

Bob McCoy
Email: rmccoyjr62@gmail.com
Cell: 978-852-9370
Website: <http://thegolfodyssey.net>

2017 Odyssey

Greeting to all my golf friends,

2017 was another exciting and gratifying year. The highlights:

Top 100 Lists Revised

World Top 100 Lists 1979 through 2017

Trips

March: Scotland

September: Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, Iowa

Significant One Day

Naples Beach Club (January), Congaree (May and October), Sugarloaf (September), Diamond Creek (October), Streamsong – Black (October)

Other Items

Billy Cleary Harvard Hockey Endowment Fund

Boothbay, Maine

Website/Blog “The Odyssey” (<http://thegolfodyssey.net>)

Facebook

Future Plans

How To Become a Master Sommelier

Top 100 Lists Revised

In the odd-numbered years, both *GOLF Magazine* (World 100) and *Golf Digest* (USA 100) revise their biennial rankings.

Added to 2017 *GOLF Magazine* World Top 100 List (5)

#29 Tara Iti GC*, Te Arai, North Island, New Zealand, Tom Doak 2015

50 Cabot Cliffs G Course*, Inverness, Nova Scotia, Canada, Bill Coore & Ben Crenshaw 2016

72 Cape Wickham G Course*, King Island, Tasmania, Australia, Mike DeVries/Darius Oliver 2015

91 Yas Links*, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, Kyle Phillips 2010

100 Prestwick GC*, Prestwick, Scotland, Old Tom Morris 1851/1883

* Played as of 12/31/2017

Removed from 2017 *GOLF Magazine* World Top 100 List (5)

#91 Harbour Town G Links, Hilton Head Island, SC, USA, Pete Dye/Jack Nicklaus 1969

94 Kauri Cliffs, Matauri Bay, North Island, New Zealand, David Harman 2000

97 Durban Country Club, Durban, South Africa, Lauri Waters/George Waterman 1922

98 Rye GC (Old), Camber, England, H.S. Colt 1894, Tom Simpson 1932, Guy Campbell 1938

100 Cabo del Sol Resort (Ocean), Cabo San Lucas, Mexico, Jack Nicklaus 1994

Fortunately, I had already played the five new additions on the world list, so there was nothing to do in 2017 to stay current. In 1988, I first completed the World Top 100 (1987 list) and have stayed current with the 15 revised lists since then.

Added to 2017 *Golf Digest* USA Top 100 List (4)

#69 Spring Hill GC*, Wayzata, MN, Tom Fazio 1999

91 Essex County Club*, Manchester, MA, Donald Ross 1917

98 Sahalee CC (S/N)*, Sammamish, WA, Ted Robinson 1969

99 Mayacama GC*, Santa Rosa, CA, Jack Nicklaus 2001

* Played as of 12/31/2017

Removed from 2017 *Golf Digest* USA Top 100 List (4)

#78 Mountaintop Golf & Lake Club, Cashiers, NC, Tom Fazio 2006

86 Hazeltine National GC, Chaska, MN, Robert Trent Jones 1962, Rees Jones 1988, 2010

96 French Lick Resort (Pete Dye), French Lick, IN, Pete Dye 2009

100 Streamsong Resort (Red), Streamsong, FL, Bill Coore & Ben Crenshaw 2013

At the beginning of 2017 I had already played three of the four new additions on the USA list. In September Spring Hill let me play their exclusive course in Wayzata, Minnesota. Thus by the end of 2017 I had again played all USA Top 100 courses. In 1984, I first completed that list (1983 compilation) and have stayed current with the 17 revised lists since then.

World Top 100 Lists 1979 through 2017

The core of my book, *The Golf Odyssey with the Real McCoy*, focuses on a list of the best golf courses in the world and my quest to play all of them. The list changes every two years. On my website “thegolfodyssey.net” under “Top 100 Lists,” readers can track all changes and challenges over a 29 year period.

The first list of the best courses in the world was published by *GOLF Magazine* in 1979. It consisted of 50 courses presented in alphabetical order. The same format was used with the next list published in 1981. Then, in 1983, the list still comprised the Top 50 in the world but now ranked in numerical order. Finally, in 1985 the list was expanded to the Top 100 courses in the world ranked numerically. This format has remained in place for each subsequent list.

With huge gratitude to my MIT educated numbers guy, **Paul Rudovsky**, the following pages list all 201 courses that have been on one or more of the 20 biennial rankings produced in the odd-numbered years. There are a lot of courses, locations, dates, and numbers involved so the presentation format is challenging in order to maintain consistency. It can become almost mind numbing to try to absorb so much data - courses (201), countries (30), and lists (20 x 100 courses). I have chosen to begin near the international date line in Japan and work westward to the USA. Each year involved is also sorted by numerical order starting in 1983.

On subsequent pages the biennial rankings are presented by year starting with 1979. In order to track my progress, I indicated on each list the courses already played when the list was published plus the progress made in the two subsequent years until the next list appeared. Also presented are the additions and removals.

As a *GOLF Magazine* panelist beginning in 1986, my first voting responsibility was for the 1987 list. It is an honor and great fun reviewing every candidate course I have played over the years. The *GOLF Magazine* nomination list in 2017 had 522 courses and I have played 398 (76%). In my mind, I replay each course with all the circumstances, including all the travel. Remembering all the nice people I have met remains very special.

In 1988, I first completed playing the World Top 100 (1987 list). The non-USA quest began with the 1979 list on October 19, 1979 at Carnoustie, Scotland. The world quest finished on November 12, 1988 at the Gary Player Country Club in Sun City, South Africa. At the time that course’s location was designated as Bophuthatswana. I like to think of the international part of the odyssey as starting in traditional **Scotland** and finishing nine years later in remote **Bophuthatswana**.

