

# Southern COMFORT

The praises for Southbroom Golf Club on the South Coast of KZN are sung often and loudly, and it is easy to see why. Besides its charming location, the course's excellent design and its culture of welcoming visitors with open arms make it an ever-popular local choice, writes **John Botha**.



Unnecessarily Well Made

GLENMORANGIE  
SINGLE MALT SCOTCH WHISKY



For those of us who have been fortunate enough to play many golf courses at home and abroad, there are a few simple acid tests to measure the quality of experience. Perhaps the most obvious is the longing to return; another is the memorability factor, either of the golf course or the clubhouse and other facilities. Personally, if I play particularly poorly (which nowadays is more often than not) and still enjoy my round, this proves the course is something special.

I have a list of what I consider to

be the finest tests of golf – a South African group and one for courses abroad. In SA, the likes of Gary Player Country Club, Blair Atholl, The Links at Fancourt, Durban Country Club, St Francis Links and Humewood make the cut. Beyond our borders, I rate Muirfield Village, Royal Melbourne, Ballybunion, Royal Dornoch and Augusta National as exceptional tests.

But there is a clear distinction between what I consider to be a thorough examination of a golfer's ability, where each department of a player's game is tested, and

those courses that are forgiving enough to have fun, without being condescending. Tracks such as these I file in a personal 'favourites' folder, and Southbroom is certainly one of them.

Southbroom Golf Club owes its existence to a British missionary, Alfred Eyles, who had acquired the land from the Natal colonial government in 1883. It was Eyles' sons, Frank and Gilbert, who in 1933 established a township here, complete with plans for a nine-hole golf course designed by

J Naven, the long-serving golf

professional based at Observatory Golf Club and who then moved to Umkomaas. (Naven would later become an honorary life member of the PGA.) The original course was opened in 1938, but after the Second World War, the increased popularity of the club created a demand for 18 holes. Durban Country Club's M Mandy teamed up with Ron Burd, Southbroom's first resident professional, to lay out the new course, which used just four of the original holes.

It was only in 1950 that Southbroom Golf Club was

officially formed. At the time, there were 50 regular players, only eight of whom attended the inaugural meeting. A single room constituted the clubhouse, and the ablution facilities consisted of a shack at the back that served men and women.

As the southern coastal region of KZN became more popular as a permanent residential area and holiday destination, so the fortunes of the club improved, but while some areas nearby became overdeveloped and the magnificent subtropical coastal forest was destroyed, the village of

Southbroom, due to the foresight shown by the original developers, was mercifully preserved. At a time when environmental consideration had not yet gained universal momentum, the Eyles family fortunately appreciated the importance of retaining as much indigenous vegetation as possible, providing for larger residential stands, as well as generous provisions for the golf course and other open spaces.

This course may lack the length to qualify it as a serious test of ball striking, but it is certainly not

cramped, and for the majority of golfers, particularly when a breeze is blowing, the layout is tough enough to hold their attention.

There are simply no bad holes on this course, and after a rather benign par four to start (324 metres), where the only real danger is water down the right side, another relatively straightforward 335-metre two-shotter is played. After an iron off the tee, an approach over water is required, but following this gentle introduction comes one of the best holes. Deserving of its stroke-1 label, this par four is

**PREVIOUS PAGE** The mix of thick shrubbery, water hazards and strong breezes makes this short layout a true test.

**THIS PAGE** The putting surfaces are in top condition year-round.

flanked by out-of-bounds stakes, and particularly when the southerly wind is blowing, this beauty can present a rather intimidating tee shot. The approach, over water, also requires some precision, and the first-time visitor might at this point realise that this unnecessarily well-made course is no pushover.

## FACTFILE

### GETTING THERE

Head south from Durban on the N2 (it becomes the R61). At the end of the toll road, 7km after the Margate/Ramsgate turnoff, turn left into Southbroom Avenue. Follow the signs to the clubhouse.

### COURSE

Classic coastal parkland, 5 584 metres

### DESIGNER

Mandy/Burd (1949)

### CLUB MANAGER

Gavin Sole

### CLUB PROFESSIONAL/GOLF DIRECTOR

Derek James

### CLUB CAPTAIN

Derrick Matthew

### COURSE SUPERINTENDENT

Charl Potgieter

### GREENFEES

Non-affiliated R300, affiliated (Saturdays and peak season) R265, other R245

### CONTACT

Tel: 039 316 6051

Website: [www.southbroomgolfclub.co.za](http://www.southbroomgolfclub.co.za)

### LIKES

- The classic feel of the design and excellent playability.
- The birds and occasional duiker and bushbuck sightings.
- The friendliness of the staff.
- The traditional pro shop is easily one of the best in SA.

### DISLIKES

- This course is just too busy during high season, but the flow of play is well controlled.
- Southbroom's location is out of the way for most golfers.



The opening par four looks easy, but the coastal breeze changes everything.

Every golf course should have one really short hole, and Southbroom's 4th, measuring a modest 114 metres, certainly qualifies, but few par threes anywhere offer a more beautiful view from the tee. A driveable par four is another must on any layout, and a few foolhardy long-hitters may fancy their chances of powering a tee shot onto the green at the 5th, a 255-metre hole that has a green guarded by trees. Most would regret this decision after making a big number, and the same can be said for a few holes here if a player becomes too ambitious.

Many golfers would agree that to design and construct mammoth par fives, which become not much more than long-hitting contests, makes little sense. It was the immortal Bobby Jones who pointed out that on long, wide par fives, the player only starts playing golf with the third shot, and who can argue? Higher handicappers are disadvantaged on these holes, and the margin for error is just too big for the 'slug-gers'. Refreshingly, Southbroom is home to a quartet of par fives that measure between 413 and 443 metres. One might assume that on all of these holes, the lower handicapper has only to bomb a drive out there and lob an iron

onto the green to make a mockery of par. Forget it. On the first of these, the 6th, a well-positioned tee shot is needed to a sloping fairway, and to get up in two the second must be played with fine judgement or end up in a stream in front of the green. The 9th, the shortest of the four, is a superb hole with water all the way along the right side, and punishing vegetation to the left. The approach must again carry water, and any shot tugged to the left also ends up in the drink. Something of an anomaly is the pair of par fives to finish the round, but rather than being a soft ending, both are genuine score-spreaders that require finesse and accuracy – two attributes that certain modern designers ignore.

I can pay this club no greater compliment than to say that during this time of economic uncertainty when more than a few courses may close, if only a handful survive, I would hope Southbroom is among them. This is the sort of layout that one could play every day without tiring of it, and long may it retain its quaint, friendly atmosphere. Calling this a 'holiday' course hardly does it justice, but if you must, rather call it 'the best holiday course in the land'. **CG**

**GLENMORANGIE**  
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