

# The

Any encirclement of Australia that omits the Apple Isle is an incomplete journey.

BY MATT CLEARY.

# Circling Tasmania

**When** you tip enough beer into a mate of mine whom we'll call "Paulo" because that's his name, you'll hear him opine that "there are only two states to be in: Queensland and pissed". The majority of Paulo's 40 years have been spent in at least one of these states, often both at once; a third he's seen out in the strip clubs of Bangkok, and none at all does he spend playing golf. So we need speak of him no further. And clearly he hasn't been to Tasmania or else he'd have added the Apple Isle to his select list of coveted states of being. Because Tasmania, friends, has it going on.

Yes, the fourth leg of the Big Lap odyssey finds us in the great state of Tasmania. After a short skip across Bass Strait and a one-sided conversation with the most boring tofu salesman alive, Mum and I (you have to take your mum to Tassie; it's like a by-law) land in Launceston and hook up with my mate "Cobber from Yarrowonga"

whom regular readers of this malarkey might remember as "The Sandbelt Pimpernel" (though I didn't call him that in the February issue because I didn't think of it then). Cobber is the fellow who's played every one of Melbourne's best courses by dressing the part and just walking on (though he had to flee over the fence after seven holes at Royal Melbourne West when greens staff got suss). He's taken leave of butchering to cruise around Tassie with Mum and me, and pretend he's a golf photographer. And to tell his mates back in Yarrowonga. Forever.

We head straight to the "Jewel of the Isle", the great Barnbougle Dunes – 90 minutes up the road from Launceston, that fabled course you've no doubt heard tales of. I certainly have, so I try to go in with an objective and open mind. But it gets hold of me quickly. After nine holes I'm thinking you can have St Andrews, you can have Valhalla,

you can have any other course named after holy deities, after-life communities or self-styled godly artifices of grass and sand, wind and water. And if they ever get around to making Heaven Golf Club, you can have that, too. Because Barnbougle Dunes, clinging like a velvet tongue onto the wild and windswept north-east coast of Tasmania, is the greatest course in the history of golf and of man.

Granted, bold statements like this aren't likely to see me voted onto the international panel of GOLF DIGEST course-rating judges any time soon. (Well, unless they need someone to rate the bars.) But what you enjoy about a golf course is as subjective as your favourite music, food or yoga position: You like what you like. So let me qualify: Barnbougle Dunes is the greatest course I've played, just nudging out New South Wales, shading The National's Moonah course, and blowing away fabulous tracks like Bonville, Brookwater, Huntingdale, Hope Island, Joondalup, The Cut and a flash one in Phuket I can't remember the name of.

Gee it's good. But don't take my word(s) for it. For vastly more astute, wise and qualified golf nerds have waxed longer and more lyrical than this drunk junketeer about the joys of Barnbougle Dunes, talking of its "spectacular sand dunes" and "instantly memorable holes", and describing it as "a piece of golf heaven". The editor of this esteemed journal once wrote: "Barnbougle is so jaw-droppingly spectacular that it will be love at first sight for even the most travelled golfer." Even the name – Barnbougle – is Australian in a Scottish sort of way. You know what I mean.

That Richard Sattler – who calls himself "a dumb spud farmer" in the self-effacing ways of locals – appreciated the potential for true links from the non-arable land between pasture and sea despite knowing nothing about golf is a story up there with the Kiwi fellow who constructed the world's fastest motorbike (and was the subject of a good film starring Anthony Hopkins).

It should be on "Australian Story".

You haven't played it? OK, stop reading now. Go on – stop reading. Seriously. Put down the magazine, stand up, go over to your computer and Google some pictures of "Barnbougle". Go on. We'll still be here. Go on – now!

Back with us? Not bad, is it, eh? Now picture yourself on the first tee as a 40-knot nor'-wester is bending the thick marram grass flat. You can't see much of the wide-open fairway but you know it's out there, a vast green landing zone the size of an Australian Rules footy field. It's reachable by threading the pill through a tussock-lined chute. Do you let that big dog eat? Or hit a 4-iron? Your call. Move onto the fourth tee and decide whether to lay up or drive the par 4 (my advice: lay up). Walk beside Bass Strait to the par-3 fifth – and decide on 7-iron or hybrid, depending on the breeze.

Ah, don't take my word for it. Get down there. Seriously, book your flights now. Then battle the winds. Hit an 8-iron 200 metres. Hit a 3-wood off the par-3s. Tread the hard and true and super-undulating greens; surfaces that look like huge billowing sheets of linen frozen in time. Three putt. Four putt. One putt. Eat sand as you explode from the huge, chunky bunkers. Watch your ball traverse rolling dual fairways, ruled by nature. Live the theatre, absorb the thick salty air, drink the cold Boag's Draught, and feast on the great green beast of Tassie's north-east.