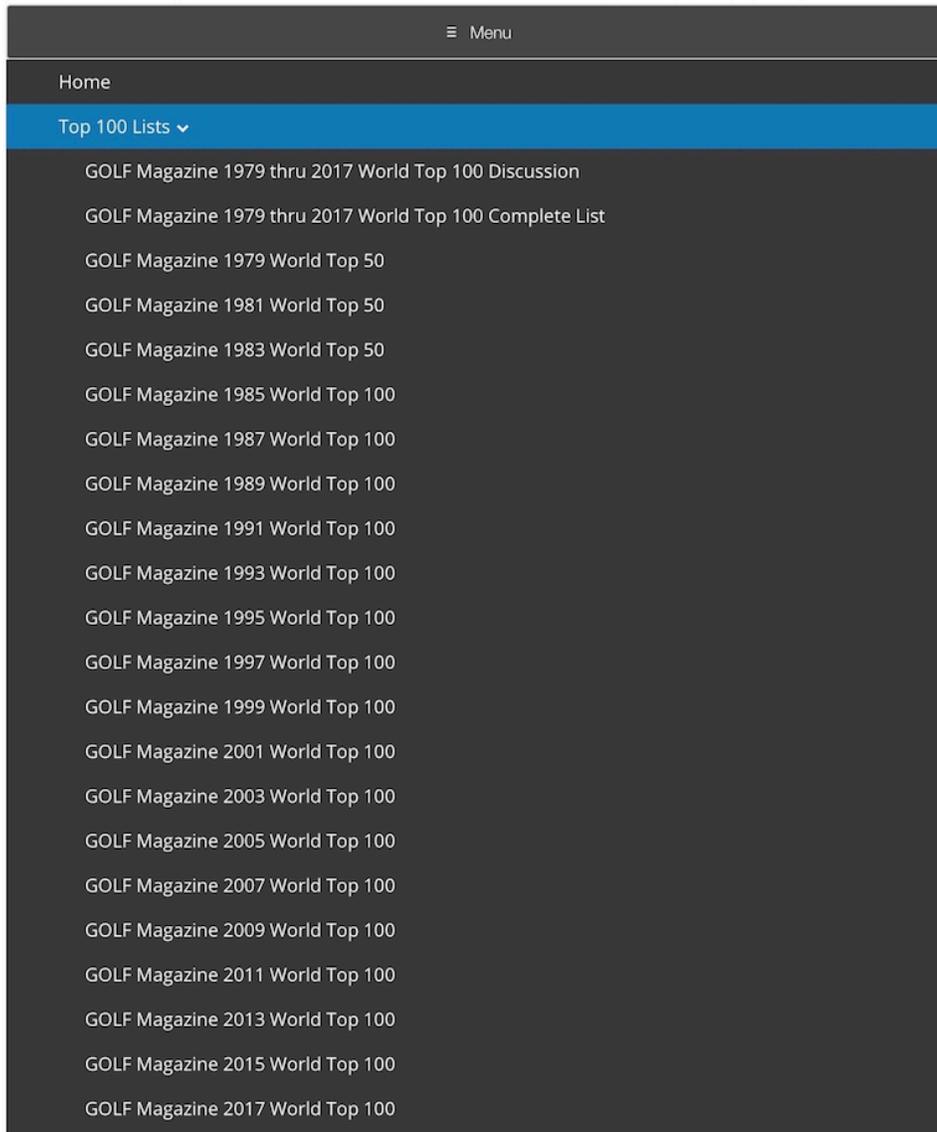
Since the 1987 list there have been 15 subsequent lists with 82 course added and removed. I have played all 82 of the additions. I’ve also played 196 of the 201 courses that have ever been listed. Fellow panelists Paul

Rudovsky and Tom Clasby have played all 201. So a goal for the next couple of years is to visit Taiwan, the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, and Singapore to join the elite 201 group.

All the data can be found at <http://thegolfodyssey.net/top-100-lists/> and then accessed by using the drop down menu. Finally, you can download the PDF files to your computer and then play with the numbers to your hearts content using Adobe Acrobat DC: "<https://acrobat.adobe.com/us/en/acrobat/how-to/pdf-editor-pdf-files.html>".

The Odyssey: The Chronicles of Bob McCoy's Worldwide Golf Course Travels

The Odyssey's content is best viewed by using the "View Full Screen" option at the top of the first page.



Scotland – February/March

| | | |
|------|--------|--|
| Sun | 26-Feb | Drive Naples/Orlando Fly Orlando/Reykjavik (Iceland) Icelandair 6pm |
| Mon | 27-Feb | Arrive Reykjavik 6:10am Fly Reykjavik/Glasgow 7:35am-9:40am Car Rental Drive to Inverness Stay Kingsmills Hotel 4 nights |
| Tues | 28-Feb | Register Scottish Design Masters |

| | | |
|-------|--------|---|
| | | Coach to Dornoch Dinner Royal Dornoch GC |
| Wed | 1-Mar | Celebrating Scotland's Global Legacy-Adam Lawrence, Dr. Paul Miller, Bradley Klein, Martin Ebert, Mungo Park, Gordon Irvine Dinner Town House-Helen Carmichael, Provost of Inverness |
| Thurs | 2-Mar | Future Approaches to Sustainable Golf Course Design Tom MacKenzie, Thad Layton, Richard Windows, Sam Thomas Conference Dinner-Kingsmill Hotel |
| Fri | 3-Mar | Site visits- Fortrose & Rosemarkie, Castle Stuart, Nairn Drive to Fort William Stay Nevis Bank Inn |
| Sat | 4-Mar | Drive to Kennacraig, Kintyre Peninsula Ferry Kennacraig/Port Askaig (Isle of Islay) 1pm-2:55pm Drive to and stay Bridgend Hotel |
| Sun | 5-Mar | Play Machrie Golf Links noon Dean Muir, Course Manager Port Askaig/Feolin (Isle of Jura) Ferry 5:30pm-5:35pm Stay The Jura Hotel, Dinner with Bob Harrison (Ardfin course designer) |
| Mon | 6-Mar | View Ardfin Estate Golf Course with Bob Harrison and Willie MacDonald, Estate Manager (Factor) Feolin/Port Askaig Ferry 2:25pm-2:30pm Ferry Port Askaig/Kennacraig 3:30pm-5:35pm Drive to & stay Stonefield Castle (just north of Tarbert) |
| Tues | 7-Mar | Drive to Gailes Play Glasgow Golf Club (Gailes Links) 1:38pm Stay The Gailes Hotel |
| Wed | 8-Mar | Play Dundonald Links 8am Drive to and stay Trump Turnberry |
| Thurs | 9-Mar | Play Trump Turnberry (Ailsa) 8am, Kenny MacLeod caddie Stay Trump Turnberry |
| Fri | 10-Mar | 3 hours tour course & talk to Ricky Hall, Director of Golf Stay Culzean Castle, General Eisenhower's Castle |
| Sat | 11-Mar | Drive to Glasgow Airport Fly Glasgow/Reykjavik Icelandair 1:20pm-3:40pm Fly Reykjavik/Orlando 5:10pm-8:05pm Drive Orlando/Naples |

A favorite golf magazine of mine is *Golf Course Architecture*, a quarterly publication based in England with Adam Lawrence as editor. The magazine is the best source for all new worldwide golf course construction (both new and renovations). Adam was in Naples in early February. After a few years of email exchanges, we finally met at dinner, which was interesting and great fun.

In late 2016 I became aware of a golf conference in Inverness, Scotland called the “Scottish Design Masters” with Adam as moderator. The program sounded interesting and dovetailed with a strong desire to play the recently renovated Trump Turnberry (Alisa course). Early March is not the ideal weather time for golf in Scotland, but I decided to take a chance. Luckily I was able to fit in all the planned courses.

Getting to Scotland involved a new approach. To save money and avoid London, I decided on Icelandair from Orlando to Reykjavik and on to Glasgow. The airline experience proved positive and I saved thousands of dollars over a ridiculous British Air quoted price. My hope is to take Icelandair for a September, 2018 trip with a layover in Reykjavik for at least a day of golf in Iceland.



The conference was interesting, especially the opportunity to informally talk to many of the golf course architect panelists. Martin Ebert of MacKenzie & Ebert was especially helpful by giving me his 68-page proposal documents concerning his recent renovations of Turnberry and Royal Portrush.

In 2016 a new course in Scotland – Ardfin – had popped up on the radar screen. It was being designed by Australian Bob Harrison, who had been my host at the exclusive Ellerston (Greg Norman/Bob Harrison co-design) in Australia in 2006. When I saw the list of speakers at the conference, I was thrilled to see Bob’s name. Not knowing how Ardfin’s construction was progressing, I emailed Bob to see if we could get together at the conference. Not only did that happen, but we also arranged to meet at Ardfin a few days hence.

Machrie Golf Links

Now that I was going to the remote Ardfin on the island of Jura, I got the idea to see the major renovation taking place at nearby Machrie Golf Links. Getting to Ardfin requires passing through the Isle of Islay where Machrie is located. Both islands are west of Glasgow in the southern Inner Hebrides. There are two flights a day from Glasgow to Islay. Driving from northern Scotland I chose a two-hour ferry from Kennacraig (just south of Tarbert).

