

## Chapter Three: Central Scotland around Crieff

**Golf:** Crieff Dornoch, Crieff Ferntower, Comrie, St. Fillans, Killin, Kenmore, Taymouth Castle, Strathtay, Muthill, Auchterarder, Muckart, King James VI, Murrayshall, Murrayshall Lynedoch, Sterling

**Pubs:** Arduthie House Hotel, Meadow Inn, Haggis and Sporrán, Killin Hotel and Riverview Bistro, Tormaukin Hotel, Byre Bistro, Royal Hotel

**Attractions (for when you can't golf):** Stuart and Caithness Glass, Huntingtower Castle, Balhousie Castle Scone Palace, Sterling Castle, Drummond Gardens, Famous Grouse Experience and Dewar's World of Whisky, Innerpefferay Library

### ***GOLF***

The Old Course at St. Andrews is recognized as the Home of Golf. The King's and Queen's Courses at Gleneagles may be golf's royalty. Prestwick, Royal Troon, and Turnberry represent golf's heritage. But the gems of Scotland's golf, the diamonds, sapphires, and rubies, have names like Fortrose and Rosemarkie, Boat of Garten, Shiskine, Killin, Crail, and Crieff.

While the world may recognize and honor the grand courses of Scottish golf, golfers would be remiss if they didn't seek out the gems hidden in almost every small community in Scotland. Here, on these little known and mostly unacknowledged courses, visitors will find scenic beauty, interesting holes, challenging tests, friendly and accommo-

dating staff, eminently fair prices, and, unlike the big name clubs, Scots on the course.

Perfect examples of the Scotland's out-of-the-way golf gems are available nearby the central Scotland community of Crieff. About an hour from the capital city of Edinburgh and only a little more than that from Glasgow, Crieff (from the Gaelic *craobh* meaning "trees") is a central location for tourism and golf. Perth, only 17 miles east with Caithness Glass, Balhousie Castle (the museum for the Black Watch Regiment), and Scone Palace, provides much for the non-golfer to see and do. And if Perth isn't enough, Sterling, with its wonderful castle and monuments to William Wallace and Robert the Bruce, is only about 30 minutes away to the southwest. In and around Crieff itself, the tourist can visit the Drummond Castle Gardens, Stuart Glass, and Scotland's oldest lending library at Innerpefferay. As central as Crieff is to cultural and historic Scotland, it's just as central to great golfing experiences.

We start our tour of Scotland's hidden gems of golf in central Scotland with two very nice courses which lie at the outskirts of Crieff—**Crieff Golf Club's Dornoch and Ferntower** courses. On the A85 heading towards Perth, the Crieff Golf Club is located on the east edge of town. Both courses occupy land overlooking the Strathearn (valley of the River Earn), but they differ in size and history. If you only have time for a short stop, visit the Dornoch nine-hole course designed by St. Andrews golf professional Old Tom Morris in 1891. The course carved out of what was once East Ledbowie Park is an easy walk that climbs gently to the sixth green, then comes back to the pro shop and impressive clubhouse. The featured hole may be hole six, the *Colonel*, a 256-yard par 4 which starts with an uphill blind tee shot with a fore bunker at the top of the hill. The second shot will be into a relatively flat green guarded by a bunker left. From this green are nice views south towards Gleneagles Resort and west towards the Ferntower layout.

If you have the time, the Ferntower course is the one to play. This eighteen hole track, opened in 1980, has the beauty to satisfy any golf tourist, and enough challenge for even the most skilled. Playing the Ferntower course one day with local Bed and Breakfast owners John and Jacky Clifford, I asked about the accessibility of these small courses to visitors. The Cliffords told me that Crieff Golf Club, like almost all the local courses, welcomed visitors anytime a competition was not being held. It helped to be playing with local members who could point out nuances of the course. The challenges start at the first, an uphill par 3 of 163 yards (*Beech Knowe*, literally "hill of beeches"), with bunkers front left and to the right of the smallish green. It's an exciting start, but fair as well. On the second hole, with a right sloping fairway, you must try to keep your tee shot on the left side. Not only is the second shot

easier from the left, the right side of the fairway is home to a fine group of Druid Stones, remnants of one of Scotland's ancient cultures. From the second, the layout winds slowly upwards to the top of the course. There are much appreciated bathrooms ("toilets" to the Scots) accessible from the ninth tee and just past the eleventh green. This is an amenity not found on many of Scotland's out and back eighteen-hole courses. On most courses be advised to be well relieved before you begin your round. The top of the course is also the location of one of Ferntower's best holes, the fourteenth. *Ferny Den* is a lovely 324-yard par 4 which starts from an elevated tee. The first shot travels down to a wide fairway, and the second shot comes back up to a raised, narrow green fronted by bunkers and backed by a steep hillside. As much as the shots will challenge the golfer, the hole offers other attractions as well. Great views of the valley and hills south grabbed Anne's attention, as did the 14th Century ruined stable of Ferntower House just to the right of the tee box. The Ferntower and Dornoch courses are only the start of the fine golf available in the Crieff area.

Seven miles west of Crieff on A85 is the small community of Comrie. This village has a nicely decorated main street, with a profusion of flowers at almost every house and business. On the east side of Comrie on Muirend road is **Comrie Golf Club**. A real "Highlands" feel accents this nine-hole course, which remains today much as it was laid out by Colonel Williamson in 1891. The course, like so many in Scotland, is set on the hillsides. Comrie climbs gently uphill for the first five holes, plays the sixth across the top, and from the seventh comes back down to the small clubhouse. While all the holes are interesting, two holes stand out. First is number three, a 174-yard par 3 called the *Quarry*. It's no surprise that the tee shot is over an old fern- and grass-filled quarry to an elevated green. Next is *Monument*, the 493- yard par-5 sixth hole. From the top of the course, with good views of the Lord Melville Monument (a tribute to Henry Dundas, first Viscount Melville who, in effect, ruled Scotland for a time in the late 18th Century), the tee shot drives to a wide fairway. This sets up the second shot, a lay up in front of a green set into a grove of tall trees. The course is worth a second round, but there are more jewels awaiting.

Continue along A85 for six more miles to the next find, the **St. Fillans Golf Club**. This 1903 Willie Auchterlonie tract is mostly flat with nice mountain views. Located at the east end of Loch Earn, the course provides views that may have been the cause of many wayward drives, or, at least, that's what the golfers will say. Anne originally thought the course was fairly easy, but the more she plays it, the more that impression changes. St. Fillans offers plenty of challenge. The only hill on the course comes into play as an elevated tee for the 296-yard par 4 third.