

**GOLF
WORLD**

THE AILSA,
TURNBERRY

TOP 100

**LINKS COURSES
OF GREAT BRITAIN
& IRELAND**

**THE MOST AUTHORITATIVE
COURSE RANKINGS IN GOLF**

**Including Britain's
secret links**

The classic courses you've never heard of

HOW WE RANK OUR TOP 100 COURSES

WELCOME to our first ever ranking of the Top 100 Links Courses in Britain & Ireland. It represents the start of a new era for *Golf World* magazine's highly respected course rankings, which will now be published monthly in *Today's Golfer*.

They will, however, still be chosen by an experienced panel of readers, invited to take part because of their extensive knowledge of the courses ranked that month.

There are a total of 100 marks awarded, and every course is marked using the following criteria...

- **Design [40 marks]** A key category, split into three sub-sections: Does the course take advantage of its landscape [20]; the green complexes [10]; the routing [10].
- **Setting [15 marks]** The aesthetic value of the surrounding views and the course itself. And the overall 'atmosphere' of the course – not the club.
- **Memorability [15 marks]** How easy it is to recall holes? Are they distinctive, varied and interesting. Are they strategic and heroic?
- **Playability [10 marks]** Is it just too tough, possibly even unfair, for the majority? Or is it easily enjoyed by all?
- **Consistency [10 marks]** Does every hole deliver all of the above, or is it let down by a few poor ones?
- **Presentation [10 marks]** Two aspects: is maintenance at ease with its surroundings, and the conditioning of tees, fairways, bunkers and greens.
- In the event of a tie, the Top 100 Editor decides the positions based on breadth of opinions from the panel.

Off-course facilities, customer service or tournament pedigree played no part in deciding this Top 100. No matter what your budget is, there are courses to fit your pocket. And you can play every course in this list, even if some offer very limited tee times.

The British Golf Museum defines a links as: "Land near the coast characterised by undulating terrain, often associated with dunes, infertile sandy soil and indigenous grasses such as marram, sea lyme, and the fescues and bents which, when properly managed, produce the fine textured turf for which links are famed."

Chris Bertram, Top 100 Editor

EXPERT PANEL



CHRIS BERTRAM

Top 100 Courses editor has played all 100 in the list. H'cp 11



MICHAEL BAILEY

88 of the Top 100 played. H'cp 17



PETER BOSWORTH

96 of the Top 100 played. H'cp 14



OLLE DAHLGREN

98 of the Top 100 played. H'cp 6



NICK DUNGAY

96 of the Top 100 played. H'cp 11



ALAN FERGUSON

All of the Top 100 played. H'cp 4



SIMON HAINES

61 of the Top 100 played. H'cp 3



CLYDE JOHNSON

87 of the Top 100 played. H'cp 8



RONAN RAFFERTY

All of the Top 100 played. H'cp Pro



BEN SARGENT

84 of the Top 100 played. H'cp Pro



STEPHEN VINCENT

73 of the Top 100 played. H'cp 10

In addition, we accepted input from our Scottish specialists Alan McPherson and Neal Stewart, Irish supreme Kevin Markham and Wales aficionados Richard Allen and Phil Davies.



1

ROYAL COUNTY DOWN [CHAMPIONSHIP] NEWCASTLE, CO. DOWN

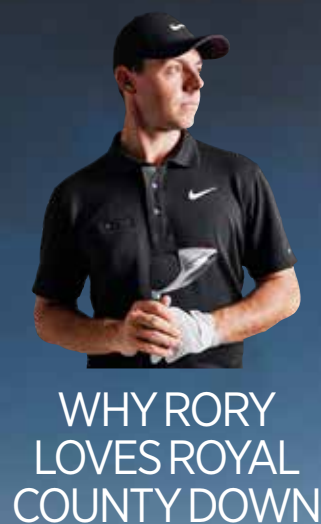
Design **36.9** Setting **13.7** Memorability **14.1**
Playability **7.2** Consistency **8.9** Presentation **9.7**
TOTAL 90.5

A seductive blend of five-star holes and glorious views. The top five was naturally extremely competitive but Royal County Down's combination of beauty and examination edged it past the stellar cast. There are very few courses in the world, never mind by seaside in Britain and Ireland, which mesmerise and challenge as RCD does. The setting is epic, the Mountains of Mourne a brooding presence overlooking linksland that flits between gentle ripples and pronounced mound and dips. There are stories of American visitors playing here and walking down the fairways of the back nine backwards so they can keep looking at the mountain.

