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Swing

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Seaside MAJESTY

BARNBOUGLE'S DOUBLE DELIGHTS
ARE A TREAT FOR THE SENSES

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REVITALISE S'PORE GOLF

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WATCH FEATURED SUBJECT TO STOCK AVAILABILITY



BY
TAN JU KUANG

SEASIDE MAJESTY

Tasmania that far-off state surrounded by water in Australia isn't known for many things. Granted it has somewhat arresting geographical features, and a calm, serene ambience and disposition not unlike that found in the countryside in the British Isles. But then again, so do many parts of Down Under. Oh, yes, it is also home to the Tasmanian Devil, that nasty, carnivorous marsupial made famous by Warner Brothers cartoon. Long considered the backwater to its motherland, "Tassie" (the familiar nickname given to the state) can now hold its head up high as far as golf is concerned. It can thank the two layouts at Barnbougle for that.

Since opening in 2004, Barnbougle Dunes has claimed the No.3 spot in the country, and currently ranks as 33rd in the Golf Digest World Top 100 Courses ranking. Interestingly, its God-given topography was originally purchased as part of farmland. But owner Richard Sattler saw something in this stretch by the coast, and envisioned something grander.

"Given the dune land was not arable for farming, the idea quickly developed into a plan to use this unused links land to recreate something that might be reminiscent of the great links of Scotland and Ireland," Sattler explained.

"Experts from the golf industry indicated that the land was indeed spectacular and that with the right architects there was the opportunity to build something special. The opportunity to create something that could be recognised not just on a national level but also be known internationally does not come along very often, and it was one I didn't want to pass up."

Luckily for golfers all over the world, Sattler trusted his instincts. He roped in noted golf architect Tom Doak, and Australian designer Mike Clayton to realise his vision – to "create a top golf course that was almost a wilderness retreat while offering a fun, natural experience".

The emphasis on "wilderness retreat" cannot be ignored. The closest town of any commercial significance to Barnbougle Dunes, together with its sister course Barnbougle Lost Farm next door, is Launceston, about 80km away. But golfers can be heartened to hear that there is accommo-

modation at Barnbougle, so a stay and play weekend of pristine golf (there is little else around the area) can be a refreshing proposition.

The first thing that hits you when you arrive at Barnbougle (about a 75-minute drive from Launceston through scenic country roads) is that the property is expansive. And why not, Sattler purchased 15,000 acres here for farming, and the openness provides a surreal sense particularly if you come from an urban environment.

Much of the land currently functions as a working farm, and only small strips have been used for both the courses. But while cattle and sheep graze and potato is grown in the surrounding areas, the holes on both Barnbougle Dunes and Lost Farm are putting Tassie on the lips of travelling golfers around the world.

Doak's penchant for creating masterpieces on naturally occurring land is strengthened with his work on Barnbougle Dunes. There is great variety in the 18 magnificent holes that the American designer has put together here, all taking full advantage of a land that was just perfect for a golf course.

Within the dunes of this northern coast in Tasmania, Barnbougle Dunes provides different facets at different times. The sense of intimacy is reflected in the par-3, seventh hole. At just 112m from the back tees, it is a perfect example that length isn't everything. The raised green is not completely visible from the tee box, and the nasty bunkers to the front left, and right of the hole are score busters

if you ever get in them.

From the cozy disposition of the seventh, the course takes you up elevated ground to the three finishing holes that combine beauty with beastliness (to your scorecard, at least). All three holes give you a great view of the land around the course, accentuating the property's natural suitability for a links layout.

The par-3/par-4/par-4 finish of the 16th/17th/18th plays along the coastline all the way back to the clubhouse. Depending on the wind direction – and the elements, expectedly, play a big role in links golf – you could cruise home with the wind on your back, or suffer the consequences when finishing your round into the teeth of what could be very blustery conditions.

Doak's Dunes meanders in and out of sand dunes with the suavity of a ballerina performing Giselle. Lost Farm, on the other hand, offers a different, albeit more drastic turn of events.

Designed by Coore & Crenshaw, the course opened a decade later than Barnbougle Dunes, and not only had to live up to its elder's reputation, but also provide a counterpoint to its bra-

vado. This year, it ranked No. 40 in the Golf Digest World Top 100 rankings, which proved that Sattler's decision to use the design team that gave us Sand Hills Golf Club in Nebraska and Shiqin Bay in Hainan, was infallible.

