



SOUTH AFRICA'S

100

GREATEST GOLF COURSES

AERIAL VIEW
The par-three 17th at Oubaai.

A NEW NO 1

South Africa's 100 Greatest continues to build in quality every year, as the competition intensifies for the top places. This year we announce a new No 1 for the first time in six years, with the Links at Fancourt surpassing Leopard Creek, which had been holding the crown since the 2005 issue. It's not the only surprise we have for you. The top 10 has a new look to it. The time has come to reveal South Africa's latest rankings. Prepare to greet nine new members, and a host of positional changes.

FANCOURT LINKS TAKES OVER AT NO 1

By Stuart McLean

*Photos by
Grant Leversha
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THE LINKS AT FANCOURT IS now the No 1 course in South Africa, having edged the perennial titleholder, Leopard Creek, by the statistical equivalent of a short putt.

Leopard Creek had been No 1 for six straight years, so dropping to No 2 is a seismic shift for a club which had grown comfortable with its continuing dominance. And owner Johann Rupert will no longer have bragging rights over Fancourt's Hasso Plattner, who was just as much an inspiration behind the building of the Links as Rupert was in establishing Leopard Creek in the mid-'90s.

Leopard Creek's slip to No 2 should not be deemed a demotion. This magnificent venue overlooking the Kruger National Park remains the benchmark when evaluating other courses in terms of its Memorability, Aesthetics and Conditioning.

But in elevating the Links to No 1 we are recognising the transformation taking place there in fulfilling its immense potential. It is only the fourth different course to reach that pinnacle. The last time Fancourt had a No 1 course was when the Montagu layout headed the rankings exactly 10 years ago, a few months after the Links was opened for play.

The Links, an incredible architectural achievement in local terms, created out of flat farmland, has made the leap from

UNDULATING LINKS
The par-five 17th at Humewood.

BEST CONDITIONED COURSES

Top 25 coastal region courses

1. Fancourt Links	7.82
2. Pearl Valley	7.81
3. Arabella	7.55
4. Fancourt Montagu	7.54
5. Fancourt Outeniqua	7.30
6. Oubaai	7.21
7. Steenberg	7.03
8. St Francis Links	7.00
9. Wild Coast	6.98
10. Zimbali	6.93
11. King David	6.89
12. Erinvale	6.89
13. Royal Cape	6.77
14. Cotswold Downs	6.77
15. De Zalze	6.76
16. Simola	6.71
17. Kingswood	6.65
18. Goose Valley	6.64
19. Champagne Sports	6.63
20. East London	6.60
21. Pezula	6.54
22. Clovelly	6.53
23. Pinnacle Point	6.49
24. Victoria	6.47
25. Hermanus	6.45

Top 25 inland region courses

1. Leopard Creek	8.16
2. Gary Player	7.88
3. River Club	7.82
4. Blair Atholl	7.56
5. Royal J&K East	7.19
6. Glendower	7.17
7. Elements	7.05
8. Parkview	6.97
9. Pecanwood	6.95
10. CCJ Woodmead	6.84
11. Royal J&K West	6.83
12. Sishen	6.74
13. Bryanston	6.73
14. Lost City	6.72
15. Kyalami	6.71
16. Randpark	6.70
17. Roodepoort	6.64
18. Gardener Ross	6.58
19. Irene	6.50
20. Woodhill	6.49
21. Zebula	6.48
22. Pretoria CC	6.47
23. Ebotse	6.46
24. Graceland	6.42
25. Silver Lakes	6.40



LINED WITH PINES
The par-five 11th at Hermanus.

No 3 to the top spot after an intensive campaign over the last two years by the Fancourt resort team to further improve the quality of a golf course which has received numerous plaudits.

Course designer Gary Player has also had considerable influence. Since moving his Gary Player Invitational tournament to the Links in 2008 he has spent more time at Fancourt, and thus had frequent opportunities to play the course and consider changes to the layout. The GPI field attracts tour professionals, celebrities and businessmen, and Player has been keen to showcase the Links in the best possible light for the occasion.

The Links, like Leopard Creek, also now hosts a regular Sunshine Tour event, the Dimension Data Pro-Am

having moved from Sun City to Fancourt in 2010, utilising all three of the resort's courses.

Just how much attention to detail goes into improving the Links can be seen in an incident involving Player in a practice round for one of the GPI events. He was crossing a wooden walkway from the 15th green when a board shifted as he placed his weight on it, causing him to lose his balance, fall off and sprain his wrist.

Nearly all these walkways have been replaced with an imported hardwood to prevent this happening in future.

An argument directed against the Links being a contender for the No 1 position over the last decade has been its Playability for average golfers. This was often cited by Golf Digest's evaluation

panel members as a weakness. It was considered too difficult to enjoy as a golfing experience unless you were expert enough to rifle pinpoint shots at elusive targets.

Even Sunshine Tour professionals failed to have much fun there. When the Links hosted the SA Open in December, 2005, only the top four finishers – including Retief Goosen and Ernie Els – broke par for the 72 holes, and the 36-hole cut was eight-over-par!

That particular Open was a fabulous championship, the course highlighting the special golfing skills of Goosen and Els, yet the greens and fairways were so stressed by the intense preparation that went into the week that grass soon began dying all over the place, and the condition suffered for months afterwards.

It remained a golf course with ongoing conditioning problems until, in July 2008, a new course superintendent arrived on the scene. Graham Corbett, who had spent most of the previous 30 years at Royal Johannesburg & Kensington, made an immediate impact. He changed the management structure, reduced the course staff from 73 to 45, and introduced a more efficient way of maintaining a labour intensive golf course where every tee has to be cut by a walk-behind mower.

