

Golf Travel in the Emerald Isle - Cead Mile Failte (a hundred thousand welcomes) from Bob Fennell,CGD.

As owner of Classic Golf Destinations, a golf tour operator that specializes in golf vacations to Ireland, this was my first trip to the home of my ancestors with clients in the off season month of January. I escorted 2 four balls as they like to be called in Ireland, but known to us here in the United States as two foursomes. It is our policy at Classic Golf Destinations to escort and customize every trip to our client's wishes. It's all about service to our clients. Our flight left Chicago's O'Hare around 6:40 pm on Thursday and I must say from check-in to gate it was a mere thirty one minutes to the executive lounge. One of CGD perks. The group was very excited for it was their first trip to Ireland. This was a chance for me to escort the group and to continue on with my sight inspections of courses, resorts, hotels and B&B's for the following year. The flight was routine and the time seemed to just fly.

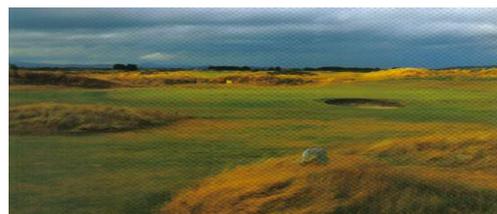
The anticipation of great golf and meeting the merry people of Ireland might have something to do with it. After two movies, dinner, some TV shows one of which was an Irish comedy show that was hilarious, I had my final snack and settled in for some four hours of shut eye. I awoke to some calming Irish music and breakfast. Shortly thereafter a perfect landing in Dublin and in around 15 minutes thru customs the group and I had arrived in Ireland. Dublin airport is a relatively small airport in comparison to Chicago's O'Hare and easy to find your way around. Something magical happens to me every time I walk out of the terminal and head toward the tour bus. Maybe it's the Irish brogue that Sean our driver has or the friendly atmosphere that our golf tour guides David presents to the American golf traveler as he loads your golf gear on board. Perhaps the fact that at 8:30 in the morning everyone's saying, a fine, fine day we have today, with a big grin and a smile from ear to ear. How can one not be in a good mood? What ever it is, it is a magical feeling to be standing in Ireland, beginning on a trip of a lifetime. Here it was January and the temperature was 52 degrees and slightly overcast with the sun creeping in and out but overall a nice day. The pavement was wet from a small shower but that's one thing you get used to in Ireland. The day kind of felt like an early April spring day in Chicago. We were on our way via motor coach (from experience let the Irish chauffeur handle all the driving for the roads are not what we are accustomed in the states, plus it takes some time to remember that you drive on the left side of the road and the driver knows the short cuts) to Portmarnock Links & Hotel about a half hour ride from the Dublin

airport. Our guide is chatting away getting very acquainted with all on board. Portmarnock Links & Hotel was the former estate home to the Jameson whiskey clan of Ireland and is located just north of Dublin and about a

Portmarnock Jameson Hotel & Links – 18th Hole



9 iron from the Irish Sea. On our arrival we are greeted by Moira, our hostess of the Portmarnock Hotel and an army of her staff. Everyone is quickly situated in their rooms and breakfast is being washed down by your first pint of Guinness. Within two hours of landing the group is teeing off on the first hole of the seaside links course, a short par 4 with a slight dog leg to the right. Unique to the first hole is that it is home to Saint Marnock which the area is named. Golfers, be sure you purchase a yardage book from the pro shop and maybe a wee conversation with the pro or caddie when in Ireland for the first group found the hidden bunkers that are blind from the teeing area. This course was designed by American Stan Eby and PGA player Bernard Langer and for January the course is in great shape. Portmarnock Links is a favorite of Hollywood's and Scotland's own Sean Connery. You'll find that Ireland is all about the people that you encounter along the way, which are happy to see you, provide you with excellent service and are well endowed in verses of blarney, the English language and Irish Folklore. Make sure you hire some of Ireland's caddies because your golf day will be amplified ten fold. After photos my two groups are all situated and off the first tee for a great day of links golf. The sun is out and in my 4 ball are the resident golf pro, his assistant, myself and my business associate in Ireland, David. David and his partner Lowell are responsible for all our ground reservations; they are our eyes and ears here in the land of St Paddy. They have over 50 years of servicing vacationers in the golfing and hospitality field in Ireland.



