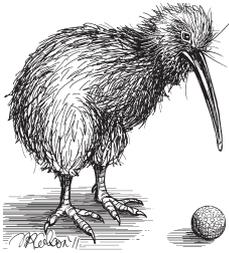




ANDREW HARPER'S Hideaway Report[®] special edition

New Zealand Golf Odyssey



FOR MANY HARPER MEMBERS, golf is clearly an abiding passion. Over the years, I have received innumerable requests for advice about golf vacations. Although my own golfing abilities are sadly limited, during more than three decades of travel I have been fortunate enough to play many of the greatest courses in the world. So experience rather than expertise perhaps qualifies me to express an opinion. One inquiry returns time after time: “What is the ultimate golf trip? If you could go anywhere in the world for a couple of weeks, where would it be?”

Alas, I can offer no simple answer. I have certainly acquired a store of indelible memories in both Scotland and Ireland, and the history-soaked tracks of the Old World still have an undiminished allure. But by common consent, the most innovative course design outside of the United States is today to be found in South Africa and New Zealand. (Knowledgeable friends tell me that many of the greatest golf architects are now plying their trade in Asia, especially China, but most of these developments are still works in progress.) South Africa and New Zealand both offer delicious food and wine, spectacular scenery and affable, English-speaking inhabitants. So, maybe my ultimate golf trip necessitates a choice between Johannesburg and Auckland. After lengthy deliberation, I found myself on a plane heading west.

Kauri Cliffs is an inspiring place to begin a New Zealand golf safari. Located in the dramatic Bay of Islands 170 miles north of Auckland and named for a magnificent native hardwood tree, the par-72 layout was designed by Floridian David Harman. It opened in 2000 as the

centerpiece of an elegant yet understated resort created by American hedge-fund pioneer Julian Robertson.

Though not a true links, the course at Kauri Cliffs often plays like one as a result of its seaside setting and the fact that players can run their approach shots onto most greens. The ever-present cattle and sheep on an adjoining property also remind me of golf in the Old World, as does the blustery wind. Standing over my approach to the 16th hole, preparing to hit a wedge to a green perched on a splinter of land jutting into the Pacific, I could not stop smiling. Partly this was because of the extreme beauty of the setting. Beyond my target, a cluster of islands rose from the azure waters. Some, stark and rocky, looked like snaggletooths. Others, gently illuminated by the late-afternoon sun, were topped with lush meadows and stands of evergreens.

I was equally enthralled, however, by the challenge presented by the downhill shot. The flag was only 100 yards away, but a breeze blew hard in my face. Behind the putting surface, there was a 200-foot fall-off to a beach below. And the ocean backdrop dissolved any certainty of distance. I tried to focus harder, like a pilot staring at his instruments while flying through clouds. At the same time, I attempted to calculate just how much I must take the wind into account. The mental effort was considerable, but golf is rarely better than at such moments, when

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you are forced to grapple with elements of design and weather. I lifted my head one final time and then made my swing. The ball ballooned in the wind just as intended, dropping gently to the green 15 feet from the hole.

There were many such memorable moments during my subsequent two-week tour. Not every shot turned out quite as well, but the experience was always exhilarating. New Zealand offers some of the most picturesque tees and fairways in the world, and it is a land where pace-of-play issues arise because golfers simply cannot stop gawking at the scenery. It can also boast some of the most deftly designed courses of the modern era, with layouts that force golfers to use every club in their bags and hit a challenging variety of shots, be they draws or fades, flip wedges or bump-and-runs. The finishing stretch of Nos. 14-17 at Kauri Cliffs is as challenging, visually compelling and enjoyable a sequence of golf holes as I have ever played.

THE LODGE AT KAURI CLIFFS features 11 two-bedroom cottages, all overlooking the Pacific. Add the Owner's Cottage, which is available when Robertson is not around, and the property sleeps a maximum of 50. This keeps it delightfully civilized, both on and off the golf course. Each suite features a separate sitting area with a gas fireplace, lavish bath and scenic private veranda. A casually elegant lodge opens into a glass-enclosed dining room serving Pacific Rim cuisine and fresh New Zealand lamb and beef dishes. Facilities include an outdoor infinity pool, two tennis courts, three private beaches and a spa.

