

The Old Course

I had that most wonderful experience again this year, playing a round of golf on the Old Course at St. Andrews, attempting to decipher the bumps and hollows of these exquisite links. For any golfer, this is the opportunity of a lifetime, and I enjoyed this classic for the sixth time. What a pleasure!

We had 23 golfers in our group, with six tee times. The first four times were between 7:00 and 8:00 AM, but I was in the last group, a threesome, at 10:00. The day featured brilliant sunshine, little or no wind, and 65 degrees Fahrenheit. Perfect! What more could you want? A golfer treasures first of all family and good health, followed by fine companions, with great weather thrown in, and lastly, a superb golf course. We had it all this May 31st, plus we had RAF Leuchars Euro-fighters practicing takeoffs and landings just across the bay, an added bonus.

If you have ever been to St. Andrews or watched the Open Championship from there, you know that the course starts and ends at the edge of the historic old town, and there are always many spectators and residents watching play from the nearby streets. So it was as we hit our initial shots. I must admit that the tee shot was not as intimidating as it had been in 1993, my first visit, but nerves still strike, and one must find a way to ignore all the negative emotions.

I was partnered with my long time friend and our 76 year old trip organizer Don Morrison, and his nephew, Peter Wallace. This week was Peter's first experience with links golf, and he truly loved the different style of play, with St. Andrews being the crowning achievement.

Don loves links golf, as it allows him to use his putter from great distances and avoid chipping, his Achilles heel. He played well all day, and shot a sparkling 84 off his 19 handicap, probably the best game I had seen him play in over five years. He made two great sand shots from very deep greenside bunkers, converting the 10 – 12 foot putts each time. I played decently, until I caught one of Don's bunkers, and after three hopeless flails, could not extricate my ball. I merely put it in my pocket and walked to the next tee. I did have a couple of memorable shots. I hit the 175 yard 11th green, for the first time, using a 4-hybrid. It a stout par-3 perched high on a sand dune, fronted by the Hill and Strath bunkers and with St. Andrews Bay lurking over the back. Later, I hit the 17th fairway, where your tee shot has to carry the old sheds to the right of the hole and avoid the hotel and out-of-bounds right. Almost made par there, but finished in style with a par on the 18th. I had taken many photos of friends on the Swilken Burn Bridge over the previous five visits, but did not have one of myself. I had dressed similar to Jack Nicklaus in his farewell round there a few years earlier and used the same pose, so I am now attempting to photo-shop the two photos together. The rest of our group were behind the 18th green with a Canadian flag draped over the fence, and we had my caddy take a group photo. One of the best golf days ever!

Walt Lemon November 7, 2013 (582 words)

