



# Tour Report '09

*St Mellion, we came, we saw and we...*



2009 has seen a well documented pop at the economy and Tradlads have been affected just like everyone else.

So much so that we were unable to commit to our annual invasion of Europe's warmer areas for a week of golf and jollity.

**How great, then, that back in July, Dave Butler emerged from the Proshop at Traditions saying that we had got a great offer, 3 nights accommodation and 3 rounds of golf at St. Mellion, the flagship of Crown Golf's empire and a premier golf location in the UK. All for £75. Have some of that.**

*Kerching!*

St.Mellion is on the Cornish side of the Cornwall/Devon border so we seemed certain of sun or rain.

Never ones to look a gift horse in the mouth, 12 of us jumped at the offer and the deal was done. Tradlads will be taking on St. Mellion.

The next week, Dave gave me the confirmation for safe keeping.

I relaxed, thinking there was a trip where I did not have to do a load of organizing, it was all in the bag and I could disappear for my annual holiday knowing I had something else to look forward to when I returned. (Dave was later to describe my disappearance in less rosy terms).

The trip was booked for Friday 18/9/09 to Sunday 20/9/09.

I returned from holiday to an urgent call from Dave.

"Neil, what a game! I've booked the golf, but the inclusive golf was on the Old Course and we have had to pay extra for the Nicklaus signature course."

Dave had done well, the extra golf should have cost £80 per round and he had got it for £50, and he had also got a deal on the buggies costing us £40 each for the weekend. Good value for 5 rounds.

So, done & dusted, the £75 weekend was now costing £215. Kerching! A few murmurs when the 12 were told, but it was still not bad value and we were back to looking forward to a great weekend again.

If a deal sounds too good to be true, it probably is. Yep.

*Kerching! Kerching! Kerching! Kerching!*



*and we...*



The Sunday before we are due to go I was preparing the NTP markers etc. I looked at the confirmation Dave had given me. £15 per person per room. Not just per room.

Urgent messages to Dave who then got on the phones to Trads, St. Mellion and who knows who.

The price quoted on the confirmation was correct. And no golf was booked!

**A panic for Dave.**

They found our golf bookings for Saturday and Sunday but not for Friday. Fortunately, that was easily resolved. But will the extra cost put anyone off. It didn't luckily but GT had to drop out for work reasons. "I am not doing this again, it does me in" said Dave.

So, 11 of us headed west for Cornwall with a good weather prediction for the weekend. Happy days.

I arrived to see the Barnett Bro's parked up and then Dave's Mercedes 4x4. But no trailer. Dave was bringing Peter Sealy, Paddy and Robert Lloyd. Surely their luggage and golf clubs would mean that a trailer would be needed for all Dave's clubs? Five rounds for Dave would normally require 5 different sets of clubs. He is after all one of E-Bays most regular contributors. But no. Dave had decided that one new set would suffice. My standard (£5 a round to new readers) could be in danger as by the 5th round he will surely have learned that the more you practice with something, the better you get.



All arrived safely and we convened in the Nicklaus bar to sort out the pairings for the afternoon's round on the Kernow.



*and we...*

### **The Kernow**

Originally designed and set out by J Hamilton Stutt in 1976, it soon became recognised as one of the finest courses in the South West, playing host to the Benson & Hedges International Open in 1979, followed by the Tournament Players Championship and the Weetabix Ladies British Open.

With the arrival of the Jack Nicklaus Signature Course in 1988, the Kernow course was somewhat overshadowed, until in 2008 it was completely redeveloped, incorporating 9 of the original holes, extended and modernised, along with nine exciting new holes. With wider fairways, larger greens and spectacular views the Kernow course is a wonderful complement to the Jack Nicklaus Signature Course.

The new layout includes the 7th, a par three measuring over 200yds, followed by a stunning new 530yd par 5, while the outstanding 179 yd par three over the chasm has been incorporated as the new 14th hole and the 18th hole now brings your round to a close at the club house.