Corbett is now the Fancourt resort course manager, his assistant Spencer Cooper being promoted in 2009 to take over the course super duties at the Links.

The nature of Golf Digest's annual course ranking survey doesn't provide

easy explanations for why courses climb and fall, but it is the job of our evaluation panel members to notice when golf clubs go to extra lengths to improve their courses.

This was certainly the case at the Links.

First of all the greens were replanted in July 2009 with a new variety of Penn A4 bent grass mix (identical to that used successfully at the Kingswood estate next door). The old greens at that stage resembled a patchwork quilt of different colours and quality.

Secondly, each of the 93 bunkers at the Links was inspected, and changes made to 26 of them. Some were closed up, new ones were added, and many were refaced. Most importantly, all the bunker sand

was replaced with a new sand variety that today provides a much firmer feel.

Subtle design changes enhanced the Playability of the course, widening playing corridors in areas so that there was more room for club golfers to manoeuvre their way around. Last year the controversial 12th green was rebuilt by Gary Player Design. This is one of the most demanding par 4s on the course, stroke one, yet its challenges were compounded by a tiny green set on a mound hard up against an unseen water hazard on the left. The green was an intimidating target. If you did risk going for it, and were fortunate enough to land on the

NINE COURSES DEPARTING THE RANKINGS

Oppenheimer Park, No 89 a year ago
Bushman Sands, No 92
Randfontein, No 93
Reading, No 94
Zwartkop, No 95
Bloemfontein, No 96
PE Golf Club, No 98
Koro Creek, No 99
Germiston, No 100



green, your ball would likely still roll off into a deep swale on the right, which made for a tricky recovery.

The new green (pictured on the cover) is now 40 percent bigger. It has two large ridges running through it, so putting remains tricky, but there are three distinctly large putting areas where you can place the pin. A bunker now catches golf shots missing to the left.

This is an artificial links – its design based on the wild links experiences of Ireland and Scotland – and all the mounding that is a feature of the layout was pushed up by dumping thousands of truckloads of sand across the property. It differed from most links however in that numerous wetlands were created. These had become overgrown, and have now been cleared to expose wide expanses of open water, improving holes like 8, 12 and 15. More bird life is returning to the property.

Corbett wishes to emphasise the environmental strengths of the Links, and intends making it Audubon Golf Course Certified within a couple of years. Only Royal J&K has such a certificate in this country. The course is almost free of kikuyu grass, thanks to a regular eradication programme.

FISH RIVER SUN – A REMOTE JEWEL

A course which continues to hold its own high up the rankings, despite inadequate funding and attention to detail, is Fish River Sun in the Eastern Cape.

The resort's remote situation on the coast midway between Port Elizabeth and East London means that this Gary Player layout doesn't get much traffic, so budgets have to be kept tight. Greenkeeper Ezra Watson is doing a good job in keeping the course playable with limited water (all of it goes on the greens).

Fish River is still something of a 1980s time warp in terms of design. A major refurbishment – and this layout has much potential – could do wonders for the resort by attracting more golfing groups.

“Improving the Links is still a work in progress,” says Corbett. “The cool season grasses on the fairways and tees are the wrong grasses for our climate and unsuitable in terms of the course's playability. They are at their best in November for the GPI, but not good for the DiData in February after enduring the summer heat. We have been holding trials near the range with a variety of cynodon species and will introduce that on the fairways towards the end of 2012. The cynodon is a healthier grass, stays green in winter, requires 40 percent less water, fewer chemicals, and would save us almost a million rand a year.”

So the Links, with its exclusive membership, does not have a limitless budget to spend on the course? “On the contrary, the maintenance budget has been slashed at the Links more dramatically compared to the other two resort courses, by as much as 20 percent year on year.”

Golf is a game of funny bounces, and there were more than a few of those when it came to this year's Top 100 list. Golf Digest invited applications for additional panel members in 2010, and 60 of these newcomers contributed to the rating process, increasing the total size of the evaluation panel to 150. In the end, their scores produce in the region of 75 000 individual elements.

We don't ask them to pick a No 1 course, a No 2 course, and so on. Instead, we ask them to evaluate all 18-hole courses and score each on a scale of 1 (Unacceptable) to 10 (Absolutely Perfect) on seven evaluation criteria.

Six new courses – Blair Atholl, Gardener Ross, Ebotse, Parys, Kingswood and Simbithi – were among those the panellists had to rate last year, plus two older courses (Humewood and Krugersdorp) which had undergone significant design changes in 2009 and were not in a position to be rated that year.



SHORTEST HOLE
The island green of the par-three 17th at Simbithi.

SIMBITHI BREAKS THE MOULD IN JOINING THE TOP 100

The most interesting newcomer to the Top 100 is a course which measures 4 042 metres from the tips and has a par of 60. It is mostly comprised of par-3 holes, 13 of them, and yet you could never describe it as a pitch-and-putt layout. The course in question is a Peter Matkovich design, Simbithi, part of an eco-estate in the resort town of Ballito on the KZN North Coast.

Simbithi has been referred to as an “Executive course,” which might have some reference to the fact that a twoball sharing a golf cart can get around its 18 holes in about two hours. So you can play golf in the morning and still be at work by 8.30.

There was some division among the Golf Digest evaluation members as to whether Simbithi should actually qualify for the Top 100. After all, it isn't a proper full-length course, so how it can be compared to the likes of neighbouring layouts like Umhlali, Zimbali and Prince's Grant?

