

Dornoch Days



ROYAL DORNOCH



A new era beckoning for Royal Dornoch

As I write these words for the latest issue of “Dornoch Days” I can see our fabulous new clubhouse edging towards completion on the other side of the first tee on the Championship Course.

While we are working on plans for an official opening next year, the staff are already preparing to relocate in early December.

The annual prize giving will herald the end of an era for the current clubhouse, which has served us well over many decades, and we are all looking forward to working in a building which has been designed to meet the highest contemporary standards in terms of energy efficiency and comfort for our members at home and abroad, and our many visitors from all over the world.

As older members are aware, the building has existed in various guises down the years and has been showing signs of its age.

The opening of the new clubhouse will ensure we have facilities to match the reputation of the Championship Course, which is regarded among the finest links on the planet.

These are exciting times for everyone connected with Royal Dornoch and the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the golf club beckons with our 150th anniversary looming in 2027, and the Curtis Cup coming our way the following year.

It has been a privilege to watch our new clubhouse taking shape and progressing month by month, on time and on budget.

While the clubhouse project, naturally, has enjoyed priority status, the Council of Management is already looking to the future.



Earlier this year, the club announced the appointment of US golf design team King Collins Dormer to create a masterplan to enhance the Struie Course and exploit opportunities created by securing 50 acres of land at Davochfin.

There is no hard and fast timescale involved, but the vision includes a new 18-hole course, new holes on the Struie, a Par 3 course and the long-coveted driving range.

We firmly believe that offering three top-class golf courses will secure the status of Royal Dornoch for generations to come and continue to support the economy of the town and the Highland region.

I’d like to take this opportunity to wish all our members and friends from around the world a Merry Christmas and a Healthy and Prosperous New Year.

Yours in Sport

NEIL HAMPTON, GENERAL MANAGER



US Podcasters hail the “magic” of Royal Dornoch

One of America’s most popular sporting podcasts has hailed Royal Dornoch among the finest links courses on the planet.

The US based team also highlighted the growing reputation of the Scottish Highlands as a golfing destination in its own right. The far-travelled “No Laying Up” presenters, who also incorporate YouTube golf travel features among their wide-ranging output, zeroed in on Royal Dornoch, Brora, Cabot Highlands and Nairn in a podcast.

Hosts Chris “Soly” Solomon and “TC” Todd Schuster were joined by their “Scottish golf guru” and Cruden Bay member Ru Macdonald for a fascinating 90-minute feature urging more American-based golfers to head for the Highlands.

In addition to recalling personal visits to Dornoch and memories of the Championship Course in the most glowing terms, the trio encouraged travellers to broaden their horizons and sample the many gems that the region has to offer.

“Royal Dornoch is in the top five golf courses in the world for me. There is just something special about it,” declared TC.

“It’s not that long but it’s everything you think of in terms of Major championship golf, the bunkering, every facet is there. So often they can lack charm or they are so big and brawny and penal they kick you in the face.

“But the views and the routing (on the Championship Course), it is just magical. It has one of the best sets of par 3s in the world. Dornoch is like no other course I have played. It has everything you have ever sought-after in a links golf course, all rolled into one. The 6th is one of my favourite Par 3s in all of golf. It’s that good. Royal Dornoch is my golfing Heaven.”



Soly urged listeners: “Go to the Highlands, go play golf here, go set out to see this golf course in your life because it is that good.”

Ru, who offered advice on travel and hotels – suggesting US golfers begin plotting their trips 12 and even 18 months in advance – admitted: “I’m in love with Dornoch the town. It is one of the few golf towns. There’s a magic to the place.

“There’s a huge amount of charm and sense of place there, which is somewhat lost in St Andrews just because of how vibrant and busy it is. I make a point of telling people to go to Royal Dornoch.”

The Scot also seized the opportunity to highlight the club’s new clubhouse and ambitious plans for creating a golfing hub by developing land by the Struie Course.

