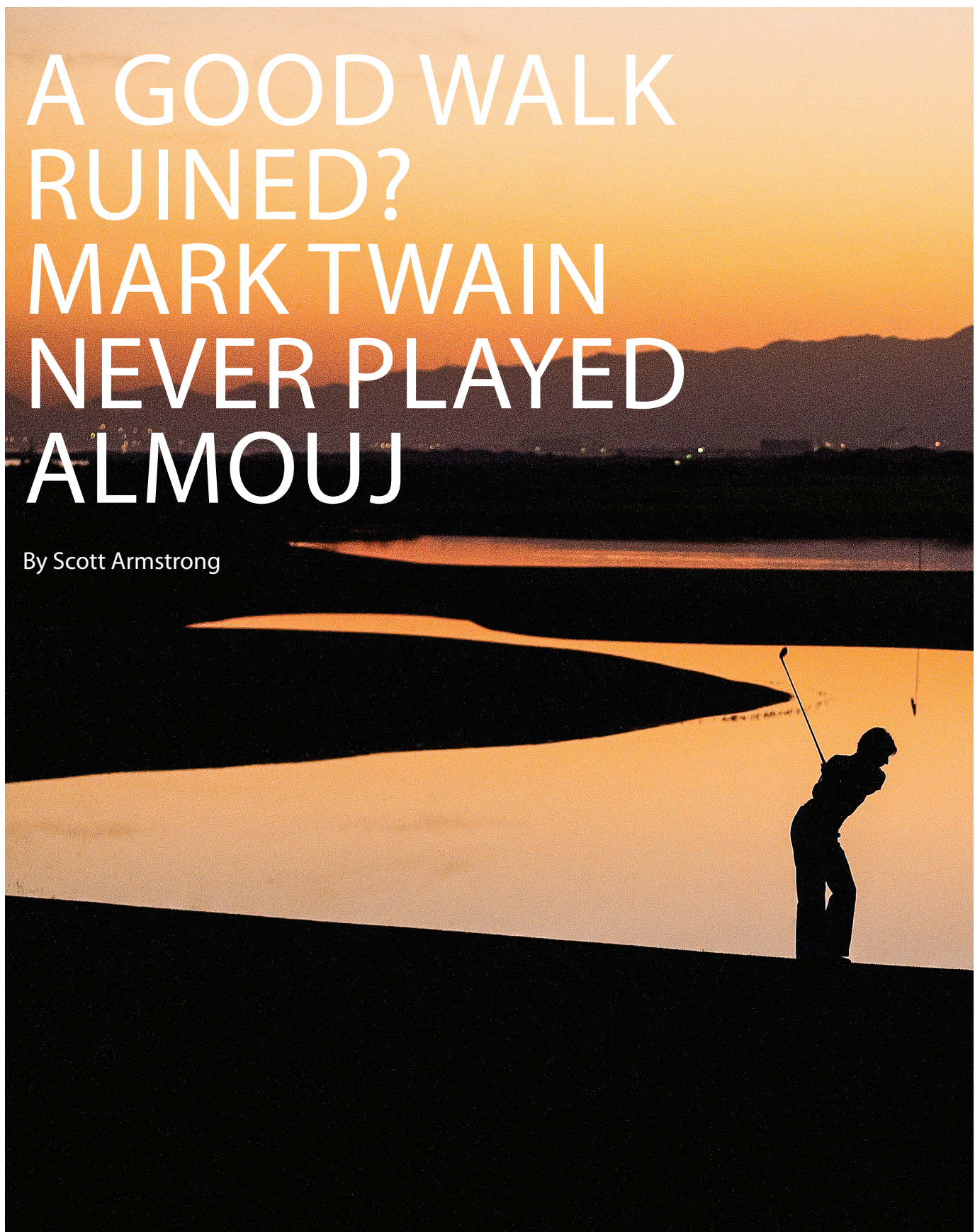


A GOOD WALK RUINED? MARK TWAIN NEVER PLAYED ALMOUJ

By Scott Armstrong





Running alongside a two-kilometre stretch of ocean, Almouj Golf at The Wave is a 7,342-yard course of lush green grass peppered with bunkers, water hazards and natural dunes. Hat's off to Greg 'The Shark' Norman because as the course's designer he has excelled in creating a beautiful place in which to be outdoors

It is almost impossible to remember how tragic a place this world is when one is playing golf."