Off to the first tee. Nice green grass immaculately presented with a sloping par four to ease our way in. Nope. 200 yard walk to a temporary tee and a blind shot to a par three.

No shot and a blob at the first set the personal tone for the weekend. I was out with Dave, Peter and, something that was to prove a recurring theme, Marcus Bernard, son of Mayhe.

The second hole provided a familiar story; Dave and Peter slugged it out for the longest drive, won by Peter to bring a smile to his face. Off to the third, a tight 190 yard par three. Dave almost airmailed the green with a six iron. "I love these Diablo's" he said. "They are going to make such a difference to my game!"

Par for me, a good tee shot and I was off & running.

But Dave was loving his new clubs after just 3 holes. Sound familiar?

The Kernow (New name for the Old Course- apparently Kernow is Cornish for Cornwall) course is currently a work in progress and, as with the Sagra Familia in Barcelona (get the tourist guide out Lloyd) it will be nice when it is finished. The first ten holes provided an interesting challenge, nestling between the Nicklaus signature course and the hotel and it is relatively flat, combining some longish par threes with a short par 5 and a driveable par 4. The 2nd green was in a poor state, recovering from hollow tining and a beach full of sand, but as we were to find out, this was the only real downside on this loop. The dogleg 6th proved to be very interesting. The green is very hard to hit & hold. With "Out of Bounds" all the way down the right, there is no short cut and there is a very tight approach through a gap in the trees.

The 10th quickly became an exocet hole, proving a very driveable par 4.

The back eight takes players round the back of the hotel and you can see the new holes nearing completion as you complete the trek to the 11th tee. This part of the course again combines driveable par 4's with a short par 5, a real risk & reward hole and some attractive scenery. Two temporary greens are a bit of a disappointment but it will be interesting to return for the full 18 at some point.



*and we...*



Rajindra Singh Dhoni took the honours with 39 points, getting cut for the trip and an additional shot for tomorrow morning.

The session in the bar was one of the most amusing I can recall, side achingly funny, as Butler piled in to anyone & everyone but most regularly Peter, his stooge of old.

Pete just took it and took it as Dave marched around the room delivering his one liners and put downs. One, two tree, tree two one. Me nummer one, Rasta nummer two and me Raj, im make nummer tree. (Why does he try and talk like a brother from the hood?)

Still they came. "Peter you will never make it as long as there is a hole" etc.

Until, with Dave standing over him, ready to let rip with another dig at Peter, Peter delivered his riposte,

"Dave, stand up when you are talking to me".

**Size matters!**

Dr. Raj, our consultant Urologist and therefore used to taking the piss, was on the floor, creased up with laughter as for once Davie Baby was lost for words.

The draw was made for the morning round on the Nicklaus Signature course and this saw me out in the first group with Alan (or Aylan or Alleyne or Elaine depending who you are speaking to) and Marcus.

As is usual, people did their own thing for the evening. Some took a cab to Plymouth, some had an early night, some including me paid £40 for a small steak, half a potato and a few slithers of Duck breast hiding under a lentil playing hunt the raspberry coulis. I am still hungry thinking about it.



Sustained on beer and wine, though, I felt crap the next morning, but not as bad as Dave looked. How does he do it? Why does he do it? He's just a boy who can't say no, he's in a terrible mess! Paddy invited him to finish the evening in the hotel bar after they got back from Plymouth. The evening finished Dave.



*and we...*



Everyone was on the tee more or less on time though and as Alan/Alleyne/Elaine was not ready I had to take the first whack with the starters comments about this course being a million times better and a hundred times harder (or was it the other way round) still fresh in my memory and a crowd watching.

Phew, a good connection and in to the fairway. That was about as good as it got until finally getting a par on the 9th. One tough mother of a course. The greens had been heavily sanded recently and the dew or watering did not make them any easier.

Behind us there were similar stories as Dave lost 9 balls in 8 holes, or was it 8 balls in 9 holes, either way, you get the picture.

