

## TRAVEL

## Blustery Irish weather doesn't deter area golfers

BY HUGH GALLAGHER  
STAFF WRITER

The winds whipped off the Atlantic Ocean at 40 to 50 miles an hour and the rain changed from misty fall to torrential downpour.

But that didn't stop the intrepid golfers from Oakland County who had come in mid-September to challenge Ireland's legendary Ballyunion golf course. After all, a little foul weather was to be expected on the Emerald Isle.

"The caddy said in Ireland you experience all four seasons during a round of golf," said Frank Schekell of Birmingham.

And golf Irish style was the primary reason for this trip, though seeing the ancient sights and enjoying Irish hospitality were also part of the deal.

Terry Page of Bloomfield Hills said he got the bug about doing the trip from Bud Erickson, who has been active on the local golf scene for many years and organized the U.S. Open at Oakland Hills in 1985. Page, an Oakland Hills member, contacted his friend and travel agent Vivian Paesano of Bloomfield Hills to make the arrangements.

"The thing Vivian did on this trip was to balance between playing golf and seeing Ireland. It was nicely balanced," Page

said. "Golf addicts could play a lot of golf. You had the option of playing as much golf as you wanted."

Others agreed that Vivian Paesano, who works at Gateway Travel in Southfield, did a good job of creating an interesting mix of activities as the group of 22 made their way through southern Ireland (with a side trip to northern County Down). And she went with the group to make sure everything came out right.

"I love doing the groups," Paesano said.

She arranged that group members would have a choice of playing eight, five or three rounds of golf on a mix of traditional Irish links style courses (unmanicured courses that use natural terrain) and parkland courses.

"Bud Erickson helped with the golf courses," Paesano said. "He has traveled in Ireland in the past and did a lot for us in picking courses. The majority of the people who went were good golfers. They knew what to expect with links courses, but the challenge was more than they had read about."

The golfers were greeted by foul weather and fair, sometimes all in one day. Nasty weather started at Lahinch and continued to get worse at Ballyunion.

"I like to golf, but I'm not real good. I found I'm a parkland

course kind of girl," said Margaret Schekell. She and others opted to forgo the pleasures of playing golf in hurricane force winds. But most of the men played through.

"We had pouring rain, rain off the ocean, you could put a hat on and still get wet because it was blowing in sideways," said Page about Ballyunion. "But everyone was teasing off. You play in the natural conditions."

Even in less severe weather, the links courses can be "punishing," Page said at Royal County Down he "worked his tail off" to shoot a 94 and when he came back to Oakland Hills he breezed to a 79.

The links contain problems not usually found on American courses.

"You're dealing with heather and gorse and not many trees. Gorse is like a prickly bush. If you hit your ball into it, you might see the ball but you can't get to it," Page said.

Nancy and Jeff Peck of West Bloomfield liked the idea of combining golf with sightseeing.

"We went because it was going to be a golf and sightseeing trip," said Nancy. "We had been to Scotland two years ago, and my husband golfed but hadn't been able to do any sightseeing. It was fabulous and the courses were absolutely beautiful, though the weather was somewhat hindering."

Jeff Peck said he thought the Irish courses were more "interesting" than the Scottish courses.

"Some courses were like what we'd have here but top notch. Others were ocean courses that would rival Pebble Beach. They're real tough courses, courses where it's better to have a caddy. There was lots of wind on both the Atlantic and Irish Sea sides."

Everyone commented on the warmth of the Irish people and their eagerness to accommodate tourists.

Paesano said tourism is the No. 1 industry in Ireland and the country has made a concerted effort to create hotels and restaurants that provide quality service.



Pub fare: Sampling the simple cuisine and fine beer of an Irish pub are, left to right around the table, Carl and Bev Haas, Sheryl and Tim McConaghy, Mickie and Bud Erickson, Ann and Doug Povenz and Roe and Dick Gromacki.

"They knew they had to do something about the food," Paesano said. "In the restaurants they serve gourmet food and in the pubs they serve pub grub. Rack of lamb in the restaurants and lamb stew in the pubs. And the beer, the Guinness was flowing and the Irish whiskey."

She said it used to be that the dreamers stayed in Ireland and doors left, but now the doors are staying and most of the population is under 30.

"They wanted to impress you with how happy they were to have you in the country," Paesano said.

Group members made note.

"They were so nice, courteous and polite. I never saw a bad attitude. They bent over backwards to be helpful," said Nancy Peck.

Margaret Schekell said she'd go back in a heartbeat.

"We found we belong there, especially me," she said. "It's absolutely beautiful and friend-

ly."

Even the cities won approval. "Dublin is beautiful, clean and, though there are signs 'ladies mind your purses,' we never felt anything but safe," Schekell said.

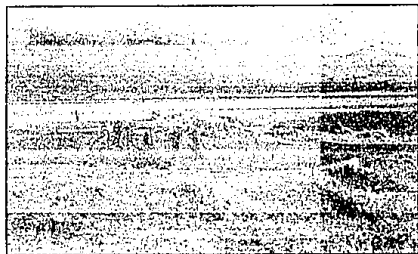
The group stayed in a variety of accommodations from the quaint Kilmarnock Park Hotel to the Kinkora Lodge inland at Killoe to the Davenport Hotel in Dublin. They did the usual tourist things, as well, including kissing the Blarney Stone, visit-

ing other castles, going to Trinity College and taking in a cabaret show at Dublin's Jury's Hotel.

But it is probably the golf that will draw the Oakland County group back.

"You'd go back because there's so much more to see. If you're a golfer, so many more courses you want to play," said Page.

For information on group travel through Gateway Travel, call Vivian Paesano at (810)353-8600 or (800)423-4898.



Links course: Oakland County golfers take on Ireland's famous Ballyunion golf course, a natural links course cut through heather covered meadow.

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