Then there is Dundrum Bay, which sits hard to the 2nd and 3rd holes on what is a spectacularly good start. But RCD is about a lot more than just pretty pictures; this is a links that examines every part of your game as much as any course in the land.

There are few moments when you are nonchalantly hitting a shot with a carefree attitude. If you're on the tee you are attempting to avoid gorse, bunkers and heather, sometimes as you blindly traverse dunes. With approaches you have devilish sand traps in your mind as, in addition to trying to work out where the good "miss" is, leave yourself in the wrong spots for a recovery and you face check mate. With wedge or putter in hand on and around the greens, you can never relax, knowing a clumsy effort can so easily end up further away than where you started. It is, indubitably, an exhaustive short game test. But if that all sounds like an unfair and tiring grind, it is not. RCD is unrelentingly exacting, but it is fair, unless you consider blind shots unfair – and we don't.

You leave the stellar 18th knowing your game has had one of the hardest exams it will ever undergo, but you've also had the best experience of your life, too, where a superstar hole is always imminent, with the stretches on the front nine of the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th plus the 7th, 8th and 9th without peer – which is exactly the quality you'd expect from our No.1 links in GB&I. 🏌️



The 4th hole on the front nine is one of my favourites.

I believe this par 3 is also one of the most photographed golf holes anywhere. Essentially, it's a straightforward hole on a calm day, but gorse and bunkers protect the green and really come into play in breezy conditions.

It's a very challenging test for any level of player.

Just like every links course, the elements are its best defence. But you also have a number of blind tee and approach shots to contend with. Then there's the rough and the gorse, so there can be no let-up in concentration when you play here.

It's definitely in the top few courses in Britain and Ireland.

There just seem to be too many top links in Britain and Ireland for me to point to just one as the best. Each has its own qualities, quirks and character traits that make it unique. When I'm home, I still play the odd round at RCD with my mates.



2

ST ANDREWS [OLD] ST ANDREWS, FIFE

Design **36.8** Setting **13.2**
Memorability **14.0** Playability **8.7**
Consistency **8.5** Presentation **9.1**
TOTAL 90.3

Still and always will be the Mecca for any serious scholar of the game. People will tell you to go left from the tee, but that leaves difficult second shots on 'double' greens.

The most special experience golf can offer for probably all of us. It makes the hairs on the back of your neck stand up on the 1st tee and it makes you think and plot your way around every hole after that. On the stellar back nine it has in the 11th, the 17th and the 14th – arguably three of the seminal par 3, 4 and 5 holes in the world.



3

TURNBERRY [AILSA] TURNBERRY, AYRSHIRE

Design **36.0** Setting **14.4**
Memorability **14.4** Playability **8.7**
Consistency **8.3** Presentation **8.5**
TOTAL 90.3

Donald Trump's multi-million pound investment has led to a masterful remake, and the changes make the difference between a top-10 spot and a top-three ranking. That third on this list is the absolute lowest we could have placed the Ailsa sums up how effective the overhaul by Martin Ebert has been there.

We loved the Ailsa for many years, but eventually saw its flaws – that it didn't make the most of the peerless location, that it had weak holes and it felt disjointed. None of those complaints remain now, after Ebert's renovation.

The 'new' Ailsa is now one of the world's finest courses. That's a fact. It lost a decimal point here and there among the panel for its turf being less pure links than those above it – but we are talking about the very finest of margins here.

TURNBERRY'S LIGHTHOUSE



Built in 1873 on the site of a castle that once belonged to Robert the Bruce, the dilapidated 24-metre lighthouse [designed by Thomas Stevenson, father of the author Robert Louis] was included in the resort's £200m refurb in 2016. It now houses the Turnberry

Lighthouse Suite – two rooms, each with their own private balcony [yours for £2,500 a night] – along with the Ailsa course halfway house.

A plaque on the lighthouse describes it as "the world's finest and most spectacular Halfway House," and as you enjoy a mid-round bacon bap with views over the Firth of Clyde to Ailsa Craig and Arran, it's very hard to disagree.



