

Bandon Dunes

adds to its authentic links arsenal
with Old Macdonald

BANDON'S *New Gem*

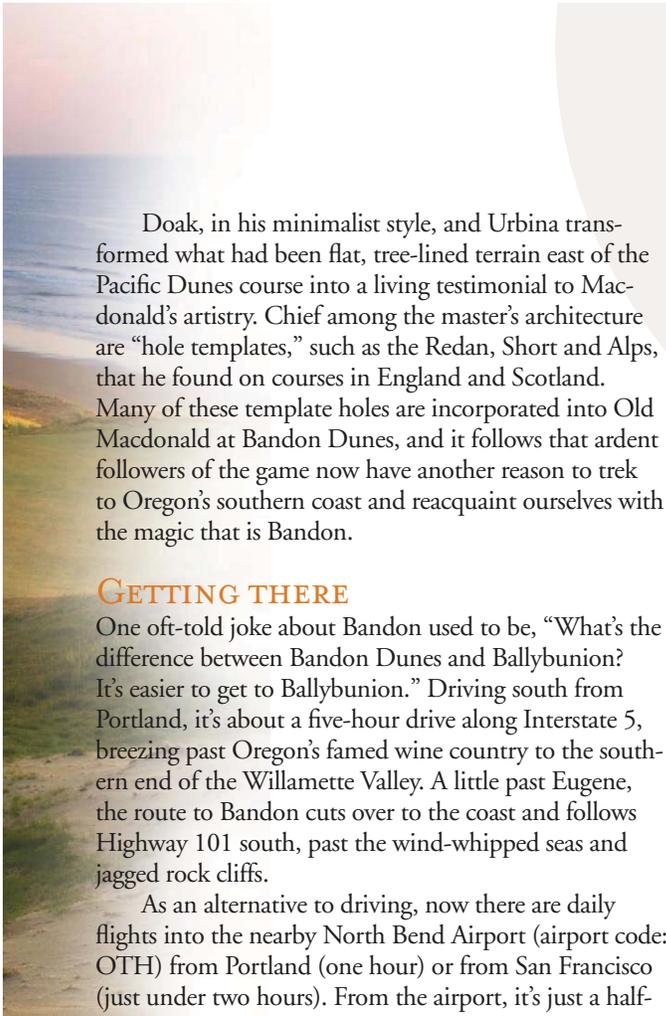
BY DESTON NOKES
PHOTOS BY WOOD SABOLD

Since opening Bandon Dunes in 1999, followed by Pacific Trails in 2001 and Bandon Trails in 2005, the resort often has been listed at or near the top of many golf aficionados' lists of best places to play. But to consider the setting, the views, the ease of getting from one course to the next, the restaurants, and for — most of all — the quality of shots required on courses that look like nothing else in the United States, Bandon Dunes might be the best golf-centric resort in the country. Some say the world.

With that perspective, three years ago it would have been prudent to ask owner Mike Keiser why he needed a fourth course. And in light of what has happened with the economy during the last 24 months, he might have said, "You're right, skip it." But he didn't, and the resort now has another compelling golf experience called Old Macdonald, which opened last summer. Tom Doak, who gained world renown for Bandon's second course, Pacific Dunes, teamed with Jim Urbina to bring out the charms and tricks of course designer Charles Blair Macdonald, who

many consider the father of American golf.

When in college at St. Andrews in Scotland, Macdonald tutored under Old Tom Morris, played and won against Young Tom Morris and, upon his return to the U.S., designed the first 18-hole course in the States, Chicago Golf Club. Among Macdonald's other accomplishments were a U.S. Amateur title and the layout for the venerable National Golf Links on Long Island. And if those weren't enough, he also had a major role in the formation of the United States Golf Association.



Doak, in his minimalist style, and Urbina transformed what had been flat, tree-lined terrain east of the Pacific Dunes course into a living testimonial to Macdonald's artistry. Chief among the master's architecture are "hole templates," such as the Redan, Short and Alps, that he found on courses in England and Scotland. Many of these template holes are incorporated into Old Macdonald at Bandon Dunes, and it follows that ardent followers of the game now have another reason to trek to Oregon's southern coast and reacquaint ourselves with the magic that is Bandon.

