

SHORT GAME... 18

Sifford son faces theft indictment

THE son and former daughter-in-law of Charlie Sifford have been charged with stealing from the late World Golf Hall of Famer.

Sifford blazed a trail for African-Americans in golf, defying discrimination and death threats along the way. But it seems he was the victim of theft by members of his own family before he died earlier this year, aged 92.

He knew better than most what it was like to be insulted. The charges against his son Craig and former daughter-in-law Sandra suggest yet another affront to a proud man.

The couple allegedly stole more than \$1million from Sifford during a four-year period starting in 2010 and spent it on travel, dining, clothes, jewellery and landscaping, according to the Ohio attorney general's office and Cuyahoga County prosecutor.

The couple, who divorced earlier this year, were charged with theft and money laundering. Sandra Sifford has also been charged with receiving stolen property.

Malcolm is Scots' PGA trail blazer

SHONA MALCOLM, who has just taken up her role as the new secretary of the PGA in Scotland, is the first female to hold that position in any of the association's seven regions.

Malcolm, who hails from Ayrshire and will be based in the PGA's office at Gle-neagles, has a wealth of experience as a golf administrator, having served as both chairman of the Scottish Ladies' Golfing Association and CEO of the Ladies' Golf Union.

In the latter role, she successfully re-engineered the organisation, managing and growing the marketing and promotional sponsorship activities of the St Andrews-based organisation while organising both professional and amateur golf championships.

"Shona's experience and passion for the game means that she is extremely well equipped to promote the best interests of the PGA in Scotland, its members and to realise the region's potential," said Liam Greasley, the PGA's director of regions.

Following a recent visit to Poland, Paul Trow believes that the game there is poised to take off in a big way

Northern Poland is no stranger to dramatic events. Mainly flat and defenceless, though of huge strategic value because of its access to the Baltic, it has perhaps witnessed more social changes than any other corner of Europe.

As a playground for Teutonic knights and Hanseatic merchants, as a battlefield variously for Prussian, Swedish, German and Russian armies, it lurched wildly between dictatorship and enlightenment with only Catholicism as a buttress for more than a thousand years.

Then it triggered the most politically seismic upheaval of the late 20th century – the tearing down of the Iron Curtain. The Solidarity movement headed by Lech Walesa that steered 1980s Poland from fiefdom to freedom was centred on the two main shipyard cities – Gdansk and Szczecin.

As a result of Solidarity's endeavours, the region is now vibrant and prosperous. All the fortifications, civic buildings and churches have been lovingly restored and the old towns are abuzz with commercial energy. The Swedes, Germans and Russians flock in today as tourists rather than oppressors and retail prices are distinctly competitive (unlike Greece, Poland has not embraced the euro).

This process of rejuvenation has also led to the arrival of golf, that most bourgeois of sports. Looked at logically, this should not be a surprise. Poland, 25 per cent bigger than the UK with only 60 per cent of the population, has plenty of spare capacity. It teems with forests, parkland and unfarmed open spaces – perfect for the construction of golf courses.

And perfect too, in particular, for those British golfers who prefer familiar countryside to the desert hotspots of the southern Mediterranean.

I was part of a group of journalists that recently whistled back and forth across northern Poland, or Pomerania as our hosts liked to call it. It seemed like we were actually being driven through Norfolk or Nottinghamshire – the trees lining the roads were exactly what we see at home and the summer climate (an alternating mix of sun, wind, cloud and rain) was eerily similar.

Of course in wintertime they have a much frostier deal than us, but that should be of little concern to golfing visitors as the courses are generally closed from early December until late February.

While there, I managed to play seven of the country's 18 18-hole

courses and was mightily impressed with the quality of design, the overall standard of maintenance and the fact that they were all apparently well-financed. In this respect, we shouldn't be surprised: Poland is a nation of builders and they take pride in the finished article.

Our Polish golfing Odyssey divided into two parts – trawling the hinterlands surrounding Gdansk and then Szczecin (pronounced Stchetchin, in case you were wondering).

