



moedweck



Membership

Features

Shop

Events

Feature TLD No 3

The Last Caddie

Siven's what ye need

Words by Jim Hartsell
Photography by Graeme McCubbin

"I can't hit a seven-iron a hundred fifty. I can't hit it even one forty, against this wind." Yet the caddie's fist, in a fingerless wool glove, did not withdraw the offered club. "Siven's what ye need." - from Farrell's Caddie by John Updike.

There have been a few exceptional caddies in the history of golf. Tip Anderson, Arnold Palmer's Open Championship caddie, Alfie Fyles, who caddied for Tom Watson in all 5 of his Open wins and Jim "Bones" Mackay, the former caddie of Phil Mickelson, are three that come to mind immediately. What often sets these great caddies apart is their devout loyalty to their employer. Anderson - holding court in The Dunvegan until his last days in St. Andrews - spoke of his love and respect for Palmer to anybody that would listen. Who can forget Fyles' exclamation of "We've got him now, sir!" after Watson's approach on the final hole against the mighty Nicklaus at Turnberry? It would take a hard person indeed to not be moved by Mackay's reaction on the 72nd hole at Muirfield in 2013. Realising that his mercurial boss had just won the greatest championship in golf, Bones could no longer control his emotions. The best caddies genuinely want their golfer to play well - it is not an act.

A handful of places remain - such as The Old Course and Prestwick - where full-time caddies are always available. At some of the lesser-known courses in Scotland, like Machrihanish, the club professional will find a local junior golfer or member to caddie for a visitor, with enough advance notice. In my experience, these are often the best caddies you will find. They are proud of their home course and eager to show it off to visitors. The type of serious caddying still performed at a few places like Prestwick has been a slowly dying art. Thankfully it continues at some level in Scotland, where golf will always be a walking game.

Chris McBride of Ayr has caddied on the Ayrshire coast since the age of 13. Caddying is the only job he has ever held. He started out looping at Turnberry in the 1970's, working two days a week for ten shillings a round - about the equivalent of fifty pence today. Moving on to Royal Troon, he caddied during the week - eventually advancing to work the coveted weekend rounds. He learned the art of caddying through experience and observation. In 1987, he became a full-time caddie at Prestwick Golf Club, where he remains to this day, working 36 holes a day at the historic links whenever possible. "It took me a wee while to get in at Prestwick, but once you're in there, you're fine," he says today. There is nobody alive that understands the subtleties and mysteries of Prestwick better than Chris McBride.

Chris McBride of Ayr has caddied on the Ayrshire coast since the age of 13. Caddying is the only job he has ever held. He started out looping at Turnberry in the 1970's, working two days a week for ten shillings a round - about the equivalent of fifty pence today.





Prestwick Golf Club is one of the special places in golf. At this ancient links, caddies are still viewed as an integral part of the game. Chris may be the last true embodiment of a Scottish tradition as old as the game itself. I have been fortunate to have him caddie “to” me at Prestwick on several occasions. After just the third hole of our initial round together in the 1990’s - we had met only 30 minutes earlier - he would simply offer a club and expect me to hit it. If I questioned his club selection, he would calmly explain his reasoning. He offered advice as he thought it was warranted – ‘You want to favour the right-hand side here.’ His counsel was given economically, but at always just the right moment. He read the tricky Prestwick greens with unfathomable accuracy. As we progressed into that long-ago round, I remember thinking to myself, “This man is a genius.”

Chris has seen everything in his 50 years of caddying. Even a partial list of golfers he has “been out with” around the links of Ayrshire is impressive - Gary Player, Ben Crenshaw, US and British Amateur champion Harvie Ward, Byron Nelson, Doug Sanders, Peter Jacobsen and Payne Stewart are just a few. He once told Stewart, then the reigning US Open champion, that he could not reach the difficult par four 10th from 226 yards with a 3 wood. With his caddie insisting that the only play was driver off the deck, Stewart declined and promptly struck his best 3 wood. “He was a fast player,” Chris recalls, which is possibly the highest praise from an old Scottish caddie. The shot came up short of the green and rolled back another 30 yards. Walking up to play his third, the late American pro said with a laugh, “Chris, that is the best driver and 3 wood I’ve hit in 20 years. By God, you were right.” Chris McBride is rarely wrong at Prestwick.