4

MUIRFIELD GULLANE, EAST LOTHIAN

Design **37.5** Setting **12.1**
Memorability **13.2** Playability **7.4**
Consistency **9.5** Presentation **9.6**
TOTAL 89.3

Golfing perfection, only lacking the scenery to match. Muirfield does the pure links golf experience exceptionally well. Outstanding routing, majestic bunkering, strategically brilliant and peerless condition and consistency. The walk from the car park to the clubhouse gives you time to think. You are about to play a legendary course, to enter a legendary club. Stepping onto the 1st

tee, you know you are in for a fight – against nature, Old Tom [original 1891 layout], as well as Harry Colt [1923 revision]. Every hole is tough, the routing is unrivalled, the rough unrelenting. But there is inspiration, from some of the great moments in Open history. It's a dramatic course, but not in the drama of great and not so great holes... they are all good, if not better than good.

THE GENIUS OF MUIRFIELD'S BUNKERING

Ask any top player to highlight Muirfield's greatest challenge, and they'll tell you the same thing – its bunkers. They are among the finest in the world, in terms of their shape, variety and positioning. Finding one will invariably cost you a shot and their size is magnified by delicious contours that further narrows the margin for error in selecting the correct line off the tee, or into one of the notoriously small greens. When Nick Faldo won his third Open here in 1992, he heeded Jack Nicklaus' personal advice: "Stay short or long of them."



Muirfield's 15th... home to 13 devilish little traps.

5

ROYAL PORTRUSH [DUNLUCE] PORTRUSH, CO. ANTRIM

Design **35.6** Setting **13.2** Memorability **13.9**
Playability **7.6** Consistency **8.4**
Presentation **8.8** **TOTAL 87.5**

The Dunluce requires and rewards good driving more than most. A wonderful journey among high dunes that take you to the edge of the sea and back. The land is a mix of quietly rippling fairways mixed with often notable changes in elevation, all the while with drama seemingly awaiting around every corner. Some understandably quibble with the decision to change the course in order to host The Open, but in the two new holes by Martin Ebert the Dunluce has at least gained two epic tests. Colt's green complexes are as elegant as any links in this list.



6 ROYAL ST GEORGE'S SANDWICH, KENT

Design **36.3** Setting **12.6** Memorability **13.9**
Playability **8.3** Consistency **8.6** Presentation **7.8**
TOTAL 87.5

RSG is quintessentially English in character – lovable, a little eccentric, but tough underneath. We are quite sure this is England's best links. Gorgeous dunescape provides some of the best set of green sites in this list.



7 ROYAL BIRKDALE SOUTHPORT, MERSEYSIDE

Design **35.3** Setting **12.2** Memorability **13.9**
Playability **8.1** Consistency **9.0** Presentation **8.9**
TOTAL 87.4

A tough but fair test – the English Muirfield, routed through some enormous dunes. It's one of our most cherished and majestic links, few courses sustain the nature and extent of their challenge from start to finish as consistently as Birkdale.



8 ROYAL DORNOCH DORNOCH, HIGHLANDS

Design **36.5** Setting **13.4** Memorability **13.5**
Playability **7.8** Consistency **8.3** Presentation **7.9**
TOTAL 87.4

Play on a sunny summer evening and get a glimpse of heaven. Your appreciation grows with each and every visit. One of the finest natural links in the world and in 'Foxy' – the famed par-4 14th – Dornoch boasts a hole that is among the world's finest.



9 NORTH BERWICK NORTH BERWICK, EAST LoTHIAN

Design **37.1** Setting **12.5** Memorability **14.4**
Playability **7.9** Consistency **7.7** Presentation **7.8**
TOTAL 87.4

If there's one course our panelists said they would return to again and again and still get unbridled enjoyment playing it, this was it. North Berwick is home to some of the world's most replicated holes – which is testament to its memorability [note its score in that category] and entertainment.



10 CARNOUSTIE CARNOUSTIE, ANGUS

Design **35.8** Setting **10.9** Memorability **13.5**
Playability **6.9** Consistency **9.2** Presentation **9.7**
TOTAL 86.0

Can be brutal if you attempt to play off tees beyond your capability. Unremittingly demanding and utterly unfussy, it is a pure and comprehensive test. There are however regular lighter moments as well as gorgeous linksland scenes. Very possibly the best-presented links in the country.