Playing Lost Farm after Dunes, you get the sense that both courses were cut from the same cloth, despite them being designed by different architects. They share the same piece of land being situated right next to each other, as well as the same weather features that come with their exposed location facing the Bass Straits that separates Tasmania from continental Australia. Both courses demand a combination of strategy, and shot-making ability, and an understanding of what the ball does when it hits the ground on an undulating links fairway.

Comparatively speaking, the Lost Farm layout feels more open. Elevation changes are present, and the holes aren't as protected by high dunes as those found on the Barnbougle Dunes course. All this points to a greater effect from the winds when they kick up from the sea. (On the day of my visit, winds were running at 47km/h and sand blowing in from



An aerial view of Barnbougle Lost Farm Hole 4.

the beach hit my face like bullets.) Bear in mind that accuracy off the tee is important if you don't want to spend half the day looking for your balls in the rough. The par-5 10th comes to mind here as your tee shot is required to pierce through a narrow passage between dunes and rough to find the narrow fairway. The par-4 11th, at 405m from the back, is equally daunting with its gargantuan fairway bunker staring you in the face asking if you have what it takes to hit it past.

From there the course takes you to higher ground, and from the tee box on the 14th, you have a marvelous view of the hole as well as the furrowed blankets of emerald that stretch out to yonder. Of course, with such a vantage point comes exposure to the wind. Just hope it's a mild enough day for you to enjoy the occasion.

Lost Farm has 20 holes, with par-

3 alternatives found on the 13th and 18th. If you're not pressed for time or by the group behind, play the extra holes as they are both pretty and testing at the same time. The short, 119m one at the finishing hole is just what you need as a tie-breaker, what with the large bunker to the left of the green providing additional drama to the conclusion of your match.

If you're not from Tasmania, let alone Australia, you'll need to play both courses to get the full Barnbougle experience on your visit. Lodging here is limited so you would probably need to make your bookings well ahead of time, especially during the busy holiday seasons. Alternatively, Launceston has several good hotels, if you don't mind driving the hour or so up and down from there.

One thing that you need to do at Barnbougle is to have a meal at the Lost Farm Restaurant at that location. Besides the great menu of wonderfully fresh and deliciously prepared Australian-influenced dishes, the views from the dining area are to die for.

Wall-to-wall glass lets you look out to the course and beyond for one of the most stunning vantage points offered by a golf club anywhere in the world.

Sattler's vision has provided more than two great courses in the southern hemisphere. "We are also proud that Barnbougle has been able to provide employment opportunities for people in North East Tasmania," he adds. "We hope that with the courses ongoing success that as the region's largest employer, we can continue to provide locals the opportunity to stay and work in the area."

Indeed, the Barnbougle duo shows the efficacy of the "if you build it, they will come" syndrome. Tourism Tasmania has already latched onto them as lynchpins for their marketing of the state as a premier golf destination. Barnbougle Dunes and Lost Farm's success has also inspired the opening of several other highly rated courses in the state. The recently opened Cape Wickham has debuted high on the Australian golf course rankings, and the visually appealing Ocean Dunes Golf Course should be completed in about a year's time.

With this core of courses on the cards, there is little doubt that Tasmania will hold its own among the great golf regions of Australia, if not the world. And they have Richard Sattler's vision and his two golf courses by the sea to thank for that.

TASMANIA ATTRACTIONS

While you won't be disappointed if you just came to play both Barnbougle Dunes and Lost Farm, there are several places you can visit to make your trip worthwhile.

- **Cataract Gorge**
This is arguably Launceston most famous natural attraction. The natural river gorge is located just 1.5km from the city centre and is part of the South Esk River.
You'll find lovely gardens, restaurants and the world's longest, single-span chairlift to offer you great views of the surroundings. Hiking trails further let you while away an entire day exploring the picturesque environs. www.launcestoncataractgorge.com.au
- **Harvest Market Launceston**
The weekly farmers market in towns like Launceston is not to be missed. If you are here over a Saturday, spend some time exploring the stalls that sell locally farmed produce ranging from avocados to potatoes and all things green.
There is also a fine selection of cooked food as well so you can grab a quick, delicious lunch before heading out to the golf course. Open every Saturday from 8.30am to 12.30pm. harvestmarket.org.au
- **Woolmers Estate**
For a glimpse of Tasmania's history, you can't do better than visit Woolmers Estate located south of Launceston.
The historically significant colonial buildings here reflect Tasmania's past in a well preserved authentic setting. Six historic cottages have been converted into accommodations so you have a sense of what it was like in the 19th century when the place was used as a penal settlement.
Open daily from 10am to 4pm. www.woolmers.com.au



Barnbougle Dunes Hole 16.

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