

*Destination Focus*

# *Carnoustie Country*

*David J Whyte takes us on a tour of his 'home turf' ahead of this year's  
British Open at Carnoustie Championship on Scotland's East Coast*

**WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID J. WHYTE**



An ancient linksland was formed where the River Tay meets the North Sea and there, three 18-hole courses provide the backdrop to our story here. There could be more but the British Army commandeered the land in the late 1800s for gunnery practice. It is also a 'Site of Special Scientific Interest' with many rare birds passing by - although I don't fancy their chances with all those rifles going off.

According to records, golf at Carnoustie goes back at least to the early 16th century. In 1842, a formal 10-hole course was established by Allan Robertson and the then yet young original Tom Morris. It was the railway that brought golfers from further afield eager to tackle these redoubtable links. In 1867, the course was again remastered by Morris, by then referred to as 'Old Tom' and son, young Tommy went on to win a major event on Carnoustie's links that same year.

In my youth, Carnoustie was no big deal. My father and uncles would occasionally make a pilgrimage from nearby Dundee to play the 'big course' as they referred

really need to get home tonight!"

Philp was uber-passionate and did for Carnoustie's Championship course what Walter Woods just a few years before had done to the courses in St Andrews. These two men, greenkeepers of the old school and close colleagues, (Philp had worked with Woods in St Andrews), had come along when Scotland's two premier municipal facilities badly needed to come into the 20th century, let alone the 21st. Together, they did just that.

In my youth, I played my first golf in Carnoustie, mainly on the Buddon Course. It costed £5 a round at the time. Philp did much for the Burnside and the Buddon courses also, applying the same standards of greenkeeping as he did on the 'Big Course' and bringing them to an impeccable standard of condition and routing.

The Burnside was longer and considered the better of the two but just before he retired, Philp oversaw the addition of two new holes and re-routing on The Buddon, making it now perhaps the better test.

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to its Championship layout. In those days, it wasn't in good shape, a municipal facility run by Angus County Council who, at the time, clearly didn't appreciate what they had. It was still on the Open rota but by the mid 1970s, it fell off again due to a lack of accommodation in the area and rather indifferent course conditions.

Then in the 1990s, two men came to Carnoustie's rescue; Jock Calder who encouraged nearly everyone he met to get The Open back and a new greens superintendent, John Philp. I was fortunate enough to know both of them, especially John who was always happy to take me out on the courses as he plied his prodigious greenkeeping skills and basically rescued Carnoustie from oblivion.

"John, can we hurry up, please?" I had to ask him one evening when I was researching the copy for the 1999 Open Championship programme. We'd been touring the course for hours discussing every hole, and it seemed, each blade of grass. "It's my anniversary," I told him. "I

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Even on a reasonable day from the visitor tees, Carnoustie's Championship is a proper 'man's' course. But if you can pick your days and conditions, you can steer it round without that much bother.

You see, for us average handicappers, there is actually room out there. I've enjoyed some of my best rounds here, scraping home in the low 80s and stepping off the 18th with a deeply satisfied smile.

Come this July, everyone will be watching the Open to see just what 'Car-nasty' will throw at the Tour elite. But there really is a lot more to Carnoustie Country than just one great golf course.

Dundee's my home base and if you're planning a



**TOP THREE PICTURES - CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT:** Dundee and the Tay Bridge from the Law (Hill) looking to the Kingdom of Fife; Carnoustie Buddon Course; Carnoustie Championship 14th, known also as the Spectacles due to these two gaping bunkers.

**BOTTOM PICTURES-LEFT TO RIGHT:** The Par 3 5th on Carnoustie's Burnside Course is surrounded by the Barry Burn on three sides. Already holder of The Masters and The U.S. Open Championship; Ben Hogan came to Panmure Golf Club to practice ahead of the 1953 British Open Championship at next-door Carnoustie. He won it!



visit to Carnoustie or indeed St Andrews, I recommend making this your base also. This former industrial city is currently enjoying a major renaissance with a £1 billion investment mainly into its amazing waterfront.

If you approach Dundee from the south, St Andrews and the Kingdom of Fife, it really does have a fairytale frontage, especially at night. And now they have augmented it with a star attraction, the V&A Museum of Design, the first dedicated design museum in Scotland, hopefully to open in time for the Open.

The city itself has a charm and small-town ambience that makes it easy to love. It is friendlier than Aberdeen and Edinburgh and a cinch to stroll around as everything is close to its centre.

With a host of great hotels, restaurants, pleasant pubs and evening entertainment, it does present an ideal base for golfers. St Andrews is only 10 miles south, Carnoustie the same in the opposite direction and Gleneagles just a bit further west.

Besides those, there is a host of superb, lesser-known courses in between. The pockets of sandy links that exist all the way up Scotland's East Coast have lent themselves well to the creation of a number of great seaside tracks. I play much of my winter golf at Monifieth and both its Medal and Ashludie courses are pure pleasure, with the Ashludie more as a practice round as it is shorter.

Panmure Golf Club next door is more challenging. Ben Hogan prepared himself at Panmure prior to his 1953 Open win at Carnoustie and the 6th was a hole he relished - an interesting tight dogleg playing up to an elevated green, well-protected by Scotland's infamous gorse bushes.

Further north still is Montrose

## HOW TO GET THERE

### BY ROAD

Dundee & Carnoustie are located on Scotland's East Coast and well linked to motorway services from Aberdeen, Edinburgh or Glasgow.

