and lightning storm blew in. An assistant pro was the last one there and he wanted to close the course and go home. Somehow we convinced him to stay and managed to get in the last 7 holes when the weather cleared.

There was also a hiccup at Royal Melbourne when they were not expecting me to play the composite course and there was a ladies day event on the East Course that was going to make it impossible. Somehow we managed to work that out too. Overall the trip was very smooth, but there was definitely some zigging and zagging!

**TIG: With as much as you’ve seen in your travels you are sure to have some favorite moments. How about sharing a couple?**

**McCoy:** On the 100 day trip there was a day where I played Pebble Beach in the morning with bright sun, had lunch over-looking the 18th green and then played Cypress Point in afternoon with the same great weather. I ended the day with a refreshment on the Cypress Point clubhouse patio overlooking the Pacific Ocean and the spectacular 15th through 18th holes. That makes for a memorable day. Also on the 100 day trip I had a day playing Portrush in the morning and then Turnberry in the early evening sunset with a bagpiper playing around the hotel high above the course.

**TIG: I think those both make for pretty incredible days. So, now that we’ve heard about some of your favorites (see sidebar for more) what about underrated courses? Surely you’ve got a few thoughts on courses that you feel are grossly underrated.**

**McCoy:** I believe some of the places that are somewhat off the radar and may not be as welcoming to the raters don’t quite get their due on the lists. Two that come to mind are Shoreacres and Camargo Club. Both are very good golf courses that may not get the credit they deserve because they’re shorter than most modern courses or are ultra private and don’t really have an interest in being rated. Some other courses I think are underrated are Spring City (Lake) in China, Ellerston in Australia, The European Club in Ireland and one of my home courses, Baltusrol Upper, in New Jersey.

**TIG: Funny that you mention two clubs with Seth Raynor golf courses. I’m a big fan of Raynor and love both of those courses. How about a hidden gem we might not know about?**

**McCoy:** Like most of us I’m always on the lookout for hidden gems. On a recent trip out west I had a drive from Coeur d’Alene, Idaho to Bend, Oregon and was looking for a course to fill an empty day. I ended up stopping at Wine Valley Golf Club in Walla Walla, Washington. I wasn’t really expecting much and ended up spending the day at a golf course that was every bit as much of a true links course as you will see in America. The course was designed by Dan Hixson, a virtually unknown PGA pro turned architect, who drew much of his inspiration for the course from his time in Australia playing professional golf. With a green fee of under $100 it’s not only a fun course, but an incredible value. It was a great surprise. A few others I would characterize as hidden gems are The Addington and Beau Desert both in England, Ayodhya Links in Thailand, Carne in Ireland, Les Bordes and Saint Germain both in France and Royal Zoute in Belgium.

**TIG: You’ve had a very full life in golf, there is no question about that. So what’s next for Bob McCoy . . . besides the 2012-13 trips you mentioned earlier?**

**McCoy:** I’ll be writing a book called “A Golf Odyssey With The Real McCoy”. It will will be a comprehensive examination of the greatest golf courses on the world. It will address how each course became great, why they each deserve to be highly rated and noteworthy architectural aspects of each course and the architect’s themselves. My 100-in-100 trip produced some significant nuggets of information that have never been published before or are not well known. Because the trip also put me in touch with a historian or knowledgeable member at almost every course I can call on them to review drafts. The book will devote absolutely no space to club tournament history such as U.S. Opens.

The added dimension is the idea of interviewing all the leading contemporary golf architects. The book is going to discuss the architectural style and achievements of these gentlemen as well as the great architects no longer living. So far I have interviewed Weiskopf, Crenshaw, Nicklaus, Joe Lee, Pat Ruddy, and Pete Dye. Still remaining to be interviewed and all well known to me are Tom Fazio, Rees Jones, Donald Steel, and Tom Doak. The key question to each architect is, “What were the circumstances that produced a world class course at XYZ club.”. Weiskopf was very insightful about Loch Lomond as was Crenshaw with Sand Hills.

There will also be a travel guide in the book. I am often asked “what are five courses in a certain area you can recommend that are not on the World 100 list but are worth playing”. From a geographic standpoint, the book will start in St. Andrews and, after completing the British Isles, the direction will be westward ending up on the European Continent.

Finally, I will also have a section on rating courses and what it is like to be a panelist. I was a panelist for Golf Digest’s Top 100 in the USA from 1984 through 1992 and Golf magazine Top 100 in the World starting in 1988.

**TIG: Wow, that sounds like an incredible book. When will we be able to get our hands on this??**

**McCoy:** (Laughs), It a work in progress. I’m still enjoying the field research!

**TIG: I can’t say I blame you. I would be too!**