

Change for the Better



Turnberry will be a tougher challenge this year



Martin Ebert, of course architects Mackenzie and Ebert, was the man charged with refining Turnberry's Ailsa course for this year's Open. Jeremy Ellwood discovers how he went about creating a suitably challenging test for Tiger and friends this July

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Aerial hole graphics courtesy of Mackenzie and Ebert

The R&A leaves no stone unturned in its quest to set a stern test every July. Tour driving distances have increased by 10% since 1994, so extra yardage was one factor in the Ailsa upgrade. "We always ask if it's good for each hole rather than just to get overall yardage up," Ebert explains. "On holes like the 3rd, extra length has helped preserve the character – it keeps shots played into that green to a respectable length."

But the greater desire is to "put more question-marks in players' minds on the tee" as Ebert puts it. New bunkers play a major role, not necessarily to take the driver out of the game, but rather to ensure players can't just reach for it without thinking. But where do you position them? "Our philosophy is that bunkers should be set for still or downwind conditions," Ebert says. "Into the wind the hole's going to be tough enough anyway."

It's also vital that when The Open leaves town, the course remains playable. If the

march of progress means tinkering with the classics is now unavoidable, that's no excuse for cavalier abandon. "It's a great responsibility," Ebert concedes. "But if the great architects were still around, we like to think they'd be making similar decisions."

"Messing about with Turnberry was quite nerve-wracking," Ebert admits. "When we started digging for the new crater on 16, some people thought we'd lost our minds!" They hadn't. Read on for details of some of the major changes to the Ailsa course for 2009. ▸



Two new fairway bunkers on the 3rd



3RD Par 4
489 yards
1994 Open: 462 yards

KEY CHANGES

- New back tee added (+27 yards)
- Two new fairway bunkers added
- Bunker to left of green turned into hollow

MARTIN SAYS: In conjunction with the bunkering, the extra yards mean that players will now have to make a decision to hit their driver or not off the tee. If they opt not to – to avoid flirting with the bunkers – they’re going to leave themselves awfully long second shots. So I think the new back tee and new bunkering combine to really strengthen the hole. There were no bunkers before and it was just a question of blazing away really. We worked with Donald Steel ahead of the Royal Liverpool Open in 2006, and the bunkering there really did force people to decide on a strategy. It was great to see different approaches being adopted. If we see people standing on that 3rd tee considering their options then that’ll be great.



5TH Par 4
474 yards
1994 Open: 441 yards

KEY CHANGES

- New back tee added (+33 yards)
- Two new fairway bunkers added on right

MARTIN SAYS: I don’t know if the old tee we’ve reinstated had been used in previous Turnberry Opens, but I do know it was certainly some time ago that it was last played. It was just sitting there in the dunes and it seemed to make a lot of sense to use it, although we had to improve the view from it by valleying out the area in front of it. As for the two new fairway bunkers on the right, there was a feeling that the bail-out area off the tee was down that right-hand side, and with certain flag positions it could make the approach shot a little bit easier. In conjunction with the greenside bunkers they should certainly help tighten up the hole.



The greenside bunkers could be more of a danger this year



8TH Par 4
454 yards
1994 Open: 430 yards

KEY CHANGES

- New tee added (+24 yards)
- Two new fairway bunkers added on right
- Run-off hollows created to left of green

MARTIN SAYS: We did consider putting a tee closer to the coastline on the left-hand side; that was something we weighed up and debated with the R&A. But the final decision was that, because of the left-to-right camber on the fairway, it was fairer to put the tee over on the right-hand side. With the new bunkers set in there, we think that was the best option. As for the greenside hollows, the R&A’s philosophy is to have closely mown areas around the greens to allow balls to run further away, and also allow different types of recovery shots to be played. One of the characteristics of the Turnberry greens is that they’re a little bit forgiving – if you hit it within the target the ball will gather in slightly. So the 8th is one instance now where, instead of balls running round and in from the left-hand side, they’ll end up in those new hollows.