Cobber and I play the course twice and sneak in another nine holes on the morning we leave. I shoot 90 in the wind and 82 in relatively benign conditions, both fabulously enjoyable rounds. As is his way, Cobber blasts the driver long and erratically, and I take several beers off him despite his 9-iron second shot on the par-5 11th that travels 190m with a tailwind and



*You can see plenty of water from the tee of the famous par-5 third hole at Tasmania Golf Club.*



*It took a mere nine holes to fall madly in love with Barnbougle Dunes.*



*The new car on offer for a hole-in-one at Royal Hobart remained the property of the good people of Subaru.*

rustled up funny fellow Marty Fields to be funny and fitness-type Ramsay McMaster – whom you might know from these pages – to contort the hundred or so Tassie business folk into silly but probably quite supple poses.

The tournament is a four-man ambrose and I'm teamed with Greg Ramsay, who in 2000 – aged just 24! – decided to project-manage a golf course near Bridport and call it, well, Barnbougle Dunes. Also in my team are Sam Steven, a tall polo player from Tourism Tasmania who plays golf like Prince Charles drunk on a horse, and Charles Woolley, the fearless investigative journalist whom you might remember from such television shows as “60 Minutes” and... that's all. Charles is a radio guy in Tassie these days but might not be so fearless anymore given he calls in sick. Which is a bummer for Charles, but Manna from Heaven for Cobber who gets a gig in our foursome and a goody-bag chock full of goodness.

Royal Hobart? It's a fine and lovely old track. Manicured, full of deciduous pines, greens of truth and justice. Our happy and half-drunk little foursome roll around in a fun even-par (or something) sampling each hole-sponsor's product, devouring Barilla Bay oysters as big as Buddy Franklin and donating money to the bookmaker taking odds of whether we'd hit the green at the seventh (he gave us 6/4). Adding to the intrigue of the seventh is Subaru (whom regular readers might have cottoned on have given this journo a car and to whom he is eternally grateful) who are offering a free Subaru to any person who lands a hole-in-one. We aren't required to relinquish our amateur status, though another player lips out.

Afterwards they give every player a new Srixon golf bag (Cobber does not donate his to charity, indeed, he's straight on the phone to Yarrawonga) before we roll on to the superb sandstone boutique Henry Jones Art Hotel on Sullivan's Cove in Hobart's pretty harbour. There Goggin is hosting the Swing and Supper Club, where we eat some flash canapés, pluck drinks off waiters' trays and party on down with the young professionals and their lady friends (who describe themselves frostily as “players' partners” when Cobber makes a casual enquiry). Even Charles Woolley shows up.

Next day Cobber and I take on Tasmania Golf Club with its terrific greenery, sloping fairways and massive entrenched gums. You might have seen pictures of the signature third hole, the dogleg par 5 that wraps around the bay. Haven't seen it? Stop reading now. Stand up, go over to your computer... or not, and take my word(s) for it [*Or turn back a page and check out Matt's photo.* – Ed]. It's a beauty, Tasmania, particularly because I take another few beers off Cobber and record 38 Stableford points in the comp.

And so we're on the road to Launceston again, this time by way of Bothwell, where we check out the Golf Museum and play some hickory stick golf on Ratho, Australia's oldest course and host of the National Hickory Championship. We meet renowned club-maker, professional and curator Ross Baker, who lends us some hickory stick ancient golf technology. The clubs themselves look like goat herders' whacking sticks but play surprisingly purely out of the middle (less purely off toe and heel) and fly perhaps a club or two shorter than your modern-day weapons.

