

An elevated tee plays down to a fairway with yet another burn running the length of the hole at the right and directly in line with the green. Unless you can fly the green, aim to the fairway left and chip on. Carrbridge GC can be a demanding track, but the views of nearby hills and more distant Cairngorm Mountains along with blooming heathers and silvery birches, will make every round enjoyable.

Comments from the Forward Tees: This course was a big surprise. It looks simple, but there are challenges at every hole. The course is short at only 2401 yards, but will still require good course management to score. I especially liked the 4th even though I played it badly. You tee off over bushes and then the fairway drops down and over the burn to the green. If you aren't intimidated you might try to carry to the green which is only 233 yards, but looks much longer. The course is worth the time to play.

DURNESS GOLF CLUB

Balnekeil, Durness, Sutherland IV27 4PN
01971-511364 www.durnessgolfclub.org
Links 9-hole, 2762 yards, par 35, £15 day

Amenities: The comfortable no-frills clubhouse lounge offers grand views of the beautiful bay and the sea. Snacks and soup (homemade and delicious) are available most usual hours, as are a few golfing essentials. No golf shop, but golf manager Lucy Mackay (a playing member) is a wonderful host and a fount of information. Honesty box for when no one is about.

Course Comments: Without going to the islands, Durness GC is about as far off the beaten track as you can get in Scotland. It's worth the trip! The 9-hole course is built on ancient dunes which rise above the beach only a few miles from the northwestern most corner of the Scottish mainland, Cape Wrath. When we played the 1988 course, we thought it reminded us of some of the great links courses in Ireland. As we sat in the clubhouse lounge after our round talking to golf manager Lucy Mackay, her husband, and two other members, we knew we'd played one of the great 9-hole links courses in the world. We've played several stunningly good 9-hole courses: St. Medans, St Fillans, and Corrie (from *Scotland's Hidden Gems*); Rush, Connemara Isles, and Cruit Island (from *Ireland's Small Greens*); and Newport (Pembs), Traigh, and Durness (in this book). Most would acknowledge Cruit Island as perhaps the best in the world, but I would say that Durness could rival or surpass Cruit Island, if you saw them both in good weather. We played Cruit on a gorgeous day, and trekked around Durness in 30 mile per hour winds and driving rain (though Lucy e-mailed to me that after

we played, the course had almost a full month of shirt sleeve weather). Both are excellent courses, with Durness presenting more straight ahead demanding golf, while Cruit Island has a couple of quite unique holes. Each has a hole where you dramatically hit over the ocean, but at Durness it's the last. The views from the course are fantastic, and not just the ocean views. On our first visit we could barely see the fairways, but the next year when we played and the weather was reasonably clear the views of surrounding hills were stunning.

It's not just the location that makes the golfing good at Durness; there's plenty to test the best of your game. The course has 19 heavy sand fairway and greenside bunkers. None of the bunkers is too severe except for one behind the green on the 6th. A loch is in play all along the right side of 6 and two small ponds are in play on the fairway. The sea is crossed off the tee of 9/18 (more about this in a minute). The greens are small to moderate with interesting slopes and borrows. All are easy to read and putt very true. Most holes have either blind drives or approach shots, and 8 is double blind. Significant elevation changes will affect play on most holes. Most importantly the wind and weather will be a matter of concern.

All holes at Durness, the most northerly course on the British mainland, are great fun to play and have challenges for all golfers. The following should give a good feel for the course, of course from our biased view. The 5th is a 344-yard par 4 where you drive (or try to) over a large hillock or go around to the right. If you try to go over and don't make it, you will be left with a 130 yard shot from a steep up slope. The green is elevated and is a small target. No bunkers are needed here. A classic golf hole is the 443-yard par 5 sixth. Start from an elevated tee on this sweeping dogleg right. The landing area is wide, but a small pond sits toward the right about 220 yards out and the loch is farther on the right the length of the hole. Big hitters with a good drive can take an iron across the loch to a two-tiered green tucked around the loch to the right. A menacing bunker awaits shots left of the green (behind the green if you're coming across the loch). Eagles are possible, but so are doubles or others for those who are short or who find the bunker. The 8th is a downhill blind 377-yard hole. The tee shot is down to a fairly level landing area from which you may or may not see the flag further downhill over a drop-off. The putting surface is defended by three traps and backed by the sea. The 9th at 108 yards or the 18th at 155 yards finishes your round. If you only go around once, play this one from the 18th tee. Shoot across a sea chasm to a small green guarded by two bunkers. It's a lovely, visually intimidating hole. A picture postcard finish! Lucy told us a story about a golfer who the week before had left £2.50 in the Honesty Box when nobody was

around, and wrote on the envelope, "What a fantastic position for golf. Took 3 shots on the 18th—made the Atlantic on all three." Two Canadian golfers came in soaking wet while we were getting soaked on our first visit. They told Lucy to tell the American writers they loved the course despite the weather, and to be sure to put it in the book. Those are the kind of reactions Durness GC inspires. The second time we played was very windy and on the tee box of the 8th we let a single play through. As he teed off he looked over and said, "It's madness to be out in this." If it were, it was a fine madness. Be sure to play it!

Comments from the Forward Tees: What a fantastic 9-hole course. Yes, it's worth the effort to get to this far northwest corner of Scotland. If the weather is bad there's always the Cocoa Factory for the most decadent hot chocolate ever. We played the course in two different fall trips. The first time it was raining and quite windy and there were only limited ocean views. The second trip we played with heavy wind, but dry and partly sunny weather. In good weather there are gorgeous views in all directions: mountains and moorlands to the southeast and ocean views to the southwest and northwest. Every hole on this 9-hole links course is unique. The yardage is short at 2473 yards, but there are challenges on every hole. Some shots are very steeply uphill to elevated greens. The 9th is a fair but daunting shot over the ocean. Durness GC is an exciting course to play.

FORT WILLIAM GOLF CLUB

Torlundy, Fort William, Inverness-shire PH33 6SN
01397-704464 www.golfhighland.com
Heathland, 6217 yards, par 72 (5464 gents, par 68), £20

Amenities: Pleasant, friendly lounge in the small clubhouse offers drinks and snacks, and (when we played) a group of friendly members eager to find out how we liked their course. No golf shop, but a few essentials are available at the bar where you check in for golf.

Course Comments: The Fort William GC is a reasonably interesting course. Played from the medal tees at 6217 yards into the prevailing wind the course can be a stern test for the lowest handicappers. Played from gents' or members' tees, 753 yards less than the medal, it's still a challenge for all players. Sited at the foot of Ben Nevis, Great Britain's tallest mountain, the Hamilton Stutt 1974 design heathland course is an easier walk than the one on the Ben Nevis hiking/climbing path that runs through the course. Besides the wind which will usually be blowing, seven holes have bunkers, almost all greenside, to confront your shot-making. When we played in the late summer of 2007, several of the bunkers had heather growing down into them, which added difficulty to bunkers which would normally be easy to play from