The fact is, you cannot, but that does not

detract from the fact that Simbithi is an exhilarating experience to play and that's why we have allowed it to be part of the Top 100. The whole point of the rankings is to showcase South Africa's best golfing locales, and Simbithi is one of them. It's also an excellent challenge of golfing ability. When we were in Ballito last year, playing the course, we met up afterwards with Sunshine Tour professionals Warren Abery and Adilson da Silva, who live locally. Both of them play regularly at Simbithi and they said that the unusual nature of the layout helps them prepare for tournaments. “With so many par 3s of differing lengths it tests your iron play and short game,” said Abery. “And let me tell you it's not easy to score well there. There are some excellent holes.”

Simbithi only came in at No 95 on the rankings on its debut, which its supporters might find disappointing, but a course with so many par 3s is lacking in some aspects of the seven criteria panel members have to

consider, notably Shot Values and Design Variety. Apart from two long par 4s and the one par 5, you don't have much use for a driver in your bag. And half your tee shots are played with a short iron.

Yet Simbithi is superbly designed and crafted, as you would expect from Matkovich, who resides in a home on the estate, and that is matched by great conditioning on varied greens complexes. It has the shortest par 3 in South Africa, the 17th, which is also one of the most treacherous. It's a flick sand wedge from an elevated tee, but the green is a tiny island in a water hazard. Hit the target and you've got a birdie putt; miss it and you're wet.

With a par of 60 this presents a terrific opportunity for golfers to break 70 on a Top 100 layout, but don't be lulled into thinking that shooting in the 60s will be a doddle. It's a tough course at which to play to your handicap.

MOWBRAY ALMOST CLOSED ITS DOORS

Mowbray Golf Club celebrated its centenary in 2010, but the 101st year of the club's existence was almost its last. This traditional member's club, which has hosted seven South African Opens and the Bell's Cup in the 1990s, nearly went belly-up. Mowbray, like several golf clubs around the country, was in financial trouble last year. Had it not been rescued by its members, it would have closed its doors on December 31 and possibly become Cape Town's first municipal course. The last payments to secure the future of the club were met on December 26.

The club's problems began a few years ago when they took the risk of planting paspalum grass on the greens. Paspalum might thrive in the tropical heat of KZN, but it was a big disappointment in the Cape. Mowbray's conditioning woes made it an unpopular place to play. That is reflected in its almighty fall down the rankings. It

ended the 1990s at No 39, and is No 99 in the latest list!

But Mowbray appears to have accomplished a U-turn in recent months. The club dismissed its top committee members, alleged to have been interfering too much in the running of the club, and greenkeeper Neil Claassen was allowed to work unhindered on the course. The result is an incredible improvement in the quality of the greens (which have also been enlarged to include the fringes, a superb decision). Visiting golfers responded by packing the course in December, and the club turned over a substantial profit.

New general manager O'Brian Barber, formerly at the Tamarina estate in Mauritius, is helping lift the club back to where it was. A sign of the times is that a once conservative club is offering packages to new members which are drawn from the virtual club model.

on the greens in the months leading up to the SA Open in December. The compliments weren't exactly flying around from players during the championship – more the opposite. But the new greens, once settled, could decidedly improve the look and playability of Country Club in coming years.

Elements, after two years in the top 10 following its 2009 debut, fell out, all the way down to No 13. Its Conditioning mark, although still high, was considerably lower than it had been.

Humewood returned to the rankings after a year's absence four places worse off than it had been, coming in at No 20. However, the new-look Humewood, after its redesign by Sean Quinn of Golf Data, is a far better course than the raggedy links it had become before its 2009 revamp, and it could return again to the top 10. The new bent grass greens are excellent, and members now have consistent putting surfaces.

However, extensive removal of alien trees and bush around the links, without any thought to what would replace them, has left Humewood looking ugly and barren in places. The Aesthetics and Memorability leave much to be desired, especially the eyesore of rusty flagpoles, cartpaths and netting around the clubhouse and first tee. There is also not an old traditional links anywhere in the world that encourages the use of golf carts as much as Humewood does.

All eight of these courses earned high enough marks to be part of the latest Top 100, so by taking up places from the top to the bottom of the order it had a considerable knock-on effect on the overall look of the rankings. Three times as many courses went down on the rankings, compared to those which actually made headway and climbed up.

Blair Atholl, another Gary Player design in an exclusive, private estate, near Lanseria Airport in Gauteng, was the highest new entry at No 6. This

big, bold layout on rolling hills has been highly acclaimed (winning Golf Digest's Best New Course award in 2008) and it was no surprise to see it come in so near the top. Blair Atholl has aspirations on the No 1 position.

The top 10 this year has seen more movement than usual, with a former No 1, the Gary Player Country Club, falling to No 4, and Durban Country Club dropping three places down to No 9, no doubt the result of their replanting a new variety of Mini Verde cynodon grass

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SPLENDID SETTING
The par-3 third at Blair Atholl.

GOLF DIGEST PRESENTS

SOUTH AFRICA'S 100 GREATEST GOLF COURSES 2010/2011



NUMBER 35
The par-3 eighth at Ebotse in Benoni.

NUMBER 51
The 18th hole at Modderfontein in Johannesburg.

