

Dornoch Days



ROYAL DORNOCH



Silver and gold at Royal Dornoch



We are a hardy lot here in the Highlands, so golf tends to be a year-round recreation for many of us.

You may have spotted stunning photographs taken by locally based photographer Matthew Harris over the Festive season. His marvellous images of our Championship Course enveloped under a blanket of snow went viral.

They showed off every tier, bump and hollow and with the sun’s rays glancing off the pristine silvery covering, the huge response on our social media channels was hardly surprising.

It temporarily put on hold the winter golf programme, of course. Patience awaiting the thaw was demanded of our more committed members and greenkeeping team.

Some golfers tuck the clubs away in the attic, shed or garage over the winter, awaiting the glorious April footage of azaleas bursting into life at Augusta National before emerging from their golfing hibernation.

Royal Dornoch’s fairways are already being graced by the golden fringe provided by banks of gorse bursting into full bloom.

Mother Nature has certainly been kind to us here and Eoin Riddell and Scott Aitchison, the leaders of our award-winning greenkeeping team, take pride in preserving and enhancing the environment wherever possible.

Our impeccable environmental and sustainability credentials were in my mind when I was invited to address the Coul Links inquiry held in Embo.

As those of you who have been following the progress of multi-million-pound plans to create a new job generating, “world class” championship course will be aware, its fate will lie in the hands of politicians at Holyrood.

I was delighted to speak in support of Coul Links on behalf of Royal Dornoch Golf Club and judging by the reaction of community members attending a question-and-answer session to speakers backing the project, I am hopeful that the Reporters and ultimately the politicians in Edinburgh will give investors the green light.

Golf tourism is a key driver of the local economy and I’m in no doubt the creation of another top-class, environmentally sensitive golf course will be a huge asset to the Highlands.

Yours in Sport

Neil

NEIL HAMPTON, GENERAL MANAGER

Toasting a Dram Fine Festival

The Dornoch Whisky Festival will have visitors raising a glass to celebrate its 10th anniversary later this year.

The 2025 gathering takes place in the town from October 24-26. It’s the ideal opportunity for visitors and locals to enjoy an introduction to Scotland’s national drink, or to tap into the knowledge of experts and exhibitors from around the country.

The event, like so many taking place in the town, enjoys the support of the team at Royal Dornoch Golf Club. “It is always great fun and if you like your whisky, it is a great time to visit Dornoch,” said general manager Neil Hampton.

“The golf club is delighted to play its part in the annual Whisky Festival, which is supported by various local venues. We were one of six seed funders who helped get the project off the ground.

“Golf and whisky are natural bedfellows here in the Highlands, with so many wonderful golf courses and distilleries to savour in the region.

“In addition to the Blind Gin and Whisky Tasting in the clubhouse on the Friday evening, golfers

compete for the David Urquhart Memorial Trophy on the Sunday, which brings the festival to a close.

“The two Grand Tasting sessions on October 25 take place in a marquee erected in the grounds of the Dornoch Castle Hotel and we anticipate around 400 people taking the opportunity to sample drams supplied by more than 20 different distilleries.”

The Thompson brothers, Phil and Simon, who own the hotel, have secured planning consent to create a modern, eco-friendly distillery on land bordering the Struie Course. It has been named Struie Distillery and a crowdfunding campaign is under way.

Neil said: “The Thompsons are also keen to build on the current path network in the area and discussions are ongoing.

“There is certainly potential for encouraging walkers to enjoy the fresh air and fabulous views without impacting on the golf.”



Pictured above: A flavour of the 2024 festival (© Eoghan Smith Photography & KA Images)
Pictured left: Winter scenes at Royal Dornoch captured by photographer Matthew Harris went viral

Golfing adventures abound in the Highlands

As “The Home of Golf,” Scotland is awash with challenges which are sure to reward golf tourists prepared to do a little research before packing their bags and heading for the airport.

While other regions also have their fair share of “bucket list” courses, the Highlands are fast becoming one of the more popular areas when it comes to booking golf breaks. Household names like Royal Dornoch, Nairn Golf Club and Cabot Highlands – formerly Scottish Open hosts Castle Stuart – all attract golfers from around the world.

But more and more courses are enjoying spin-off benefits from visitors prepared to broaden their horizons and embrace opportunities to create memories which will last a lifetime.

More than 30 courses market themselves under the “Golf Highland” umbrella and the upwards trajectory in visiting golfers, post-pandemic, confirms the value of this sector to community clubs and the wider economy.

