

## **A little piece of Scotland right in your own backyard**

**By Gayle Moss ([www.golfgal.ca](http://www.golfgal.ca))**

Back in 2004, I was introduced to my first true links course at a Muscular Dystrophy charity tournament – the Links at Boundary Bay. As a fairly new golfer used to the tree lined cathedral called UBC and bridal gardens of a Mayfair Lakes, I was a little taken aback by the stark barren landscape that faced me. I distinctly remember thinking as I stepped out of the car, “Where’s the golf course? Where’s the clubhouse?”

But I was with friends and it was for charity and so I thought, “Okay, at least the course will be fairly easy - look no trees!” Oh my, did I have a lot to learn! Instead of cocky bravado, fear and foreboding should have been my order of the day. You’d think I would have gotten a hint of things to come when a dozen golf balls were handed out to every player on their first



Photo by Nic Roggeman, Maple Street Productions, [www.kingslinks.ca](http://www.kingslinks.ca)

tee. Our threesome lost 33 balls that day – some right in the middle of the fairway!!!

I thought as I drove home that evening, how Bobby Jones must have felt in 1921 when he stormed off the 11<sup>th</sup> hole of the Old Course in the third round of the British Open at St. Andrews. Links golf sucks!

So that experience didn’t exactly endear me to Boundary Bay, but I’ve grown up a lot since then and, frankly, so has the golf course. Two years ago, the Newell family purchased Boundary Bay and renamed it “Kings Links by the Sea”. They did a lot of changes to the course and many upgrades and I’d heard good things about it. I even remember a member of the club telling me how much “friendlier” the course was, but I was hesitant to try it again, given my first experience. It was only after I played Chambers Bay and fell in love with links golf that I decided it was time to give Kings Links another try.

What a different experience!

Sure, the clubhouse is still not fancy, but that shouldn't dissuade you from Kings Links. The friendliness of the staff and the quality of the course make it worth the 30 minute drive from Vancouver. The grass tees at the range were a real treat and I particularly enjoyed the chipping and bunker practice area. The testing green near the clubhouse was very undulating, and very tricky. But if you could putt on that, you'd be well prepared to tackle the next 18.

Standing on the first tee, what struck me was the 360 degree view and I started humming in my head The Who's, "I can see for miles and miles...". It really was breathtaking being able to see Mount Baker to the south and the skyline of Vancouver with a back drop of our mountains to the north.

And as I looked down the first hole, I caught my breath yet again to see a man in a wheel chair belting his ball one-handed straight down the middle of the fairway. Amazing! No power chair for him – he rolled himself up and down those links like he'd been doing it all his life. Sometimes you'd see his wife in her power cart give him tow, but many times, he was just out there playing golf and loving it. I knew right then, this was going to be a very special day.

As I walked up to the 1<sup>st</sup> green on a warm but hazy day, the view of Mount Baker bookended by the two trees sideining the green was stunning. I wish my camera could have caught that Kodak moment a bit better.



By the 3<sup>rd</sup> hole, you know why this is a true links course. Many North American courses are inaccurately called links courses because of their lack of trees and some long grass called rough, but to be true to the British Golf Museum definition, a links course should meander *along the coastal strips of land between the beaches and the inland agricultural areas*. Kings Links lives up to that definition.

As you tee off on number 3, you'll find yourself heading straight for the ocean with massive sandbars and waves that glitter in the sun. But don't go long on your approach to this green – all kinds of danger back there as our playing partner discovered.



From there, you'll play along the shore for the next few holes. Early in our round, the pace was a tad on the slow side, but I didn't care. On the 6<sup>th</sup> hole I just stood and watched the strollers, kite flyers, bikers, dog walkers and horse back riders enjoying their gorgeous fall day on the wind swept sand as I marvelled at the views of Mount Baker and Mother Nature (bald eagles and blue herons) putting on a show for us.



Except for the occasional small plane overhead from the Boundary Bay airport, the normal hectic sounds of civilization were not to be found. However, don't be too distracted by the beauty around you - you need to pay attention on this course. There are lots of ways to get into trouble, from the strategically placed waste areas and bunkers that can eat up your ball faster than you can say "unplayable lie"



...to the deadly fescue that sweeps around and into the manicured fairways like here on seven...



And the wind is almost always a factor. Although it didn't blow us over that day, it certainly came into play in our club selections. I kept thinking that the wind was changing just so it was sure to be in our face on every hole. Rarely did I club down – I always seemed to be taking an extra club, or even two. Ah, the gods of golf do love to play havoc with us, don't they?

The greens were in very good condition and rolled true and fast. It's one of things I like about semi-private clubs – the members care and repair their marks. Frankly, I don't play our municipal courses as much anymore because the players don't repair their ball marks. It's a real shame. I think the "players' assistances" should watch out for those culprits and send them back to fix their marks as they walk off the greens. That, and pace of play, are my two biggest pet peeves on munis.

But, I digress...back to Kings Links. As true as they rolled, I felt that the greens keeper must have woken up on the wrong side of the bed that morning, or someone p\_\_\_ed in his cornflakes because the pin placements were brutal. Luckily, my golfguy was generous with the gimmes that day because even the 2-3 footers were a challenge.

We were told by Brad Newell, The King of Floors, that the back 9 was tougher than the front, especially the last 4 holes. But it started off nicely for me with #10.



It had everything – trouble on the left (fescue) and trouble on the right and across the fairway (water). You had to think on this hole from the tee to the green. I played it well and walked away thinking, “Back 9, hard? Hmmm...” And then I met number 12...

I loved the look of this hole, but I didn't love the look of my score card after playing it.



My slightly blind tee shot looked so good in the air over the mound in the middle of the fairway, but so bad in the water. I must have ruffled the feathers of about a hundred ducks hanging around the pond with my splash, because in unison they all started squawking at me – or was it laughing?

After 12, I was dreading that last 4-hole challenge that Brad warned was coming. But as we all know...golf is a fickle sport and when I landed my second shot on #17 5 feet from the hole, I had my come-back-tomorrow hole in the bag and was already thinking, "I'm coming back to this course and I'm going to tame that blasted 12<sup>th</sup>!"



Yes, Kings Links by the Sea is much more fun to play than it was in 2004 and will become one of my regular golf destinations next year. The green fees are very reasonable at \$59 during the week and \$69 on weekends in high season and their annual membership of \$2,900 for unlimited play seems pretty reasonable too.

So if you're thinking of heading over to the British Isles to satisfy your hunger for golf as it was meant to be played, I highly recommend you start your links adventure at Kings Links by the Sea ([www.kingslinks.ca](http://www.kingslinks.ca)) – a little piece of Scotland right in your own backyard.