Pictured above: “Golf guru” Ru Macdonald tells US podcast listeners Dornoch is a magical place

Hidden treasures showcased in the new clubhouse

With 2027 marking the club's 150th anniversary, Royal Dornoch has a wonderful heritage story to tell. The new clubhouse is the perfect platform to showcase an array of artifacts which can be enjoyed by members and visitors.

Bringing its history and stories to life has been made possible by the indefatigable passion of club archivists Christine Callingham and Eileen Macrae, who picked up the baton from Tom Tew and Liam McLaughlan in late 2015.

The ladies took inspiration from numerous small museums and golf collections, such as at Nairn and Royal Blackheath.

They have dedicated countless hours to unearthing objects which had been gathering dust in the attic and cupboards of the current clubhouse.

Introducing museum standard software, the ladies have documented several hundred individual items to create reliable records.



Appeals to members to search their properties yielded significant finds: competition registers from the late 1880s; two photograph albums rescued from a builder's skip by former professional Willie Skinner during the 1970s clubhouse refurbishment; and numerous items of ephemera, including a peace pipe gifted to a team which was invited to golf in Idaho!

Rescued from a dark cupboard and now restored from the ravages of damp were 31 hefty volumes of "Golf Illustrated", which date back to the era of legendary club secretary John Sutherland.

"I'm delighted to say we still receive items of interest from members and individuals from much further afield who are keen to donate items to Royal Dornoch," noted Christine.

A variety of heritage golf clubs bearing the individual stamps of former professionals Danny McCulloch and T.D. Currie, who worked with the golf club's first ever professional, Donald Ross, will be displayed on the feature spine wall within the new clubhouse.

Christine and Eileen have worked closely with the design teams on the curation of the exhibits in the new clubhouse.

"The iconic Carnegie Shield will undoubtedly be the centrepiece of the new clubhouse. And it is sure to deliver an even bigger wow factor," noted Christine.

"The value of the club's history and heritage cannot be understated. The concept of 'heritage' has been well established within the club over the past ten years, to preserve, conserve, protect and promote Royal Dornoch's collections for generations to come."

General manager Neil Hampton has seen the exhibit spaces within the clubhouse come together in recent weeks.

"Christine and Eileen have done sterling work in bringing together all kind of items which reflect the rich history of Royal Dornoch," he said.

"They have worked tirelessly to unearth many of these artifacts from hiding places in the old clubhouse, and future generations will undoubtedly appreciate their determination to record precisely what we have in our collection. The ladies have worked hand in glove with the design team from Mather and Co and the end result is a stunning display which will capture the imagination of members and visiting golfers alike for many years to come."

*Pictured above: Club archivists Christine Callingham and Eileen Macrae
Pictured left: The new clubhouse with a photo above of Carnegie Shield Day dated 1902.*

Peace pipe stirs fond memories of an Idaho adventure



Royal Dornoch members are welcomed warmly at clubs across the world. Exchange trips to Pinehurst and other North American clubs feature on the annual fixture calendar.

But 20 years ago, a party of Highlanders embarked on a memorable adventure which saw them playing a Ryder Cup challenge match on the Coeur d’Alene Indian Reservation in Idaho.

Billy “Strathy” Mackay, now one of the rangers on the Championship Course, was one of the lucky lads who enjoyed a never-to-be-forgotten trip to the Midwest, where they were greeted by a colourful combination of pipers and hosts on horseback wearing traditional tribal regalia.

Among the trove of treasures in the Royal Dornoch archives is a peace pipe presented to head professional Andrew Skinner by Ernie Stensgar – “Snow on Mountain” – the president of the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians.

The invitation followed on from a visit to Dornoch by Bob Bostwick, communications and pr director for the smart hotel and casino near the Circling Raven Golf Course.

“Bob had come over in 2004 with the idea of playing five courses in Scotland,” recalled Billy, who at the time was running what is now the Dornoch Stores in Castle Street.

