

Carnoustie Golf Links Carnoustie, Scotland

Architect: Allan Robertson, Old Tom Morris, James Braid (1840)

	Par	Rating	Slope	Yardage
White	72	75	144	6948
Yellow	70	74	142	6595
Red	72	72	132	6144

Overview:

Carnoustie has had it's share of critics over the last century, most of them said it was too boring, too penal, or had too many weak holes to hold a place in the Open Championship Rota. But in the late 1990s, under the direction of their green superintendent John Philip, an astonishing renovation/restoration of the course was done and the result is a very difficult links golf experience. Of the resultant course changes James Finegan says "A sow's ear had metamorphosed into a silk purse. This eighteen is the ultimate golfing challenge."

This is not a course you can play gripping it and ripping it, you have to play almost every shot with proper forethought and flawless execution. There are no breather holes out here-play with absolute resolve on every hole or your scorecard will be punished. Sound of report of shooting range gunfire from the nearby military installation early in the round should remind you that you are in a full contact skirmish out there.

Built on about as flat a piece of land as any links layout you will ever see the excitement had to be made in the strategic layout of fairway landing areas, green complexes, and the extensive use of burns and OB to cordon off reckless shot execution. As you experience in Florida they incorporated heavy dosages of burns (water) and Barbasol bunkering to make this place very punitive-especially when the wind is present. The closely shaven surrounds to the burns and bunkers give the hazards an especially strong magnetic attraction to a ball hit without sufficient resolve. There are many times when you think you hit the perfect approach and you are scratching your head in disbelief at where it ends up.

To add more intrigue the greens are sprawling, oddly shaped with tiers and elevation transitions that make getting the ball close to the day's pin a big challenge. Without any topography to block the breeze the putting is very wind affected which makes downwind, downhill putting particularly treacherous.

The scorecard reveals much of the difficulty of this course in the yardage alone. Close to 7000 yards from the white tees with a par of 72 with only three par fives on the shortish side there are a bevy of brutish par 4s that add up to that yardage total. From the yellow tee at 6600 yards two of those five pars on the inward nine become punitive par 4s as well. The last four holes are the most difficult finish you have ever encountered with a manly par three close over 235 yards and the three par four holes all approaching 450 with serious diversionary hazards everywhere you look. The result is a slope rating of 144 and 142 respectively off the white and yellow markers which tells you all you need to know about the challenge at hand.

I will leave the details of this trek to the hole-by-hole description below but suffice it to say that this is the most excruciating test of recreational golf you will ever play. It needs to be experienced once simply

because of its place in Open Championship lore where the likes of Ben Hogan, Gary Player, Tom Watson, and Padraig Harrington have claimed the Claret Jug. Tell the women and the kids to enjoy the day walking the quaint fishing town of Carnoustie and make sure they visit Simpson's Golf Shop across the street, they will have a much more delightful day than you have had.

The place is infamously known as the graveyard of Jean van de Velde's Open Championship dreams. His nightmare finish on the 18th is commemorated by an inscription of his name on the top of the burn wall where he arrogantly tried to play one of the silliest recovery shots in major championship history. I don't see you rolling up your pants legs and playing anything standing in the water on the last hole but I am pretty sure that once you are sitting in Calder's Bar with an Irn-Bru in your hand there will be many wounds to salve from your walk around these links.

Hole-By-Hole Analysis: (White/Yellow)

#1 Par 4 401/389 Yards Cup

The opening drive is played to a wide fairway with slope that tends to take the ball to the right hand side toward the fairway bunker. Left center off the tee gives you the best look at the green setting. The approach is a blind shot created by the fact that the green is set on a 7 to 1 diagonal and obscured by a dune front right that also masks a bunker. It may be best to aim at the front left edge on all approaches and let it feed onto the two tiered green.

#2 Par 4 435/407 Gulley

A long straight drive is needed to avoid Braid's Bunker in the center of the fairway and the bunkers flanking both sides of the dogleg right. Your second shot is up an alley to a long serpentine green measuring almost 60 yards from front to back pinched between the dunes. Since most of the trouble is lurking up front play the middle pin distance on all approach shots.