On Sunday March 5 I met Dean Muir, Course Manager, at noon at the muddy construction site of the Machrie Hotel and Golf Course. Elaine and I had been here in 2009. The original wild, old-style links course opened in 1895. I was not impressed – too many blind shots (15) along with brutal deep rough just off narrow fairways that resulted in six lost balls. Equally distressing, the hotel was semi run down with brown colored water coming from the sink faucets and shower.



View From One of Machrie’s New Elevated Tees

The whole operation was purchased out of bankruptcy in 2011. Both the course and hotel are being totally rebuilt. 90% of the blind shots have been eliminated. I had no lost balls due to much wider fairways. New elevated tees and fairways now provide pleasant Atlantic Ocean views (next stop USA). Overall, really enjoyable improvements.

Ardfin Estate Golf Course

If you want a totally quiet and remote place, come to the 14,000 acre Ardfin Estate on the island of Jura just east of Islay. A five-minute mini-ferry takes you from Islay (Port Askaig) to Jura (Feolin). All the roads on Jura are single lane with the occasional cutout so cars can pass. Fortunately, there are only 180 residents (14,000 red deer) on the island so road traffic is minimal. Another way to get to Jura (summer only) is drive to Tayvallich on the mainland and take a 12-passenger ferry (called a rib). The trip takes 45 minutes over the Sound of Jura and docks at the southwest tip of Jura with the golf course nearby.



Ferry to Jura

I had a great time at dinner with Ardfin course designer Bob Harrison. The next day I spent five hours with Bob viewing his work at the almost finished Ardfin. Accompanying us was Estate Factor (Manager) Willie MacDonald (father and grandfather were previous Ardfin Factors). Unfortunately, rating the course was not possible because it was not yet ready to play.



Ardfin with Bob Harrison



Ardfin with Willie MacDonald

What I was able to experience was the **mind-blowing visuals** along three miles of rugged coastline. To the west are the weathered mountains of Islay just across the half mile body of water called the Sound of Islay. This is where the Feolin ferry traversed the previous evening. To the south is the huge expanse of water named the Sound of Jura with the Kintyre Peninsula in the distance. More important, the extensive shoreline affects shot making on several holes.



Ardfin Hole 2 Par 3 at 165 yards



Front 9 Looking Back-2nd Hole Hidden Top Right

The stunning scenery belies severe terrain, harsh soil conditions (peat and rocks/boulders galore), and wetlands. Construction commenced in July 2014. Despite normal windy conditions, this is not a links course because there was no sand on Jura. In addition, some holes are on the side of high and steep cliffs. From the second green to the beach at the 11th green the elevation change is 180 feet. Holes 12 through 14 run on level terrain and then the closing holes go gradually uphill.



Approach Shot to 11th Green With Boathouse (Halfway House) Then Viking Harbor With Islay in Background

There are several forced carries over streams (called burns), gullies, crevasses, ravines and even rock walls crossing fairways. The fairways are generous in width. The 34 bunkers are wild looking with heather growing out of the bunker faces. The greens looked reasonably contoured

In addition to the scenic course, a 20-bedroom lodge is under construction with opening scheduled for mid-2018. The only problem is the Australian owner has not decided on how all this will work. The facilities might be open to the public, but could be just for the owner and his friends. Then there is the question of getting around the 18 holes. The owner wants old style walking golf with no buggies allowed. The course remoteness precludes caddies. On steep terrain golfers will be totting their clubs or pushing them on a trolley (hopefully motorized). I'm leery that this strategy will work. Time will tell how it all shakes out.

There is tremendous potential here and I cannot wait to return after the turf has had a chance to mature. Under challenging logistics and difficult terrain, Bob Harrison has created a real gem.

Area Golf Opportunities Plus Famous Single Malt Scotch Distilleries

Even though I found myself in a fairly remote part of the world, additional world-class golf is nearby. The ferry terminal for the two-hour trip to Islay is located in Kennacraig, at the north end of the Kintyre Peninsula. Near the southern end of the peninsula are Machrihanish Golf Club (rated #88 in the world by *GOLF Magazine*) and Machrihanish Dunes Golf Club. So in reality, there are four world-class courses relatively near each other. The added attraction is nine famous single malt Scotch whisky distilleries on Islay.

Golf in Ayrshire (Southwest of Glasgow)

Southwest of Glasgow is the county of Ayrshire on the shores of the Firth of Clyde (an inlet of the Atlantic Ocean). At the southern end is Trump Turnberry. Going north are Prestwick, Royal Troon, Western Gailes, Dundonald, and Glasgow Gailes. Having not played the last two, I thought it would be a good idea to see if they were worth including in an Ayrshire golf package.

Glasgow Golf Club Gailes Links

After just seeing two modern courses with spectacular water views, it was now back to basics. This is true links golf designed over 100 years ago. Glasgow Golf Club Gailes Links is near but not on the coast. The club dates back to 1787 and the Gailes Links were acquired in 1892. The present course was re-designed by Willie Park, Jr. in 1912.

Gailes Links is a low-key private club. In the early afternoon I was pulling a trolley and had the course to myself. The land is dead flat with holes defined by trees, gorse and heather (although much was cut back this winter to improve playability). There are few bunkers (most small and deep) and medium-sized greens with modest contours. Some greens are nicely elevated to provide variety. It is pure links golf and I cannot get enough of it.

As an aside, I posted some of the above on Facebook and immediately received a response from Grant Dodd in Australia. "Qualified for the '97 Open Championship there. Great memories."

Dundonald Links

The course was originally called Southern Gales and was part of a planned real estate development. Construction started on the course, but the whole development went bankrupt. Then Loch Lomond Golf Club bought the semi-finished course in 2003 to provide their members the opportunity to play true links winter golf. Kyle Phillips came in to complete the project and the course opened in 2004. The Scottish Open was played here in 2017.

The property is just south of Gailes Links so the terrain was originally dead flat. It looks like a lot of soil was brought in to create interesting features. All holes are lined by fairly high mounds (faux dune looking). In addition, the wide fairways have some movement and many of the greens are elevated.

The course is a modern links design requiring both a ground game as well as an air game. There are 73 bunkers, with many guarding elevated greens precluding a low running shot. The only water on the course are thin streams (banks supported by vertical wooden planks) running in front of five greens. Most greens are large with substantial contours. The condition of all greens was excellent, especially for early March. In addition to the dunes, gorse is in the far rough. Trees are on the periphery of the course.

A commuter railroad track lines the western side of the course with Western Gailes Golf Club on the other side. You can see some of its holes and even out to the sea.

Thanks to the friendly and efficient staff, I was first out and played as a single pulling a trolley. Later in the morning I saw a packed parking lot and a busy course. Obviously, Dundonald is a popular course and reinforces my opinion that it is, along with Glasgow Gailes, certainly worth playing if you are in Ayrshire to play the more famous courses.

Trump Turnberry (Ailsa)

Since playing Turnberry in 1984, the Ailsa course has been one of my favorites in the whole world. The links course design is excellent and the scenery, along with Royal Dornoch, is the best in Scotland. The handsome hotel is perched high on a ridge and can be seen from almost every hole on the course. Conversely, looking down from any part of the front of the hotel there is a magnificent view of the course and then out to the Firth of Clyde, Ailsa Craig and the Isle of Arran.



View From Turnberry Hotel Down To Course And Out to The Firth of Clyde



I can still vividly remember the 1984 experience of playing 36 holes pulling a trolley on a warm Saturday in mid-May. Then going back to the room and ordering two bottles of beer from room service. At that time Turnberry had huge bath tubs seven feet long. I just soaked in hot water sipping the beer for the longest time. Totally relaxed and exhilarated!