FIRST 10

COURSE	LOCATION	DESIGNER	OPENED	GREEN FEE	SCORE	MOVE	CONTACT
1. Fancourt Links	George, Southern Cape	Gary Player	2000	R1 600	630	Up 3	044 804 0183
2. Leopard Creek	Malelana, Mpumalanga	Gary Player	1996	R1 850	628	Down 1	013 791 2000
3. Pearl Valley	Winelands, Western Cape	Jack Nicklaus	2003	R745	622	Up 2	021 867 8000
4. Gary Player CC	Sun City, North West	Gary Player	1979	R735	620	Down 2	014 557 1245
5. Arabella	Kleinmond, Western Cape	Peter Matkovich	1999	R625	600	Down 1	028 284 0000
6. Blair Atholl	Lanseria, Gauteng	Gary Player	2007	Private	586	NEW	011 996 6300
7. Fancourt Montagu	George, Southern Cape	Gary Player	1992	R795	584	Up 1	044 804 0183
8. Royal J&K East	Johannesburg, Gauteng	Bob Grimsdell	1935	R295/R395	582	Down 1	011 640 3021
9. Durban CC	Durban, KZN	L Waters/G Waterman	1922	R495	580	Down 3	031 313 1777
10. St Francis Links	St Francis Bay, Eastern Cape	Jack Nicklaus	2006	R525	579	Down 1	042 200 4500

SECOND 10

COURSE	LOCATION	DESIGNER	OPENED	GREEN FEE	SCORE	MOVE	CONTACT
11. Wild Coast	Port Edward, KZN	Robert Trent Jones Jr	1983	R250/R280	578	No move	039 305 9111
12. Glendower	Johannesburg, Gauteng	Charles Hugh Alison	1937	R320	573	No move	011 453 1013
13. Elements	Waterberg, Limpopo	Peter Matkovich	2005	R270/R350	570	Down 3	082 490 4735
14. River Club	Johannesburg, Gauteng	Bob Grimsdell	1968	Private	569	No move	011 783 1166
15. East London	East London, Eastern Cape	G Peck/S V Hotchkin	1929	R317	564	Up 1	043 735 1356
16. Pinnacle Point	Mossel Bay, Southern Cape	Peter Matkovich	2006	R495	562	Down 3	044 693 3438
17. Simola	Knysna, Southern Cape	Jack Nicklaus	2005	R690	561	Down 2	044 302 9677
18. F'court Outeniqua	George, Southern Cape	Gary Player	1997	R795	558	No move	044 804 0183
19. Pecanwood	Hartbeespoort Dam, Gauteng	Jack Nicklaus	1998	R360/R410	555	Down 2	012 244 8000
20. Humewood	Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape	Col SV Hotchkin	1931	R295	551	NEW	041 583 2137

THE GARY PLAYER CC WAS NO 1 FROM 1998-2000, AND 2002-2004



THIRD 10

COURSE	LOCATION	DESIGNER	OPENED	GREEN FEE	SCORE	MOVE	CONTACT
21. Lost City	Sun City, North West	Gary Player	1993	R720	549	No move	014 557 3722
22. Sishen	Kathu, Northern Cape	Bob Grimsdell	1979	R140	547	Up 3	071 222 2214
23. Erinvale	Somerset West, Western Cape	Gary Player	1995	R435	546	No move	021 847 1906
24. George	George, Southern Cape	C M Murray	1931	R280	544	Down 5	044 873 6116
25. CCJ Woodmead	Sandton, Gauteng	Fred Hawtree	1970	R297/R352	543	Down 3	011 202 1620
26. Pezula	Knysna, Southern Cape	Ronald Fream	2000	R675	542	Up 1	044 302 5300
27. Beachwood	Durban, KZN	Sid Brews	1930	R375	541	Down 3	031 313 1777
28. Prince's Grant	KZN North Coast	Peter Matkovich	1994	R270	540	Down 8	032 482 0041
29. De Zalze	Stellenbosch, Winelands	Peter Matkovich	2000	R361/R381	537	Down 3	021 880 7300
30. Zimbali	KZN North Coast	Tom Weiskopf	1998	R300/R385	536	Down 2	032 538 1041

FOURTH 10

COURSE	LOCATION	DESIGNER	OPENED	GREEN FEE	SCORE	MOVE	CONTACT
31. Oubaai	Herold's Bay, Southern Cape	Ernie Els	2005	R445	535	Down 2	044 851 0131
32. Gardener Ross	Centurion, Gauteng	Ernie Els	2007	R350/R460	533	NEW	087 943 9222
33. Champagne Sports	Drakensberg, KZN	Hugh Baiocchi	1997	R325	531	Down 1	036 468 8000
34. Steenberg	Cape Town, Western Cape	Peter Matkovich	1996	R630	530	Down 3	021 713 1632
35. Ebotse	Benoni, Ekurhuleni	Peter Matkovich	2007	R290/R350	529	NEW	011 749 1638
36. Fish River Sun	Fish River, Eastern Cape	Gary Player	1990	R160/R195	528	Down 6	040 676 1002
37. Kyalami	Midrand, Gauteng	A Tomsett/ K De Beer	1955	R275	527	Down 3	011 468 1665
38. Royal J&K West	Johannesburg, Gauteng	Laurie Waters	1920	R230/R370	526	Down 5	011 640 3021
39. Cotswold Downs	Hillcrest, KZN	Peter Matkovich	2006	R350	524	No move	031 716 8184
40. Randpark	Randburg, Gauteng	S Brews/De Beer	1971	R265/R295	523	Up 4	011 215 8600

FIFTH 10

COURSE	LOCATION	DESIGNER	OPENED	GREEN FEE	SCORE	MOVE	CONTACT
41. Royal Cape	Cape Town, Western Cape	C M Murray	1928	R300	522	Up 2	021 761 6552
42. Bryanston	Sandton, Gauteng	C H Alison	1948	R280	518	Down 2	011 706 1361
43. Hermanus	Hermanus, Western Cape	Peter Matkovich	2006	R285	517	Up 9	028 312 1954
44. Pretoria CC	Pretoria, Gauteng	Bob Grimsdell	1909	R300/R370	516	Down 8	012 460 3372
45. Roodepoort	Roodepoort, Gauteng	Gary Player	1995	R250/R275	515	Down 8	011 958 1204
46. Zebula	Waterberg, Limpopo	Peter Matkovich	2004	R260	514	Down 8	014 734 7700
47. Parkview	Johannesburg, Gauteng	Laurie Waters	1916	R285/R305	513	Down 2	011 646 5400
48. Maccauvlei	Vereeniging, Gauteng	Peck/Hotchkin	1926	R150/R215	512	Down 6	016 422 1263
49. San Lameer	KZN South Coast	Peter Matkovich	1992	R310	511	Down 8	039 313 5141
50. Hans Merensky	Phalaborwa, Limpopo	Bob Grimsdell	1967	R325	510	Down 15	015 781 3931



NUMBER 68
The par-4 sixth hole at Parys in the Free State.