#3 Par 4 351/331 Jockie's Burn

A short par four of similar shape to the last, you want to hit a 200-yard shot from the slightly elevated tee to left center off the bunker and mounds on the left. This gives you the best look back to the right where the green is set. Your second is hoisted over the fairway bunkers in front of you and Jockie's Burn that comes up from the left and cuts directly in front of the green. As with all burns in Scotland there is a magnetic effect on timid approach shots, so hit it strong. Besides the fronting hazard the green is gnawed by bunkers on either side in the center of the green. This is a deep green that widens to the back so you are better long than short in the approach.

#4 Par 4 375/364 Hillocks

Again a slight dogear right so play your drive at the left edge of the fairway bunker on the right. A ditch resides just over the left bunker so no big hooks off this tee. This is a double green well protected by bunkers on either side-long is better than short. You are playing the yellow flag for the front nine.

#5 Par 4 387/369 Brae

This hole doglegs to the right with a transition ditch at 280 yards to confine the long hitter's aggression. Drive to center on the left gorse bushes through the fairway for a look at the very long two tiered green that bends sharply back to the left. The pins on the top tier can add a couple of clubs to your approach choice. Do not be fooled, the two eyeball bunkers short right of the green are not at the green's edge.

#6 Par 5 520/500 Hogan's Alley

Named after the immortal Ben Hogan who won on his only visit to the Open Championship in 1953, this hole is where Carnoustie starts to turn up the heat. This generally plays into the breeze which only adds insult to potential injury. The out of bounds cordons the left side of the driving area and the bunkers on the right make bailing from the OB not an option. If you can place a drive between the two you have a look across the edge of the OB left to a very narrow lay up area at around 100, but beware that Jackie's Burn revisits the right side of this hole. The approach is to an undulating green that pinches the further back you get. You should always be content with a five on this hole as it can be the ruin of many a scorecard.

#7 Par 4 394/373 Plantation

There is a pay off in a long drive on this one. Again the out of bounds threatens on the left hand side and the fairway bunkers are cleverly placed to catch the drive pushed only slightly to the right. Best drive is aimed at the right green side bunker. Green sits about 20 yards from the bunker on the left and behind a lone bunker biting into the green on the right. Don't get overzealous on the approach because running through the green a difficult up and down awaits.

#8 Par 3 167/157 Short

It was a long wait but you finally get a short hole to play. This is normally played into a cross wind so the out of bounds left and bunkers encircling the small green are in play. The stacked Siamese Twin bunkers front right of the stepped green are a no-no so I think the best shot is into the back third of the green. Simply stated you need an assertive swing here to mitigate the wind effect to find a very tight target.

#9 Par 4 413/406 Railway

This hole has a real Florida Condo feel with a cluster of housing framing the back of the green. A long drive is paramount on this hole and is aimed at the chimney on the house behind the green. You must avoid out of bounds left, a ditch on the right and numerous fairway bunkers. Finding the fairway comes as a welcome relief but then a long difficult approach to a well-protected lamb chopped shaped green awaits.

#10 Par 4 446/417 South America

You have to hit a long and straight drive at the bunker on the left with particular care to avoid nest of bunkers on the right hand side. Once you find the fairway, a decision is then required as to whether the Barry Burn which runs some 40 yards in front of the green can be carried with a 2nd shot or not. Unless confident of your ability to fly the ball all the way onto the putting surface, it is best to lay up and accept a pitch and a putt attempt for par. Two eye ball pot bunkers front the left and a tall tree on the right between the green and the burn that continues up the right make this a tight approach shot. Make sure to stop in the halfway house behind this green for an ice cream bar or something else to sooth your tension since there is much more to come.

