



Shinty, Ancestor of Golf

A Hit at the Monterey Scottish Games

BY MICHAEL BENTLEY

During the first weekend of August, a unique sound was heard at Salinas' Toro Park, the sound of two shinty sticks clashing over the ball. Shinty, called *camanachd* in Scots Gaelic, is Scotland's oldest team sport, a stick and ball game similar to field hockey and Irish hurling.

"Some spectators were calling it combat golf. In fact it's probably one of the ancestors of golf," said local shinty enthusiast Loren Mckechnie .

Mckechnie, who lives in Monterey, is part of the Northern California Camanachd Club (NCCC), an organization supporting the growth of shinty in the Golden State. The NCCC was participating in the 43rd Monterey Scottish Games where shinty joined piping, Highland dancing, and caber tossing among the activities celebrating the culture of Scotland. Shinty has been an important part of Highland communities where games have been traditionally played as part of the New Years (called Hogmanay in Scotland) celebrations. In fact, its 2,000-year history makes the sport older than kilts by far.

"Historically shinty was played by whole communities, with one village playing its neighbor, or even one clan taking on another," explains NCCC co-founder Elheran Francis. "These matches would figure into the celebrations of Christmas or the New Year and could last an entire day with hundreds of participants taking



part... it must have been a completely wild scene!"

The Monterey Games hosted a somewhat more modest match with six players on a side and playing by modern rules, but the action was still something to behold. Unlike field hockey, the ball can be played in the air as well as on the ground, and so there were extended exchanges where the ball never touched the turf. One of the weekend's best goals was scored by Mckechnie from an overhead shot.

Today shinty is played by a number of teams in Scotland, with players of all ages, but here in the US the ancient game is just getting going. The NCCC was founded in 2001 and has grown slowly in the years since. Now there are three Bay Area teams with another forming in the Monterey area.

While it is unlikely to challenge the popularity of golf at nearby Pebble Beach, perhaps one day shinty will share the fields of the Monterey Peninsula with its progeny and bring a little piece of Scotland to California throughout the year.

More information can be found at the NCCC website – www.norcalshinty.com.