If you do not know where the ball is going off the tee round here, you have problems.

The brand new long hitting Diablos were spraying the ball further in to the rough.

Putting was also very tricky. Unseen breaks and slopes steeper than they appeared.

Behind our group there was a big corporate event going on as Sony were running a Ryder Cup type competition, Europe & USA emblazoned bags, logo balls, matching outfits, the lot. They even had their own tee markers, usually in front or alongside the ladies!

Unfortunately they were playing alternate shot matchplay and being a faster game they were constantly pressing our last group to speed up.

The marshals did not seem sympathetic, despite everyone finishing inside the guide time on their website.

The first few holes on the back 9 are amongst the most attractive I have played and were a bit reminiscent of parts of the Alabama trail, with the tall pines lining the holes.

The course was tough with a capital TOUGH!

Paul Barnett won the round with 31 points, just pipping Lloyd who had 30 off of a 5 handicap.





*and we...*



So. To the afternoon and back to the Kernow. I was paired with "Son of Mayhe" again. Is a pattern emerging?

Having played it again, everyone's opinions seemed to be more favourable to this course and scores were generally better. Peter made a big move scoring 41 points, nudging out Raj who again scored 39 points.

As is usual on a tour, Dave, seeking to improve his own chances, made a suggestion that, as the competition was best 3 out of 5 rounds, the 3 should include at least one round on the Nicklaus.

Good idea.

Is he laying off the booze tonight? If it had been just the best 3 out of 5 they would most likely be all from the Kernow. This idea was justified.

Delboy earned new nick names of Mick Jagger and Jumping Jack Flash for his trousers. Missed a putt, "Can't get no satisfaction", feeling mellow after playing a great shot, "Get off my cloud". Will we see the trousers at Trads?

The draw for Sunday on the Nicklaus saw me out with Marcus again and talk starting about adoption papers as he was seeing more of me than his father!

Peter and Raj look to be in pole position with Rasta Paul and Lloydly clinging to their coat tails.

Peter, Lloydly, Dave, Paddy & I decided to eat in the Brasserie which looked to be better value than the posh place.

When told Fish & Chips was off, Paddy said he would get something elsewhere and left. Where to? Cab to Plymouth?

Food was okay, but Friday night's exertions were catching up with Dave and he retired after his bangers & mash.

I remember seeing a bit of Match of the Day but not much else. Apparently the local draft beer sold at St. Mellion, Doom Bar, is not particularly strong but if you have enough of it followed by bottles of Gaymers cider it does the trick.





*and we...*



Similar conditions on the Nicklaus course but not as many hangovers. After walking out of the Brasserie, Paddy had not got any further than his bed and spent the front nine getting a sugar rush from Doughnuts and Mars bars as he had not eaten last night.

The golf saw similar performances despite the generally better physical state of the lads. It is very difficult to score well on this course and straight hitting is vital. Apparently the course record is one over par.

The Sony lot were out after us again.

There was a good story as we got back to the 19th hole.

The PGA rep asked us if we had noticed the Sony tee box signs on the 5th.

No-one could remember seeing them but we did comment that they always seemed to be in front of the tee of the day where we played from or next to the ladies tees, were they on the reds?

Now, we were told that they should in fact have been alongside the yellows, which is a carry of about 170 yards off the tee over water.

Some comedian guest at the hotel had moved them back to the professional tees which Jack Nicklaus says in his course notes "Pro's will probably take a 3 wood off the tee". Now, as mentioned, the Sony tee markers were normally alongside the reds, suggesting that the competitors were not the longest hitters. The carry off the back tees is about 220 yards.

Look out for Sony Logo lake balls next time you are in St. Mellion! Apparently so many went in the waterline is an inch higher!

Peter again proved the top dog with 32 points and nipped in ahead of Lloyd & Dr. Raj who had 31 points.