New Zealand contains fewer than 5 million inhabitants, and the place has a beguiling emptiness. Its natural beauty is routinely sensational, with glacial mountains and vast, unspoiled beaches. Ferns and palms coexist with firs and hardwoods, making the visitor feel as though he has been transported to some realm of mythology or science fiction. The feeling of dislocation is augmented by the fauna, especially the charmingly

disproportioned and sadly endangered kiwi, with its hair-like fur and cat-like whiskers. New Zealanders are justifiably proud of their country's endowments and lose no opportunity to extol the superlative trout fishing or the pleasures of trekking through the snowcapped Alps.

They are equally passionate about their fine food and wine. (And what's not to like about succulent lamb seared medium rare, sweet green-lipped mussels simmered in garlic and butter, and the crisp Chardonnays and meaty Syrahs that go so well with them?)

Visitors tend to be just as easily smitten by the conviviality of the inhabitants and a prevailing ethos that harks back to a less crowded and complicated time. The golf, too, seems to recall a vanished age. With so many sites to choose from, golf architects have been able to build courses on the choicest pieces of property. The layouts are never crowded, and the

conditioning is first-rate. Places such as Kauri Cliffs are Pebble Beach without the hustle and the hordes, at a fraction of the cost.

Lake Taupo lies 170 miles southeast of Auckland. Despite a famously tranquil and scenic appearance, it was created by the cataclysmic eruption of a super volcano 27,000 years ago, and today, the area remains a center of geothermal activity. Taupo is world-renowned for its trout fishing, especially in the Tongariro River, but since December 2007, the region has had another claim to fame. The **Kinloch Golf Club** is the only Jack Nicklaus-designed golf course in New Zealand, and many experts consider it to be one of The Golden Bear's finest works.

Kinloch is built on land that appears perfectly suited for golf, with natural blow-out bunkers and wicked undulations on fairways and greens. The par-72 course is unusual in that it has five par-5s and five par-3s. And in look and feel, it evokes the inland links-style layouts of the great Sand Hills courses in Nebraska.

For those who wish to stay right on the course, **DUNALISTAIR HOUSE** is located between the third and



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fourth holes and offers four spacious rooms with stone fireplaces and restrained contemporary design. The services of a private chef can be arranged on request. Just a 20-minute drive from Kinloch, however, is **HUKA LODGE**, a country house hotel set along the willow-draped banks of the Waikato River. Long a favorite of Harper members, it offers 25 accommodations contained within a series of duplex cottages, each with a wicker-furnished sitting area and a riverside veranda. The main lodge has a clubby living room, a library with fireplace and a fine dining room decorated with Scottish tartan fabrics. Amenities include an outdoor swimming pool, plus spa pools and a tennis court.

It is a picturesque two-hour (100-mile) drive southeast from Taupo to Hawke's Bay, a region on the east coast of the North Island renowned for its orchards and vineyards. The first vines were planted by missionaries in the mid-19th century. Today, there are approximately 75 wineries, and Hawke's Bay is renowned for its full-bodied reds.

Cape Kidnappers is Julian Robertson's second venture in New Zealand. The golf course debuted in 2004 and is regularly and deservedly rated among the Top 50 in the world. The architect of this gem was Tom Doak, and his par-71 course is Cypress Point spectacular. Water is never out of view, and several holes run atop fingers of land that fall off sharply, either to the bay or into gnarly, wooded ravines. The track plays firm and fast, like a traditional links, and it, too, is receptive to the ground game. The back-to-back par-5s at Nos. 15 and 16 are revelations. Fifteen is built on one of the fingers, and anything pulled left falls 1,200 feet to the sea below. The same fate awaits your ball if you overcook your approach,

for there is nothing but a cliff and water behind the putting surface. Then, there is the tee shot on No. 16, from markers set at the edge of the earth. You do not want to look over the post-and-rail fence to your right if you have any trouble with vertigo!

THE FARM, CAPE KIDNAPPERS opened in 2007 and sits on a working 6,000-acre sheep and cattle spread overlooking the Pacific. Once again, Robertson built only a handful of cottages to keep the maximum number of guests below 50. The resort's wood-and-stone lodges resemble a cluster of weathered farm buildings. Appearances can be deceptive, however, and the 22 lavish suites come with a full range of modern technology and private balconies with sensational bay views. Extra-spacious baths are

equipped with separate showers, soaking tubs and heated towel racks. Gourmet cuisine is served in two dining rooms and on a covered loggia. Amenities include a library, a wine cellar/tasting room, a 50-foot heated pool and a luxurious spa.