Before embarking on course descriptions, a caveat is necessary for the benefit of would-be green-fee payers. With the exception of two clubs in the north-west, which are a short distance apart, visitors to this region must factor in at least an hour to travel to their course of preference. The reasons are logical. Look at a map of Poland – fundamentally it's a square-shaped country – and therefore the 18 full-length layouts (and a similar number of nine-hole courses), mostly built off the beaten track within forests or on set-aside land, can take time to access.

Think needles in haystacks! Still, the effort was certainly worth it and, in fairness to the owners, the clubs I visited are all offering on-site residential units, either already built or off plan, for sale.

Following the two-hour flight from Luton to Gdansk, courtesy of Hungarian budget carrier Wizzair, it took another two hours, this time by road, to reach Mazury Golf & Country Club near the medieval town of Olsztyn in the Warmia-Mazuria region, close to the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad. Next door to the club we found ourselves billeted that first evening at the functional yet agreeable Hotel Marina Club.

Laid out by British course architect Martin Hawtree in 1994, Mazury stretches across undulating meadowland and has no shortage of strategically-positioned ponds and bunkers to keep the golfer guessing. From the back tees, it provides sweeping views of the surrounding terrain and woodland. A large new clubhouse overlooking the ninth green and first tee is currently being built and once completed it should become a social hub for the whole local community.

From Mazury, we journeyed north and west for around an hour to the port of Elblag upstream from the River Vistula. The Hotel Elblag in the heart of this pristine town was our launchpad for the following morning's excursion to Sand Valley Golf & Country Club, home to a delightfully natural course that, as the name on the tin suggests, is built on sandy subsoil and routed through a valley dotted with small stands of pine trees.

Sand Valley opened in 2008 and its owner, genial Finnish émigré Antti Pohjonen, refuses to allow the club to be shackled by dress codes and other tedious rules, thus ensuring a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere.

The final destination of our Gdansk leg was Sierra Golf Club, just inland from the Baltic resort town of Sopot, home to Europe's longest wooden pier and currently enjoying a tourism renaissance thanks to its spas and beaches.



Popular layouts: Sierra Golf Club, inset, Mazury GC

For more information
Mazury Golf & Country Club
www.mazurygolf.pl
Sand Valley Golf & Country Club
www.sandvalley.pl/en/
Sierra Golf Club
www.sierragolf.pl/en/
Amber Baltic Golf Club
www.abgc.pl
Kamień Country Club
www.golfkcc.pl
Binowo Park Golf Club
www.binowopark.pl/en/
Modry Las Golf Club
www.modrylas.pl
Wizzair for low-cost flights from Luton to Gdansk and Szczecin
www.wizzair.com
Official Poland tourism website
www.poland.travel/en/



Stunning: Sand Valley Golf & Country Club

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In contrast to Mazury and Sand Valley, Sierra has a full membership and is busy nearly every day – a consequence, no doubt, of its location near an upwardly-mobile conurbation.

Scottish designer Cameron Sinclair fashioned this manicured parkland layout in 2002 and its signature hole, the 190-yard 16th, is both enchanting and treacher-

ous. With water down the left and a long, snaking bunker with out-of-bounds beyond wrapping round the right and back of the green, this is not a challenge for the faint hearted.

We did not have time to visit the other 18-hole course in the region, but as Postolowo, just south of Gdansk and designed by Britain's Jeremy Turner in 1990, measures a gargantuan 7,750 yards off the back tees it was probably just as well.

Switching to West Pomerania, where Szczecin is the capital, our next round was at Amber Baltic Golf Club near the unpronounceable seaside resort of Miedzydroje where we subsequently spent a pleasant night sipping cocktails in a bar on the beach.

As you'd expect of a course that's apparently below sea level, Amber Baltic has almost as much marsh and water as grass, certainly on the front nine. It came into being in fits and starts as its earliest incarnation was wrecked in its infancy in 1992 by a violent storm and it took a few more years for its current layout to evolve under the watchful eye of German designer H.G.Erhard.

The following morning it was only a short hop to the secluded Kamien Country Club. The course, designed by American David Donnellan and opened in 2012, was fun to play though certainly not to be underestimated.

It was slightly reminiscent of Dale Hill in East Sussex in that while much of the layout is carved

through a thick indigenous forest, there are also at least half-a-dozen holes on the back nine that are spread, in an almost linky style, across open land.

