

# VIDEO – Chair of VisitScotland Mike Cantlay talks to The Edinburgh Reporter



Dr Mike Cantlay is about to have very sore feet. He is embarking on a golfing marathon this weekend during which he will play what amounts to six rounds of golf in a charity event to raise funds for Callander Golf Course which is his home club.

Keen golfer Mike will be joined by two friends, Ken Milligan and his son Harry from local school McLaren High, in an exhausting 108 hole marathon of Callander golf course, on 1 July 2013.

The trio plan to tee off at 4.30am before holing the last putt sometime after 10pm. To keep things interesting, the group will play six different rounds throughout the day off the standard tees, the competition tees and also playing a round with just three clubs and a putter.



To someone who arrived at our appointment wearing a Ryder Cup 2014 badge this is clearly something he will be looking forward to:-“This is an extraordinary period for Scottish golf with events like the Aberdeen Asset Management Scottish Open in Inverness and The Open Championship at Muirfield this Summer, and of course the Ryder Cup at Gleneagles next year. These events offer huge opportunities to all sorts of businesses, from hotels, guest houses and B&Bs to coach companies, shops and restaurants.

“Bill Clinton visited Scotland last week and like so many international visitors made sure he managed to fit in a round of golf during his stay. VisitScotland and industry partners are working hard to ensure that golf clubs across Scotland benefit from the world’s focus being on Scottish golf.

“That said, Scotland has more golf courses per head of population than any country in the world and this tough economic climate has affected the golf industry like many others. In many instances club membership has dipped and finances have been challenging. Industry leaders from the Scottish Golf Union, PGA, The R&A and the European Tour have all been looking at ways to ensure that golf at every level benefits from Scotland’s success in attracting tournaments.

“I am just doing this charity thing to support our local club in Callander which is where I live.”

But what does being chair of an organisation like VisitScotland involve? It appears to be exactly what Cantlay is good at. He loves the job of selling Scotland, and it shows. He has just extended his term as Chair for a further period of three years, following the first term which expired only a couple of months ago.

The Edinburgh Reporter met up with him in the heart of Edinburgh, in Charlotte Square to talk about what he loves about his work with the organisation.

“It’s the best job in the world. I get to sell Scotland to the world.

“I think to put a business perspective on it we must emphasise that VisitScotland is here to help industry. What we have focussed on is reconnecting with industry so that we know what they want us to do for them.

“As we head into 2014 when Scotland will welcome the world, we have adopted a theme of Winning Years. It is a chance to

put Scotland and Scottish tourism firmly on the world stage and we have never had a better opportunity to do so than in 2014.”

Asked about the marketing effect of the animated film Brave released by DisneyPixar last year on Scottish tourism he replied:-“It has been huge for us. In particular Brave was important to us in bringing Scotland to the non-English speaking people in 72 countries around the world and also introducing Scotland to a younger market, perhaps to whet their appetite to come to Scotland. I am glad we grabbed the unique opportunity.”

This is the year of Natural Scotland. The previous years all had other themes, and the plan is for all of them to come together next year in the year of Homecoming. Cantlay explained the latest theme:-“We launched the whole Year of Natural Scotland programme from the Botanic Gardens here in Edinburgh. Using natural as a theme we have posed the question to the public as to how well they know natural Scotland. We keep saying that tourism is everyone’s business, and everyone will have to be an ambassador in 2014. I hope that everyone gets out into the countryside in Scotland and gets to know it.”

Dr Cantlay also extolled the virtues of Edinburgh as a world class tourist destination:-“4.1 million visitors come to Edinburgh each year and they produce £1.2bn for the city’s economy. Edinburgh is a world class destination in its own right. People across the world aspire to come and visit the city. Our job is to connect with them and make it easy to do.”

As a businessman, Mike Cantlay owned the Hector Russell kilt-making business and knows very well the virtues of having tourist icons such as tartan to hook the country’s identity onto. He said:-“Tartan is key, and it is no surprise that tourists want to find that when they visit. It is important to

protect our features with things such as the Tartan Registry which politicians have helped with, and it is important to exploit our unique features.”

“It’s difficult to know which is my favourite spot in the country. I have travelled the length and breadth of the country and there are really no bad tourism destinations. But yes in Edinburgh, Princes Street Gardens is the best!

Mike Cantlay writes a blog [here](#) on the VisitScotland website which is otherwise full of information for you if you are running a tourism business.