As you stand in the fresh breeze, the sunshine broken only by a few occasional clouds, waves rolling into shore and friends by your side, the words of Irish writer Robert Lynd seem far more accurate than any shot I'll ever play.

With the temperature easing, the humidity dropping and Oman enjoying the beautiful weather that annually tempts us into outdoor activity, I decided it was time to blow the cobwebs off the golf clubs and finally try a round.

As a relative newbie to the Sultanate I'd not yet strode purposefully out on to a tee so I figured I should do it in style and head to the award-winning, championship PGA standard Almouj Golf at The Wave.

Running alongside a two-kilometre stretch of ocean, the 7,342-yard course of lush green grass is peppered with bunkers, water hazards and natural dunes.

Hat's off to Greg 'The Shark' Norman because as the course's designer he has excelled in creating a beautiful place in which to be outdoors. Before you swing a club, and in the many moments that you pause to reflect between holes, you can't help but appreciate how he blended his vision for 18 holes into the stunning natural landscape.

As befits one of the world's top 100 courses, the tees are postcard-framed portraits, some looking to the mountains and many out along the coast.

With many about to start their Christmas holidays, what better way to decompress from the stress of work and enter the festive spirit than to embrace that wonderful peace and isolation that can be found on a golf course.

However good or bad your game might be, when there is a touch of wind that crests the waves with white tops it's hard to stay mad or frustrated, just take a deep breath, watch a flamingo or two take



Almouj Golf has Early Bird Membership deals until the end of this month. The packages offer members access to the club's world-class facilities, great value on amenities and hospitality benefits throughout Oman and the United Arab Emirates.

With no increase in domestic membership prices, the club is offering benefits that are as good as cash, with a total discount value of up to OMR1,020.

New and renewed memberships will also receive a 20 per cent saving on food and beverage, as well as 10 per cent off in the Pro Shops at Almouj Golf, Dubai Creek and Emirates Golf Club.



Almouj possesses a zen-like calm, those lakes and ocean views, crested on the right by the Hajar mountains, instil an inner calm which allows you to shrug off the lost balls and the embarrassing four-putt (yes four) and just enjoy your day



flight, and relax for the next shot.

Which is handy because in many ways Almouj, purely from a playing point of view, is a real challenge, especially for an occasional golfer such as me.

Narrow fairways mean only the ambitious pull out their drivers, a four-iron was as brave as I got, as accuracy rather than distance possibly being the better tactic. Slow and steady winning the race here.

Those natural dunes that line the fairways, like many links course, are the graveyard of many a stray shot, with the coarse, thick-matted grass swallowing balls, which only the most determined will look for, an inevitably even then be forced to take a drop.

Add to that holes like the 14th, teeing off over a lake on to an all too small green. My first attempt almost made it, perfect line but the length was not up to snuff. My ball manfully attempted a Dambusters manoeuvre, once, twice, but it didn't have the strength for a third bounce which would have snuck it onto the green. My second and third attempt fared no better, if not worse. But my Titleists were in good company, apparently in two days using divers the course recovered 9,000 balls from their watery grave.

But as a man called Nubar Gulbenkian said back in 1972, "It is more satisfying to be a bad player at golf. The worse you play, the better you remember the occasional good shot."

