

The ups and downs of golf course ratings

The Royal Dornoch golf course, never out of the top 20 since first entering *Golf World's* biennial rating of courses in Britain and Ireland, has returned to its 1988 ranking of No 11 in the newly released 2008 review.

But there is disappointment for Brora Golf Club, which has seen its acclaimed links course drop out of the of the top 100. With so many new golf courses being opened over the past 20 years, it is a testament to the enduring natural quality of the Dornoch links that the course has maintained its reputation.

After Tom Watson's visit in 1980 to tune up for his defence of the Open Championship (he still refers to Dornoch as his favourite links course) the venue became a "must play" on every golfer's list, especially the Americans. And in his new book, *Being A Scot*, Sean Connery writes: "During the filming of *Goldfinger* I learnt the essential challenge of links golf in Royal Dornoch. ... Ever since then I have been drawn to links golf and its enduring challenges."

In Scotland it ranks as No 6, behind only Turnberry, St Andrews, Muirfield, Carnoustie and Loch Lomond. Behind Dornoch in Scotland's top 10 are Kingsbarns, Royal Troon, Nairn and Gleneagles King's, the latter rated at number 30 in the overall 100.

In the book *1001 Golf Holes You Must Play Before You Die* the Dornoch course, where golf was recorded as being played as early as 1616 and the club founded in 1877, has five holes listed: the 4th, 5th 6th and 9th on the outward half and, coming home, the bunkerless 14th. In Scotland only Carnoustie and Royal Troon can match this number in course evaluation.

Even Turnberry's Ailsa course, that has retained its No 1 position in the ratings, has only four holes amongst the 1001.

Ailsa retained its *Golf World* first position ahead of Royal County Down, which moved up to second from fifth place, and Royal Birkdale which improved one place to third. St Andrews has dropped from third to fourth and Muirfield, which lost its No 1 status in 2006, has now slipped back to fifth place. Carnoustie remains at No 6. In the top ten, Loch Lomond has taken the biggest jump, up four places to No 9. Other noted Scottish movers were: Dornoch, up three to 11; Kingsbarns, up four to 12; Royal Troon, down two to 23; Nairn, up six places to its second highest ranking ever at 25. But the King's Course at Gleneagles was rated down three places to No 30.

The Brora course, which broke into the top 100 for the first time two years ago at No 99, has dropped back to No 113 and been replaced by the Goodwood Golf Course in Chichester, West Sussex, which dropped back from No 94. Returning to the top hundred at No 100, 14 years after its first and only listing, is the Jack Nicklaus course of St Mellion. Most likely due to the changes over the past two years, that have still to bed in, the Carnegie Links has plummeted to number 182.

The panel of nine judges were sports broadcasters Ronan Rafferty, Bruce Critchley and Ewan Murray, course architects Donald Steel and David McClay Kidd, Ryder Cup captain Nick Faldo, former Walker Cup captain Peter McEvoy, former European tour player Jamie Spence, and golf photographer David Cannon. The full list has been published in the November issue of *Golf World* magazine.



Enduring quality – Royal Dornoch's world-famous links course.