Like Kamien, our next port of call, Binowo Park Golf Club south of Szczecin, has a Swedish owner. This complex, which includes a nine-hole academy course and conference facilities, was opened in 2000 by Princess Birgitta of Sweden and seems almost as popular with local golfers as Sierra. Uncharacteristically for the general landscape, the 18-hole layout has quite a few elevation changes. More characteristically, it is surrounded by lakes and framed by giant beech trees. Overall, it was another fine test of golf.

Our journey ended on a high

note at the Gary Player-designed Modry Las Golf Club. The course, which opened in 2009, straddles gently rolling terrain flanked by a mature oak, pine and birch forest and interspersed with colourful colonies of wild flowers and the crystal-clear Lake Radun. I shared a buggy with Stewart Snedden, the director of golf from Scotland, and after the first three holes, which all skirt the lake, he mostly steered me clear of the less desirable lines that can lead to significant scorecard damage.

Happily, our visit also coincided with the unveiling of the club's answer to the Par-3 Course at Augusta National – the beguiling new Orli Las layout which is surrounded by lush woodland and features infinity greens that jut

into stunning lakeland scenery. As we embarked on the 30-mile drive from Modry Las to Szczecin airport, I reflected that while golf in Poland is undoubtedly moving in the right direction, the country needs a lot more courses so the number of its native golfers can rise to a sustainable level. At present, golf is largely the preserve of the rich (as it used to be in Italy) or aimed at tourists, mainly Scandinavians and Germans.

My conclusion was that playing in Poland would be a fantastic experience for British visitors, but it's impossible at present to regard it purely as a golf destination. Thus the key is to book a holiday to a resort of choice, enjoy everything else on offer and perhaps have a game or two along the way.

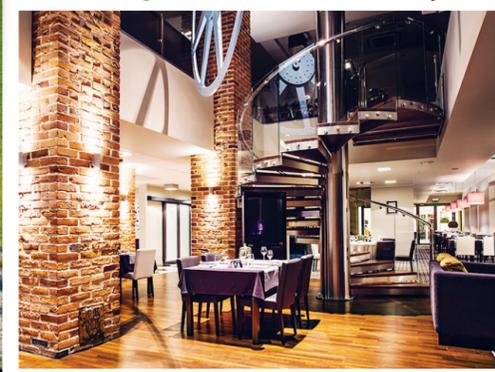
The seven centres are in Portsmouth, Tilgate Forest in West Sussex, Richmond Park and Beckenham in London, Edwalton near Nottingham, Duxbury Park in Chorley and Castle Point on Canvey Island.



Hanseatic style: A waterfront scene in Gdansk



Beautiful setting: The Hotel Marina Club near Mazury



Fine dining: The restaurant in Hotel Elblag

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Jacklin to play Par 3 host again

OPEN winners Tony Jacklin and Paul Lawrie and defending champion Eddie Pepperell are part of a star-studded cast who will play in the Farmfoods British Par 3 Championship at Nailcote Hall, Warwickshire, from August 11-14.

Jacklin, twice a Major winner and Europe's most successful Ryder Cup captain, will host the tournament for the seventh year running.

In addition to Pepperell, five other former winners – Peter Baker, DJ Russell, Carl Mason, Robert Rock, and Mark Mouland – have all committed to the event.

Also in the field chasing a share of the £100,000 prize fund are European Solheim Cup star Charley Hull and fellow Ladies' European Tour players Amy Boulden, Carly Booth and Kelsey MacDonald.

The European Senior Tour challenge will be spearheaded by Gary Wolstenholme while entries have also been received from former Ryder Cup players Brian Barnes, Tommy Horton and Des Smyth.

Initiative to grow game under way

A CHAIN of seven golf centres across the country is staging a festival this month to attract new participants and build relationships with local communities.

Glendale Golf staff, from Portsmouth in the south to Chorley in the north, are dedicating themselves to spreading the game.

Each centre will stage golf camps, free rounds for youngsters, free lessons, FootGolf events, ladies' days and fun activities for all the family, including senior citizens.

Tom Brooke, Glendale Golf's operations director, said: "Each person who tries golf for the first time at one of our centres will almost certainly share the experience with at least six others – if we make it a good experience. That's the local snowball effect we are trying to create."

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