“He visited Dornoch first and fell in with the local worthies, the caddies and the like. He was blown away by the friendship and hospitality, and Bob has been back nearly every year since. Bob had this brainwave. Back in the early years of the 19th Century, Scotsmen were among the first to trade with the tribes and he decided to invite some of us over for a game of golf.

“We were a bit dubious when Bob got in touch to say he was looking for a group of Scotsmen to play a match on the reservation.

“We thought it was a wind-up when Bob said the casino would pick up the bill for the trip, air fares included. But the tickets duly arrived and we were off for a week.

“I’m not sure it went down too well with some of the powers-that-be at the club back then, so the club missed out on a huge marketing opportunity. That wouldn’t happen nowadays.

“On the day we arrived we had this incredible welcome from members of the Schitsu’umsh tribe on horseback, wearing their full regalia. With us wearing our kilts, it made for quite a spectacle.

“The radio and television over there went ballistic. There was huge media coverage, with the Circling Raven logo and the St Andrews flag very prominent.

“My son Michael got special leave from the RAF at the time and this old lad who had served in the US Air Force travelled hundreds of miles just to meet him. As I remember, Michael was regarded as a warrior and received a medicine stick made from the rib of a buffalo. We were treated like visiting Royalty. We were amazed by the whole thing. It was unbelievable.

“Back in the early years of the 19th Century, Scotsmen were among the first to trade with the tribes and he decided to invite some of us over for a game of golf.”

BILLY “STRATHY” MACKAY

“Bob and our hosts were incredibly welcoming and generous. The hotel was fabulous and some of the boys certainly enjoyed the late-night attractions of the casino and the bar after a day’s golf.

“We had a very good team for the Ryder Cup style competition so maybe that explains why we got hammered!”

The Royal Dornoch team was: Billy MacKay, head pro Andrew Skinner, current vice-captain Colin Mackay, Kevin Mathieson, Geordie Gunn, Ryan Keith, Jimmy Gunn (who finished in the top 30 of the 2015 US Open), Martin Macleod, Adam Mackay, serial Carnegie Shield winner Chippie Mailley, Gary Gruber, Michael Mackay and the late Alex Campbell.

Read some personal words from the organiser Bob Bostwick on the next page.



Pictured above: Head professional Andrew Skinner (left) and Billy Mackay with the peace pipe presented during the 2005 Idaho trip; The kilted Royal Dornoch team was given a warm welcome to the Circling Raven by tribal council member Noah Cagey; The Dornoch team members were honoured by horsemen in full tribal regalia.

Falling under Dornoch's spell

Americans tend to enjoy, or enjoying witnessing, life in the fast lane. Alas, there is no fast lane in Dornoch, County Sutherland, Scotland. Rather, there is a welcome mat. If you seek it, proceed slowly; you will find it. Come to think of it, you may just land on it without trying.



I did that, and it was the pathway to so many things, including golf, but well beyond the game and the treasured golf course for which this small town is known worldwide. The pathway, you see, extends from the hearts and minds of locals.

Back in August, 2004, on my first trip to the UK, I was finally making my way to Dornoch after hearing of it for years from the Carl family of San Diego, California, they having been members before Charlie and Betty passed. Their son Jim is a friend of almost 60 years.

The plan was to stay one night and play the course. One night, one round and off? Nope.

I stayed for five days, played the Championship Course a couple times, got an invite that led to a couple rounds at Skibo, sipped a few drams on and off the golf courses, and had my introduction to Tennents, my favorite beer these 21 years.

I spent some of the best times in the upstairs lounge. I wound up there in the company of locals, one after another buying a round for the table. I had been with these lads a few times already; I insisted on taking my turn.

"No, Bob, we'll be buyin' one for you," said head professional Andrew Skinner, whom I had just met. There was more of that warmth to come.

Several of our celebrated "Dornoch Dozen" were at that table, including Andrew and the late Alex Campbell.

My final night was spent back in the middle of these locals, glasses raised to one another, good cheer all around. And there was Alex, staring at me from across the table, staring as if he knew something that I didn't.

"Alex, what is it?" I asked, my brow furrowing a bit with the question. "Bob, you've friends here now. You have to come back."