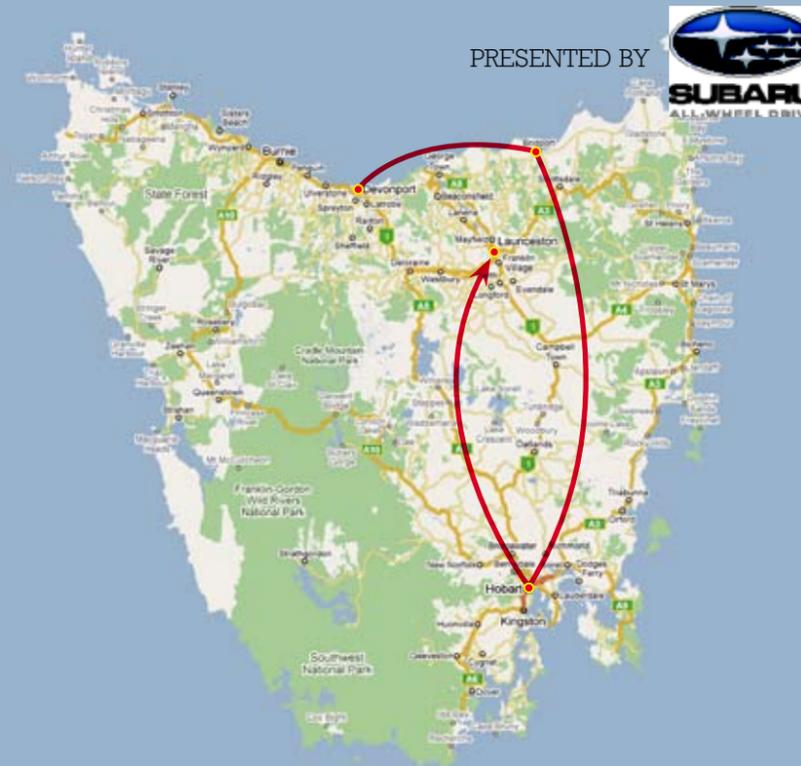
Afterwards we have a passionate and one-sided yarn with Ross about how Tiger Woods cannot be considered the world No.1 until he's played Ratho, before we drive through a rain squall to Launceston and the final round of this Tasmanian odyssey. Cobber and I are in the competition at Launceston Golf Club, teamed up with the president and captain, who tell us the excellent story of their trip to their reciprocal club in Japan where they played with a fellow who described himself as a “retired Kamikaze pilot”. There's also the yarn about the member who shot a competition score of 5-4-3-2-1 from the 10th hole onwards. Yep, sport shot a par 5, a par 4, a birdie 3, a birdie 2 and an ace. Surely a world's one-and-only.

And so with much reluctance it's time to depart the great state of Tasmania – a place of friendly locals, cold Boag's and oysters so big they're a main meal – to continue the odyssey around the mainland of the great southern land. If you are wondering, no, I'm not sick of golf. It's a bit like a mad Troppo Tour – you pack, play, unpack, drink and repeat every day. But by crikey – it is one seriously great state of being. □

*Next month: The Great Ocean Road and Adelaide*



*Cobber inspects 'ye olde' equipment that is a must for any round at Ratho.*



PRESENTED BY



## Tassie Delights

### PLAYED

- **Barnbougle Dunes:** (03) 6356 0094, [barnbougledunes.com.au](http://barnbougledunes.com.au)
- **Royal Hobart:** (03) 6248 6161, [rhgc.com.au](http://rhgc.com.au)
- **Tasmania:** (03) 6248 5138, [tasmaniagolfclub.com.au](http://tasmaniagolfclub.com.au)
- **Bothwell:** 0411 202 061, [rathogolf.com](http://rathogolf.com)
- **Launceston:** (03) 6344 1118, [launcestongolfclub.com.au](http://launcestongolfclub.com.au)

### STAYED

- **Barnbougle Dunes:** (03) 6356 0094, [barnbougledunes.com.au/accommodation](http://barnbougledunes.com.au/accommodation)
- **Henry Jones Art Hotel:** (03) 6210 7700, [thehenryjones.com](http://thehenryjones.com)
- **Kilmarnock House, Launceston:** (03) 6334 1514, [kilmarnockhouse.com](http://kilmarnockhouse.com)

### HOW

- **Car and GPS:** Subaru Liberty, 1800 226 643, [subaru.com.au/liberty](http://subaru.com.au/liberty)
- **Phone, camera, GPS and music:** Nokia N96, [www.nokia.com.au/n96](http://www.nokia.com.au/n96)
- **Camera:** Canon EOS 1000; 1800 021 167, [canon.com.au](http://canon.com.au)

## Stats watch



	Pre-trip	4th leg	Trip to date
# of rounds:	7	3	17
Handicap start:	12.0	12.5	12.0
Handicap finish:	12.0	12.1	12.1
Handicap movement:	0.0	-0.4	+0.1
Avg strokes per round:	85.2	85.0	84.3
Fairways hit %:	43.64%	59.52%	54.55%
Greens in regulation %:	34.72%	29.63%	38.15%
Putts per hole:	1.82	1.85	1.85
Putts per GIR:	2.08	2.06	2.00
Putts per round:	32.75	33.33	33.26
Up and down %:	17.02%	23.68%	26.51%
Sand save %:	0.0%	22.22%	45.45%

\* Social rounds are included in the stats, but are not used to adjust the official handicap

Statistics courtesy of the GolfLink Mates program (visit [golfink.com.au](http://golfink.com.au)). Matt also tracks his handicap by SMS. Send your 10-digit GolfLink number to 199 45465 to receive your handicap.