New greenside hollows will trip some players up

MASTER CRAFTSMAN



George Brown, Turnberry’s course and estates manager since 1985, tells us how the course is shaping up for his last Open before retirement

The winter was kind though spring was cold well into May. But the rough has been coming up a bit in recent weeks and we’re certainly somewhere near where we want to be. The course being out of play over winter gave us a free run at our refurbishment programme too, which was nice.

I think all the course changes have been positive. I’ve been wanting to build a 10th tee out on the rocks for years, so it’s great to finally see one. And the re-routing of 16 was my idea. I suppose I was the instigator of that.

You have to work hard to get everything to blend in neatly, but we’ve been pretty careful – using indigenous turf for bunker faces and things like that so it doesn’t look alien. With a links, if you make it look as rugged as possible, which some feel is how it should be, others might say it looks scruffy and unkempt. So I think there’s a balance, and we try to keep that balance.

I love it here. It’s a fun place to work – one of the best offices in the country. But I’m 71 just after The Open, so doubt I’ll be involved next time – only for fertiliser maybe, but that’s about it!



10TH Par 4
456 yards
1994 Open: 452 yards

KEY CHANGES

- New back tee added right on the shoreline (+4 yards)
- Three new fairway bunkers added – one on right, two in centre of fairway
- Fairway extended left toward the coastline

MARTIN SAYS: I have a presentation slide showing the old line and the new line off this tee, and it's a dramatic difference. But it's certainly playable. I remember watching a group coming through here in The Amateur last year and they all adopted different strategies – one hit driver, got well beyond the bunkers and only had 100 yards in; another hit it to the right between the bunkers and had 150 yards in; and the third decided to take the bunkers out of play completely and had 200 yards left. I suppose those two central bunkers are a slightly controversial design feature, but they do have a great history in golf-course architecture and I think those three guys in The Amateur showed just how interesting they will make the hole. If you're in them I'd be surprised if anyone could get it on the green, but the top pros are pretty good out of bunkers so I guess that anything's possible.



There are several different ways to now play the 10th



16TH Par 4
455 yards
1994 Open: 410 yards

KEY CHANGES

- New tees created (+45 yards)
- Fairway rerouted to left to create new left-to-right dogleg
- New fairway bunker added on the left

MARTIN SAYS: Approaching the green from further left will make the burn more of a lateral hazard now as well as a frontal one. Previously, once players were over it they were fine. Now, directionally, they've just got to be careful that they don't get the ball moving left to right at all and running off the green and down. Off the tee, I think it will now be a case of trying to thread the ball down the right-hand side of the hole because the tighter you can be to the dunes and the crater on the right, the better the line into the flag. The old left-hand bunker fitted perfectly down the right side. There's a ridge running out from it to the new fairway, and if you take a bold line and try and drive it as close to there as possible you'll get a reasonable kick on. The further left you hit the greater the danger of hitting the ridge and bouncing left.



The burn may well see more action this year



The 17th will now be a longer par-5 challenge

17TH Par 5
559 yards
1994 Open: 498 yards

KEY CHANGES

- New tees added back up old 16th fairway (+61 yards)
- Two new approach bunkers added short right of green
- New front-left greenside bunker added

MARTIN SAYS: Our main brief was to make 17 longer, which we initially considered doing by pushing the green further on. But that had complications with regard to the 18th. By doglegging 16 we've added 61 yards to this hole, but effectively it's more like 100 because previously in still conditions they could hit it onto the downslope. Eduardo Romero in the Senior Open hit driver, sand-iron here. Now, other than in seriously downwind conditions, I would have thought they're going to be landing on the upslope, so it really does turn 17 back into a genuine three-shotter. It would be great if someone did eagle it despite toughening it up. Arguably – and not to take anything away from the great three shots he hit – when Nick Price made his final-round eagle here in 1994 it was really a birdie three, rather than an eagle three. This time round it would be a genuine eagle.