The Portmarnock Links course can be described by the sight of large and small dunes, some which are natural and some created in the design, but who could tell the difference. You will notice for instance on the 18th hole the immense dunes are all along the fairway protecting you from the Irish Sea that looms just on the other side. For hundreds of years the wind has pushed the sand into these majestic hills covered with wheat like growth that adds to the beauty of the land. The play up the fairway is truly an eye full to see, the dunes on the right & left side forming a valley where the fairway lies with the green surrounded by dunes and the Portmarnock Jameson Estate Hotel in the background. What a great way to finish the first round in Ireland. The afternoon is almost over the temperature rose to a comfortable 60 degrees and the group heads to the 19th hole for some lively conversation and a hearty pub meal. One travel hint you must know is to stay up as long as you can the day of arrival. I have found it is one way to beat the jet lag and wake up refreshed for the second day of golf. After a restful night in the elegant accommodations of the Portmarnock Hotel, one arises for your typical Irish breakfast (enough to feed two people) and a new day.



Portmarnock Hotel King Room

On our second day we are off by motor coach to play a hidden gem of a links course called "The Island". Located 15 miles north of Dublin and founded in 1890 it was once only accessible by boat. It is a scenic links course and one that will test your ability to keep the ball low. Northern Ireland's Darren Clarke states "you will use every club in the bag and it's a great course that test's your game. Harold Hilton was the course designer and how he took this sand bar that was overrun with the local fawn and flora and turned it into a terrific golf venue is really a desire for his love of golf and the passion he had for the game. The dunes here are grand and the fairways roll and meander with the lay of the land. The bunkers are few and the greens undulating. The customary stop at the 19th hole is a welcome sight to the regulars of the course. The locals like to hear your stories and the exchange of the Irish and American cultures are linked together even if you're not of

Irish decedents. The Champions bar won't disappoint you. Tonight a trip to the city centre of Dublin and visit the pub culture of Ireland's many watering holes filled with the familiar sound of traditional Irish music.



The Island



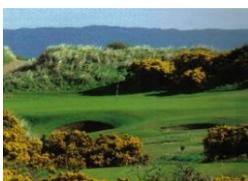
It's already the third day and we are off to the K Club a parkland style golf course where the Ryder Cup of 2006 was played. We all get a chance today to walk where Tiger, Padraig, Ernie and Phil played and test our metal. The K Club has two 18 hole golf courses both are of fantastic championship caliber. They are the Palmer and Smurfit courses along with a 5 star hotel complex called the Kildare Hotel & Country Club with great restaurants and an opulent spa. An option here is to play the Straffen course in the pm after lunch. It is one of the few golf facilities that have golf carts that we are accustomed to here in the Unites States. The Palmer course was designed by none other than Arnold Palmer. Arnie's design encompasses the River Liffey on the 7th, 8th, 16th, and 17th holes. The resort is about an hours drive east from downtown Dublin and is located on 700 acres of land. The resort is the dream of billionaire Michael Smurfit who was committed to developing a world class resort in Ireland, and that he has accomplished. Arnold Palmer and Ed Seay have taken the Irish country side and transformed it into a course only fit for the King and the Princes of golf. It's back to the hotel for a relaxing night or out to King Sitric a great seafood dinner at a fabulous restaurant in the village of Howth. Chef Aiden McManus and his wife Joan will provide a tasty and succulent seafood dishes that are 5 stars.



K Club

Today is day four and we play Portmarnock the “Old Course” established in 1894. This golf club is a favorite links course of Tom Watson and has been home to many Irish Open Championships, Dunlap Masters, and Walker Cups along with many amateur championships. Standing on the first tee you’re almost paralyzed to hit your tee shot, for the tee box is endless in length and the landing area almost out of sight except for the bunkers on the right with the Irish estuary looming large along the right hand side of the fairway. A most intimidating first tee shot if the wind is coming off the Irish Sea, but never the less a fantastic golf hole. You are playing on a course that has seen the feet of every famous golfer in the history of the sport. Only five miles from Portmarnock Links and the Royal Dublin golf course is Portmarnock’s Old Course which is located on a peninsula of land only 4 miles from the city centre of Dublin. Portmarnock Old is a fair course with few blind shots. Although the wind is constantly changing and plays havoc with your game you can feel a bit safe for there are no water hazards on the course except the estuary on the right and the Irish Sea on the left. Palmer, Crenshaw, Faldo and Norman all have commented that the 15th hole a par 3 measuring some 176 yards to be one of the toughest in the world. The elevated tee offers great views and a demanding shot, that if the wind is blowing has some players aiming out to the sea only to have the wind steer the ball back to the green. You see and feel the ghosts of history as you walk through the clubhouse to the sight of trophy’s and pictures since the club was formed. In 19th hole you will find some old time golfers that will share there great stories and converse about your day at Portmarnock’s Old Course. Our group had a great day here!

