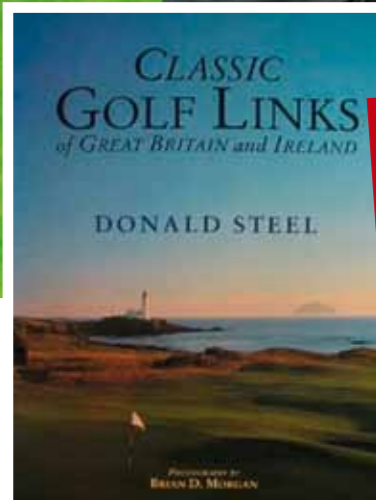


ON A MISSION

Jeremy Ellwood joins three links-obsessed Swedes at Burnham and Berrow to hear about their quest to play every course in a classic Donald Steel book...



Above: (left to right) Swedes Karl Janlert, Henrik Landahl and Per Janlert at Burnham and Berrow

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any, many emails hit the *Golf Monthly* inbox every week; some catch the eye more than others. One such electronic epistle came from Swede Henrik Landahl last summer. It read: "Since April 1, 2012, a friend and I have been playing all 75 courses in Donald Steel's book, *Classic Golf Links of Great Britain and Ireland*, and writing about them on our Links75.se website. We've had frequent email conversations with Donald, helping us out and supplying us with information. It will all end up in a book, but our vision is to gather knowledge, information and love for all the world's true links courses in one place. Our first milestone – the 75 courses – will be completed

at Turnberry on August 31. Please contact us if you would be interested in an article."

I was intrigued, as that particular book is also a personal favourite. So I checked out their website, and found myself wanting to find out more. What had inspired them to embark on such a mission overseas? How had their love and appreciation of links golf evolved? What had been their favourite and least favourite courses? And what hand had they been dealt by the less-than-reliable British seaside weather along the way? And so it was, that on October 3, 2013, I found myself waiting in the lashing rain for three Swedes at Burnham and Berrow Golf Club in Somerset, with ours pretty much the only vehicles in the car park on a day decidedly ill-suited for golf.

Photography Phil Inglis



From top: Approaching the classic par-3 9th; Karl teeing off; Henrik putting on the 12th by Berrow church; *Golf Monthly* and Links75.se in conversation



"We bought the book from Amazon," Henrik reveals when I ask how they came across this Donald Steel masterpiece. "But I first found it in the 1990s, had it for a couple of years, read it and thought it would be fantastic to go through all these courses – not as fast as we have done, of course, but in your lifetime." He laughs as fellow Links 75 'ambassador', Karl Janlert, chips in: "We started by talking about doing it before we were 60, but we've brought that forwards just a bit now!" Henrik and Karl are the Links75 mainstays, with Per Janlert – also at Burnham and Berrow – and Erik Soderbergh joining them on some trips.

Getting hooked

Henrik tells me there are just two genuine links courses in Sweden, so I ask what sparked their desire to tick off all 75 links in the book – 76, actually, more of which later. "I started playing golf in the mid 1970s," he replies. "My father lived in England for a year, and I went with my parents all around Scotland when I was 13 or 14 and played two links courses then. I think it was the combination of nature and golf together that made it for me."

"I'm not a real golfer in that sense," Karl says. "My first trip was to Wallasey five or six years ago and that was amazing. That was the first time we went together to a links course. We played Royal Liverpool in stormy weather and were afraid of hitting the clubhouse off the 1st tee. After that I was hooked."

"The club we're at now was where we started doing the bigger trips," Henrik explains. "We went down the coast from here to Trevose and West Cornwall and played every day. We played other courses not in the book, too, such as Perranporth. That's one of my favourites."

I discover that they only bring 10 clubs on their travels to make it more interesting, and aren't scorecard-obsessed, although they do

have an eagle count going. When Henrik later rolls in a 15-footer for eagle on Burnham and Berrow's 8th, he tells me it's now 3-3 between him and Karl. "My others were at Montrose and Silloth," he smiles. "Mine came on Silloth's 17th, the Old Course's 9th and Shiskine's 8th," Karl counters. "And I've set myself a target of breaking 80 at all the Open courses, but not off the back tees." Muirfield, Turnberry and Hoylake have so far succumbed.

We move on to Ireland, which has 10 courses in the book. "On our first Irish trip we played Royal Dublin and Portmarnock, but we've also played Waterville, Tralee, Ballyunion and others," Karl says. "Tralee is famous for its back nine, but the course is quite

"We started by talking about doing it before we were 60, but we've brought that forwards just a little bit now!"

unbalanced overall. It's too modern for us. We liked Lahinch, and then Henrik and I went to play County Louth, which was not so much a favourite of ours, but we did have terrible weather when we played there."