On the 1997 100-day-trip, one of the top highlights was playing Turnberry in mid-June from 7 pm to 10 pm. It was a cloudless evening so the gradually setting sun cast shadows throughout the course. Every hump and hollow was magnified in a total quiet setting. Then from high above at the hotel a bagpiper commenced playing his music and I was serenaded around the course for the next half hour. The whole experience was heavenly.

Over the years Turnberry has had several owners. Starwood Hotels purchased the complex in 1997. Then in 2008 Leisurecorp of Dubai assumed control. By 2014, the facilities had become “long in the tooth” from the lack of investment. At that point the Trump organization was able to take over at a favorable price. Since then, \$200 million has been invested throughout the whole complex, including was \$2 million for new course maintenance equipment. Despite being early March, the course was in excellent condition, especially the greens.

Trump’s approach after buying a golf course is to hire an outstanding architect and give him an almost unlimited budget. Trump also works closely with the architect, offering ideas. However, he essentially lets the architect make the key final decisions. At Turnberry, Martin Ebert of MacKenzie & Ebert was hired to do an extensive upgrade of the Ailsa course. During the first six months of ownership in 2014 Trump worked very closely with Martin going back and forth about every detail. All of these points are contained in an 68-page document, "Proposal For The Ailsa Course." It has pictures, diagrams, and text detailing every change on every hole. Significant construction took place from September 2015 to June 2016.

Proposals for the Ailsa Course at TRUMP TURNBERRY



2014-2015 Renovation Proposal

9th Hole - *Bruce's Castle*

EXISTING (1) 452 (2) 412 (3) 388 (4) 376 PAR 4

PROPOSED (1) 235 (2) 205 (3) 170 (4) 160 PAR 3



Hole Description

The new 9th hole will certainly capture the imagination of everyone and will really take the breath away in terms of the vista from the tee and the challenge of the carry across the bay. The great aspect to the change is that everyone will have the experience of playing across the bay and the view from the main tees will be extremely attractive, looking down onto the green site from on high. The tee shot from the main tees will be very playable but the test from the championship tee will be to carry a minimum of 200 yards and to control the run out to the green. This will require perfect ball flight in downwind conditions on an approach which will slope gently towards the green. The green surrounds will consist of large areas of tightly mown run offs.

Hole Changes

1. Championship tee enlarged.
2. Main tees realigned.
3. New green.



New 9th Hole Proposal



Trump Turnberry (Ailsa) 9th Hole at 248 Yards

The first day at Turnberry was spent walking the first 13 holes of the course in the late afternoon. A great opportunity for picture taking. The return walk back to the hotel was on the partially existing WWII runway. The next day I played the course walking with outstanding caddie Kenny MacLeod (a must have the next time you play Turnberry). The last morning there was a ride around the course with Ricky Hall, Director of Golf. He talked about the entire process of designing and implementing the changes on every hole. I think the result is a smashing success. More important, the course improvements have met with unanimous praise. On the *GOLF Magazine* World Top 100 list, Turnberry jumped from #23 in 2015 to #16 in 2017.



Ricky Hall, Director of Golf on Left and Caddie Kenny MacLeod on Right

As for the course, every hole has been improved, some dramatically. What has not been written is how difficult the course has become. At almost 7,500 yards par 70, I think it is now the hardest course in The Open rota. I hope to live long enough to see it on TV (maybe in 2022 or 2023). There will be some spectacular scenery and great golf needed to be ‘Champion Golfer of the Year.’

Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, Iowa - September

| | | |
|-------|--------|---|
| Sun | 10-Sep | Drive Boothbay/Logan Airport Fly Boston/Milwaukee Southwest 2:45pm-4:20pm Car Rental Hertz Drive to Wauwatosa, Wisconsin Stay Crown Plaza Milwaukee West |
| Mon | 11-Sep | Drive to Green Lake Play Lawsonia (The Links) 11:35am Josh Carroll, PGA, Director of Golf Stay Bay View Motel |
| Tues | 12-Sep | Play Lawsonia (The Woodlands) 7am Drive to Golden Valley, Minnesota Stay Holiday Inn Express |
| Wed | 13-Sep | Drive to Wayzata Play Spring Hill GC 9am Jeff Kringen, PGA, Director of Golf; Play with George Hallin (member); Terry Inslee (Golf Digest) Drive near Hankinson, North Dakota Stay Dakota Magic Casino & Hotel |
| Thurs | 14-Sep | Play Dakota Winds Golf Course 7:30am Drive to Vadnais Heights, Minnesota Stay Holiday Inn Express |
| Fri | 15-Sep | Drive to Dellwood Play White Bear Yacht Club 8am Chris Nathlich, PGA, Head Pro Drive to Lake Mills, Iowa Play Rice Lake Golf & CC 2:40pm Stay Holiday Inn Express in Northwood, Iowa |
| Sat | 16-Sep | Drive to Sand Valley in Nekoosa, Wisconsin Play Sand Valley 1pm; Play with Tyler Lower, PGA; Karen & Dr. Steve Grief (GolfWeek) Stay Sand Valley |
| Sun | 17-Sep | Play Mammoth Dunes 10am; Play with Glen Murray, General Manager; Brad Schaller Stay Sand Valley |
| Mon | 18-Sep | Play Sand Valley 7am; Play with Brad Schaller, Jim Colton, Larry Nicholls Drive to Erin Hills Stay Erin Hills; Long talk with Rich Tock, Erin Hills PGA Ambassador |
| Tues | 19-Sep | Play Erin Hills 9:24am; Play with Larry Nicholls Drive to Milwaukee Airport Stay Holiday Inn |
| Wed | 20-Sep | Fly Milwaukee/Boston Southwest 9:20am-12:40pm Drive to Boothbay |

The above schedule certainly looks disjointed with much zigzagging getting from one course to another (Wisconsin to Minnesota to North Dakota back to Minnesota to Iowa and finally back to Wisconsin). Making arrangements to play the desired courses requires patience and flexibility. Many times the best day for me does not fit the golf club’s schedule. Thus, Plan A becomes Plan B that could even become Plan C. It is a big jigsaw puzzle. Thanks to all the clubs involved, the 11-day Upper Midwest trip of nine courses in four states finally came together.

The reason for this trip was to again complete the Golf Digest USA Top 100 (Spring Hill), play golf for the first time in two states (North Dakota and Iowa), play at the newest Mike Keiser development (Sand Valley), and

return to a significantly revised course (Erin Hills). In addition, I was able to play two clubs that have been highly recommended over the years (Lawsonia and White Bear Yacht Club).

At takeoff time in early September Hurricane Irma was bearing down on my winter home in Naples, Florida. The forecast of possible 10-foot high storm surges was a worry as the house is one block from a large inlet that flows into the nearby Gulf of Mexico. I was prepared to see the modest house totally ruined. Fortunately, the storm surge never happened and strong winds did no significant damage.

The Golf Courses of Lawsonia

The first two courses visited were at Lawsonia in Central Wisconsin (65 miles southeast of Sand Valley and 73 miles northwest of Erin Hills). **The Links** course opened in 1930 and was designed by the highly regarded team of William Langford and Ted Moreau. They designed about 250 courses in the 1920s to WWII, mostly in the Midwest. The course was so popular that the “guys” from Chicago, including Al Capone, were regular visitors.

The course is a brilliant treeless design in excellent condition (firm and fast). There are many elevated greens (some mammoth) with challenging contours and extremely steep falloffs. Two of the par 3s have “all or nothing shots.” Either hit and hold the green or see your ball either careen down a sheer slope or trickle slowly down to the bottom. Once at the bottom the top of the flagstick is not visible. Cutting the grass on these steep slopes looks impossible.