GETTING THERE

One oft-told joke about Bandon used to be, "What's the difference between Bandon Dunes and Ballybunion? It's easier to get to Ballybunion." Driving south from Portland, it's about a five-hour drive along Interstate 5, breezing past Oregon's famed wine country to the southern end of the Willamette Valley. A little past Eugene, the route to Bandon cuts over to the coast and follows Highway 101 south, past the wind-whipped seas and jagged rock cliffs.

As an alternative to driving, now there are daily flights into the nearby North Bend Airport (airport code: OTH) from Portland (one hour) or from San Francisco (just under two hours). From the airport, it's just a half-hour drive to Bandon Dunes Resort.

Those who remember the town of Bandon back in the resort's earliest days might have the image of a disconnected community looking to get by on fishing and tourism. Well, the resort has brought in so many visitors in recent years that tourism has fueled an economic recovery in the area that is to be envied by any government official; it doesn't take much of a tour to see new homes, more business and a feeling great optimism here. And though the recent economic times have dulled the shine on this story a bit, it's much better in Bandon these days than in many other towns along Oregon's coast.

The nicest sights for me upon arrival were the clear skies that greeted us and a light wind off the Pacific Ocean. Bandon Dunes is open 365 days a year, and the weather on the coast can be unpredictable, to say the least. It wouldn't have been a surprise to experience a little wet or a series of strong gusts, but on this day it was pleasingly calm. Having never played at Bandon Dunes, my first thought was that any place so exalted had to be incredibly difficult to play — so I purchased a couple of boxes of Titleists, just in case my slice came back to torment me. As a native Oregonian, I knew all about the invasive beach grass and gorse that grows along the dunes on the coast; and if you launch a ball into the spiny

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gorse, it's gone for good.

With only enough time to play two courses, I elected to bring my 19-year-old son (and better golfer), Jacob, to play the resort's first course, Bandon Dunes, and its newest, Old Mac.

WALKING THE COURSE

In the spirit of old-school golf, Bandon's four courses are for walking only. There are no motorized golf carts, although there are pull carts for rent, and there is a large cadre of caddies to carry bags. No cart paths or homes line the fairways, either. Here, it's all about the game.

One way to ensure a fun round is to hire a caddie — not only will they hoist the bag, they'll also give you tips on how to best approach a hole, given your style of play. Factor in the wind, blind shots, blowout bunkers and blistering-fast greens, and getting a caddie is a no-brainer for a player of any level. Plus, most caddies have great stories to tell and, fair or foul, having an audience is fun. The rule of thumb for hiring a caddie is \$80-\$100 per bag, but the amount is discretionary.

Stepping up to play at the original Bandon Dunes course, one is immediately faced with five different sets of tees — including a set for using traditional hickory sticks.

"It's one of the reasons why Bandon Dunes is such a great course," explained caddie Tim Gleave. "Using the tournament tees will stretch the course to 6,732 yards." We opted for the green tees instead.

Designed by David McLay Kidd, the par-72 course has a rating of 74.6 and a slope rating of 145 on fescue grass. Fescue was chosen to provide a seamless look, blending in the greens with the fairways. The time of day, pin placement, and wind speed and direction will have a big impact on how the holes play from day to day. That's why there is so much more strategy on a course like this. True to links ethos, the best way to get the ball close to the hole is to aim away from the flag and let the humps and hollows serve as guides.

One of the course's most popular holes is No. 4, where the expanse of the Pacific Ocean first comes into view. This par-4 stretches 443 yards, with its pin protected by bunkers. But if you get too aggressive, the ball will simply roll off the other side of the green into



the gorse. This was one hole where a low shot up the right side was the right call.

It was on these types of holes that Gleave's counsel kept me from losing balls. "Every player has a comfort zone," he said. "Here, it's much more bump and run — staying on the ground and out of the wind as much as possible. It's all about getting close and hitting all the pars."

After playing along the ocean, we turned back inland for holes 7 through 11 before emerging back on the oceanfront for the spectacular No. 12, where again club selection was critical to keep from zipping off and over the green. The short No. 14 is only 302 yards, but a battery of bunkers have to be vaulted. If you like playing around bunkers, No. 15 has one affectionately called the "devil's (backside)" — the deepest cavern on the course. Naturally, I ended up in it and could only laugh as I earned a triple bogey on the hole.

My favorite was No. 16, a glorious, oceanfront 363-yard par-4 divided by a deep ravine. Bold folks can try to hit the green on the right, but again, the fast fescue might not hold the landing. Lining up, with the wind at our backs, it was still a thrill, even though we played it



moderately safe, swatting our drives to the left side for a better approach shot.

