

James Braid Golfing Society

Captain's Diary, Founding Meeting, 22-25 June 2021, Scottish Highlands

Background

As with many things in life, this was a different year and a different experience. The 2020 Highland Tour was cancelled, and it was only due to enormous hard work (on Alison's part) and goodwill from golf clubs and the Royal Marine Hotel that we were able to go ahead with this year's event. Not everything was as normal. No match against Fortrose & Rosemarkie, as the travelling arrangements were too great an obstacle, nor were the hospitality conditions exactly as everyone would wish. But all those who made the effort to come seemed very willing to make it work, so we confirmed that the show would go on!

For us, there is the long drive from Surrey to Sutherland, but we both like to get behind the wheel, and the countryside is stunning (once into Scotland!). So, arrival on the Sunday evening, to stay at the Links Apartments, coincided with warm sunshine and the pleasure of the view over Brora links and the beautiful coastline. Various JBGS members started to gather in Brora; it has become quite common for people to come to the coastal highlands for a whole week. The only problem this time was that meeting up socially was restricted to small groups. We would normally have hosted drinks in our apartment, but not possible this year, I'm afraid.

Tuesday at Golspie

The 'warm-up' day attracted 19 players and we held it over the course down the road at Golspie. It doesn't always get the same recognition as Brora, but in recent years its condition has improved, and it is a good test, made up of links, heathland and parkland holes in pretty equal measure. It was a pleasure to play it, as everyone agreed.

Wednesday, Match vs Brora GC

Replacing the F & R fixture, at short notice we (that is, Tony Gill) arranged an 8-a-side match against Brora GC. For some unknown reason, we've never had a fixture with our host club, or at least not in my memory, going back 15 years or more. It was a convivial encounter, though not a close one as regards to the scoring! No change from JBGS usual practice there! But, over a burger and chips afterwards, the Brora Captain Steve Darlington and I resolved to take this forward and see how we might play such a match more often. Members have also suggested that it is good to play more often than we previously did at Brora, as it is such a joy to play.

It was also good to hear that Brora GC seems to be weathering the pandemic in a positive way. Following an appeal last year, some 100+ new members have joined and on top of that, the club has managed to purchase the land on which the course is located, thus helping to secure the future for this much-loved golfing centre.

Of those who didn't play in this match, several went down to Fortrose & Rosemarkie for a social game, kindly arranged with the help of their Secretary Mike Macdonald.

Thursday, Match vs Royal Dornoch GC

This was when the sunny weather turned into a cool and wet start to the day. Thankfully, it fizzled out eventually, so we had time to dry out. Despite our rather lower turn out at our Highland Meeting, we still managed a 20-a-side match. Our three ladies decided to play with a friend who is a RDGC lady member and opt out of what then became a men's match this year. We could not have had a warmer welcome from the Club Captain, Willie MacKay, who was very generous in praising the ethos and work of the JBGS, as well as commenting that it is a popular fixture at Dornoch. The match was well-contested and although your Captain managed to snatch defeat when victory seemed almost assured, the club won by 6.5 pts to 3.5pts. One small loss was the custom of passing round a bunnet, to collect funds, which are traditionally handed over to the club, to use for the benefit of Junior Golf. (However, we have since sent £200 to RNDC for that same purpose; this has been very well-received.) It was good to meet up again with RDGC members. Their new 7th hole is superb and the planned extension to the 8th should also add to the quality of a very fine layout. But the impact of the Covid-19 restrictions has been such that their new clubhouse project has been delayed by several years. We shall keep in close touch with the club and hope that it will continue to flourish.

Friday at Brora GC

The weather had one more nasty surprise for us, as it started to rain the moment the first 3-ball got to the 1st tee for our usual Stableford. A cool north-easterly made for a relentlessly tough front nine, but eventually it stopped and the later starters maybe had the better of the timings. Some 29 members ventured out, so it was a good turnout. Despite the conditions, several players played to, or very near, their handicap and the enjoyment afterwards in the clubhouse bar was very evident.

The main prizes were won by:

Peter Thomson Memorial Trophy (main stableford) - **Malcolm Campbell**

Captain's Pink Balls (ladies' prize) - **Barbara Grounds**

Curate's Egg (play that is 'good in parts') - **Chris Taylor** (for 3 x 7s, 2 other blobs but a 2 at the 18th)

Groovy Uwe Award (the triumph of style over substance) - **Roy Pickavance** (for several unsuccessful attempts to chip up to the 18th green from down below, but in full bunnet, plus kilt at dinner)

Marco Polo Award (a combination of golf and travelling to the venue) - **Bill Stephens** (for always travelling with his kayak and commonly approaching Brora from even further north).

This year, the dinner arrangements were a bit restricted, such as no drinks reception and sitting in tables of 4 or 6, as required by law at the moment. But everyone wished to make it a success, and it all worked out for the best. New members – Tim Hamilton and his son Ed, Iain Farquhar, Alistair Picken, Chris Taylor, David Thomas – were welcomed to their first Highland Tour; they received a shot glass and bag tag.

We were entertained again by our poet, John Rankin, the food and service were excellent, port was poured from Captain Campbell's Decanter and a good time was had by all. Our Fines Master, Barrie Thomas, once again teased us with his offer of a fines amnesty, allowing those with a bad conscience to pay £10 up front, to stave off a £20 hit if later found guilty of a transgression. He collected just over £200, which the Captain handed over to Brora GC next day, 'for the benefit of Junior Golf at Brora GC'.

Finally, the Captain announced that he would be stepping down from the role and handing over. He expressed his thanks to all members who had made the past 4 years most enjoyable for him and reminded them that his appointment had always been intended as interim, as he could hardly be regarded as a 'youth policy'! **His successor as Captain is to be Barrie Thomas**, who accepted the nomination with, he said, great pride and a determination to do his best for the society. (Alison Stanbrook has indicated that she will stay on as Admin Sec, at least for a while – to Barrie's great relief!). The Captain then gave a special thanks to his dear wife **Alison** for her tireless efforts in very difficult circumstances and presented her with a bottle of Clynelish, which he knew to be much more welcome than flowers, to her good self!

So, another great week in the Highlands, with many memories of good golf and laughter.

The next events are **two Society days on Clydeside**, near Glasgow, in **late August**, plus the rearranged **matches against Walton Heath and North Hants** in **late October**. Details are to be found on the website, where you will also find the **Community Board**, which is a way for members to post their own experiences, comments, photos or views, for the enjoyment of all members. Why not have a go?

Peter Stanbrook

Outgoing Captain, JBGS