### BY PLANE

Dundee Airport takes daily flights from London. You can now land your private jet at nearby Leuchars, only five miles from St Andrews and about 10 from Carnoustie. Most of the players will use this facility. Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Glasgow International Airports are all around an hour's drive from Dundee.

### BY RAIL

The Caledonian Sleeper Service might be worth considering with services direct from London's Euston Station arriving directly in Dundee or indeed Carnoustie, only 5 minutes walk from the 1st tee with the distinct advantage of gaining a full day on the links.



Golf Links, the 5th oldest golf course in the world. At one point, it offered 25 continuous holes of golf, the largest number of any course until Old Tom set the 18-hole standard at St Andrews's Old. I love to play this gnarly old links, an authentic example of how the game might have been all those centuries ago.

Turning inland, it is here you should venture for some heathland golf experiences. Scottish heathland golf is almost as unique as its links with firm turf that is a joy to play off. Edzell Golf Club is a good example fairly close to Carnoustie but carry on towards Blairgowrie and you will find both Blairgowrie Golf Club's Rosemount and Lansdown courses probably the finest examples of Scottish heathland golf in the country.

Gleneagles is just over a half hour's drive from Dundee offering the inimitable Kings and Queens courses. I'm mentioning only the big courses here yet nearly every village along the way has a good golf facility and you would be charmed with them all. Kirriemuir, Forfar, Alyth, Arbroath, Brechin, Letham Grange; they all offer superb golf courses and I'd highly recommend a round on any of them.

While Dundee is the region's cultural centre, there are many great things to be explored in Carnoustie Country. Firstly, Angus is considered the birthplace of Scotland. The fearsomely painted Pictish tribes were responsible for blocking the Romans, and then English advances at the battle of Dun Nechtain near Forfar in AD 685.

Later Kenneth MacAlpin, king of Dalriada, moved eastwards into Pictland and established a new entity that most historians agree was the beginning of the Scottish nation. April 6, 1320 marked the Declaration of Arbroath which was signed by 38 Scottish Lords and sent to the Pope, urging him to set aside English claims on Scotland and proclaim the nation as its own country.

Glamis Castle, childhood home of The Queen Mother and setting for Shakespeare's Macbeth is probably the region's most popular tourist attraction and it is certainly one of the most beautiful castles in the country. Nearby, Kirriemuir has the contrasting notoriety of being the birthplace of JM Barrie who wrote 'Peter Pan', and the somewhat less sedentary Bon Scott of AC/DC fame.

Again from the Pictish era, there are many Standing Stones scattered throughout the landscape, with some still seen in potato fields or by the sides of the roads. Don't get too close however, as you could end up travelling back in time (for all you Outlander fans out there). Near the Standing Stones of Aberlemno is the Davidson cottage from which the Davidson family emigrated to the USA and later met a certain William S. Harley - the rest is 'hog' history. Another young emigre from these parts was David Buick who invented the overhead cam engine and established the Buick Motor Company.

The market town of Forfar is famous for Bridies, a meat pie with or without onions and one of the main suppliers is Saddlers in E. High Street. Sandy Saddler was a famous Walker Cupper representing Britain 14 times and Scotland 22 times between 1959 and 1967. He represented Great Britain three times in the Walker Cup and was the non-

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playing captain of the team in 1977. In 1967, he was the only Great Britain player to win two singles in the Walker Cup. He's pretty good at making pies too.

The magnificent Angus Glens are nearly always in sight throughout the county and where as a child, my great uncle was the local shepherd. I remember fondly travelling by bus and spending long weekends in the cottage in the glen that still stands today. ☺



For more information and videos on Scotland, The Home of Golf, along with many other great destinations, visit David's website at [www.linksland.com](http://www.linksland.com).

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: Letham Grange Golf Club - 8th; Blairgowrie Rosemount - 18th; Forfar Golf Club - 14th; Montrose members in period costume. Pictish Battle Re-enactment near Brechin; Arbroath reenactment of the Declaration of Independence; Glamis Castle, Angus.

## WHERE TO STAY & EAT

Dundee presents the most options with Malmaison Hotel in the town centre being the best bet. You may also consider The Apex City Quay Hotel & Spa overlooking the harbour and if you like staying in a castle, Kinnettles is close to Carnoustie or there is Gordon's Restaurant with Rooms near Arbroath, renowned for its cuisine. Carnoustie itself offers The Golf Hotel overlooking the 1st and 18th.

[www.malmaison.com](http://www.malmaison.com)  
[www.apexhotels.co.uk](http://www.apexhotels.co.uk)  
[www.kinnettlescastle.com](http://www.kinnettlescastle.com)  
[www.gordonsrestaurant.co.uk](http://www.gordonsrestaurant.co.uk)  
[www.bespokehotels.com/carnoustiegolfhotel](http://www.bespokehotels.com/carnoustiegolfhotel)

**CARNOUSTIE COUNTRY'S BEST RESTAURANTS**

Maxibelle just off Carnoustie's Main Street is a French Tapas bar and comes highly recommended. Sol y Sombra Tapas Bar in Broughty Ferry is pure Spanish Tapas - book well in advance as they're nearly always full. Gordon's Restaurant in Inverkeilor looks unassuming but the standard of food is superb. Blazing log fires and their famous Smokie Pancakes make the But & Ben in Auchmithie worth seeking out.

[www.maxibelle.co.uk](http://www.maxibelle.co.uk)  
[www.solysombra.co.uk](http://www.solysombra.co.uk)  
[www.gordonsrestaurant.co.uk](http://www.gordonsrestaurant.co.uk)  
[www.thebutben.com](http://www.thebutben.com)