Willie MacKay, former Scottish Golf development manager and a past captain at Royal Dornoch, has welcomed the sterling work carried out by its volunteer board.

“With Spean Bridge and Lochcarron joining us, we are up to 34 member clubs this season, ranging from the Isle of Skye in the west to Nairn in the east, and Fort William to Durness, Reay and Wick on the north coast,” he said.

“This all began as part of a tourist drive in the Highlands and in 1999 Neil Hampton, who has gone on to be general manager at Royal Dornoch, was installed as the first manager of Golf Highland. As a proud Highlander, I could see the potential in the variety of the wonderful golf clubs we have here. It’s great to see more and more visitors including them in their visits. Clubs of all sizes have been banding together to improve their websites, social media presence and marketing. It is paying dividends.

“When Royal Dornoch, Cabot Highlands and Nairn Golf Club were flying the flag at the PGA Show in Florida recently, they were also doing their bit to promote the Highlands as a golfing destination to rival any in Scotland and beyond.”

At the 2025 Scottish Golf Tourism Awards, Durness retained the Best 9-Hole Course accolade while Tain was hailed the Best Course (green fee under £100).

Paul Mills, general manager at Nairn Golf Club, believes golf tourism is going from strength to strength.

“There is real momentum in terms of the Highlands as a golfing destination,” he explained.

“Golf Highland has been playing a critical role in that, and I have been impressed with the way all the different clubs have come together. There is a great support network. It’s important that golf throughout the region is in a good place. Nairn, Royal Dornoch and Cabot Highlands were delighted to fly the flag for the Highlands at the huge trade show in Orlando.

“We encourage golfers from home and abroad to make the Highlands their base and American tour operators are becoming more aware of the fantastic range of golf courses we have to offer. Having Scottish Golf Tourism Week in Inverness last year also helped raise awareness among tour operators of just how good our courses are.”

Moves are afoot to create “Golf Highland Tour Tickets” to encourage even more visitors to play a variety of courses during their stay and the “High9s” – a group of scenic nine-hole clubs which have featured in leading magazines – are also working in tandem. One of the clubs to benefit from this co-operative approach is Durness in the north-west, which is blessed with a breathtaking scenic combination of mountains, sea and dunes.

For information on the various golf courses in the region, visit www.golfhighland.com

Greenkeeper Ali Morrison, who was selected by the British and International Golf Greenkeeping Association and John Deere to join the agronomy team working at The Players Championship at TPC Sawgrass, has seen visiting numbers at Durness rise year on year following the pandemic.

“We have a real mix of visitors, with many from the continent, and we are seeing a bit more of the American traffic now. Visitors might play a couple of rounds or have a quick nine holes while partners are sightseeing or on the beach with the kids.