16

EPIC
REDESIGN

SKIBO CASTLE DORNOCH, HIGHLANDS

Design **34.5** Setting **14.0** Memorability
13.1 Playability **6.9** Consistency **8.0**
Presentation **9.1** **TOTAL 85.6**

A serene experience for the lucky few, which improves by the year. Skibo Castle, part of the Carnegie Club in the Highlands near Dornoch, officially opened for play in 1995. It was laid out in quick time by Donald Steel's firm – for the then-owner of the Carnegie Club estate, Peter de Savary – with Tom Mackenzie doing much of the work. It got into our GB&I Top 100, but used to sit in the 90s. After a comprehensive overhaul led by Mackenzie and director of golf David Thomson, it now rightly rubs shoulders with the elite in British and Irish golf. The absence of gorse is the most obvious change, but the revolution was much, much more than that; the routing has changed, individual holes have changed and even the character of the course has changed. It is more linksy than ever and in astonishing condition [to be fair it gets limited traffic, but the great news is that you *can* now actually play it]. It also now fits into its landscape beautifully... and what a landscape, with holes along Loch Evelix and exquisite views of the Dornoch Firth.



11 PORTMARNOCK MALAHIDE, DUBLIN

Design **36.2** Setting **11.8** Memorability **13.4**
Playability **7.0** Consistency **9.2** Presentation **8.4**
TOTAL 86.0

The scene of more famous events in Irish golf than any other links. This is a player's course, oozing pedigree and demanding quality shots. An 'Irish Muirfield' in its examination, Portmarnock is all class. In most countries and in most lists in the world, it's No.1.



12 KINGSBARNs KINGSBARNs, FIFE

Design **34.3** Setting **13.9** Memorability **13.4**
Playability **8.5** Consistency **8.1** Presentation **7.8**
TOTAL 86.0

Much loved for its playability and stunning sea views on every hole, Kingsbarns is a modern masterpiece. Kyle Phillips' sequencing of holes takes you on a wonderful journey along a glorious stretch of coastline. Loses *some* marks for its purity-of-links factor.



13 CRUDEN BAY CRUDEN BAY, ABERDEENSHIRE

Design **35.9** Setting **12.7** Memorability **14.4**
Playability **7.5** Consistency **7.9** Presentation **7.6**
TOTAL 86.0

Just the once is never enough. Not even close. A superb routing, full of half-par holes, rumpied ground, dramatic elevation change and truly mesmerising vistas. Those elements combined, No.13 on this list does not flatter Cruden Bay – the top 10 would not flatter it. Endlessly entertaining.



14 ROYAL LYTHAM & ST ANNES LYTHAM, LANCASHIRE

Design **37.3** Setting **8.5** Memorability **13.4**
Playability **7.6** Consistency **9.6** Presentation **9.3**
TOTAL 85.7

"A monster of a course, ready to devour your game," is how one panellist described it. Lytham is certainly no pushover. There isn't a weak hole to be found. The turf is immaculate, bouncy and inviting and the closing stretch is just magnificent. 'Pure' sounds twee, but Lytham is exactly that.



15 TRUMP ABERDEEN BALMEDIE, ABERDEENSHIRE

Design **33.8** Setting **13.9** Memorability **14.4**
Playability **6.7** Consistency **8.9** Presentation **7.9**
TOTAL 85.6

A course as ambitious and bold as its owner, and which just about lives up to the hype. Loses some marks for its purity of links, despite sitting among huge dunes. Big holes, big views, big drama and a very big experience. The 14th tee, pictured, offers one of GB&I's jaw-dropping moments. **2**



NEW
PAR 3

20

ROYAL LIVERPOOL HOYLAKE, MERSEYSIDE

Design **36.1** Setting **11.2**
Memorability **12.9** Playability **7.9**
Consistency **8.9** Presentation **8.4**
TOTAL 85.4

Recent changes have enhanced the original home of the Amateur Championship. For some it is tough and austere, but for us it is beautifully conditioned, interesting and historic.

The 1920s revisions by Harry Colt resulted in the very most being made out of a relatively uninspiring piece of linksland, punctuated by astute bunkering and some cerebral green complexes.

It begins with subtlety, which might leave the casual golfer underwhelmed but the connoisseur intrigued, however the middle stretch along and through the coastline dunes will

satisfy all who play here.

Its return to The Open rota has enhanced its reputation and prestige further and in real terms the gift of a brand-new, Martin Ebert-designed par 3.

This new short hole [pictured] will be under 140 yards with a green located on the same site as the current Championship tee on the 15th hole.

It is to become the Championship's 17th hole, and is played towards an elevated green looking out to the Dee Estuary.

