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Serious golfers can find Nirvana at Cape Breton's Highland Links. Below, from left: Bell Bay's fast greens; Dundee's challenging narrow fairways; the spectacular scenery at Le Portage, and the brand new Cabot Links.

Great GOLF

Cape Breton is home to six fabulous courses

by Dale Dunlop

Cape Breton has been called a must-visit travel destination by both *National Geographic* and *Condé Nast Traveler* magazines. Those ratings are based, at least in part, on the island's excellent golf courses. For years, a quartet of superb courses known as the "Fab Four" dominated the island; in 2010, a fifth must-play course was born, and this year a sixth will open, making Cape Breton a golf destination second to none in Canada.

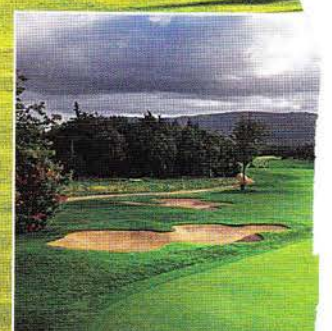
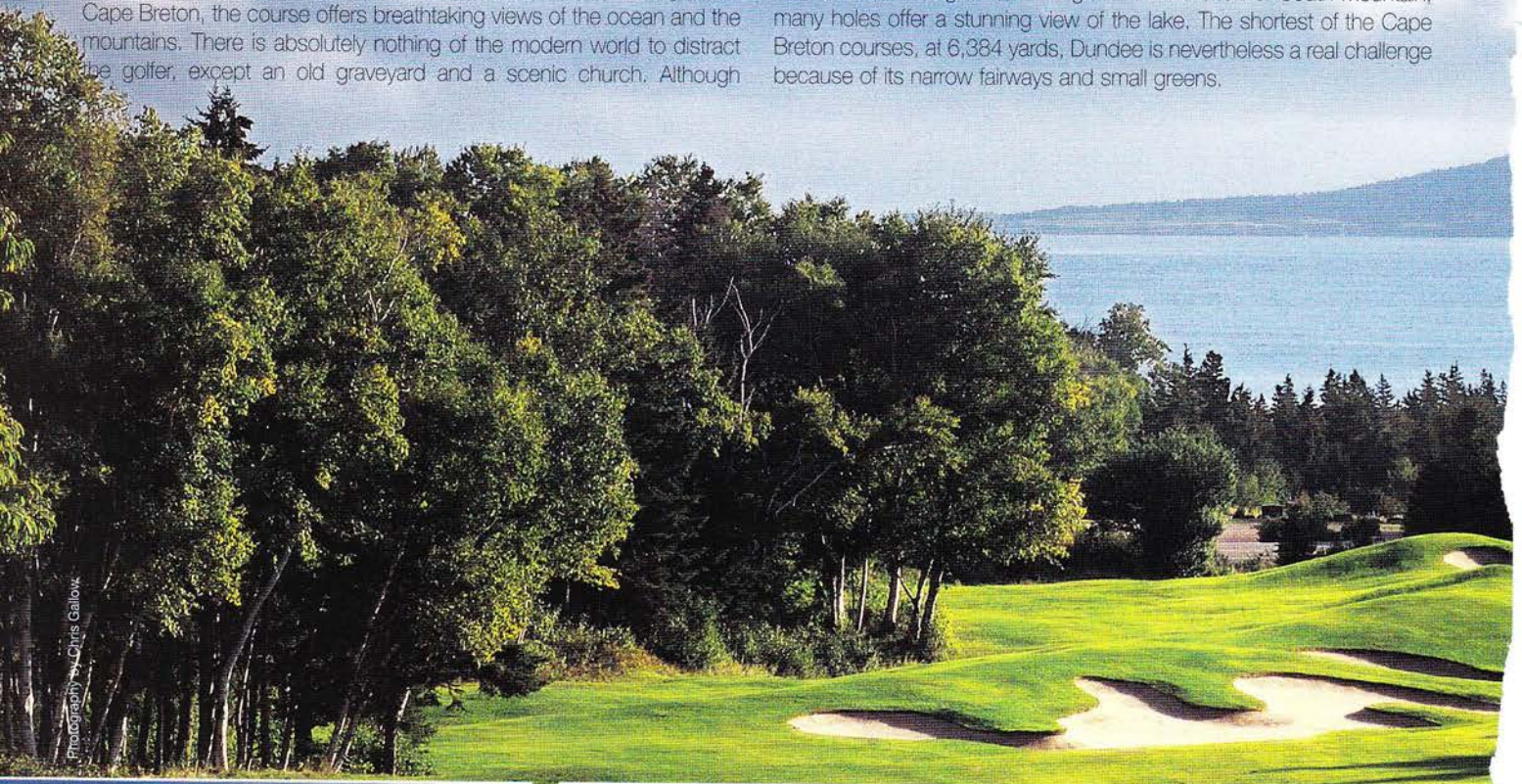
1. Undoubtedly, the course that every serious golfer wants to play is **Highland Links**. Designed by Stanley Thompson, Highland Links is considered by many to be the number one public course in Canada, and among the best in the world. In Jeff Barr's *1001 Golf Holes You Must Play before You Die*, the Highland Links had five holes listed—as many as Augusta National, US and St. Andrews, Scotland.

The course is not only challenging; it is also beautiful, particularly in the autumn. Following the Clyburn River deep into the highland glens of Cape Breton, the course offers breathtaking views of the ocean and the mountains. There is absolutely nothing of the modern world to distract the golfer, except an old graveyard and a scenic church. Although

motorized carts are available, purists will definitely want to walk this course to absorb the tranquility and sense of grandeur that permeates Highland Links.