The underrated **Woodlands** course was designed by Rocky Roquemore with 9 holes opened in 1983 and the other nine in 1986. Rocky then designed San Lorenzo in Portugal in 1988. That course has since been ranked as high as #56 in the world (see day 65 of the 1997 100-day trip).

The Woodlands is totally different in design and setting than the Links. Every hole is heavily tree lined so control of the tee shot is mandatory. The terrain is fairly hilly. There are many large bunkers and strategically placed greens. It was also in very good condition as well as being peaceful and quiet. I highly recommend playing both reasonably-priced Lawsonia courses.

Spring Hill Golf Club

As previously stated Spring Hill Golf Club in Wayzata, Minnesota (just west of Minneapolis) appeared for the first time at #69 on the Golf Digest USA Top 100. Thanks to the cooperation of Jeff Kringen, Director of Golf and Clubhouse Manager, I was able to play the course for the first time. Previously, Jeff had been an assistant professional at Pine Valley.

Jeff created a fun threesome including Terry Inslee, a friend of mine for 25 years. As a *Golf Digest* rater he is a buzz saw for playing as many courses in the area where he is rating a course. As a result Terry has played almost 3,000 courses which makes my 1,200 courses played seem paltry. Terry and I were fortunate to have member George Hallin show us the course. He was the perfect host. George captained the University of Minnesota Gophers golf team in 1960's and can still really play (today eagled par 5 huge uphill #16).

Spring Hill was designed by Tom Fazio and opened in 1999. The club of about 200 members has no tee times, and walking with a caddy is “pure” golf – no tennis courts or a swimming pool. There is a great deal of **variety** with a mixture of hilly holes (peak of property highest in the county) along with a few somewhat level holes. Most of the holes are self-contained and surrounded by forests of mature hardwood trees so not many other golfers are visible during the round. There are only two ponds, but also plentiful wetlands containing attractive tall cattails throughout the course and affecting play.

Even though the course is just over 7,000 yards and has the normal amount of bunkers (75), it rates high on the difficulty scale. The challenge is due to the many forced carries over the wetlands and the abundance of trees just off the fairways. Overall, Spring Hill has an excellent design and is in superb condition.



Spring Hill Member George Hallin in Center and Terry Inslee on Left

We finished the day with a relaxing lunch on the clubhouse patio high above attractive Long Lake.

North Dakota and Dakota Winds Golf Course

In mapping out this trip I was pleased to learn that the North Dakota border was only about a three hour drive west of Minneapolis. That state was one of four remaining to achieve the goal of playing golf in all 50 states. Fargo Country Club, #5 in the state, looked promising. Unfortunately they were closed that week for yearly heavy maintenance. The alternative was Dakota Winds, part of the Dakota Magic Casino and Hotel. In 2004, 27 holes opened there on dead flat farm land for as far as the eye can see. Fortunately, a decent amount of dirt was moved to create some interesting fairway and green contours. The gambling business must be good here as the capacity of the casino was currently being doubled.

White Bear Yacht Club

Then it was back past the Twin Cities to the White Bear Yacht Club. One course ranking has it #1 in the state and another has it at #5. Donald Ross designed the first nine in 1912 and the second nine in 1916. The score card lists yardage at 6,500 par 72. In addition, there are only 57 bunkers with water coming into play on only the last two holes. (Not only is the large White Bear Lake not part of the course design, it cannot really be seen from the course.) Based on this information, the course sure looks like a pushover. Not so fast!

The mostly tree lined course has the steepest roller coaster fairways in the country (make Royal St. George's fairways seem flat by comparison). This feature produces many blind shots along with almost no flat lies. The

members like to tell the story about a guest complaining that he only had one flat lie during the entire round. The member's response was "...where was that, because it will have to be fixed." Additionally, there are the Ross severely undulating greens with many runoffs. The round was fun and educational due to the green shapes and contours.

Iowa and Rice Lake Golf & Country Club

From White Bear it was a quick two-hour drive south to the Iowa border and Lake Mills. I was scheduled to play the next morning, but the overnight weather forecast was ominous. Luckily the Rice Lake Golf & Country Club course was near the motel so I went over to see if I could play that afternoon. With few people playing I was able to zip around in three hours. Now I have played in 48 states with Utah and Alaska left.

The Rice Lake club is an example of the current depressed condition of the golf course business. Ten years ago it had a full and active membership. Today it is barely hanging on due to a large manufacturing plant closing in the area (moved to Mexico) and much less interest in golf by the younger generation. I actually felt guilty accepting the twilight rate of \$32 including cart. This whole situation made me sad because the staff here was really nice and seemed to be optimistic about the future.

Sand Valley Golf Resort

It was a good thing I changed my schedule because during the night the skies in Iowa opened up with heavy rain along with thunder and lightning. These conditions had not changed the next morning as I headed out to Nekoosa, Wisconsin (central part of the state).

The Sand Valley Golf Resort is the most recent Mike Keiser creation. He is the most prolific builder in the world of quality remote golf, starting with the Bandon Dunes Golf Resort in Oregon (opened 1980). Mike is also involved with Barnbougle in Australia and Cabot in Canada. Another project is close to starting construction in Scotland near Dornoch. The **Sand Valley course** was designed by Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw. Construction commenced in April 2014. The official opening was May 2017 after a "soft (preview)" opening in the fall of 2016. Based on this limited visibility the course was immediately ranked #52 in the USA by *GOLF Magazine*.

The 2nd course here is a David McLay Kidd design. David designed the first course at Bandon. Construction on **Mammoth Dunes** started in the spring of 2016 and the official opening is scheduled for June 2018.

With the revised schedule, my hope in arriving at Sand Valley a day early was to play the Sand Valley course twice. Thanks to Head Golf Professional Steve Kurtz, I was on the first tee at 1:10 pm with Tyler Lower, PGA, Group Coordinator for the resort along with Karen and Dr. Steve Greif (long-time *GolfWeek* rater). Sand Valley is walking only with caddie.



L/R Steve & Karen Greif, Ty Lower

Brad Schaller, Glen Murray

Jim Colton, Brad Schaller

On Sunday at 10 am I was on the first tee of Mammoth Dunes with Glen Murray, General Manager, and Wisconsin friend Brad Schaller. Then at 7 am on Monday morning I played the Sand Valley course again, this

time with Brad Schaller, Jim Colton (the 100-hole a day for charity man), and Larry Nicholls of Mesquite, Nevada (more about him in the Erin Hills section below).

Built on a massive amount of sand, the Sand Valley course is links-style. There are some trees on the course, but basically it is a wide open look of just fairways and sand with some native vegetation in parts of many bunkers. The sand dunes on the course rise to 50 feet in height so there is nice elevation changes throughout the property. The course plays “firry” – firm and fast with tightly mowed fescue grass fairways running 9 on the stimp meter and the bent grass greens speeding along at 11+.

There are no water hazards, but the challenge comes from many strategically-placed huge bunkers. There are about 60 defined bunkers with 11 of them totally within the fairway lines. Then there are wide expanses of exposed sand, the largest of which stretches 400 yards along the right side of the 18th hole (par-5 hole 523 yards long).



Sand Valley Hole 6 Par 4 at 455 Yards

The greens are huge, averaging 40 yards in depth. Many are elevated with false fronts and falloffs on all sides. Originally, I thought number six looked like the biggest green in the USA (48 yards deep and 40 yards wide). At that moment I was thinking of some of the double greens on the Old Course at St. Andrews. However, the 18th green comes along with a depth of 62 yards!