It is the latest piece of work for one of Europe's most in-demand architects, on another Open Championship host.

"The project at Royal Liverpool has been an extremely exciting one overall, but the opportunity to create a new hole on a great links such as Hoylake is a rare one," says Ebert.

"The hope and expectation is that not only can a very short hole produce significant drama for the penultimate hole of The Open, but also provide the club with a hole which members and visiting golfers from around the world will be hugely excited to play.

"It is also a real advantage of the new hole project that the Championship 15th and 18th par 5 holes will be strengthened with new back tees."



17 BALLYBUNION [OLD] BALLYBUNION, CO. KERRY

Design **35.6** Setting **13.8** Memorability **13.9**
Playability **7.6** Consistency **6.5** Presentation **8.2**
TOTAL 85.6

From the 6th tee onwards, one great hole follows another. If it's good enough to charm a links connoisseur like Tom Watson, then it's plenty good enough for us. If you enjoy dramatic holes among towering dunes, you'll adore Ballybunion, one of Ireland's stellar links.



19 WATERVILLE WATERVILLE, CO. KERRY

Design **35.0** Setting **13.6** Memorability **13.4**
Playability **8.0** Consistency **7.5** Presentation **7.9**
TOTAL 85.4

Thrilling from the moment you arrive at this south-west Ireland outpost. The final three are as good as anywhere; they sum up the best golf has to offer – a short par 4, a mid-length par 3, a par 5 just about reachable for the very long. Each one is a brilliant test in its own right.



22 LAHINCH LISCANNOR BAY, CO. CLARE

Design **36.0** Setting **13.0** Memorability **13.9**
Playability **8.0** Consistency **7.0** Presentation **7.4**
TOTAL 85.3

'Ireland's St Andrews' – and every bit as memorable and atmospheric as that title suggests. The blind par-3 5th, 'Dell', and the iconic par-5 4th, 'Klondyke', take all the headlines, but Lahinch is much more than those two. As many as nine epic holes and super views to boot. A masterpiece.



18 ROYAL TROON [CHAMPIONSHIP] TROON, AYRSHIRE

Design **35.4** Setting **12.4** Memorability **13.8**
Playability **7.5** Consistency **8.1** Presentation **8.2**
TOTAL 85.4

Despite what you may have heard, it's not all about the par-3 Postage Stamp. Troon is generally underrated, with a scenic start, iconic middle among lots of gorse and next to the classic railway line, and a tough closing stretch [often into wind]. An awesome experience.



21 ST ENODOC [CHURCH] WADEBRIDGE, CORNWALL

Design **35.5** Setting **13.7** Memorability **14.0**
Playability **7.5** Consistency **6.8** Presentation **7.8**
TOTAL 85.3

One of the few links to play all around a churchyard, St Enodoc's aptly-named premier course boasts a magnificent opening six holes and a wonderful finish. A quieter corner on the back nine loses it a mark or two for consistency, but this is a world-class, super-fun links course.



23 PRESTWICK PRESTWICK, AYRSHIRE

Design **35.9** Setting **11.7** Memorability **13.8**
Playability **8.6** Consistency **7.5** Presentation **7.8**
TOTAL 85.3

Too short for modern Opens, but still presents a tremendous amount of fun for amateurs. It's odd that Prestwick is not regarded more highly than it is. For us, it has the history, it has the holes and it has the setting, as this position suggests. Simply a must play, and deserves this top-25 slot. **2**



24 ROYAL CINQUE PORTS DEAL, KENT

Design **35.9** Setting **11.5** Memorability **13.3**
Playability **7.2** Consistency **8.9** Presentation **8.1**
TOTAL 84.9

Benefits from some of Britain's most naturally undulating terrain. A fast-running links with rippling fairways and unexpected green locations. Littered with fine holes, Deal should not be overlooked for more celebrated neighbour, St George's. Understated, but not underpowered.



27 FORMBY SOUTHPORT, LANCASHIRE

Design **34.9** Setting **12.3** Memorability **12.9**
Playability **7.8** Consistency **8.6** Presentation **7.7**
TOTAL 84.2

Classic links holes punctuated by a fine mid-round woodland stretch. One panellist has this as their top course in Southport – and bearing in mind Royal Birkdale is just along the coast, that's how good Formby is. It has a pleasingly consistent quality of turf, too. Well worthy of this notable position.