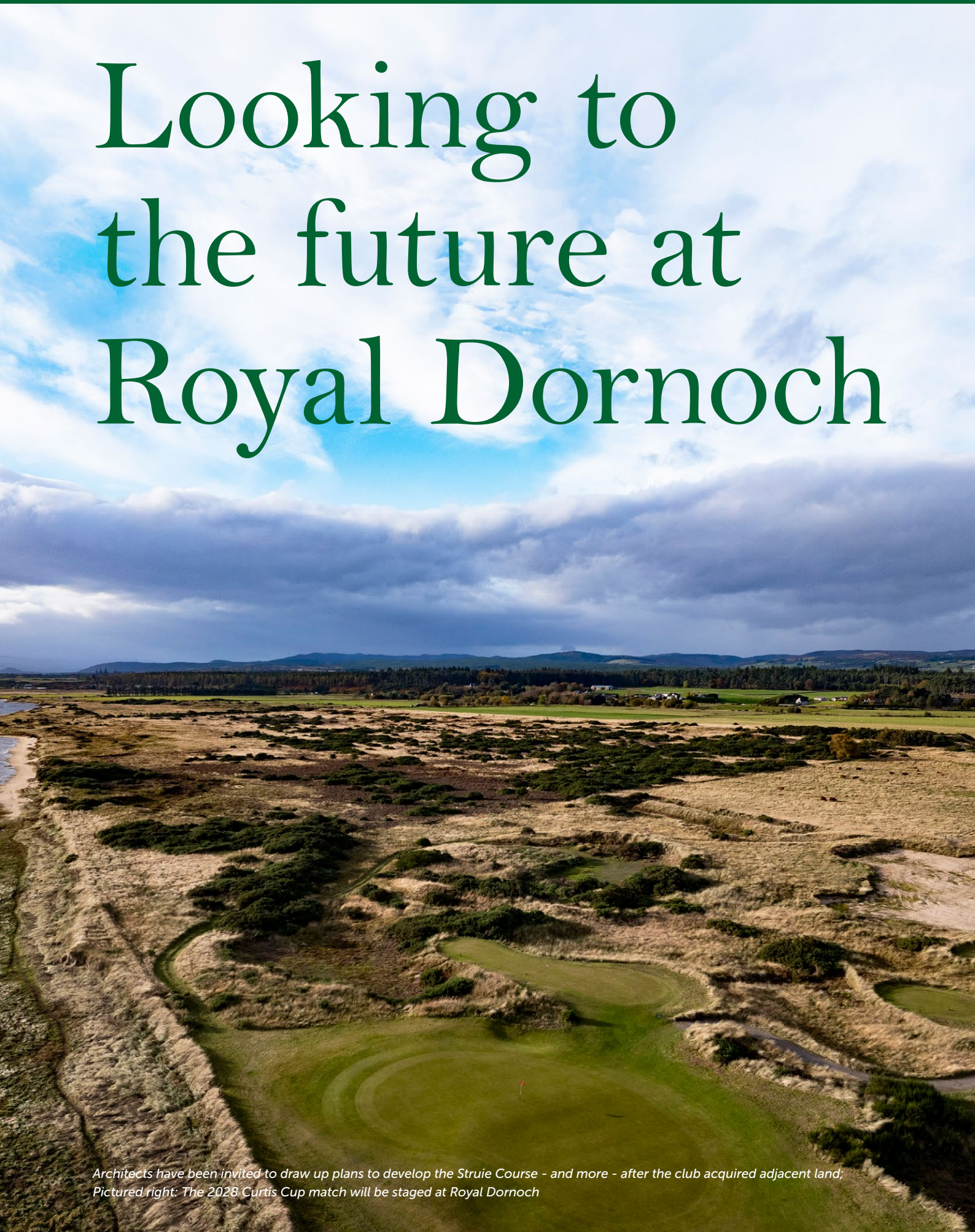
“Our profile has certainly been raised by a combination of Golf Highland and a sustained social media drive encouraged by Brora pro Malcolm Murray, golf photographer Matthew Harris and our late president Ian Morrison. Hopefully being hailed again as Scotland’s 9-hole Course of the Year at the Scottish Golf Tourism Awards will encourage even more golfers to make the trip.

“The well-known Highland clubs are very good at encouraging visitors to make the journey, which is rewarding in terms of the views, and we get great feedback on the scenery, condition and lay-out here at Durness.”



Spectacular scenery awaits visitors to Durness;
Pictured above left: Nairn Golf Club is one of the top links courses in the country.

Looking to the future at Royal Dornoch



Architects have been invited to draw up plans to develop the Struie Course - and more - after the club acquired adjacent land;
Pictured right: The 2028 Curtis Cup match will be staged at Royal Dornoch

With the eagerly awaited new clubhouse on target for an official opening next year, Royal Dornoch is already looking to the future.

The acquisition of 50 acres of land at Davochfin last year has opened the door to develop the Struie Course and embrace ambitious projects further down the line.

General manager Neil Hampton and the Committee of Management appreciate they have been entrusted with not only protecting and enhancing the current offering at Royal Dornoch, but for creating a legacy to be enjoyed by golfers, visitors and townsfolk in decades to come.

In the short-term, plans are being laid to celebrate the club's milestone 150th anniversary in 2027 and the following year the Championship Course will play host to the Curtis Cup, luring the finest women amateur golfers from the USA and GB&I to the Highlands.

At the turn of the year, golf course architects were invited to provide their vision for developing Struie and enhancing the club's practice facilities. Nine respected companies have made presentations to the management team.

"We are very much in the infancy of this potential development project," noted general manager Neil Hampton.

"But it has been exciting to see how each of the architects has approached the brief and it's fair to say the quality of the presentations we have been given has been impressively high.

"We will be assessing them closely before any recommendations to the Council of Management and the membership will be consulted closely, just as they were with the clubhouse project."

The Struie has enjoyed different guises over the past century and more – and thoughts of developing the course have been bandied about for more than 10 years.

"It's not just an extension to the Struie Course that we are seeking. We are looking for a masterplan of the all the facilities Royal Dornoch could have going forward," stressed Neil.

"Everything from a driving range, short course, putting area and simulator room could be included.

"Essentially, we have asked the architects to flag-up anything from around the world that has caught their eye and which they feel we should be offering here for golfers of any age and ability.