In the middle of September **Mammoth Dunes** is still under construction with 10 holes available for public preview play (#1-6 and 15-18). With general manager Glen Murray showing us around we were able to play 16 holes and walk the other two holes that were just seeded (#11 and 12). It is hard to believe, but Mammoth is 20-25% bigger in every respect than the Sand Valley course - fairways, bunkers, greens. The tallest dune is 80 feet high. The 2nd hole has a 100 yard wide fairway and a green 50 yards deep. As you can see from the picture of the par 3 #8 of 191 yards, there is just a sea of sand to navigate. Throughout the course there is good variety in hole design and the course flows nicely.



Mammoth Dunes Hole 8 Par 3 at 191 Yards

How do the two courses compare? They are designed for resort play so the degree of difficulty is not high if the wind does not blow. However, being an exposed piece of property, strong winds are a normal occurrence throughout the property. Both courses have the same playing characteristics – wide fairways, huge bunkers, big bold greens. Both are under 7,000 yards from the back tees. There are no forced carries gobbling up balls. In fact, a player has to work hard to lose a ball in any part of the courses. This is fun golf for all levels of players. For the scratch golfer, the challenge is to hit the tee shot in the correct part of the fairway to have the best angle to the pin on the approach shot. I really like both courses. The general public will probably split 50/50 on which one they like better. I would give Mammoth a very slight nod because of more variety in hole design and green complexes.

It will be interesting to see the design of the third course here. Construction will start in the spring of 2018 and the course will open in 2020. The finalists are Gil Hanse, Tom Doak, and Mike DeVries. After playing with me on Monday, Jim Colton then had a meeting with Michael Keiser (son of Mike Keiser) to present his design for the third course. Subsequently, Jim had a series of 18 posts on Facebook with a computer-aided design of each suggested hole. I really admired his effort in presenting his dream of designing the third course at Sand Valley.

The Sand Valley resort is operated by Kemper Management. Amongst several facilities Kemper manages are Bandon Dunes, Streamsong, and most recently Tobacco Road. Kemper is the best golf course management company I have experienced. Thus I was not surprised that the lodging, food, and service were superb at Sand Valley.

Erin Hills

The trip wrapped up at Erin Hills, 45 miles northwest of the Milwaukee airport. Amazingly, I was again paired with Larry Nicholls (see Sand Valley above). This pairing is a “small world story”. It turns out that Larry was the 28th person to have played the *GOLF Magazine* World Top 100, having completed the 2013 list in May 2015. Currently the number of people to have completed the world 100 is up to 35. What are the odds that two guys who have done this would be randomly paired together at two different courses on consecutive days in central Wisconsin?



Erin Hills with Larry Nicholls

Erin Hills was designed by Mike Hurdzan, Dana Fry and Ron Whitten and opened in 2006. I played it in 2008 and was underwhelmed after all the hype. New ownership with big bucks took over in 2009. Since then Dana Fry has made innumerable changes, all for the better. The course just returned to the *GOLF Magazine* Top USA 100 list at #74.

Erin Hills has a wide open, wild, expansive, and windswept appearance with few trees within the playing boundaries. It is on rolling farm land terrain with some hills. Almost all the tees are substantially elevated so players can see the whole property from many of them. Today the wind started at 10 mph and picked up on the back nine to 15 mph. With the refreshing breeze it was totally peaceful and quiet. The fescue grass fairways, bentgrass greens, and tall wispy fescue rough stood out.

With the exception of wetland on the first hole, water does not come into play. The humpy and sloping fairways were firm and fast. There were a few blind shots depending on tee shot accuracy. Most of the 136 bunkers had a distinctive style - long, thin, narrow with irregular cut sides. Seven of the holes had a total of 14 bunkers completely within the fairway cut. In front of eight holes there were a total of 16 bunkers preventing a run up shot. Thus, there was a mixture of holes with only one approach option (all carry into the green) and the rest were open in front for the run-in option.

The green sizes in total were normal with an average depth of 33 yards (range 24 to 48 yards). There are a few extremely elevated greens. The contours vary with some divided into quadrants separated by spines. They were all in good condition with smooth surfaces stimping between 9 and 10.

The only real negative at Erin Hills is the time it takes to play 18 holes. In the club's instructions to all players, it says the target time for a foursome to complete a round is 4 hours and 55 minutes. What are the odds that a foursome on a public course will meet the target time? The reason for this unreasonable target time was the original owner's obsession with length. For the Men's 2017 U.S. Open the course played to 7,693 yards, but it can be stretched to 8,348 yards!

Then the idea of holding a Men's U.S. Open was dreamed up and a design was required to handle the huge crowds as well as the necessary infrastructure. On the 652 acre site there is a vast amount of room around each hole for spectators as well as steep spectator mounds. There are long walks between green and next tee. Getting to the substantially elevated tees contributes to time lost and an exhaustion factor. Just the green to next tee walk adds 30 minutes to the seven-mile walk.

My caddie showed me where Justin Thomas hit his 300-yard 3-wood second shot to five feet of the cup on the 667-yard 18th hole during the third round of the 2017 U.S. Open. Not only are the distances covered on the two shots amazing, but I got an appreciation of how small the target was. Getting the ball to stop on the postage stamp sized plateau on the front left of the green with big trouble front and left was remarkable. A few months later Dana Fry told me the Thomas shot was a 20-yard soft fade. "These guys are GOOD"!

Wisconsin as a Golf Mecca

With the addition of the Sand Valley complex, Wisconsin can now be considered as a golf course destination state. Within short driving distances from Milwaukee, there are six high quality public-access golf facilities. Going north from Milwaukee there are Erin Hills, Blackwolf Run (2 courses), Whistling Straits (2 courses), Lawsonia (2 courses), Sand Valley (2 courses with a 3rd by 2020), and SentryWorld. The longest drive is 162 miles from the airport to SentryWorld (about 2 ½ hours).

One Day Trips

Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club (January)

The year began with an early January visit to the **Naples Beach Hotel & Golf Club** which is easy walking distance from my house. John Sanford, with Jack Nicklaus as consultant, completely redesigned the course. John is most noted for partnering with Jack in designing Trump Ferry Point (opened in 2015). Today John had some interesting stories about the 12-year saga of getting that course built in New York City with its challenging political and union intrigues. Once Trump became involved the problems immediately disappeared.



L/R Lorne Rubenstein, John Sanford

The Beach Club is the oldest 18-hole course in Naples (1931) and today's course is totally unrecognizable to anyone who played here before December 2016. On just 105 flat acres there is now a 7 acre, 300-yard-long range using real golf balls. The old "range" was narrow, 175 yards in length, with "limited" flight balls (felt like hitting ping pong balls). On the other 97 acres (normal golf course is usually on 150 acres or more) is now a 6,929-yard course versus 6,400 yards on the original 105 acres. There is a mixture of really good long and short holes with excellent bunkering and strategically placed water. The new greens are TifEagle Bermuda grass in first-rate condition compared to the old unputtable greens that ran at a "speed" of 7 or less.

John, with three site visits from Jack, has produced a super product for adjacent hotel guests, members, and the general public. Other than playing golf courses, my very favorite thing to do is talking to golf course architects. John has a cauliflower ear from all the questions I fired at him.

Congaree (May and October)

Congaree is in the lowcountry of South Carolina near Ridgeland (35 miles north of Savannah, Georgia). Thanks to my general manager at Naples Grande Golf Club, Mike Brooks, I was one of the first to play this exclusive, world-class course.