At the end of the day, we found a terrific, simple dinner at the lodge's Gallery restaurant, where local favorites such as pan-seared Pacific Northwest steelhead and fresh scallops are served. Plus, it has a great variety of steaks and an extensive wine list. We opted for the less-expensive pub menu and found that the calamari and their burgers easily filled the bill. The resort has three full-service restaurants; a pub or three; a new clubhouse; and ample, reasonably priced lodging. In addition to Bandon Lodge itself, there is The Grove (a cluster of 16 luxurious cottages designed for foursomes) and The Inn, with 39 guest rooms. It was nice to see that they had rates fulfilling Keiser's intent to keep the resort accessible to the public, and not just the private jet set.

OLD MACDONALD

"Old Mac is fun for everybody," said Todd Kloster, special events manager at Bandon Dunes. "It's difficult to lose a ball out there, because the fairways are generous and the greens are so large. People see that they don't have to hit the ball down a 25-foot-wide, tree-lined fairway, and it just loosens players up."

"Generous" doesn't begin to describe how wide the fairways are. But the classic links design incorporated by Doak and Urbina provides plenty of deep bunkers and uses the landscape to provide exhilarating obstacles in getting from tee to pin.

For example, on my son's favorite hole, the No. 3 Sahara, we were confronted with a blind shot over a 40-foot-high dune to reach the green on the other side. Our caddie, again Gleave, pointed out that the best way over was just right of the snare tree and down to a sloping fairway. Absolutely terrific.

But we found that, as with Bandon Dunes, the greens are extremely fast — and did I mention that they're enormous? Where other courses mandate a chip shot, here you putt.

The par-5 No. 6, the Long hole, presented a fun little test called the "Hell Bunkers," a network of gouges in the earth crossing the fairway about 100 yards from the center of the green. These bunkers are so deep, they're held in place with railroad ties set on their ends! The entire area looks like the teeth of a gargantuan monster.

The No. 7 Ocean hole is another wonder, where we hit up another hill, into the wind, and found a spectacular panoramic view of the coast. We managed to keep our shots from tumbling off the green down to the sea. The No. 8 Biarritz is the opposite, where one hits down into a valley of speedy green.

The 13th, Leven, is a very short, fun par-4 with a wild green. Being closest to the hole doesn't necessar-

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ily give you the best chance to hole a putt. The No. 16 Alps offers another shot over the left side of a dune to the green on the other side. Or, folks can get a peek at the flag by hitting the ball to the right to get around the dune from that angle. What's novel about this gorgeous hole is that when you're done putting, you clang a big bell to let those waiting know that they can tee off.

Kloster was right, I didn't lose a lot of balls — just four: two to the gorse, one to a pond and who knows about the other. Naturally I have to credit my eagle-eyed caddie for finding most.

Old Macdonald lives as a collection of golf design icons; there is even a Road Hole a la St Andrews. Pacific Dunes gets the most play of the four courses at Bandon, for it has the most stunning views and is rated higher by golf publications. Bandon Trails, a design by Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore, weaves through dunes, forest and meadow, offering the highest elevation on the resort's property. Though Bandon Dunes remains in the minds of many as the most playable for golfers of all skill levels, Old Mac already is the favorite of many. And that's the best thing about Bandon: there's so much from which to choose and enjoy.

If you go:

Green fees range, according to season and other factors, \$220-\$275 a round from May to October, \$75-\$265 other months. Caddie fees are a minimum of \$55 for single bag, \$110 double.

Bandon Lodge provides a luxurious place to relax after a day on the links, with single rooms and four-bedroom suites, many with beautiful views of the famous Bandon Dunes Golf Course. Lodging prices range from \$100 to \$1,800, depending on room and season. Cottages designed for a quartet of golfers are also available. Each cottage unit includes a gathering room with fireplace, outdoor patio area, and four separate bedrooms each with a king bed and private bath.

Off the resort, there is the nearby town of Bandon-By-The-Sea, with its renovated Old Town, galleries and antique shops. Take a camera and go along Beach Loop Drive to enjoy the incredible rock formations off the beaches. There are also opportunities for viewing wildlife, bird watching, wind surfing, sea kayaking, horseback riding, fishing and exploring Shore Acres State Park.

BANDON DUNES RESORT

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