#11 Par 4 362/351 John Philip

You are faced with the decision on this tee whether to engage the pinching fairway bunkers with the big dog to get a shorter shot at this green or lay up for a sure shot off of short grass. I favor a fairway club into the alcove between the bunkers leaving a long shot into an accessible tiered green protected on both sides by bunkers and slopes. Lots of slope from back to front so it should hold a long club approach.

#12 Par 5/4 479/407 Southward Ho

Do not be confused, this is actually a par 4 from the yellow tee on the scorecard. The hole challenges you with an intimidating drive, gorse hedges must be carried and there are ditches on both the right and left hand sides. Two massive fairway bunkers on the right hand side eat into the heart of the landing area and will catch any shot that cuts slightly to the right. Aim your tee ball at the green side bunker on the left which will leave you a full fairway metal toward a green pinched by two bunkers on each side a good 30 yards short of the green. The approach may best be a lay up short of the bunkers leaving a pitch in to a shallow and wide putting surface. The spine in the green 1/3 of the way from the right side of the green makes it two distinctly different putting surfaces. A smart five is a good score on this hole.

#13 Par 3 161/141 Whins

This is a difficult short hole, especially if the wind is behind because it is tough to control your ball from running through this 40-yard long hourglass shaped green. It is pinched by bunkers on both sides and a carry bunker in front. All the bunkers have high lips so any sand shot will be a real test. The back segment pins are super difficult so the narrow center of the green off the tee is the shot if you can pull it off.

#14 Par 5/4 476/459 Spectacles

This is the hole that Gary Player made an unlikely eagle on his way to winning the Open Championship in 1968. Not likely you will repeat that feat since this is the second par 5 on this side that is a par 4 from the yellow tee. Drive over the gorse hedge and the bunker on the left to right center of the landing area. Your second is a lay up in front of the harrowing spectacle bunkers well short of the green. Short club across the Spectacles into the front of the double green shared with 4th hole. Once again a five is an acceptable result on this hole.

#15 Par 4 459/437 Lucky Slap

Pull up your pants and hitch your belt a notch tighter, it is a very difficult stretch from here to the hotel. The fearsome finish of this course will attack your scorecard with a vengeance so get into defense mode. It begins with maybe the hardest hole of the day, which makes you wonder about the fact that it is the #7 handicap hole on the course. You need to hit a strong draw off the fairway bunkers and dunes on the right to set up another long club for the approach into this green. Prudence may require you laying up on the second short of the nasty bunkers about 25 yards short right of the green. If you go for this dell green setting it is a fade curve through the access opening on the left.

#16 Par 3 245/235 Barry Burn

You are going to see about as much of Barry as you can stand over these finishing holes. Three bogies coming in would gain shots on the field. At over 235 yards often played into the wind, this is a par three in name only. Probably a driver or three wood, you have to finesse it up the pass between three bunkers on the right that will eat up many balls and two more on the left. If you can drive it in proximity of the green and pitch and putt you may have an outside chance to salvage a par. The green is 45 yards long and very narrow with big shoulders that will feed balls off the surface even on short pitches. This green complex is a Pelz Short Game Practice Facility in waiting.

#17 Par 4 433/421 Island

The burn creates an island landing area between 150 to 230 yards from the tee. Your tee ball line is at the first right green side bunker, meaning you are aiming at the right half of the island. Water will swallow any hooked tee ball. Once on land what remains is a long approach at the narrow left opening to a green protected by three serious bunkers starting 25 yards from the green and the Barry Burn crossing and flanking the right side as well. It will once again likely take an adept pitch and a putt to make a par.

#18 Par 4 444/421 Home

Apparently the guy who did the handicap designations on this course was on serious medications because this is the hardest #11 handicap finishing hole in the world. A pure hopscotch affair this hole makes little sense to me. The Barry Burn is in play on both sides of the segmented driving area. Drive at the clock on the hotel to reach the center of the pasture between burn crossings. Next will likely be another lay up past the bunker on the right at 150 and short of the final crossing of the burn in front of the green. The pitch in is pinched by a horseshoe bunker on the right and another pit on the left. Just do not let on that you speak French or you can really experience the evil decree.