

players to a tee...

IN A story in the New Yorker entitled "The Sporting Scene", Herbert Warren Wind wrote: "It is the dream of nearly all devout golfers in America — and throughout the world for that matter — to set aside two or three weeks

some summer and play a number of the famous Scottish courses they have been hearing about all their lives.

"These would include the historic Old Course at St Andrews, the cradle of the game; Prestwick, where the British Open was inaugurated; Gleneagles, which is a fine rolling inland course; Turnberry, strung out along the Clyde Estuary; Muirfield, by general

agreement the most classic course in Scotland, and Dornoch, currently the 'in' course among American pilgrims, which is set on an ancient and spectacular natural stretch of linksland."

Herbert Warren Wind has long been fulsome in his praise of Royal Dornoch. "It is the most natural course in the world. We in America are just beginning to appreciate that no golfer has completed his education unless he has played and studied Royal Dornoch. It conveys to the modern golfer the evocation of golf at its best." The fact that Royal Dornoch was recently ranked by an illustrious golf panel as one of the top 10 courses in the world and that it should bring to the minds of Americans, who have long dominated world golf, the very nature of the game, is praise indeed.

The Dornoch links are among the oldest in the world. The ministers associated with the Dornoch Cathedral — many the 16th century. Some time later, in 1630, Sir Robert Gordon described the links as "the fairest of any pairt of Scotland".

It was not, however, until the late 19th century that the course's fame spread south of the Border. The completion of the Highland Railway Line and the introduction of "sleepers" meant that Londoners could leave the capital in the early evening and be in Dornoch by lunchtime the following day. Many seized this opportunity



ADMIRING the plaque which lists the world's 50 greatest golf courses and places Royal Dornoch Golf Club 10th are (left to right) lan Macdonald, the Rev. James Simpson, Capt. Cameron Murray, Dr John MacLeod, secretary Kenneth Murray and Dennis Bethune.

of escaping from the noise and bustle of the city to the peace of Sutherland, a county which has been variously described as "Scotland's Shangri-la" and "God's Rock Garden".

At Dornoch they enjoyed the quiet delights of a first-class seaside course, a course which had been redesigned by Old Tom Morris in 1886.

Prime Minister Asquith and J. H. Taylor, who won the British Open five times, were two of the many famous Englishmen who loved to play at Dornoch. Taylor was a close friend of Andrew Carnegie, America's steel magnate, whose Scottish home, Skibo Castle, was only four miles from Dornoch.

When Carnegie took up golf at the age of 60 there is no fool like an old of whom had been fool! — he invited J. H. trained at St Andrews - Taylor to stay at the played golf on the Dor- castle and teach him on noch links as far back as his own private course within the estate grounds. Later, as vice-president of the Royal Dornoch Club, Carnegle presented to the club the magnificent Carnegie Shield for open competition. The silver shield, which is on display in the clubhouse. is unquestionably one of the most costly and beautiful trophies in the

Royal Dornoch was the golf finishing school for Joyce Wethered, regarded by some connoisseurs of the game as the greatest female golfer. Bobby Jones, writing of a friendly round which he once played with Joyce,

said: "She did not miss one shot: she did not even half-miss one shot. When we finished I could not help saying that I had never played golf with anyone, man or woman, amateur or professional, who made me feel so utterly outclassed."

Joyce and her brother, Roger, who tied for the British Open in 1921, loved what Roger called "the exquisite charm and quality of Royal Dornoch". Each summer their parents rented a house overlooking the treacherous opening holes. Both their names figure prominently on the winners' board in the clubhouse.

Recently Royal Dornoch's fame has spread far beyond Britain.

It has become one of the "in" courses not only for American golfers, but also for European and Japanese players. Such is its fame that some tourists unfortunately feel they must play it whether or not they have ever played golf before.

I smile when I recall the German who wanted to rent clubs and play the course. The professional, William Skinner, not being available, his wife Mary gave the German the necessary clubs. When the visitor returned many hours later, his warm smile indicated he had enjoyed his round.

Later, as Mr Skinner was putting away the rented clubs, he noted that his wife had given the German right-handed woods and left-handed

The tourist probably returned to Germany more convinced than ever that Scots are a strange breed.

Not only do we wear kilts and eat haggis and drive on the wrong side of the road, but we play our "irons" the wrong way round.

Better roads and made Dornoch much more accessible. Those who make the four-hour journey by road from Edinburgh are assured of a warm welcome and a memorable golfing experience.

If expense is no object, there are quicker ways of reaching Dornoch. Ben Crenshaw took time off from his preparations for the 1980 British Open at Muirfield to fly to Dornoch with Mark McCormack. Their private plane landed on the airstrip near the course.

Being a keen student of the game, Crenshaw was eager to see and play the course about which he had heard so many favourable comments. He was not disappointed.

When he returned to Muirfield, he was asked by Keith Mackenzie, the former secretary of the R&A, how he had enjoyed Dornoch. Ben replied quite simply: "I nearly did not come back."

Full of praise for Dornoch's magnificent, natural setting and elevated greens, he encouraged Tom Watson to make the journey north the following year.

Again, it was love at first sight. Standing on the third tee, Tom turned to his playing partner, Sandy Tatum, and said: "This is the most fun I have had playing golf in my whole life." The fact that Tom played three rounds during his 24-hour

stay was proof that these were no idle words.

In 1980, the American Society of Golf architects visited Dornoch to honour Donald Ross, a Dornoch man who was to bridges have recently American golf-course design what Telford was to Scottish roads and bridges.

> Of the Donald Ross courses — and there are about 600 of them — a respected student of the game has said: "There you see a lot of shots not found on modern courses. He is one of the very few designers who were, or are, able to put a real purpose into each shot on every hole."

> Many believe Donald Ross learned this art by studying Royal Dornoch.

The golf architects seeing our course at its finest in the late spring with the gorse-lined fairways in full bloom, waxed eloquent about it. "Glorious. Mind-blowing. Easily the best we have seen in Scot-

So did the golf correspondent of a Sunday newspaper who accompanied them. In an article entitled "A Dream by a Scottish Shore", he quoted one of the architects who was adamant about the stature of Royal Dornoch:

"Forget Cypress Point and the others. This is easily the finest course in the world. The absolute number one ... I am not going to tell anyone about Dornoch. I want to keep it for myself, the way it is, and come back every year until I die."

Overstated? Perhaps. But few would deny that Royal Dornoch is one of the truly great golf courses of the world.

1984: Scottish women's championship, May 1985: British amateur championship, June 3