







A PAIR OF SOUTH-EAST QUEENSLAND COURSES FORMED PART OF THE FINAL THREE ON THE STILL-TO-PLAY LIST.

## Carl Murphy set out on an ambitious task to play the Top 100 courses in the country, but as with all great quests there were two late obstacles he first had to overcome. **By Tony Webeck**

**L**IKE most great quests of such a nature, the best place to start is at the end. When Carl Murphy decided in 2010, having played 10 or so of AUSTRALIAN GOLF DIGEST's ranking of the Top 100 courses in the country, that completing the set was something he would like to attempt, there was no timeline for its completion.

By last November when we learned of his mission, Murphy had just four courses left to play in order to complete both the 2014 and 2016 rankings. Yet like Frodo's desperate attempt to rid himself of the ring and Indiana Jones' search for the lost ark, finishing the journey would present his greatest challenges.

Brisbane Golf Club's re-entry into the rankings in 2016 gave Murphy another course to tick off in Queensland, but an overturned truck blocking the entry to the club in mid-November threatened to stymie his chance.

"The police had blocked off all surrounding roads so I didn't know how we would actually get in," Murphy tells AUSTRALIAN GOLF DIGEST. "James, who I was playing with, had picked me up, which was lucky since he knew the area. We had to park a bit away, walking in about 1.5 kilometres, golf bags in hand and a few odd looks. I had to ensure the course was played as I was flying out that afternoon."

While in south-east Queensland, Murphy added Pacific Harbour and Indooroopilly West to his list of completed courses, leaving just one spectacular expedition to play all 100: the No.3-ranked course in the country, Cape Wickham Links on King Island.



The evolution of Murphy's quest was rather simple in its origins, the 8-marker from North Ryde Golf Club in Sydney initially setting out to play all the Sandbelt courses during trips to Melbourne to visit his in-laws.

An IT manager for a Japanese technology and infrastructure solutions company, Murphy's job provided opportunities at a few local corporate golf days. With the support of his wife, Annette, family holidays were engineered with the Top 100 list firmly in mind. It was after playing Lake Karrinyup in Perth in 2010 that a dream became a goal and a website built ([www.aussiegolfquest.com](http://www.aussiegolfquest.com)) to not only document the journey but provide some sense of accountability.

## CARL'S TOP 10 AUSTRALIAN COURSES

1. Royal Melbourne (West)
2. Kingston Heath
3. Barnbougle Dunes
4. Cape Wickham
5. Barnbougle Lost Farm
6. New South Wales
7. Royal Melbourne (East)
8. The National (Moonah)
9. Victoria Golf Club
10. Royal Adelaide

OCEAN DUNES FORMED PART OF THE KING ISLAND DOUBLE.



‘It was good for me, too, because I got to see parts of Australia that I probably would never have gone to if we didn't have a reason to go – *Annette Murphy*

“I think the catalyst was the website because that’s when it got a bit more structure to it,” says Annette, who has compiled an impressive catalogue herself of visiting Australian day spas over the past eight years.

“We take it in turns to organise our anniversaries, so when it was his turn and he wanted to go somewhere to play golf, it was somewhere that we hadn’t been. It was good for me, too, because I got to see parts of Australia that I probably would never have gone to if we didn’t have a reason to go.”

Taking inspiration from the likes of The Itinerant Golfer and John Sabino, who also documented their USA and global golf quests, Murphy began sharing his journey with whomever he played with. And the golf community rallied around him to share news of their course and also provide leads to get on others.

While attending the 2011 Masters, a conversation with a fellow ‘patron’ at Augusta National led to an invitation to play Castle Hill Country Club upon their return to Sydney, but it was Annette who provided a way to access Australia’s most exclusive golf course.

“My boss helped to get him on Ellerston,” she reveals. “I’d simply asked my boss what he had done on the weekend and he mentioned that he’d gone up and played Ellerston. I told him that Carl was doing the Top 100 and that was one of the remaining courses on his list. He said to tell him when Carl got into the 90s that he’d do what he could to help get him on.

“When he got to 91, Carl followed that up quick smart and my boss organised it all and went and had a game with him.”

