



# GOLFING WITH THE *WIND* IN THE OUTER BANKS

BY MIKE DOJC

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Golf isn't the primary draw on the Outer Banks, or OBX as in the know folks call the 200-mile span of dune strewn barrier islands in Northeastern North Carolina that buffer a trio of Sounds (Currituck, Albermarle, and Pamlico) from the crashing waves of the Atlantic.

This rugged chunk of land that juts out from the Eastern Seaboard is often called the “Graveyard of the Atlantic.” Countless ships and mariners have met their makers in these treacherous waters. Thousands of documented shipwrecks litter this stretch of coastline; from pirate schooners and cargo ships to German U-Boats sunk by the U.S. Navy during WWII. The mere thought of OBX's underwater cemetery gets nautical archaeologists flying half-mast. And the

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wreck junkies are actually outnumbered by aeronautics nerds making pilgrimages down to Kill Devil Hills near Kitty Hawk.

But playing third fiddle to maritime misfortune and aviation glory has its benefits: speedy rounds on immaculately conditioned courses—just don't let the secret out of the bag. I like to think that ten years down the road naïve scuba divers will wonder if seafaring men used to tee up a few balls and whack them off the bow of their ships as they kick their flippers on my lost Calloways while exploring a wreck. Currents carried at least a dozen of my windswept slices miles offshore so that should help matters.

At Nags Head, the same updrafts that made the Wright bros choose the OBX as the launch site of their powered flights can wreak havoc on highflying golf balls.

My tendency to sky approach shots with a hang time roughly equal to Orville's halcyon twelve airborne seconds of history allow plenty of time for windy intervention. On a gusty day, negotiating the breeze on this Bob Moore design may prove a challenge, but thankfully her stunning seaside beauty



will keep accuracy-challenged duffers from moaning about their dwindling ball count.

While Nags Head's pedigree as one of the grand dames of OBX golf should earn it a spot on your playlist, I found the generous plush fairways and eager to receive greens of the immaculately conditioned and less heralded Carolina Club, a former potato field, mashed and mounded into a beautiful farmland track, to be a more satisfying treat.

The signature seventh hole is an island green stunner that may have some imaginative duffers pretending they've parred the 17<sup>th</sup> at TPC Sawgrass. And the ninth, a sprawling par-five with a narrow strip of fairway that bisects water forces you to plot out a plan of attack from the war room of the tee box. Midway through the hole, even though my shots weren't deviating too badly from my game plan I was still left scratching my chin pondering whether to lay up or live a little and go for the green on my third shot.

Tom Steele's wetland masterstroke Kilmarnock which played host to the North Carolina Open in 2004 and 2009, makes for a memorable round in the park with a bevy of risk/reward tests in the mix so keep your wits about you. At a glance the Scottish namesake may not seem to fit the nature preserve character of this inland track where houses rarely come into eyeshot and you might spy an otter in a pond. According to course lore, the kilts and bagpipes friendly moniker for the land came after a ship from Kilmarnock carrying a boatload of Scots and brimming with casks of whiskey ran aground on the coast. The wrecked ship's precious cargo washed onto shores largely intact and locals toasted the discovery by naming the land in tribute to the Scots who brought the boatful of booze. Plus, much like a great single malt Scotch, Kilmarnock is one you'll savour long after the finish.

The belle of the ball of all the courses I played on my OBX golf trek was the Rees Jones design Currituck, worthy of all the back pats and fist bumps Golf Magazine

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and Golf Digest have lavished on it over the years. “You can take a nap on this fairway it’s so lush,” general manager Patrick Damer quips as we approach the 8<sup>th</sup> tee box. While I was going to chock up the comment to hubris, out of eye-shot of the rest of my foursome, I laid down on the inviting Bermuda grass and let me tell you, if you’re a firm mattress type you could totally take a snooze on this stuff—of course you’d have to get up every five minutes to make sure no ones hitting into you. If you’re looking to shoot low, pay attention to headwinds, tailwinds and side-to-side bluster as you loop around this beautifully groomed puppy. A laissez-faire attitude to Mother Nature’s breath can butcher your scorecard.

### 19<sup>th</sup> Hole

Turns out Mick Jagger was wrong, wild horses CAN drag you away—from the golf course. On a break from chasing down white balls and hitting them again, I took a wild horse tour in Corolla. The first forty minutes was a pretty uneventful 4X4 ride down the beach as the Spanish Mustang mares and stallions seemed to be hiding. An uprooted large pink house on wheels being driven to higher land and a couple pushing their car that didn’t read the four wheel drive sign were the only photo ops. The guide even stopped to apologize citing

the unseasonably cool weather as a reason the horses must’ve galloped inland. On the way back to the tour operators shop, tails tucked between our legs resigned to the thought that there’d be no horseplay today, a small herd appeared in the dunes and began trotting along the surf. The guide did a 180 and we were driving alongside the most free-spirited ponies I’ve ever laid eyes on.

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