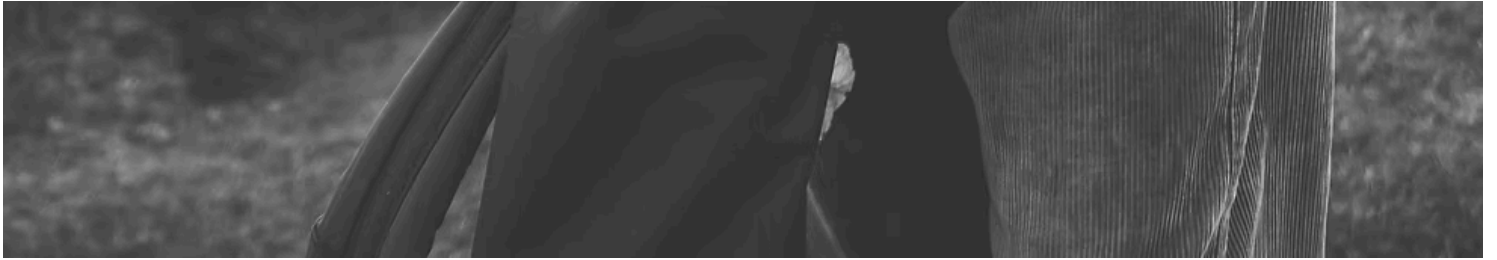
After caddying briefly for Dundee native and former Walker Cup player Steve Martin for a handful of events in the mid-1980’s, Chris turned down an offer to work full time on the European Tour. “I just couldn’t see living that way, sleeping in tents and train stations, and there was hardly any money in it back then,” he says with a laugh. He had heard enough horror stories from older caddies to realise that the nomadic tour lifestyle was not for him. In the ensuing years, he has worked in The Open and Senior Open Championships at Royal Troon, Turnberry and Royal St. George’s, as well as countless Open qualifiers and British Amateurs whenever they are held in Ayrshire.

In 1997, he caddied for the American professional Ken Duke in local qualifying and then The Open proper at Royal Troon. “He was playing lovely golf. He came second by a stroke in the qualifying at Glasgow Gailes. We were just very unlucky at Troon,” says Chris. The afternoon draw for the opening round in the 1997 Open is legendary for the biblical weather that struck the Ayrshire coast. “It was a nightmare. An absolute nightmare. We were even par on the front nine and 9 over on the back coming in. There wasn’t a single green we could reach in regulation,” he remembers.

Almost 25 years later, Chris has an amazing recall of that fateful round at Royal Troon – “It was driver -1 iron all the way home. We hit driver into 17, the par 3, and came up 20 yards short.” The 18th hole was essentially unplayable, with a 240 yard carry to reach the fairway. While waiting on the 18th tee, he saw a Troon member he knew and jokingly asked him how they were supposed to play the hole. “Hit it in the grandstand on the right and take a drop” was the response. “So I said to Ken, well you need to hit it in the grandstand and he says, well I can’t do that, and hits it straight down the middle and comes up short of the fairway. He had to hack out with a sand wedge.” When I mention that (a then 57 year-old) Jack Nicklaus shot even par on the back nine in the worst of the conditions that afternoon, he says seriously, “Aye, I know. When I found out later that day what Jack had scored, I could not believe it. That is the greatest nine holes ever played in the history of golf.”

The first time I parted ways with Chris was at the bar in the wonderful Prestwick Old Course Hotel, which is sadly now closed. He had invited me to join him and some other caddies for their daily post round convocation. It was a lively discussion - centred around links golf and the US President Bill Clinton - of the type often found in Scottish pubs. As the evening wound down, Chris asked where we were off to play next. I said, somewhat proudly, “We are driving to Royal Dornoch in the morning.” He looked at me as if I had just said I was flying to the moon - “Dornoch?!? The last time I went up there, the polar bears were picking up firewood.” Over 20 years later, I can still hear the raucous laughter of a table full of Prestwick caddies.









In August of 2000, I played four rounds at Prestwick, all with Chris on the bag. Back in those days, scoring was somewhat more important to me. When we had our reunion - once again in the Old Course Hotel bar - I told him that I just wanted to break 80 once at Prestwick. He took this as a deadly serious directive. With an irony that is almost comical, over the course of the next two days we shot three consecutive 80's. In our last round, we came to the short par four 18th needing a birdie for a 79. After a good drive, I hit a nice running chip with an 8 iron - eliciting possibly the second highest praise a Scottish caddie can give: "Shot." Chris read the short birdie putt perfectly - just inside left - but overcome by the moment, I made a quick stroke and caught the edge. As I shook his hand he said, "I'm sorry, Jim." By the look in his eyes, he truly meant it.

