



COURTESY OF BANDON DUNES GOLF RESORT

Bandon Dudes

Few things in life are as rewarding as a guy's trip to America's greatest golf destination.

BY SCOTT RESCH



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It's a windy Saturday afternoon at Bandon Dunes Golf Resort and my friend Brett is struggling — not just with his golf game, but with an alp of sand that appears to stretch from the magnificent Pacific Dunes course's 13th fairway all the way up to the sky.

A moment ago, his approach shot took a mean right turn and lodged high in one of the many towering slopes that make up this rugged linksland along the southern Oregon coastline. Fog had just rolled in off the Pacific — as it does most every afternoon around here — but somehow Brett managed to see it. And since he's loonier than a \$1 Canadian coin, he decided to go after it.

"I got it!" he yells, sand moving under his Footjoys like a treadmill stuck in "Sprint" mode.

Brett has trouble holding steady for even a second. But eventually those soft spikes find a grain of traction, and he takes the kind of swipe usually reserved for chopping down a tree.

"Practice swing," he shouts sarcastically after whiffing like Jose Canseco.

He's hell bent now. He repeats the act. And repeats it. Until finally ... *a miracle*. Brett blasts out to just in front of the green, the ball coming to rest near the feet of our friend Rock, who can't help but howl with laughter.

"Golf shot," Brett says with a smirk as he negotiates his way back down the pitch. "I'm just gonna chip this in for a 17."

The scorecard would show an "X" for Brett on 13, but it should've read "A" for effort. And a couple hours later, as the sun began to set and throw bright orange streaks overhead, we — me, Brett, Rock and the other three buddies of mine that made this journey to America's greatest golf destination for the very first time — would acknowledge it, in the form of a toast on the patio of the resort's raucous Tufted Puffin Lounge, a spot teeming with other groups of men celebrating their day's travails in the exact same fashion: with beers and stogies and stories to last a lifetime.

"To Bandon Dudes!" exclaimed Percy, after one of the only women on the entire 2,500-acre property delivered us another pitcher of Mirror Pond Pale Ale.

"To Bandon Dudes!"

IT ALL STARTED ON A CHILLY, DRIZZLY THURSDAY night in September, when the last member of the group showed up three hours past midnight, only four before the first tee time, dying for a cold beer, desperate for a short sleep.

That's a lie.

In truth, the Weekend of Our Lives began to take shape well before, about two months prior, when the idea of meeting up at Bandon Dunes to reconnect over the world's finest game was first lobbed at five of my closest friends, residing nowhere near each other and everywhere in the triangle that exists between Seattle, Salt Lake City and Southern California.

Okay, none of those places are separated by more than two hours on a plane. But my buddies and I don't get together often. And for some strange reason even phone calls are limited.





Brett battles the 13th hole at Pacific Dunes.

But email? Well, that's different. And when the subject line reads "Bandon Trip," that's something else altogether. Because when it comes to golf, Bandon Dunes — with its three walking-only courses, rugged setting and minimalist ethic — is to America what St. Andrews is to Scotland ... even though our version has only been in existence less than a decade.

How else do you explain the first reply, from Rock, one of the most reserved guys on the planet?

"Are you freakin' kidding me???" he asked. "I'm in!"

Or O, the one who is in just the second year of his cardiology fellowship and therefore gets days off about as often as Tiger makes bogey?

"Mountain moving required," he said, "but consider it done."

The power of Bandon Dunes was overwhelming. Everyone committed. And on Sept. 7 we left our wives and our girlfriends and our jobs behind and headed for a remote part of the country with nothing to do but golf ... and get beaten like amateurs at Augusta for a few days.

We couldn't wait.

THE FIRST BALL WASN'T EVEN LOST AT BANDON Dunes. It was lost in an area of lawn at Portland International Airport, where Rock and Percy tried to stem their anxiousness by engaging in a short-game competition while O and I waited for our luggage.

"Skulled it straight over the road," Percy, an Aussie, said of the fateful shot. "Bloody shocking."

The three-hour drive from Portland to the town of Bandon was just as amazing, especially after making the turn onto Highway 38, a scenic stretch of road offering views of tree-studded hills and the tranquil Umpqua River.

But in the eyes of fanatic golfers, fairways and greens trump everything. And even though we arrived at our ultimate destination too late in the day to play 18, we weren't too late to play. The sprawling Bandon Dunes practice facility — a massive complex with two driving ranges, a series of bunker areas and a putting green so big it could pass for a helicopter landing pad from overhead — was still open, yet not a soul was around.

We all bashed some balls for a few minutes, then Rock and I headed over to the bunker area, where ancient-looking, sand-trap-guarded greens — the type you just don't see in this country — were spaced out by about 100 yards. He looked at me. I looked at him.

"Middle green?" I asked.

"Bring it," he said.

And for the next hour we all brought it, challenging each other to every little game we could think of, until darkness descended to the point where we could hardly see Percy's 200-foot putt rim out.

"That's how ya roll it," he said with a smile.

"Over the road," O kindly reminded him. "Over the road."

WHEN MY BROTHER FINALLY ARRIVED AT 3 A.M., only two were still standing — myself and Brett. The rest were snoring away in our spacious Lily Pond Room, just a mid-iron away from the Lodge.

"Pretty sweet," my brother said of the modern décor and tight location, before fixing his gaze on the slumbering



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The patio of a Chrome Lake room, just steps from the resort's main lodge.



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“WE ACKNOWLEDGED BRETT’S WOES WITH A TOAST AT THE LODGE, WHERE OTHER GROUPS OF MEN WERE CELEBRATING IN THE SAME FASHION: WITH BEERS, STOGIES AND STORIES TO LAST A LIFETIME.”

threesome. “Those bastards are pathetic, though.”

Unfortunately, the same word could’ve been used to describe our golf games just a few hours later. The moment we’d all been waiting for, the day we’d marked on the calendar back in early summer, was here. And despite a fast start on the Bandon Dunes course — we all made par or better on the first two holes — no one posted a round worthy of remembering.

The Bandon Trails course was no more charitable in the afternoon. Although O managed to grind out a 77, and my 20-handicap brother drove the ball like a 2, the average score was higher than John Daly’s cholesterol.

But here’s the thing: No one really cared. Sure, we did what everyone else does at the end of the day here — we sat on that clubhouse patio, beers in hand, blaming some of our woes on that bunker on three, maybe the rest on

that green on 12. But mostly we just laughed. And talked trash. And took advantage of the chance to catch up on each other’s lives, all the while munching on Bandon’s best, like Ginger Duck Pot Stickers and Crispy Coos Bay Oysters.

Then we shot some pool and watched football in the Bunker Bar, in the basement of the lodge, before retiring to our rooms. We had another day ahead of us, another round scheduled, this time on the Pacific Dunes course, where we would continue to do what men in all walks of life try to do once in a while — re-create a time in our lives when games mattered desperately.

I think that’s what the buddy trip is all about. And Bandon may just be the perfect place for it. Yeah, Brett might disagree. But that’s just because he’s still trying to get the sand out of his shoes. ♦