Paddy promised much, starting both nines well (3 consecutive pars on the back 9) but could not hold it together.

So, to the last round. Back to the Kernow.





*and we...*



As has become traditional on our tours, the pairings were made up based on points scored so far with the leaders out together in the last group. I was out with Marcus and will be getting a call from the social services any time now!

I had an enjoyable battle for the standard with a sober Dave Butler. Just who was it that switched the dial on his head cover from a 3 to a 5! He hit a screamer at a short par 4, looking to lay up and as he walked back to his bag saw he had hit a 3 wood. He fully expected to have gone out of bounds behind the green.

Big hitter? Pah! I was 25 yards short of him with a 5 iron and Marcus was level with him with a 3 iron. Sonny boy Marcus had spent the lunch break on the driving range trying to sort out his tee shots and was rewarded with 38 points in the afternoon.

A birdie for Dave at the 13th, who by now hated his irons and didn't want to use them. His 3 wood tee shot had obviously bounced back from a tree 50 yards behind the green and sat pin high, just in the fringe. **Was this the big comeback?**

The 14th. A duff tee shot with a Diablo short iron, "I just don't know how far they are going" and a duff chip in to the bunker slowed him up, but a birdie at the short par 5 following a big drive, to my par and a par to my double bogey on the temporary green at 16 set up the last two holes.

A driveable par 4. Dave had just marked a longest drive at 15. He had a driver in his hands. Whoosh. A duck hook, more dangerous to those on the 18th tee than the flag opened the door to me and my drive over the tree saw me alongside the green. One of my best ever drives but still he wouldn't go away as a top recovery and great chip saw him tap in for par which I could only match as my chip rolled back down the hill.

The chat continued on to the 18th tee as we drove in to the setting sun. I never saw his shot but he said it was brilliant. I hit a fairly solid one and he said "I wouldn't have lied if I'd known you were going to hit a good one". We both hit poor seconds (he looked disconsolately at his Diablo). He didn't get a shot. I did and had a 3 point lead anyway, and my fiver felt safe!

Bernie (Ok you can have the boy back) and Raj both scored 40 points to share top spot, but was Raj's score enough as Peter scored 39 and they would both be dropping one score from the Kernow.

**It was not.**





*and we ...had a good time*



Pete the taxi won the weekend playing extremely consistent golf. He hits the ball a long way but it was his approach play and putting that won it. Raj was edged out by 2 points and Bernie, thanks to his 40 pointer on the last round, slid past Lloyd for 3rd overall.

Dave contrived to nab the wooden spoon prize although the calculations may have been a bit dodgy as Marcus may have had a claim to it but identifying the winner correctly was more important.

It was far funnier as well! In his acceptance speech Dave reminded everyone how he had so many longest drives (Size matters). More drink was taken and decisions made over where to eat.

It resulted in 7 of us sharing a Chinese takeaway in Dave & Paddy's room. Glad I am not a cleaner! There was far too much and it must have been pretty ripe by the morning! I guess that must be what life at university would have been like, although the tiddly would have been eaten for breakfast!

So, homeward bound.

It was at work on Tuesday, thinking about next Saturday when I suddenly thought about what I would need to wear. It was at this point I realized I had left two shirts hanging in the wardrobe. Never mind, Peter would have seen them and brought them home. "No mate, I saw them but did not realize they were yours! I thought they were something to do with the hotel".

So just who was that imposter sharing our room, Pete? Is Peter implying that I dress in hotel workers uniforms when I go out socially?

The hotel staff, when I called them, were just as helpful as they had been all weekend and promised to arrange for them to be couriered to me.

Apart from the marshals giving our last group what was felt to be an unnecessary hurry up on the 1st round at the Nicklaus I found that the staff were all extremely friendly and helpful. It all helps to promote the resort.

**You just never know what he is dreaming about.**



*A great time, but something longer, and Robert White, or Charlie, or Jim Le Frog, or Hogg, or Penny or all of them is required for a proper tour.*