Wellington, the capital of New Zealand, is located about 195 miles southwest of Hawke's Bay. Forty minutes' drive north of the city center, the **Paraparaumu Beach** links were designed by the brilliant architect Alex Russell, who laid out some of Australia's best courses nearly a century ago. Founded in 1949, Paraparaumu has hosted the New Zealand Open 12 times. In 2002, the field included Tiger Woods, whose longtime caddie, Steve Williams, once

worked in Paraparaumu. After the tournament, Tiger opined that the collection of par-3s there was as good as any he had ever played. Although Paraparaumu seems slightly cramped and even a little scruffy when you come from somewhere as spectacular as Cape Kidnappers,



it will greatly appeal to the genuine golf aficionado.

In Wellington, the 165-room **MUSEUM HOTEL** is acceptably comfortable, with excellent French cuisine in its *Hippopotamus* restaurant. During our stay, however, the service was consistently mediocre. The nearest Harper-recommended property is **WHAREKAUHAU**, a 5,000-acre country estate and working sheep station surrounded by emerald-green pasturelands and rugged mountains, 90 minutes' drive to the southeast. This is a realistic option for those untroubled by the expense of a helicopter, as the transfer is then little more than 15 minutes. Twelve white-stucco cottage suites each feature a four-poster bed, a fireplace, a generous sitting area and a lavish bath. The Edwardian-style manor contains a grand living room and dining hall with baronial stone fireplaces. Overall, this is a wonderful sanctuary that distills the pastoral spirit of New Zealand.

It takes just under two hours to fly the 570 miles from Wellington to Queenstown, close to the tip of the South Island. Queenstown is the action-adventure capital of New Zealand. In winter, it is a haven for skiers, and in summer, the bright sails of paragliders dot the skies above the town. This picturesque resort community lies on the shores of Lake Wakatipu and is backdropped by the impressive peaks of The Remarkables mountain range, rising dramatically above the blue-green waters.

Overlooking the lake, seven minutes south of town, is **MATAKAURI**. Julian Robertson purchased the property in December 2009, and it reopened on August 1, 2010, after a complete refurbishment. The resort has just 11 suites, and offers stunning views of its fjord-like setting. Robertson has not built a golf course on the South Island. But he does not have to, as there are two superb John Darby tracks within a half hour's drive. (Darby is a Harvard-trained landscape designer and golf course architect, well-known in the Southern Hemisphere.)

One is **The Hills** — owned by an extroverted New Zealand jewelry entrepreneur, Michael Hill — which is laid out over 250 acres of an old deer farm in the shadow of the Southern Alps. A millrace winds through the property, feeding 10 lakes and various waterways on the golf course. The wetland areas have been expanded and

planted with varieties of flax, toetoe (a kind of pampas grass native to New Zealand) and the endemic and ubiquitous cabbage tree. Only 4 years old, The Hills has already been the site of three New Zealand Opens, and pros rave about the subtle changes in elevation and the downhill tee shots that set up so well.

The other Queenstown track of note is **Jack's Point**, which lies beneath the 7,500 vertical feet of The Remarkables on the shore of Lake Wakatipu, almost directly across from Matakauri. Designed with minimal

excavation, the 7,088-yard course weaves through tussocky grasslands, rocky outcrops, steep bluffs and swathes of native bush. Rough-hewn stone walls evoke its high-country farming heritage, and the wispy blond-brown fescue growing at the edges of the

fairways gives it the appearance of a Highlands links.

Each hole has been carefully aligned to the glorious backdrop. Standing on the 17th tee, contemplating a monstrous par-5, my gaze was inexorably drawn to the majestic peaks. I thought about skiing The Remarkables one winter — and then about skiing and playing golf on the same day. In New Zealand, it seems, I seldom lack for an incentive to return.

Those inclined to follow in my footsteps should contact the Andrew Harper Travel Office, Tel. (800) 375-4685. Knowledgeable staff will be able to explain the logistics of such a trip and to quote a price for a customized itinerary.

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LAUCALA ISLAND

Fiji Trip Extension

ONE OF THE BEST NEW COURSES IN GOLF IS ALSO one of the most private and remote. Designed by Scotsman David McLay Kidd, the par-72 track is located on Laucala Island in Fiji, and is part of a new resort created by Red Bull energy drink co-founder Dietrich Mateschitz. As Laucala Island resort accommodates a maximum of 80 guests on the 3,500-acre isle, players will frequently have the greens all to themselves ...

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