30 ROYAL PORTHCAWL REST BAY, MID GLAMORGAN

Design **33.2** Setting **12.5** Memorability **12.7**
Playability **7.7** Consistency **7.7** Presentation: **8.7**
TOTAL 82.5

A links masterpiece that's hosted a number of Senior Opens, Wales' No.1 enraptures you within the opening trio. The pace is however maintained throughout, with constant views of the sea and a terrific variety of holes. The Walker Cup host is better presented now than ever.



25 CASTLE STUART INVERNESS, HIGHLANDS

Design **34.2** Setting **14.3** Memorability **12.9**
Playability **8.3** Consistency **7.2** Presentation **7.9**
TOTAL 84.8

Memorable infinity views, which made for great television coverage during the Scottish Open, this is an expansive, playable and strategic modern classic. Castle Stuart could have been a touch higher but for the odd question mark over its links purity, a result of the sometimes clifftop feel.



28 BURNHAM & BERROW BURNHAM, SOMERSET

Design **34.1** Setting **11.5** Memorability **13.8**
Playability **7.8** Consistency **8.8** Presentation **7.8**
TOTAL 83.8

Blessed with some of the best green sites in England. We love Burnham & Berrow and have championed it for some time. The front nine is incredible and we don't have a problem with the so-called 'weak' holes around the turn. If anything, they prime you for the great golf coming in.



31 MACHRIHANISH MACHRIHANISH, ARGYLL

Design **34.7** Setting **12.5** Memorability **13.5**
Playability **7.5** Consistency **6.8** Presentation **7.4**
TOTAL 82.4

Much to enjoy, even after the famed opening drive across the beach. Machrihanish could easily have ranked higher, because the highs are iconic and truly unforgettable. Just a little inconsistent with some sedate moments, especially the last couple – but by then you are spellbound by Mach Old.



26 ROYAL ABERDEEN ABERDEEN, ABERDEENSHIRE

Design **34.8** Setting **12.6** Memorability **13.6**
Playability **7.9** Consistency **7.2** Presentation **8.5**
TOTAL 84.6

You can't forget to make the turn after the 9th here, or you could end up playing next door Murcar by mistake. The front nine is as good as its reputation says it is. The back nine might well be less explosive – where isn't? – but this links oozes class from every blade of its fine fescue.



29 ROYAL WEST NORFOLK BRANCASTER, NORFOLK

Design **34.7** Setting **12.1** Memorability **13.9**
Playability **8.0** Consistency **7.7** Presentation **7.1**
TOTAL 83.5

If fun, entertaining, eccentric golf is your bag, start planning your trip now. No other course in Britain changes with the tides as Brancaster does – you need to check the tide tables before visiting as you could very easily end up cut off in the car park. Tremendous fun at a terrific club.



32 SAUNTON^[EAST] BRAUNTON, DEVON

Design **33.2** Setting **12.7** Memorability **12.8**
Playability **7.4** Consistency **8.4** Presentation **7.9**
TOTAL 82.4

"A tough track with more long par 4s than you can shake a niblick at," is how one panellist described the East. The start is certainly absolutely epic, with a succession of elegant but exacting par 4s that are right out of the top drawer. That there are 31 better links shows the high standard.



33 THE MACHRIE ISLAY, ARGYLL

Design **34.2** Setting **12.8** Memorability **13.0**
Playability **7.5** Consistency **6.9** Presentation **8.0**
TOTAL 82.4

The Machrie's new owners took a gamble when they invited Tour-player-turned-architect DJ Russell to extend what was initially planned as a facelift of their acquisition into a full-scale overhaul.

The original Machrie had lots of firm fans, in love with its quirks and its eccentricities and some will always lament the loss of Willie Campbell's 1890s creation.

But the new Machrie now makes even more of its seaside

location, is distinctly more playable and has retained the unique, endearing features that it was always famed for.

Blind shots are still very much part of the Machrie experience, but now only if you get out of position. Add in terrific natural presentation, a pleasing variety of holes and a brilliant routing and you have one of Scotland's elite links layouts. This supreme redesign encourages shotmaking and is a necessary pilgrimage.



34 SILLOTH ON SOLWAY SILLOTH, CUMBRIA

Design **34.2** Setting **12.1** Memorability **13.5**
Playability **7.6** Consistency **7.8** Presentation **7.1**
TOTAL 82.3

Located far from the madding crowd in coastal Cumbria, but worth the effort to get there. Silloth rewards the determined traveller for their journey with an epic round among notable dunes leading to terrific green complexes. Scored very highly among the panel for its routing.