SIXTH 10

COURSE	LOCATION	DESIGNER	OPENED	GREEN FEE	SCORE	MOVE	CONTACT
51. Modderfontein	Johannesburg, Gauteng	Tomsett/A Barnard	1938	R180/R200	508	Up 5	011 608 2033
52. Kingswood	George, Southern Cape	Danie Obermeyer	2007	R300	507	NEW	0861 72 71 70
53. CCJ Rocklands	Sandton, Gauteng	Fred Hawtree	1986	R297/R352	506	Up 1	011 202 1620
54. King David	Cape Town, Western Cape	Bob Grimsdell	1954	R260/R295	505	Up 10	021 934 0365
55. Clovelly	Cape Town, Western Cape	Murray/Grimsdell	1934	R300	504	Down 8	021 782 6410
56. Plettenberg Bay	Plettenberg Bay, S Cape	Fred Hawtree	1976	R250	503	Down 6	044 533 2132
57. Wanderers	Johannesburg, Gauteng	Bob Grimsdell	1939	R222/R337	502	Down 11	011 880 9682
58. Irene CC	Centurion, Gauteng	Waters/Grimsdell	1911	R180/R250	501	Up 3	012 667 1829
59. Nelspruit	Nelspruit, Mpumalanga	Bob Grimsdell	1939	R240	501	Up 4	013 744 0952
60. Selborne	Pennington, KZN	Denis Barker	1987	R250	500	Down 12	039 975 1133



NUMBER 75
The 18th at Wingate Park in Pretoria.

SEVENTH 10

COURSE	LOCATION	DESIGNER	OPENED	GREEN FEE	SCORE	MOVE	CONTACT
61. Silver Lakes	Pretoria, Gauteng	Peter Matkovich	1993	R150/R340	500	Down 6	012 809 2110
62. Mossel Bay	Mossel Bay, Southern Cape	Bob Grimsdell	1961	R250	500	Up 9	044 691 2379
63. Stellenbosch	Stellenbosch, Winelands	Ken Elkin	1956	R275	499	Down 10	021 880 0244
64. Mt Edgecombe One	Durban, KZN	S Brews/A Barnard	1935	R290	498	Down 15	031 502 1010
65. Victoria CC	Maritzburg, KZN	Bob Grimsdell	1933	R250	498	Down 6	033 347 1394
66. Goose Valley	Plettenberg Bay, S Cape	Gary Player	1996	R300	498	Down 1	044 533 5082
67. Grimsor Park	Randburg, Gauteng	Bob Grimsdell	1948	R265/R295	497	Down 5	011 215 8600
68. Parys	Parys, Free State	DDV/Cobie le Grange	2007	R175/R225	497	NEW	056 818 1567
69. Woodhill	Pretoria, Gauteng	Peter Matkovich	1999	R250/R290	496	Down 3	012 998 0021
70. Paarl	Paarl, Western Cape	Elkin/Obermeyer	1955	R240	495	Down 10	021 863 1140

LEOPARD CREEK WAS NO 1 FROM 2005 TO 2010



NUMBER 90
The par-5 first hole at Crown Mines in Johannesburg.

EIGHTH 10

COURSE	LOCATION	DESIGNER	OPENED	GREEN FEE	SCORE	MOVE	CONTACT
71. Dainfern	Sandton, Gauteng	Gary Player	1991	R260/R360	494	Down 20	011 469 0040
72. Killarney	Johannesburg, Gauteng	Robert Trent Jones	1929	R275/R375	493	Down 14	011 442 3880
73. Krugersdorp	Krugersdorp, Gauteng	Bob Grimsdell	1938	R195	492	NEW	011 660 4365
74. Southbroom	KZN South Coast	A L Mandy	1948	R230	491	Down 7	039 316 6051
75. Wingate Park	Pretoria, Gauteng	Tomsett/Alison	1951	R230/290	490	Up 7	012 997 1547
76. Umhlali	Ballito, KZN North Coast	Peter Matkovich	1980	R185/R260	488	Down 8	032 947 1181
77. Orkney	Orkney, North West	Bob Grimsdell	1939	R110/R135	487	Down 20	018 473 2899
78. Umdoni Park	Pennington, KZN	Sid Brews	1930	R210	486	Down 9	039 975 1320
79. Blue Valley	Midrand, Gauteng	Gary Player	2001	R110/R250	485	Down 4	011 512 02 04
80. Westlake	Cape Town, Western Cape	Logan/Tosh	1932	R275	483	Down 4	021 788 2020