Congaree just opened after 5 years of planning and construction supervised by Tom Fazio and John McNeely, Managing Director of Congaree. The owners are two multi-billionaires from Houston, who wanted to create a club dedicated to directing young people with limited means to college. Thus, members (called ambassadors)

will contribute money and time to nurture the candidates from around the world. Another element to the charity is helping the local children in this poor county of South Carolina.

Most of the 2,500 acre property is dead flat, but the course has some nice elevation changes which were enhanced by moving about one million cubic yards of dirt. The holes are framed by vast expanses of wind-blown sand. There are only 31 official bunkers, but there is a sea of sand everywhere. The fronts and sides of bunkers are sharply edged like razor blades, reminiscent of the beautiful bunkers found on the Sandbelt courses in Melbourne, Australia. There are no back edges to the bunkers at Congaree so balls bleed into areas of vast sand.

Equally important in the design are strategically placed stunning trees. Before the start of construction, six months of logging removed thousands of pine trees. Then about 75 large, mature trees were either relocated or imported. Many are handsome Live Oaks (some 300 years old). An example is the picture with the tree relocated just before the right side of #6 green with the “Grand Canyon” bunker on the left side of the fairway and green.



Tree relocated just before the right side of #6 green with the “Grand Canyon” bunker on the left side of the fairway and green.

Other features are ponds and marshes with vegetation. There are no tee markers, but the tips stretch to 7,715 yards.

There is a nice mixture of aerial approach shots and run-in shots to greens open in front. The smooth greens speed was an attention getting 12-13. There are ample bailout areas around the greens producing

chipping/pitching opportunities off very tight lies. The green contours are modest to accommodate the high green speeds. The greens are average in size, ranging from 3,100 square feet (#12) to 7,800 square feet (#16).

Players have to be creative as multiple options are offered to get close to the pins. The course conditions are pristine. During construction no expense was spared to make sure every major and minor detail was covered down to the type and placement of drain covers.

Congaree is unlike any other Tom Fazio course and I think his best design.

John McNeely

One of my favorite things is talking to people who have designed and built one or more golf courses. My favorites are Dick Youngscap at Sand Hills (see <http://thegolfodyssey.net/articles/sand-hills/>) and Pat Ruddy at The European Club (see <http://thegolfodyssey.net/articles/european-club-pat-ruddy/>). After spending a considerable amount of time with John McNeely at Congaree, he is now in my favorite group.



L/R JD Lyon, Mike Brooks, John McNeely with Clubhouse in Background

John is a player – member of college golf team that finished sixth and seventh in consecutive years in the NCAA’s Division 1 national golf tournament. He has worked at Winged Foot for the famous Claude Harmon, Thunderbird, River Oaks, The Floridian, Grandfather, and Diamond Creek. Actually, John and I met at Grandfather way back in 1995. I can still remember having an hour long conversation with him after the round and then driving away thinking what a neat guy. At that time I thought John was one of the nicest and most interesting club professionals that I’d ever met.

In 2003 he partnered with a wealthy businessman to buy land and form Diamond Creek. Then he partnered with Tom Fazio to design and build a world-class golf course. The same scenario played out several years later at Congaree. In May and October it was so much fun to talk to John about the whole development of Congaree.

Diamond Creek Golf Club (October)

In October, I was lucky enough to catch Diamond Creek Golf Club at its prettiest due to the beautiful fall foliage of the Blue Ridge Mountains in western North Carolina near Banner Elk. This is a Tom Fazio 2003 design under the direction of John McNeely who partnered with Wayne Huizenga to found the high-end private golf club.

Diamond Creek is a mountain course at 4,000 feet above sea level with 250 feet of internal elevation change. It took a superb design and construction effort to produce playable and memorable holes with picturesque backdrops. Designers did their best to ameliorate the steepness as much as possible. Before the golf course development a ski resort was planned here. Some trees were actually cut down in anticipation of the resort becoming a reality.

The first holes starts at the high point of the course so players are looking down on the rest of the front nine. There is somewhat of an open look. Many trees have been planted and are now maturing. Framing the holes is tall fescue rough. Most of the holes on the back nine are cut through towering thick hardwood trees that make for much tighter holes.

With a par of just 70 and only 42 bunkers, one might think this could be an easy course. Actually it is high on the difficulty scale. Throughout the course there are many uphill and downhill holes (a few of the ski slope variety). Players must deal with steep sloping fairways and uneven lies. In addition, there are several forced carries to be navigated over ravines, gorges and streams. So a few of the holes play as par 5s like #9, a 440 to 515 yard par 4 with a 247 yards forced carry from the back tee. The tee is elevated, but the fairway goes gradually up hill to a challenging green.

The course was in excellent condition. The greens were smooth with a 10+ speed. On both nines there is beautiful scenery from the surrounding tall mountains as backdrops to many of the holes. Totally peaceful and quiet. There is excellent service in the handsome mountain-styled clubhouse. Diamond Creek is one of best mountain courses in the USA. On one list it is ranked in the USA Top 100 and on another as the third best in NC.



Diamond Creek Hole 17 Par 3 at 185 Yards

Streamsong - Black (October)

The finale for the year was a return to the Streamsong Resort in remote Bowling Green, Florida. I had the pleasure to play the new Black course with Scott Wilson (Head Professional at Streamsong). Scott and I have been friends since 2013. He arranged for me to be the first to play the Red course the first day that course was open for public play.

The just-opened Black course is a Gil Hanse and Jim Wagner design. Gil was given a golf course designer challenge. On 300 acres of pancake-flat terrain, how does one differentiate the Black course from the highly regarded Red and Blue courses that started out with the advantage of elevation changes and tall dunes? Gil and team did it by moving enough dirt to create some nice 30 foot elevation changes along with bold imaginative hole designs.

I was fascinated by hole five, an uphill 211 yard par 3. When I walked on the tee my first thought was wow “Calamity” at Royal Portrush – the last thing I expected to find in flat Florida. I saw a significantly uphill forced-carry tee shot over vegetation, then sand, then a grass approach to an infinity green. Then imagine a big red stop sign saying “do not go at the right side of the green.” You absolutely do not want to end up on the steep slope starting at the right side green edge leading to the creator bunker 30 feet below the green.



Royal Portrush (Dunluce) “Calamity Corner” Hole 16 (Old Hole 14) Par 3 at 230 Yards



Inspiration of Calamity at Streamsong (Black) Hole 5 at 211 Yards

Thankfully, a bailout area appeared to be to the left of the green and that proved to be correct. Not having been to Portrush since 1997, I could still remember similar characteristics at “Calamity” with a huge grass bunker instead of sand on the Black. Calamity has a 60 foot drop to a grass-covered ravine to the right of the green. The final thought is what a terrifying shot it is at both the Black course and Portrush into a 10-20 mile per hour wind. Both courses are exposed to the elements so high winds are a constant challenge.

Other creative hole designs are the pictured small, deep pot bunker on #6 342 yard par 4. Another is the pictured “punch bowl” green on the par 4 450 yard #9. Pictures are the high ridge on #9 which hides the “punch bowl” and then the HUGE bowl green.



Approach to Hole 9 Par 4 at 450 Yards



The Punchbowl Green with Scott Wilson on Right

The Black is 7,331 yards from the tips. Walking with a caddie is encouraged. There are no trees on the Black. The wide fairways have a lot of ridges, some high, so the landing areas are not visible.