"We are very much a community golf club, but our aim is to provide the widest possible range of opportunities to encourage people to visit us and spend time in the area.



"This is a golf club which has always looked to the future, since the days when Old Tom Morris left his mark on what had been a nine-hole course and, later, when the upper tier holes were created in the 1940s.

"Those 'younger' holes on the raised beach towards Embo blend in seamlessly with the rest of the Championship Course and that is what we are looking for when it comes to developing and enhancing the Struie.

"We have emphasised to the various professionals keen to come on board with us that their proposals must maintain the feel and style of the current set-up and the way it flows.

"We are keen to retain the contrast between the flatter, narrower fairways and smaller greens of the Struie and the Championship Course with its undulations, Tom Morris raised plateau greens and deep bunkers."

March madness as the aces rolled in!



The social media channels were busy last month with a super six holes-in-ones reported.

The first hole-in-one of the new season at Royal Dornoch was achieved by Joe Roylance, a member at Southport Old Links, who aced the 12th hole on the Struie Course on the March 7.

The next day, captain Gary Bethune caused quite a stir on social media when he posted a hole-in-one on the Championship Course.

Gary's ace at the 10th hole was flagged up on the club's social media channels and caught the attention of golfers far beyond the Highlands.

Around 40,000 views were clocked-up on Facebook alone!

Gary pulled out an eight iron for the 131-yard tee shot into a slight breeze.

He said: "It was the Whisky Stableford so Barry Cooke, Paul York, Colin Murray and I had a wee Glemorangie on the tee after eagles at the 9th. I joked 'there's a hole in one position if ever I saw one!'

"It hit the top of the ridge, started rolling and then dropped. Cue more Glenmorangie! A bottle was already open on the bar when we got in. Thankfully the club has insurance cover!"

It was Gary's third ace but his first in a competition.

A few days later, Royal Dornoch's PGA Teaching Professional, Ally McNaughton, made the game look way too easy with a slam-dunk ace at the 13th on the Championship Course.

Next up was Nils Leonhardt with a pinpoint nine iron to the 10th on the Championship Course, followed by Lance Sloan finding the cup with his tee shot on the 6th hole.

And on last day of the month Vincent Doyle joined in the fun by despatching his tee shot at the 13th.

Congratulations to all six... what an ace start to the season!

Pictured above: Joe Roylance; Gary Bethune; Ally McNaughton; Nils Leonhardt; Lance Sloan; Vincent Sloan

News Board



Look out for the new hole on Struie

A new irrigation system has been installed on the Struie Course over the winter.

Members and visitors will enjoy the benefits of a modern, environmentally friendly project which can be extended as and when plans come forward to develop the lay-out on land adjacent to the course.

The location of the new clubhouse has necessitated closing the opening hole but a new par 3 hole, with infinity green and the backdrop of the Dornoch Firth, located between the exiting 9th and 10th holes, has been created by our greenkeeping team and comes into play this season.



Focus on the Highlands

Keen amateur photographers will be interested in the inaugural "Golf Highland Photographic Competition."



Royal Dornoch encourages visitors to play some of our other fabulous courses during their stay.

Golf Highland represents more than 30 clubs, offering golfers everything from classic links to heathland and parkland experiences.

The inaugural Golf Highland Photography Competition encourages golfers – members and visitors, even non-golfers – to capture images which will impress a panel of judges.

The winning entrants across four categories will win £100 and a four-ball voucher gifted by Royal Dornoch, Cabot Highlands and Nairn Golf Club.

Entry forms are available at www.golfhighland.com and the competition runs through to the closing date on September 30.

Changing times at Royal Dornoch

Members and visitors should keep an eye out for the club's recently launched "Oral Memories" series.

Our older members have a wealth of fascinating stories from their time at Royal Dornoch and we are eager to capture their memories for posterity in the countdown to the 150th anniversary celebrations in 2027.

On the first Monday of every month, one of the recorded interviews will be shared on our website and social media channels.

A big thank you to everyone who is taking part.

Historic Open returns

The Championship Course will play host to the Northern Open on June 4/5.



It will be the 10th time this historic tournament has come to Dornoch and we are delighted to support the PGA in Scotland.

They have highlighted the "Royal Dornoch factor" for a record response from professionals from GB&I playing for a £20,000 prize pot in the PGA Open Series.



ROYAL DORNOCH

*Thank you for reading and we look forward to providing
you more Dornoch Days in the near future.
In the meantime, stay safe and we hope to see you here soon!*

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www.royaldornoch.com