NINTH 10

COURSE	LOCATION	DESIGNER	OPENED	GREEN FEE	SCORE	MOVE	CONTACT
81. Rustenburg	Rustenburg, North West	Members/Golf Data	Unknown	R210/R230	482	Down 9	014 597 1249
82. Atlantic Beach	Cape Town, Western Cape	Golf Data	2000	R295/R350	482	Down 8	021 553 2223
83. Royal Durban	Durban, KZN	Bob Grimsdell	1935	R270	481	Down 13	031 309 2581
84. Centurion	Centurion, Gauteng	Peter Matkovich	1997	R250/270	481	Down 1	012 665 0515
85. State Mines	Brakpan, Ekurhuleni	Unknown/R O'Friel	Unknown	R130/R170	481	Up 2	011 740 9962
86. Leopard Park	Mafikeng, North West	Peter Matkovich	1993	R160	480	Down 13	018 386 1780
87. Goldfields West	Carletonville, North West	Bob Grimsdell	1947	R105/R160	480	Down 8	018 781 1570
88. Benoni CC	Benoni, Ekurhuleni	Unknown/Robinson	Unknown	R140-R180/R250	478	Down 11	011 849 8821
89. Glenvista	Johannesburg, Gauteng	Sid Brews	1973	R195/R255	477	Down 11	011 432 3150
90. Crown Mines	Johannesburg, Gauteng	Gary Player	1976	R120/R195	477	Up 1	011 835 1344

TENTH 10

COURSE	LOCATION	DESIGNER	OPENED	GREEN FEE	SCORE	MOVE	CONTACT
91. Rondebosch	Cape Town, Western Cape	Bob Grimsdell	1935	R240	476	Down 11	021 689 4176
92. ERP	Boksburg, Ekurhuleni	Unknown/Golf Data	1914	R150/250	474	Down 4	011 826 2466
93. Langebaan	Langebaan, Western Cape	Bill Kerr	1995	R225	473	Down 12	022 772 2498
94. Mt Edgecombe Two	Durban, KZN	Douw vd Merwe	1997	R265	472	Down 10	031 502 1010
95. Simbithi	Ballito, KZN North Coast	Peter Matkovich	2006	R165	472	NEW	032 946 5407
96. Milnerton	Cape Town, Western Cape	A Tosh/Golf Data	1925	R250	471	Up 1	021 552 3108
97. Graceland	Secunda, Mpumalanga	Gary Player	1998	R180	470	Down 7	017 620 1188
98. Royal Port Alfred	Port Alfred, Eastern Cape	Unknown	1907	R220	469	Down 12	046 624 4796
99. Mowbray	Cape Town, Western Cape	S V Hotchkin	1929	R280	465	Down 14	021 685 3018
100. St Francis Bay	St Francis, Eastern Cape	Golfscape	1999	R220	463	NEW	042 294 4365

Where there are two green fee prices, they represent weekday and weekend rates.

MOST IMPROVED COURSES



The par-5 sixth hole at Sishen.

SISHEN, UP 3 PLACES FROM NO 25 TO 22

THIS BUSHVELD GEM ON THE edge of the Kalahari is now attracting a steady stream of our course evaluation panel members, who are unanimous in their appreciation of an excellent Bob Grimsdell design, most of the holes framed within a kameeldoring forest.

RANDPARK, UP 4 PLACES FROM NO 44 TO 40

WHILE A CLIMB OF FOUR PLACES doesn't appear much, considering the new courses that have entered the top 40 this represents a strong recovery from a testing championship layout which had been slipping slowly down the rankings the last six years.

HERMANUS, UP 9 PLACES FROM NO 51 TO 42

IT'S NOT SURPRISING THAT THE newly configured Hermanus layout would make a move upwards, after re-entering the Top 100 a year ago. This Peter Matkovich design in the seaside resort grows on you the more you play it with its varied and at times formidable challenge.

MODDERFONTEIN, UP 5 PLACES FROM NO 56 TO 51

THERE'S NOTHING MORE CRUSHING to the spirit of course staff than heavy rains and a river which has regularly flooded the lower holes in recent summers, but conditioning remains good under Ryan Whitson's indefatigable team, and Modderfontein possesses a fantastic back nine.

KING DAVID, UP 10 PLACES FROM NO 64 TO 54

MARKEDLY IMPROVED conditioning has boosted the fortunes of this Cape Town club in the last two years, and this tree-lined Bob Grimsdell design is also starting to be appreciated for its golfing strategy. However, it still needs design improvements if it wants to get better.

MOSSEL BAY, UP 9 PLACES FROM NO 71 TO 62

MOSSEL BAY GOT PLENTY publicity last year as the home courses of Louis Oosthuizen and Lee-Anne Pace, but good all-year-round conditioning has increased the popularity of this enjoyable seaside course, which is now taking on more of a links look with subtle changes.

WINGATE PARK, UP 7 PLACES FROM NO 82 TO 75

THIS PRETORIA PARKLAND LAYOUT is on the way back up after becoming a bit rundown. Vastly improved conditioning and design improvements under course super Pieter Cooper has done the trick.

HOW OUR PANEL RATES THE COURSES

1 / Shot Values How well does the course pose risks and rewards, and equally test length, accuracy and finesse?

2 / Playability How well does the course challenge low-handicaps while providing enjoyable options for high-handicaps?

3 / Resistance to Scoring How difficult, while still being fair, is the course for a scratch player from the back tees?

4 / Design Variety How varied are the holes in lengths, configurations, hazards, green shapes and green contours?

5 / Aesthetics How well do the scenic values add to the pleasure of a round?

6 / Memorability How well do the design features provide individuality to each hole?

7 / Conditioning How would you rate the quality of tees, fairways and greens?

Riviera submerged by flooding Vaal River

UNUSUALLY HEAVY RAINS HAVE created havoc for Gauteng golfers the last few summers. Several courses in the region have again been flooded in January; the worst affected being those close to the Vaal River, notably Riviera-on-Vaal Country Club.

Most of the 18 holes were submerged in the first week of the year, including the club's pump station, electrical stations and irrigation satellite controllers. The damage to the course was substantial, with all the bunker sand being washed away, and the greens and fairways covered in a thick layer of mud and silt.