Ah yes, I think, expecting more on the weather theme. But I'm pleasantly surprised at just how little of what we're witnessing from the safety of the Burnham and Berrow clubhouse they've suffered in their 13 trips: "Just three or four rounds. That's not what you expect," Henrik says, clocking my surprise. "At County Louth we had hail and temperatures of 1°C," Karl adds, "and after three or four holes, I was prepared to get off. And we



Left: Striding out as the weather begins to relent. Below: By close of play Burnham and Berrow was bathed in glorious sunshine

were alone on the course at Aberdovey and Cruden Bay. A shower here and there is OK, but if it's below 5°C and raining..." The sentence remains unfinished as everyone contemplates such a miserable combination.

The weather may not have interrupted their round at The Machrie on Islay, but it did delay their arrival. "Yes, we had to go all the way back to Glasgow and sat there waiting for a couple of hours because of fog," Karl explains. "We were over the island but we couldn't land. We should have been there in the morning, but couldn't land until the evening, so we didn't get to visit any of the distilleries." An unfortunate turn of events for any visitor to the whisky-rich isle.

So what of Donald Steel's input? "Sometimes we've got more information from him, sometimes less, depending on his time, and what courses we were playing," Henrik replies enthusiastically. "It's been more architectural tips and pointers than anything – where to look, what to see, things you probably wouldn't think about if you just played the course in your usual way. He's encouraged us to have a little look at what they've done with this green, what they've done there. It's been helpful and interesting to get a new view." I ask which course Steel feels is the strongest architecturally. "We have asked, but we haven't got a straight answer!" Henrik laughs. Very wise for a course architect, who never knows where the next commission is coming from.

The whole experience

And what of their personal favourites? "Do we have to pick one? That's very hard," Karl grimaces. "It might be Royal West Norfolk. But Porthcawl would be another, and No.1 on our website is Muirfield. The environment there is amazing – the clubhouse, the restaurant, the bar, everything." Links75 and *Golf Monthly* agree on the UK's top-ranked course, then. "For us, it's more to do with the feeling you get about the whole place," Henrik elaborates. "The views, the course conditioning, everything."

"Other favourites outside the really well-known ones would include Silloth on Solway, which is in the middle of nowhere. A lovely course, beautiful," Karl continues. "Extremely

bumpy!" Henrik adds. "I know which one is closest to the heart – it's Rye. Rye is the whole package with the club, the members, the environment, everything. If you bring the whole thing together it's fantastic. It's very special when you sit down and eat luncheon together with everyone, jacket and tie. I like the feel of the clubhouse. That's why our ranking isn't just about the course." Again, in tune with *Golf Monthly's* thinking.

I mention that Brora in the north-east of Scotland would be right up their street. "We haven't played it but we'll go and play there, and Dornoch with Per and Erik," Henrik replies. "We've played Skibo. That's a different experience." Different, and indeed expensive, I interject. "Yes, but it's in the book!" Henrik retorts. "Actually, there are two editions. In mine, Skibo's in, but in

"We were alone on the course at Aberdovey and Cruden Bay. A shower here and there is OK, but if it's 5°C and raining..."

the edition I bought for the other guys it's taken out and Moray is in its place. I think that's when it became private and people weren't able to play it. But in my edition it's in there, so we've played both – we've actually played 76 courses not 75." OK, now for the harsh question – which has been their least favourite? Karl laughs before replying diplomatically, "We won't say. It's only the top 30 that we publish, but we do have our own private thoughts."

Given all this links talk, I ask if they have an aversion to parkland golf. "No, our home clubs are parkland," they reply. "It's absolutely not an aversion," Henrik expands, "but the turf on a links course is very specific and when you get used to it, and get the feeling of it, you'd like all turf to be like that." Karl agrees, "Yes, the springy turf – when you hit a good iron shot, that's golf. If you go home and play a muddy course in Sweden in October, that's not fun any more."



As for our round, which had started in heavy rain... well, it ends with Somerset's finest bathed in that glorious late afternoon sunlight that renders links golf the closest thing to heaven for aficionados. I ask what they make of it second time round.

Climbing the rankings

"We enjoyed it much more," Henrik enthuses. "I remembered the first five holes being good and then the strong finish from before," Karl adds. "But there are no weak holes. The marsh holes are good holes – different but good." Ah yes, the marsh-flanked holes on the front nine, that had left me a little non-plussed on my first visit. "When we first came here, we thought there were some holes that didn't quite fit," Henrik agrees. "Today, when we teed off, it was not in our top 30. Now... well, we need to have a little debate. I know what course is in 30th spot and this is better. The more links you play, the better understanding you get of all links courses – they're all different. There isn't just one type of links."

He's right. Just because something's a bit different, it doesn't necessarily mean it's wrong. Surely we should be craving diversity, not uniformity? As I drive home, I know I've just met three kindred spirits for whom links golf is every bit as much of a passion as it is for me. A few weeks later, I check their website and there it is at No.30 – Burnham and Berrow. I know my Swedish friends will be returning to many more links in the coming years to refine their rankings, and look forward to reading their book having played just a minor supporting role in their wonderful links journey. ■