Only three holes have water. There is a stream with vegetation in front of the third green. On the fourth hole a long, thin meandering stream bisects the entire length of the fairway and thus produces a dual fairway. Finally, the entire right side of the eighteenth hole is bordered by wetlands and a large pond that extends to the front of the angled green.

It is difficult to accurately count the number of defined bunkers. Anyway, that number is meaningless because there are so many vast sand areas with sparse vegetation. I counted 110 official bunkers!

Several greens are angled, long, and thin. Many of the greens have humps and ridges. The Black might have the largest greens in the country. They average 11,000 square feet, but the “fringe” has the same MiniVerde Bermudagrass cut to the same level as the greens. Long putts are the order of the day.

The Black course was in good condition, especially considering its recent opening, and played firm and fast with opportunities for multiple ground-game shots. This is resort golf so golfers will not lose balls.

All three courses at Streamsong are terrific. The large lodge with 216 bedrooms rooms is modern, sturdy, and comfortable. With Kemper Management in charge, Streamsong is a world-class golf destination located between Orlando and Tampa.

Billy Cleary Harvard Hockey Endowment Fund

In early January I went up to Cambridge, MA for the plaque dedication celebrating the creation of the Harvard Hockey Billy Cleary Endowment Fund. Billy has been one of my all-time idols. He is one of the greatest

college hockey players ever, the leading scorer in the 1960 Olympics (the first “Miracle on Ice” when the USA upset the heavily favored Soviets to win the gold medal), coach of the 1989 NCAA hockey championship when Harvard beat Minnesota in the Twin Cities, and then Director of Harvard Athletics (1990-2001).



Honored to be with Billy Cleary

One of the five lead donors was Bob Higgins. At the reception, I asked Billy who would believe two Holland Road neighbors from Melrose, Massachusetts would not only play for Harvard but also be involved in his endowment fund. This is what Bob Higgins sent to a friend: “Holland Road was also known as ‘Hockey Street, USA.’ Various Harvard, Boston College, Boston University, Brown and West Point players perfected their games playing street hockey there in the late-1950s and into the 1960s. We even had a kid who signed with Montreal. Bob McCoy got it all started shooting pucks in his garage.”

Boothbay, Maine

Elaine and I continue to relish our new home in Boothbay. We enjoy the nearby Boothbay Harbor Country Club. After experimenting with a small Boston Whaler in 2016, we up graded to a 20-foot Pioneer with a 150 hp Yamaha engine in 2017. Bruce Burnham is our local boat guru and his recommendation was a smashing success. We did a little fishing with mixed results. Granddaughter Elizabeth caught one off the dock and I even snagged a few off the boat. See picture. **I’m not just a golfer anymore.** We will try to be more adventurous in locating the fish in 2018.



Official Family Fishing Picture



Not Just a Golfer Anymore

There are always new challenges with a new house and in 2017 it was **geese**. In the spring a mother and father waddled out of the weeds followed by six kids. I immediately learned that a male goose is called a "gander" and a baby goose is called a "gosling". A group of geese is called a "gaggle". All of a sudden we had a real "**gaggle**", an army of 30 or more geese. They are cute running around the front lawn, but unfortunately leave a large amount of droppings.

Racing after them swinging a golf club was totally ineffective. What to do? Why not ask the superintendent at the country club. Sure enough, he had a solution called a "**bird banger**". The order was placed, gun and ammunition arrived, extremely loud noises exploded from firing the gun, and geese gone along with their droppings. Actually they are persistent, but I bought a huge supply of shells. About every 10 days out comes "the banger".





Website/Blog

I am pleased to say the website/blog “The Odyssey” (<http://thegolfodyyssey.net>) continued to make progress in 2017. Kevin Larrabee is my IT guru, and he has patiently created what I hope is an excellent working site. To easily locate it just Google “golf odyssey mccoys”.

“The O” on a website gives everyone various options to read the material – computer, tablet, smartphone. My preference is tablet. In “the nothing is easy category” I found that my website provider WordPress has a glitch in their system. If you use an Apple product, minor amounts of the text and some pictures do not appear. Thus we have posted the following: Safari Users (iOS/OSX): The Odyssey's content is best viewed by using the "Download" option at the top of each page. Actually, no matter what browser used, the “Download” routine is the best way to view any of the documents. Please disregard the “login” item at the bottom left of the first page of the website.

Facebook

The only social media I have time for is Facebook. I like to see what my family and friends are up to. I try to keep my activity to a minimum, but do like to post something when I am at a course for the first time. If you are interested, please “friend” me at “Bob McCoy Naples Florida.”

Future Plans

May

Bluejack National, north of Houston, Texas
Ohoopie Match Play, Cobbtown, Georgia
The Cradle at Pinehurst, Pinehurst, NC
Quail Hollow, Charlotte, North Carolina

September

Netherlands – Royal Hague, De Pan
Portugal – West Cliff, Monte Rei
Ireland – Royal Portrush, Portstewart, The European Club, Carlow, Hogs Head, Adare Manor

How To Become a Master Sommelier

The final thought of 2017 is something not expected to be in The Odyssey. During the Saturday dinner at Sand Valley with the Greif's I learned about how difficult it is to become a Grand Sommelier. Being a beer drinker, I did not even know how to spell sommelier. After peppered Steve with questions about his whole sommelier experience, I was fascinated about the incredible story. Thus, I asked him to write about it.

“I have been a GolfWeek rater since 2002 and a practicing dentist since 1986. I got interested in wine about 10 years ago and found I wanted to learn more about everything involved with wine. I read books and wine magazines and then found out that the Court of Master Sommeliers offers certification exams for wine professionals. I signed up for the first exam in 2013 in Dallas which was being held during the world’s biggest sommelier conference - TexSomm.

The Introductory exam is a 2-day class with the written only exam at the end of the 2 days. They then bring everyone into the ballroom at the Four Seasons Las Colinas and announced those who had passed alphabetically. When announcing the names they went right past my last name without stopping. I was pretty upset because I knew I had passed. When they got to the last name they announce that they always honor the highest score on the exam last and then announced my name. I was an honor to have many of the Master Sommeliers come up to congratulate me, and also to see the looks on their faces when they found out I am a practicing dentist.

I then decided to take the next step and signed up for the Certified Sommelier exam in Denver. That exam is a combination of a written exam, an exam on restaurant service and finally a blind tasting of 2 wines, one red and one white. The written exam was pretty easy for me, and the Master Sommelier in charge told me afterwards that I had the highest score "by a wide margin". The restaurant or service exam turned out to be a champagne service for 8 guests (4 female and 4 males) all poured the exact same height, without running out of wine from one bottle. Oh and the entire time a Master Sommelier is peppering you with questions like- name two port producers that produce non-vintage port, or what is the primary alcohol in a side car? That went pretty well.

The final part of the exam is blind tasting where you have to be able to determine on both wines whether they are an old world or new world wine, What country it is from?, What region and sub-region it is from, what grape it is, and a 2 year range of when it was produced? I managed to pass with the 2nd highest score.

I am currently attempting to pass the Advanced Sommelier exam, of which, there are only about 600 in the world. The final step in Sommelier certification is called the Master Sommelier Exam and only 246 people have passed that exam since 1969. I love to have people Google ‘worlds hardest exam’- the Master Sommelier Exam is considered to be the world’s toughest.

Conclusion

I thank everyone who helped make the 2017 events possible. There is no way I could do any of what has happened in 2017, or for that matter all the other years of golf travel, without the help of so many people. As far as this “O” is concerned, special thanks goes to long-time friend Tony Maramarco for his editing expertise.

Wishing all the readers of the “O” good health and enjoyable golf in 2018.

Bob McCoy