Portmarnock



The Old Course



Day 5: Today we are off to the south of Dublin and the Wicklow Mountain area of Ireland. First our motor coach will stop at city centre of Dublin for us to see some of Ireland’s national landmarks. The Temple Bar district, Saint Patrick’s Cathedral, Christ’s Church, St Stephens Green, Trinity College and between being tourists we have some souvenir shopping on O’Connell Street. We also make time for a few pints at the Guinness brewery in the heart of downtown Dublin. This afternoon it’s off to the Five Star Marriott hotel called Druids Glen. A golf resort with two 18 hole golf courses the Heath and Druids Glen that were once home to the Irish Open. Druid’s is known as the “Augusta of Ireland”. The courses are as green as can be with beautiful views of the Irish Sea and the Wicklow Mountains. It is here that you feel the presence of leprechauns and the folk lore of the Emerald Isle. The Marriott hotel has three tasty restaurants to fill you’re culinary needs and a most relaxing spa, health club, gym, solarium, hydrotherapy, massage rooms, sauna and steam room all adjacent to a 55 foot indoor pool complex. The rest of today is R & R, for tomorrow 36 holes of great golf. Relax, Druids Glen is americanized and has power carts. Our sixth day is filled with fun on two great golf courses. Our first 18 is on the famous Druids Glen home of the Irish Open for many years. Druids Glen is a total departure from the previous golf courses for it is a parkland style course with natural hills and valleys. The 5 star Marriott resort is located in the Irish village of Newtownmountkennedy some 15 miles south of Dublin in County Wicklow. The course seems to have been built thru and around an arboretum. Druids Glen plays to a par 71 and covers some 7,026 yards of rolling countryside with many elevation changes. All four of the par 3 holes at Druids Glen are special. For instance the 2nd hole of some 175 yards was inspired by the Road Hole at St. Andrews in Scotland. The designer creates an illusion in our minds. The hole has a lone bunker located very close to the green on the left and to the right and rear is a road and wall. The 8th hole is just one of the par three holes that seem to be reminiscent of 16th at Augusta National.

Druids Glen



Heath



Classic Golf Destinations is a golf tour operator and business incentive company with tours and vacations for all.



Druids # 12



Heath # 2



Druids Glen # 13



Heath # 18

Your approach to the 152 yard par 3 that plays over a pond and must be well aimed to the cruelly undulating green complex, your patience and putting skills will be tested here. You will notice some of the great landscaping and how the bushes are groomed and arranged as snakes and folk lore items. On one of the holes on the back nine there is a statue of a "Druid" overlooking the signature par 3, 12th protecting your ball from the evil spirits. The elevated tee box has a giant Celtic cross decorating the slope amidst many colorful flowers. Your shot here carries over a stream to another sloping green with a bunker on the left of the hole. You best be on the green, for its hard to stop the ball when coming out of the trap because the green slopes back towards the stream. The course has colorful plants that decorate the landscape in the spring & summer with the vibrant colors we see in Augusta, Georgia at the Masters. The course was designed by Pat Ruddy of the European club and the late Tom Craddock, two of Irish golf's most passionate people. The last of the par three holes is the 180 yard 17th. This hole is special for it's an island green that is protected by water and a bunker that is shaped like a horseshoe which surrounds the front and sides of the green. Your final hole is a par 4 that climbs gradually to an elevated green with the Georgian style clubhouse built by Irish royalty in the year 1760. It has been renovated to the tune of over three million dollars and is a fabulous finishing hole with a fantastic clubhouse with two restaurants and a great bar. That's not to say that the course doesn't have other favorite holes. One of mine is the par 4, 13th hole where the tee is perched high above the fairway that slopes slightly from left to right and then turns to help create a sharp dogleg to the right. A stream is meandering all along the right side; a power fade drive