2. Another of the Island's courses is **Bell Bay**, which has hosted the Canadian Amateur championships, the Canadian Club Champions Championship, and the 2001 Wayne Gretzky and Friends Invitational. Just outside the Bras d'Or lakes resort town of Baddeck, Bell Bay was laid out by one of Canada's top modern designers, Thomas McBroom. Known for its excellent conditioning and fast greens, the course starts out with relatively open space and gradually descends into heavily-wooded hillsides, ending with a series of challenging holes that feature a deep ravine and spectacular views of the Bras d'Or Lakes.

3. A second course that exploits the Bras d'Or Lakes as a backdrop is **Dundee**, on West Bay. Dundee is part of a large resort complex. The course takes great advantage of the elevation of South Mountain; many holes offer a stunning view of the lake. The shortest of the Cape Breton courses, at 6,384 yards, Dundee is nevertheless a real challenge because of its narrow fairways and small greens.





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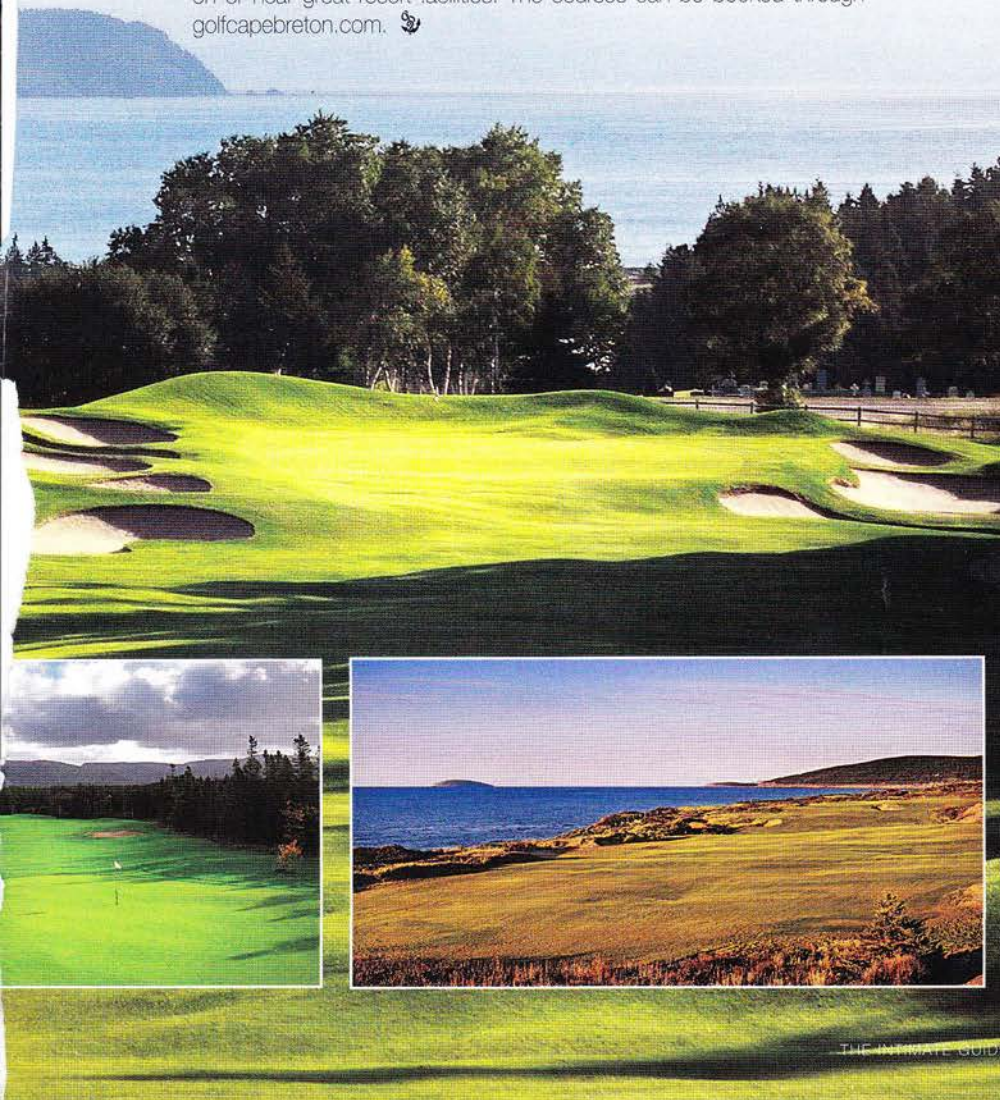
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4. The last of the original "Fab Four" is **Le Portage Golf Club**, is in the Acadian community of Chéticamp on the Gulf of St. Lawrence. A largely undiscovered gem, the course has fantastic scenery and water views, with the added bonus of a lot of history.

5. One of the newcomers to the group, opened in 2010, is another Bras d'Or Lakes masterpiece, **The Lakes**. Located in the tiny community of Ben Eoin, the course was designed by another of Canada's great modern designers, Graham Cooke. The Lakes also takes full advantage of the natural beauty of the area. With both nines straddling the sides of Ben Eoin ski resort, golfers contend with a challenging course that offers many changes in elevation.

6. **Cabot Links** is the newest course. Described by managing director Ben Cowan-Dewar as the only true "links" course in Canada, Cabot Links will open 10 holes this year on July 1; the final eight will be ready next year. "To have a links course in Canada was my dream," says Cowan-Dewar. "It's an exciting form of golf, and it's exciting to have something so different in the Canadian market. From every spot on our property you can see the Atlantic Ocean. It's a compelling site for golf."

All of Cape Breton's golf courses are reasonably priced, and all are on or near great resort facilities. The courses can be booked through golfcapebreton.com. 



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