Murphy readily acknowledges this is a pursuit that would have taken many more years to complete without the support of his wife, estimating his green fees at about \$10,200 and travel in excess of 119,000 kilometres on 35 separate flights. Playing 111 different Australian courses during the seven years didn’t help his handicap (he now plays off 14), but did expand his shot-making and appreciation for golf course architecture.

# TRIP TAKEAWAYS

## **WEATHER DELAYS**

“Only one game was ever cancelled due to weather. Playing Hamilton Island an electrical storm came in when I reached the fifth hole. I tried waiting it out but eventually gave up and decided to return the next day. “There were only two games where significant rain was encountered, once at Pacific Dunes and another at Kalgoorlie where it hadn’t rained for some time. My shoes were red for months after.”

## **DANGER GAME**

“Playing Palmer Sea Reef the ball came to rest close to a water hazard. Lurking just below the surface was a crocodile. Let’s just say I wasn’t in too much of a hurry to hit that ball.”

## **THE TIP**

“One big piece of advice for those wishing to play the Top 100 is to network no matter where you are. You will be surprised where you could come into contact with someone who can open a door. At least 10 courses were accessed by playing with people at open days and being invited to come and play their course.”

## **ALL ACCESS**

“The three hardest courses to gain access were The Grand, Royal Sydney and Ellerston. Initially denied access as an interstate visitor, I somehow ended up on The Grand’s mailing list and when I received notice of an open day they were having that week, I dropped everything to get up to the Gold Coast. A chance to play Royal Sydney eventuated through a friend of an AUSTRALIAN GOLF DIGEST panellist and my wife’s boss was the connection for Ellerston.”

## **LONG DRIVES**

“The courses that took the most effort to get to were Kalgoorlie and Capricorn Resort in Yeppoon. Flying out to Kalgoorlie from Perth, I stood out because I was the only person on the flight not wearing hi-vis. That course will probably always be under-rated because not many people get to see it. Capricorn seemed like an effort to visit because there was no other reason to go. It involved flying to Rockhampton and a drive to Yeppoon just to play the golf course.”

“The first time I played Royal Queensland I thought it was good, but I didn’t really like the land due to it being so flat. I was just playing it really to tick it off the list,” Murphy says. “But seeing it again towards the end of 2017 – five years later – I actually did appreciate the course and its design. I took in a lot more than what I did the first time. That’s probably a really good example of how my knowledge has changed over the period.

“Playing the courses and seeing better designs, you question why certain courses are so high and look more closely at the design features, such as bunker placement and green designs. Playing your average public golf course and then going on to these better-designed courses, it really stands out what the golf course architect has done.

“Visiting all of these courses has also opened my eyes to a lot more shot-making styles. It doesn’t mean I’m good at executing it all the time, but looking at different ways of playing different shots. Down at Cape Wickham and Ocean Dunes, there weren’t that many people so we had quite a bit of time to experiment. If a certain shot didn’t work we’d try something different and have the whole group try it, using the contours of the greens. It hasn’t helped my game scoring-wise, but it’s definitely made it more fun.”



## WHAT'S NEXT

Even before walking off the 18th green at Cape Wickham last November, Murphy's mind had turned to what he would attempt next.

There will be, of course, the obligatory additions of 2018; new entries so he can continue to complete AUSTRALIAN GOLF DIGEST's Top 100 lists. Plus there are three still to play from the 2012 list. And then there are the really big ideas.

“As for bigger plans, attempting the ‘Awesome 8’ challenge – playing the hottest, coldest, most northerly, most southerly, highest, lowest, toughest and oldest courses in the world within a 12-month period,” Murphy revealed. “There is also a toss-up between playing all the Royal clubs in the world or going for world domination and being the first Australian to complete the World Top 100,” Murphy says.

“Although after mentioning the latter to Annette, her reply of, ‘Maybe just the top 50 sounds good,’ seemed to echo around in my head. Might need to be a bit more work on that one.”

And thus the next quest begins with perhaps its greatest challenge. **G**



CARL IS NOT DONE TRAVELLING YET, WITH MORE LIST-BASED QUESTS IN MIND. INSET: HIS GOLF BALL COLLECTION GROWS WITH EVERY TOP 100 COURSE VISIT.

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