would be a perfect shot to play here. Your second shot has to carry a pond that guards the front and left side of the green. The green is not too undulating but slopes from back to front. A well maintained and manicured facility with many picturesque holes that make Druids Glen Championship course a masterpiece in design and a must play while in Ireland. The sister course to Druids Glen is the Heath course that is built over rolling terrain of the country side at the base of the Wicklow Mountains. This course has a great vista of views of the Irish Sea and coastline. The style here is totally different from the Druids course. It has very open fairways, light rough and sort of plays like a links course but in a parkland style if that makes any sense. My favorite hole is the quarry hole which is downhill par three guarded by the Irish granite quarry on the left and which also guards the back of the hole. It is decorated with bright yellow gorse and is a scenic golf hole. On the Heath course the views and the layout makes the course just flow naturally. You will enjoy your round here and will have a chance for a great score. The final hole plays from a somewhat elevated tee to a large fairway slightly dogging to the right with the Marriott Resort in plain sight. A wonderful finishing hole to a great course named Heath. The combination of the Five Star Hotel, Spa & Golf Resort with two fantastic courses and less we forget the wonderful fare in "Flynn's Steakhouse", The formal "Druids" restaurant and the great tasting pints and pub fare in the "Thirteenth Bar" that make Druids Glen a top resort in Ireland.



Druids Staff & Guide David



Druids 12th Hole

Day seven we start with a late wake up call for we have an afternoon tee time today at the European Club located in Brittas Bay on the Irish coast about an hours drive from Dublin but only a short drive from the Marriott resort. Once again we are treated to a wonderful links course, a masterpiece designed and built by golf historian, writer and golf course designer Pat Ruddy who is a legend here in Ireland. The land was purchased by Pat by mortgaging his house and all he had. His family which consists of two sons, wife Bernadine and three daughters all worked hard and constructed the course under the watchful eye of Pat. He started in the mid 80's and in 1992 finished 14 holes. A few years later all 18 were completed. In 2007 he was

offered 56 million for the course but the European Club remains firmly in family hands. The course rolls up and down with views of the ever present Irish Sea. The 12th hole borders the Irish Sea and the beach is in play. The European Club is a spectacular links golf course which is a must play for all who go to Ireland. There are no caddies, practice range is minimal and no power carts, its grab a pint take a few swings and off you go. The fairways are wide and favorable and even after a rain shower drain very well and roll a good way. The dips that were created by Pat Ruddy with the visual effect of the large dunes and how the hole is situated from narrow to wide and reversed can give a golfer fits with the perception of the yardage. The course is a par 71 and is 7,323 from the tips and 6,186 yards from the daily markers which is a great golf challenge. An example of the designer's optical illusions of design is the par 4, 378 yard 17th hole. Teeing off from an elevated tee down to a valley created by extra tall dunes on the right and left your tee shot lands in a wide fairway. Your approach shot is to an elevated green complex which is very large but does have a false front. It is guarded by the fairway ending some 75 yards from the green and the upslope to the green area rises with undulating terrain and nodules. The large green from the fairway seems impossible to miss, but the distance from the end of the fairway to the green puzzles the thinking and is a mind bender to golfers. I watched one day while I had a group of 20 golfers that travel all over, play this hole and of the 20 golfers, not one hit the green which is gigantic. I have to admit I was golfer number 21. So if you play the European Club remember to take 2 extra clubs and be on the green. The European Club also has two strange quirks to it that you won't see any where else in the world. There are two extra holes on the course. I kid you not. Yes they are holes number 7a and 12 a, now you don't have to play them but you certainly will. I had an opportunity to meet Pat on one of my sight inspection tours in 2007, he could not have been nicer. After having a pot of tea and some apple pie for lunch he escorted me around the links course constantly describing the holes and their nuances. I found him to be a down to earth person with a passion for life and golf. When finished with the tour we exited to the clubhouse where we raised our glasses filled with Ireland's brown nectar, Guinness, and continued our talk about the game we both love and have a passion for, the game of golf. It's back to Druids Glen for our last night at the Thirteenth Bar or off to Johnny Fox's a local pub for some Irish music and local fare. Both are favorite spots to golfers and vacationers alike.



European Club

Day eight we are off by motor coach to catch our flight back home after spending the last night at the Druids Glen golf resort. This has been a truly great trip that has my group so excited that they are booking ahead to the following year for another great adventure in golf to the South West of Ireland. The group has met some interesting Irish characters along the way that has had them (having plenty of "craic" which is the Irish expression for fun) laughing and listening to great Irish stories by our guides, bartenders, waiters and even the owners of some of the resort facilities. I hope you get a chance to come to Ireland to play golf, for you won't regret it. The Irish people are filled with a blarney of charm and service that is second to none. When they greet you it's with a hundred thousand welcomes and when you leave they are sad to see you go. You have crossed an ocean to vacation and low and behold you left Ireland with new friends who were here waiting and ready to showcase their home and wonderful country of Ireland. Slainte (cheers or to your health) and warmest regards from Ireland. 1/20/09

Bob Fennell / President Classic Golf Destinations.

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