There are a couple reasons why the Dornoch event at Circling Raven happened. I am a publicist, and shared publicity with Royal Dornoch would be pure gold for a resort course in its first year of operation.

I pitched the idea of a Ryder Cup style competition to the late David Matheson, our CEO at the Coeur d'Alene Casino Resort and Circling Raven Golf Club. He liked it, so the wheels were turning. Alex was my main contact and organiser at the Dornoch end. We blended perfectly.

Over a 10-month period, everything came together. The resort underwrote everything for the trip, apart from the bar tabs!

There were a couple reasons why it all happened. The first would be business, the second would be personal.

It was payback, folks, quid pro quo for five wonderful days among the denizens of this magnificent little town... the town with no fast lane.

Bob Bostwick

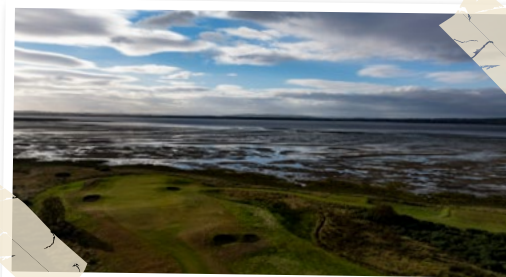
Pictured above: Bob Bostwick with current Royal Dornoch vice-captain Colin Mackay during one of his Dornoch visits

News Board



Factor in a game on the Struie Course

If you're planning a trip to Royal Dornoch in 2026 remember to include a game on the Struie Course. While we have plans for further enhancements and create additional golfing facilities, it is a top 50 rated Scottish links course which has hosted prestigious championships and a very enjoyable test of golf.



A new par 3 hole was brought into play this season and we have been delighted with the feedback from members and guests alike.

The scenic 9th hole plays towards the Dornoch Firth and we seized the opportunity to create a series of new tees to enhance the highly regarded 10th hole hugging the coastline.

Architect Tom Mackenzie of Mackenzie and Ebert and our greenkeeping team under the watchful eye of course manager Eoin Riddell thoroughly deserve the plaudits coming their way.

A treasure trove of memories

Anyone interested in the rich history of Royal Dornoch will enjoy our "Monday Memories" series of interviews. Various long-standing members have been sharing fascinating recollections of how life has changed down the decades.

It's hard to credit that a club preparing to unveil a spectacular new clubhouse and eager to develop a third course and additional facilities was once dependent on sales of work and bingo fundraisers to keep the wolf from the door.

The interviews can be watched on our website and social media channels from the first Monday of each month.

Clocking-up the miles

Our talented young golfers are making the most of a new minibus secured with the backing of the Junior Foundation, which was launched earlier in the year. Generous support from our members at home and abroad enabled the club to buy the vehicle, which is enabling teams to travel together for competitions held south of the Highlands.

We now have around 150 young boys and girls taking part in coaching classes supervised by Gary Dingwall, Ally McNaughton and Erin Herd. Every school pupil in Dornoch is being given the opportunity to sample golf and see if they'd like to take up the sport which plays such a huge role in the life of the town.



With tax breaks for donations made by US based members and Gift Aid applicable for UK members, the Junior Foundation, and our Heritage Foundation, have enjoyed a very positive start since being launched.

If you would like to contribute to our Foundations please email rdgc@royaldornoch.com

Speeding up communication lines

Members and visitors enjoying the new clubhouse facilities next year will be delighted to learn they can take advantage of ultrafast broadband.

The connectivity offered by the hook-up with Highland Broadband will provide speed, reliability and security for golfers keen to keep in touch with the world beyond Dornoch, before and after their time on the links.

The fast growing network is backed by the Scottish Government, the Scottish National Investment Bank, Building Digital UK and the UK Government's Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme.



ROYAL DORNOCH

Royal Dornoch Golf

*Merry Christmas and best wishes for a Happy,
Healthy and Prosperous New Year.
We look forward to giving you a warm Highland welcome in 2026.*