With the generosity that Scots often display, Chris invited my cousin Chief and I to meet him later at the Ayr train station for a night on the town. What followed was a night of food and drink that ranks as one of the favourite evenings of my entire life. After a lovely dinner - and several pints of Tennent's - we settled in at Chris's favourite pub for the requisite golf discussion. Knowing that I was something of a golf obsessive, he began to ask me random trivia questions on the history of the game, which I answered accurately time after time - "Who was Nicklaus paired with in the last round at St. Andrews in '78? Who finished third in the '77 Open at Turnberry?" He finally said, "Aye, I've got one you can't answer, Jim. Name all fourteen courses where the Open Championship has been held."

When I recited the 14th venue - Prince's at Sandwich, where Gene Sarazen won - he said with amazement, "Well, I will be damned. You are the only person that has ever answered that one, except for one of the R&A guys I caddied for." Chris has a near encyclopedic knowledge of golf history and I had managed to impress him. It was a moment that somehow more than made up for the earlier missed birdie putt for 79. We retired to his house for a final dram of whisky. Saying our goodbyes in the Ayr street in the wee hours of the morning - with our host refusing to take any money from us for the evening - he put us in a taxi back to the Prestwick Old Course Hotel. That was the last time I saw him.

When you are young, it is easy to assume that things will always work out the way you expect them to. I thought I would be back in Prestwick again soon, surely within a year or two at the most. Chris and I stayed in touch for a few years. After the world economy collapsed in 2008, I was unable to visit Scotland again for quite a long time. We lost touch as the years went on. In 2019, I finally made it back to my favorite country. On our last day of golf, we were scheduled to play two rounds at the ethereal Shiskine Golf Club on the island of Arran. I had booked a hotel in Ayr for the night and hoped to catch the Ardrossan ferry in time to stop by Prestwick and see if I could find Chris. Failing that, I would try the bar of the Old Course Hotel. It was admittedly a long shot. In one of those things that only seem to happen on a golf course in Scotland, I found a connection back to my old caddie. During our afternoon round at Shiskine, the course was empty except for a lone foursome that had gone out a few minutes ahead of us. When we caught them on the 4th hole, they graciously stopped on the 5th tee to allow us to play through. Seeing that I was taking pictures of everything in sight, one of the gentlemen offered to take a photo of my son and I, with the stunning 4th green as a backdrop. He introduced himself as Derek Nichol from Ayr.

On a whim I said, "I know this is a ridiculous question, but do you happen to know Chris McBride from Ayr? He's a caddie at Prestwick. He probably won't remember me now, but we had some great times together. I'd love to get back in touch with him again." Derek replied matter-of-factly, "Aye, he's one of my best mates. I'll tell him you're looking for him." Following the day on Arran, we arrived at Prestwick just as the gate was being locked for the night - and then found that the Old Course Hotel and its bar were long gone. A few weeks later, having almost forgotten that chance encounter at Shiskine, I got a message from Derek on Facebook with Chris's mobile number - "Of course he remembers you. He said to call him anytime."

These days, with the global pandemic causing serious disruption to the caddying profession, Chris has turned his brilliant mind to writing a book he has titled simply: "18 Ayrshire Holes." He plans to feature his favorite holes from some of the lesser-known courses in

the area such as Ayr Belleisle, Prestwick St. Nicholas, Glasgow Gailes and Barassie. Intertwined with each hole profile will be 18 different stories from his long years of caddying on the Ayrshire coast. When I said it would be a best-seller, he laughed, “Aye, you aren’t the first to tell me that.”

For a man who could have done anything with his life, there is a simple elegance to a career dedicated to caddying at one of the world’s great golf courses. He obviously loves and respects the links of Prestwick. “It is the finest match play course I have ever seen in my life. I’ve been to every great course in Scotland, England and Ireland and there is only one Prestwick. You cannot explain the course to people. They have to experience it,” he says with clear admiration in his voice. Above all, I believe he simply enjoys the interaction that occurs between a caddy and player during a round of golf. There is a sense of fascination, even after all these years, of what might

Made possible by our members with support from:



KJUS



EDEN.MILL
ST ANDREWS

SUPPORT

[Shipping](#)

[Returns](#)

[About](#)

[Membership T&Cs](#)