For all my incompetence and lack of

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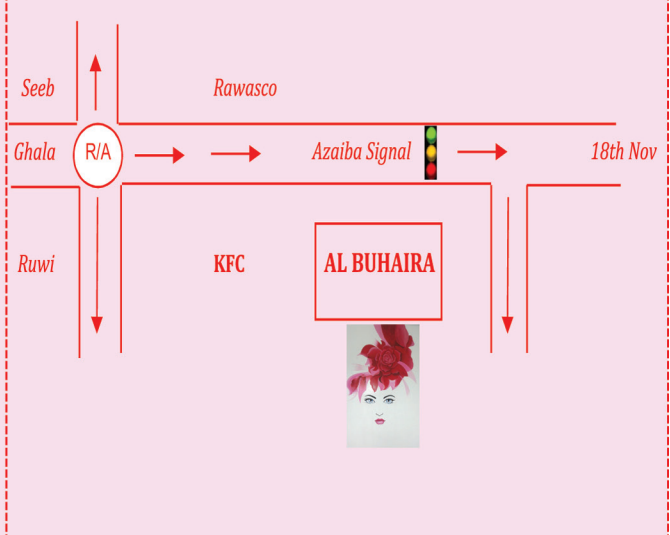
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practice, and for all Almouj's cunning and guile, I still walked off having made par on two holes, and had a number of 'what could have been' holes spoiled only by a bad chip here or an over-exuberant putt there.

Time wise my three-ball took about three hours and fifty minutes to get round, and the average pace of play runs to four hours and 20 minutes to complete. I've played some monsters from which I've limped in after six hours, but while Almouj has some long holes and some major challenges it won't crush you physically no matter how bad the scorecard.

In fact, one round will leave you wanting more. Any golfer will understand the desire to return and select a bigger club for the hole that got away, or a different approach to another of Almouj's water hazards.

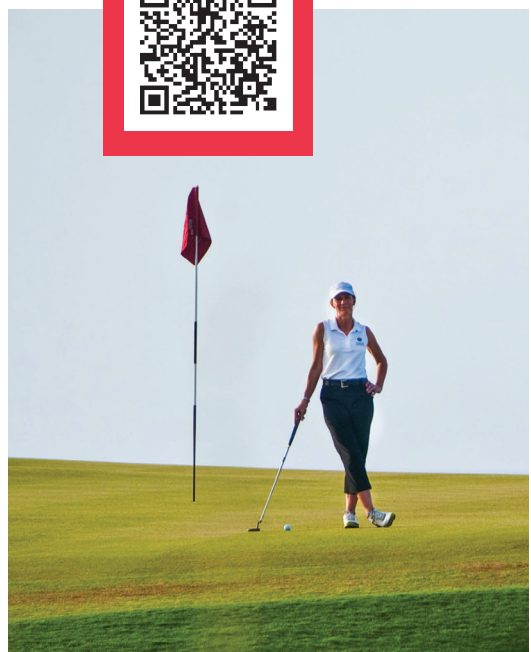
In my case, I may have been better bringing a deckchair and some sun lotion as I spent so much time in the many bunkers, but they are not a nightmare to escape.

Mark Twain might have called golf a good walk spoiled, but Almouj defies that humorous premise by serving up a unique blend of stunning scenery and challenging, but not soul-destroying, play.

I'd actually venture to say that with its tight fairways it provides a perfect training ground for those wanting to improve, if you can conquer Almouj you'll smash it



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Directions

If you are coming from The Wave head down 18th November Street. Follow the road for about 4.5km until the 1st exit right before the flyover. Make a U-turn at the underpass and keep right on the slip road to Almouj Golf entrance on the right. If you are coming from Muttrah then again make your way across to 18th November Street and look for the slip road on your right, if you miss it you'll have to head all the way up to The Wave roundabout, to come back down again.

From The Chedi

Follow the beach road towards Seeb, passing through Al Athaiba. After about 10km at the 3rd set of traffic lights sign posted left to Muscat International Airport. Keep going straight at the traffic lights and after approximately 3km exit right before the flyover and keep right passed the underpass traffic lights to the entrance of Almouj Golf on your right.

on European fairways with their wide, open approaches.

Equally, Almouj possesses a zen-like calm, those lakes and ocean views, crested on the right by the Hajar mountains, instil an inner calm which allows you to shrug off the lost balls and the embarrassing four-putt (yes four) and just enjoy your day.

It is that zone away from work, away from the mobile phone, away from the stresses of everyday life, that gives golf its massive appeal, and Almouj really delivers on that promise.

Will I go back? Definitely.

Will I lose the same number of balls? More than likely.

Will I enjoy it all the same? Unquestionably.