This is a rather sad situation, as Riviera – once the favoured haunt of Bobby Locke when it was known as Vereeniging CC – had been making a strong comeback in terms of the Top 100. It was very close to being back in elite company for the first time since 2002. Greenkeeper Leon Kruger had transformed the course since arriving at the club, and its modest green fees made 18 holes there one of the best value deals anywhere. Kruger and his

team have now cleaned up the course, at great expense, and to help allay the costs Riviera is having a fund-raising weekend on March 4-6 to coincide with the club's 73rd anniversary.

If you're interested in supporting, phone the pro shop at 016 420 1347.

659MM OF RAIN IN SIX WEEKS!

Kyalami Country Club in Midrand, Gauteng, has an average annual rainfall figure of 702mm. But in a six-week period from December 16 to the end of January the heavens opened and the course received a soaking deluge of 659mm! Amazingly, though, the club's excellent drainage system saw only 2½ days of play lost in that time. Kyalami are replanting their greens with a new bent grass starting in May, and all 18 will be open for play by October.



The par-three 14th at Riviera.



GREEN FEE SPECIALS

BUDGET BEATERS

Several golf clubs have come up with innovative specials to lure golfers into playing more rounds.

2 OII IS A GOOD YEAR TO PLAY more golf, because you're going to get some unbeatable green fee deals in most parts of the country. If you're a weekday morning golfer living in Gauteng you can find several good courses where R100 will get you 18 holes and perhaps even a sandwich at half price. And it has never been cheaper to play Pinnacle Point, one of the most fabulous golfing experiences in the world.

The economic slowdown has had an impact on golf clubs in South Africa, but as yet no club has closed its doors. Many clubs in Gauteng have reduced morning green fees to attract more visitor rounds, without infringing on times for members, and some clubs have reduced their rates to attract more visitors.

On average, clubs annually hike their green fee by margins of five and 10 percent, but 17 clubs in the Top 100 have bucked that trend by freezing their current visitor rate.

Pinnacle Point near Mossel Bay (No 16) was an exclusive venue when it opened for play a few years back, not accepting walk-in golfers. They didn't take long to realise that wasn't a good idea. Now, the resort/estate, which is

about to undergo a change of ownership, has slashed its affiliated visitors green fee from R680 to R495, and that price includes a golf cart. It's one of the best deals on the Garden Route where there is a surfeit of great courses to choose from.

Three top 10 clubs – Leopard Creek (R1 850), Arabella (R625) and Fancourt Montagu (R795) have all maintained their 2010 prices, while Pearl Valley have introduced an affiliated rate of R745, down from a standard visitor rate of R1 095, which now remains the unaffiliated green fee.

Pecanwood reduced their weekday and weekend rate by R70 to R360/ R410, while Royal Johannesburg & Kensington added only R5 to their green fee, which remains outstanding value for two quality golf courses, at R295 during the week and R395 on weekends.

If you go outside the top 50, Modderfontein GC (which climbed five places to 51) has an attractive special of R85 for all golfers playing before 08h30 on Tuesdays to Fridays, and a flat rate of R200 on weekends.

Orkney GC, albeit a rural destination but beautifully situated on the banks of the Vaal River, is still a bargain at R110 during the week, and that has now been reduced to R65 on weekday mornings and R135 on weekends. You



Pinnacle Point is cheaper than ever to play.

GARDEN ROUTE GREEN FEES

A trip to the Garden Route provides a feast of good quality courses and golfing facilities. Here's what it costs to play the Top 100 courses on the coast from Mossel Bay to Plettenberg Bay as an SAGA affiliated visitor:

Course	Location	G. fee
Pinnacle Point	Mossel Bay	R495*
Mossel Bay GC	Mossel Bay	R250
Oubaai	Herold's Bay	R445
Fancourt Links**	George	R1 600
Fancourt**	George	R795
Kingswood	George	R300
George GC	George	R280
Simola	Knysna	R690*
Pezula	Knysna	R675*
Plett CC	Plettenberg Bay	R250
Goose Valley	Plettenberg Bay	R300

* Includes golf cart

** You need to be a hotel resident, or guest of a member, in order to play any of the three Fancourt courses. The Links has limited times available for hotel residents each day.

can play State Mines for R80 on Wednesdays or Wingate Park in Pretoria for R100 on a Monday.

At the coast, Royal Durban have introduced a Monday to Friday green fee of R100 for play teeing off between 7-9am. And Steenberg in Cape Town offer a R135 reduction on weekdays before 9am at R495. – Barry Havenga



SLOW RECOVERY FOR GOLF ESTATES

Embattled estates owe the banks R1.5-billion. By Dylan Rogers

THREE YEARS AGO GOLF Digest published its tenth annual issue of Golf Course Living. The 200-page supplement included a directory of 131 estates: 62 existing estates, 27 estates under construction, and 42 planned developments. But in early 2008 the golf estate bubble was on borrowed time. It had peaked and was about to burst with a bang, one of South Africa's biggest victims of the worldwide recession.

Today, the country is littered with financially troubled golf estates – it is estimated the banks are owed a cumulative R1.5-billion! – mostly developments started five or six years ago, where costs were allowed to spiral. They were caught in the maelstrom of the recession. Critically affected were rural estates – Highland Gate (Mpumalanga), Euphoria (Limpopo), Nondela (Drakensberg) and Bushman Sands (Eastern Cape) to name four – where the developers were relying on buyers seeking holiday homes.

Of the 42 planned estates in GCL, none have shown any sign of activity the last three years. And of the 27 under construction at that time, only a handful could be considered successful – Serengeti and Jackal Creek in Gauteng, Legend in Limpopo. And Zimbali is going ahead with their Lakes development on the KZN North Coast, where demand for property is high.