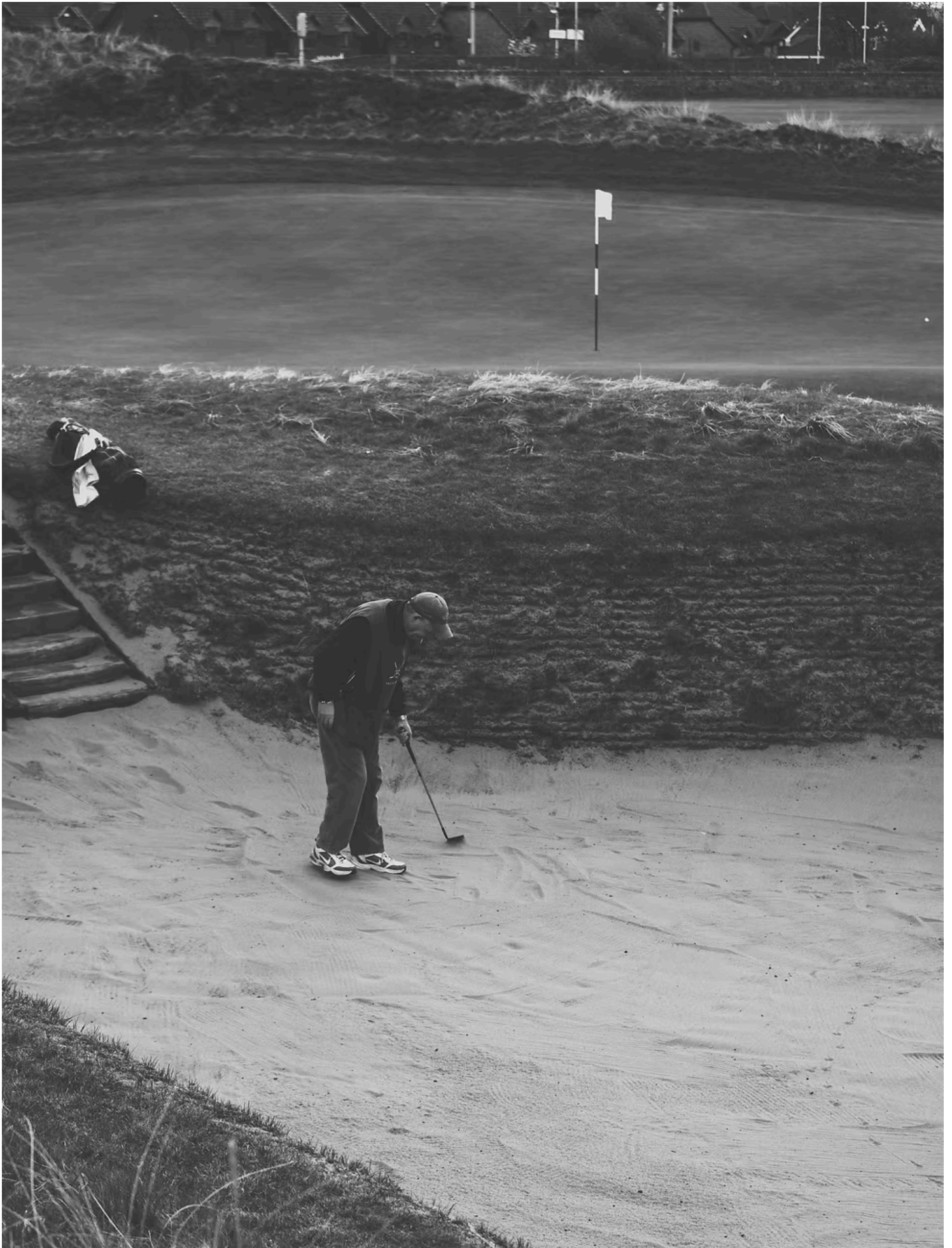
SOCIALS



CONTACT

info@thelinksdiary.com

© 2026 by The Links Diary





My favourite Chris McBride story is one that I have told countless times over the years, but it never gets old. On my last round with Chris at Prestwick, it was a tough, windy afternoon. I had somehow birdied the 9th to get to even par for the round and we silently made the short walk to the 10th tee. The 470 yard uphill par 4 - the same hole that got the best of three-time major winner Payne Stewart - was playing dead straight into a 25 mph wind. Chris was not saying much, which meant he was pleased with how we were playing. I felt that I owed him a good round - and perhaps even that elusive 79.

Chris silently handed me the driver. I had the honor and was enjoying the moment, as anybody would. As I lined up the tee shot, I stopped and asked my caddie, "Chris, can I reach this green in two today?" He replied, as grave as a judge, "Aye. Aye, Jim. You can indeed. Not a problem at all - as long as you hit three good shots."

If you are fortunate enough to visit Prestwick Golf Club, take a caddie. If you want an experience that you will remember for the rest of your life, ask the caddie master if Chris McBride happens to be available for 36 holes. It is not often that you can spend the day on one of the world's greatest links with a golf genius.

[Prev Story](#)

[Next Story](#)