

Tom Doak's Pacific Dunes Edges Out Pebble Beach on Top 100 Courses You Can Play



Photo by Kevin Frisch / Resort & Golf Marketing

Golf Magazine celebrates public golf courses in its September issue with the release of the 2008 Top-100 Courses You Can Play – a biennial ranking of the top courses across the country where membership is not a requirement to play. Pacific Dunes, Tom Doak's Links-style masterpiece in Bandon, Ore., edged out Pebble Beach Golf Links for the top spot on the list.

"What Pacific Dunes has going for it is that it's totally back to nature," says Joe Passov, Golf Magazine's Course Rankings and Architecture Editor. "There are no homes; there are no roads; there are some truly gigantic dunes that occupy holes; various routing quirks that are a lot of fun that you don't see elsewhere – back-to-back par 3s, four par 3s on the back nine alone – and you've got more ocean views there than you do at Pebble Beach."

-- Taken and edited from a Golf Magazine release <http://www.GOLF.com>

SLICE OF LIFE

Recalling Royal Birkdale and a certain caddie



By Terry Moore

On Sunday afternoon at Royal Birkdale Golf Club, a smiling and very relieved golfer will be named the "champion golfer of 2008" and will hoist the famed claret jug of the Open Championship, aka the British

Open. This will be ninth time Royal Birkdale will have hosted the Open Championship and I always look forward to watching its majestic dunes-laden landscape confound the world's best golfers.

Forgive me for being a "course dropper" but I have played Royal Birkdale and found it to be wonderful although a stern test of true links golf. It was back in 1989 when I traveled to England to cover the Ryder Cup Matches at The Belfry in Birmingham. Several months before departing, I contacted budding course designer and world golf traveler Tom Doak and asked him for some advice on playing some courses in the region. Doak not only kind-

ly offered several "must play" suggestions but also generously mailed me a Michelin road map with the suggested courses and the routes to them highlighted in bright magic marker. A pre-Mapquest travel guide! With the itinerary in hand, I then wrote the suggested golf clubs, introducing myself and asking for a teetime on such and such a date. In my letter to the Secretary of Royal Birkdale, I distinctly remembered asking for his assistance in reserving one of his best caddies for me. I knew Birkdale would be a challenge especially for a first-timer and an able caddie would be an invaluable resource and ally. Okay, now here's the rest of the story.



Photo by Getty Images

Royale Birkdale

Accompanied by a fellow golf writer and friend from Michigan, I drove to Royal Birkdale located in the seaside town of Southport, north of Liverpool. Driving into the carpark, I marveled at the towering sand dunes gracing the layout. This was indeed a links course in the truest sense of the term—land left by the departing sea. After checking in the clubhouse, we were instructed to head to the first tee where our two caddies were waiting for us.

Approaching the first tee, I noticed two older gentlemen dressed in tams and jackets and looking every part of a central casting call for “veteran local caddies.” Drawing closer I caught better sight of one of the men and something told me I had seen this gentleman before. I stretched out my hand to introduce myself and he did the same saying, “And I’m Alfie Fyles and I’ll be your caddie today.” Yes, THE Alfie Fyles, the famed Scottish caddie who was on

Tom Watson’s bag for all five of his Open titles, the last being at Birkdale in 1983. What good fortune, I said to myself. Not only was I familiar with Fyles but I had closely followed the career of Tom Watson and his remarkable British Open record. I knew this day would be a special treat.

Meanwhile, my traveling companion had the look of doom on him as he sized up the day’s match—knowing a friendly wager as always was in the cards. “Oh great, I’m playing you and you now have Alfie on your bag,” he lamented. He too had a veteran Birkdale caddie but as we quickly learned he was not in Alfie’s league in terms of stories and course knowledge. My friend was already 2-down and we hadn’t even teed off.

Although only a quarter mile from the Irish Sea, Royal Birkdale’s holes lay hidden from the water as they are set down and between the dunesland. The only time I recall seeing the sea was when we were searching for a golf ball and we climbed atop some on the giant dunes (think Arcadia Bluffs backside.) Other than that, the entire round is nestled within the dunes with only an occasional sight of the quirky and

modernist Art-Deco-designed white clubhouse in the distance. Alfie was an absolute delight and naturally a most able caddie as he showed me the best line off of the tee and into the green. He inspired me to concentrate and play my best and I kept the ball in play throughout the day.

Meanwhile my friend seemed lost and out of sorts at times with his caddie. He struggled off the tee which can be ruinous at Birkdale which then was marked by heavy gorse, bushes and scrub vegetation. (Note: in the last several years a major course renovation included stripping the layout of such scrub vegetation while leaving the dunesland intact.)

Fortunately, in my bag I had carried along a mini-tape recorder so as Alfie and I headed down the fairways I would ask him various questions about the course, Watson, and the Opens and he gladly shared his insights and stories. Later in the round after I nailed a drive long and straight down a long par-four, I turned to him and asked, “Okay, Alfie, now tell me, did Watson hit his drive any farther than that in ‘83?”

He looked at me and with a Scottish brogue and a wry smile, he said, “Oh yes, Terry, that he did and Tooom used a one-iron, nay a driver, from the tournament markers twenty paces behind us here!”

It was a royal retort by an Open Champion’s caddie and a lesson quickly learned by me. Don’t mess with the legend and lore of Tom Watson at Royal Birkdale. Not when Alfie Fyles was around. **MG**