There are exceptions. The Simbithi eco-estate in Ballito sold more than R300-million of property last year, in large part due to the opening of the King Shaka International Airport on the KZN North Coast.

The lucky developers were those on the Garden Route, where government red tape stymied proposed developments such as Lagoon Bay near George. Five years ago environmentalists had envisaged a scenario where the Tsitsikamma coastline would be one unbroken line of golf estates. In reality

it never seemed likely, and today there remain only eight estates in the region.

Much of the talk at golf clubs is that just about every estate launched in the past 10 years is apparently “in trouble” or has been “in trouble.” However, few operational estates will admit to problems, although some have taken it on the chin and resolved to turn things around. Euphoria chief executive Gert Erasmus concedes they haven't sold a stand in two years, but says they have changed their approach to focus on the conference market.

The most talked-about estate has been Pinnacle Point Beach & Golf Resort, with its spectacular Peter Matkovich course alongside the high ocean cliffs at Mossel Bay. Holding company, the Pinnacle Point Group, has endured a tumultuous few years, including a 2008 merger with JSE-listed Acc-Ross Holdings. Shares traded at R1, but at the end of January they were worth two cents. There is now a

new majority shareholder in Trilinear Asset Management, and 2010 saw the group announce that golf estates were no longer part of their strategy. COO Steven Kruger told Moneyweb that Pinnacle Point and Clarens Golf & Trout Estate would be sold by March.

Other Pinnacle Group estates in the spotlight include Wedgwood in Port Elizabeth, where construction halted, and Gardener Ross in Gauteng, sold to Investec last year to settle debts owing to the bank. Investec's plans for the estate include a “recreational complex” instead of a clubhouse, to make the offering more appealing to non-golfers and families. “We want to make the golfing experience more casual and less intimidating for the beginner, and meet our objective of adapting golf to the new world,” says Investec Property's Raymond Hofmann.

Investec's name crops up whenever golf estates are discussed. While Hofmann will only confirm ownership of the exclusive Millvale estate in the North West – a joint venture between Investec and a private client – the bank has been linked with Highland Gate, Nondela, Silwerstrand (Western Cape), Cotswold Downs (KZN), which is under provisional liquidation, Legend and The Hills in Pretoria.

Delays at Highland Gate and Nondela, both Ernie Els designs, have been well documented. The 18 holes at Highland Gate were completed last year, but the estate remains in liquidation.

Despite the rocky ride, Investec still see value in the estate market. “We believe the industry has reached its lower turning point and that we are now in a recovery phase,” says Hofmann. “The rate of recovery is difficult to predict but it will be assisted by lower interest rates, and is likely to last for at least another three years. We feel that sales volumes will recover progressively and that average sales volumes for primary home estates

could be back to an average of 100 to 150 per year by 2013.”

One previously ailing estate now healthy is Elements Private Reserve in the Waterberg region of Limpopo. Graham Power, head of one of South Africa's largest privately held civil construction and property enterprises, bought all the unsold stands and properties, 103 of them. “Power understands that Elements is a project with good prospects, having a quality bushveld location and golf course, and would be first out of the blocks once the recession is over,” says Bernard Mostert of Atticus, an investment and advisory business which looks after Power's stake.

Mostert has strong views on the estate market. “The problem is that most golf estates were initially developed by people with very little experience and even less capital,” he said. “Banks were willing to lend money until no longer in a position to do so because of the global financial crisis. The biggest difference between the ones that have worked and those which have failed can be seen not only in the quality of their location and amenities, but mostly in the quality of the money and experience behind them.”

It's not just golf estates which have had a tough time. Golf clubs are also struggling to balance the books. The FIFA World Cup was meant to boost the industry last year, with many visitors expected to play golf and watch the soccer, but that never materialised. In fact, the World Cup delivered a “double whammy” in that the corporate market reduced their traditional golfing budget.

Golf clubs were generally damning in their assessment of the impact of football's showpiece, best summed up by Blair Atholl chief executive Mark Williams. “Corporate golf days are the backbone of most clubs and in 2010 a lot of big companies allocated their golfing budgets to World Cup enter-

tainment. And, in a recession, golfing entertainment budgets have been slashed,” he said.

It wasn't just the lack of corporate days. Golf clubs cost millions to run. Dave Usendorff of Inside Right Golf Club Management – which manages Ebotse and Eye of Africa among others – estimates that a quality club needs revenue of between R7-million and R15-million each year.

One can understand, therefore, why Royal Johannesburg & Kensington received a fright when they recorded 10 000 fewer rounds last year. “We tried to cut costs everywhere,” said golf director Jaco du Plessis. “The last thing you want is to run your operational costs out of your capital fund. The club needs to run itself.”

There was no retrenchment of staff, but Royal's membership model was reviewed. The entrance fee was cut by 50 percent, and a host of different payment options introduced. The club also drove a “Play 4 More” project after calculating that if each member played four more rounds, the club would meet its targets.

All clubs felt the pinch, including newer properties such as Eye of Africa, south of Johannesburg, which popped up in the middle of the recession and started out with the intention of retaining exclusivity with a members-only policy. Usendorff's advice to them was that “the best way to advertise is to get people to play there” – hence the opening of the doors.

So where to from here?

“There's no general solution,” says Williams. “You can't turn around and say, ‘This is going to save golf estates.’ You, as the owner, developer or management team, must come up with a plan. The industry is there, the golfers are there – they're not going away – and it's a case of how you attract those people. How do you build a model to sustain your facilities? That's got to come down to the people who are running it.” ■