35 RYE RYE, EAST SUSSEX

Design **35.3** Setting **12.1** Memorability **13.0**
Playability **7.6** Consistency **7.0** Presentation **7.3**
TOTAL 82.3

A Harry Colt seaside masterpiece that will enchant with its layout and feel from start to finish. A historic links that oozes charisma with a set of par 3s overshadowed by very few even within this stellar list. Yet, while Rye's short holes are correctly admired, the par 4s are equally strong.



36 THE ISLAND MALAHIDE, CO. DUBLIN

Design **34.3** Setting **12.0** Memorability **13.1**
Playability **7.2** Consistency **8.0** Presentation **7.7**
TOTAL 82.3

Not a big name and easily overlooked, but a brilliant links, as we've been stating for the past few years. Mackenzie & Ebert's rework has enhanced what we always rated as one of Ireland's elite, with new bunkering, new tees and greens and a couple of new holes. Understated excellence.



37 WESTERN GAILES IRVINE, AYRSHIRE

Design **34.9** Setting **11.5** Memorability **12.2**
Playability **6.9** Consistency **8.9** Presentation **7.7**
TOTAL 82.1

Lying along a thin strip close by the sea, crosswinds are a strong factor at this Ayrshire links. High-class hole after high-class hole unfolds in front of you on a pedigree links that takes no prisoners. Western Gailes’ par 4s ooze quality as they examine your game thoroughly.



38 THE EUROPEAN BRITTAS BAY, CO. DUBLIN

Design **32.5** Setting **13.5** Memorability **13.3**
Playability **6.1** Consistency **8.6** Presentation **7.6**
TOTAL 81.6

The European is a magnificent test that is well-suited to those with a strong long-game. It is a classic Pat Ruddy examination – as you’d expect from the man who owns the club and designed the course. With the freedom to do as he wished, he produced a titanic, brawny test... just as he likes it.



39 COUNTY SLIGO ROSSES POINT, CO. SLIGO

Design **33.9** Setting **12.8** Memorability **12.6**
Playability **7.1** Consistency **7.5** Presentation **7.6**
TOTAL 81.5

As inspiring a setting of sea and mountains as any in the British Isles. Expect acute elevation changes, magnificent views of Benbulbin [Ireland’s Table Mountain], and some brilliant holes that strain brain and brawn at this unassuming links. A top-40 slot, ahead of some feted Irish links.



NEW COURSE 45 DUMBARNIE FIFE

Design **31.1** Setting **13.6**
Memorability **13.2**
Playability **8.3** Consistency **7.7**
Presentation **7.1** **TOTAL 81.0**

Does Scotland need a new links course? Does Fife need a new links course? It’s a moot point.

A course opening in arguably the most famous golfing area in the world has to be special, otherwise it stands no chance of being successful given St Andrews New, Old and the Castle as well as Kingsbarns are its neighbours – not to mention the likes of Elie, Lundin, Ladybank and Leven.

Well, Dumbarnie is special. And it

is different. There are similarities with Kingsbarns – also man-made, with lots of sea views and strategic holes – as well as Castle Stuart – just as wide off the tee with funky greens – but Dumbarnie is distinctive. Designed by Clive Clark, it wants to flatter you, not beat you up. Off the whites it is great fun, off the blues at 6,400 yards it is playable for the majority.

The conditioning, for a new links, is frankly incredible, with impressive

covering of fine fescue on the fairways. A vast amount of sand was moved to create Dumbarnie, turning it from a farmer’s field into a dune-lined course. The shaping is impressive, even if bulldozers can never match what the wind can do over thousands of years.

Dumbarnie had to be special to stand out – it is and it has. It will be extremely popular with American golfers as well as Brits for its mix of

scenery, risk-reward holes and playability. We even predict the 17th, a sharp dog-leg right which will bemuse some off the tee and might be pinpointed as a weaker hole, will end up being a heroic moment in the round. It is, already, a top 25 course in Scotland in our view, and a top 50 links in GB&I. As it matures and settles – giving it higher Presentation marks – expect it to rise. This, rest assured, is a cautious first ranking.



40 DOONBEG KILKEE, CO. CLARE

Design **33.0** Setting **13.7** Memorability **12.7**
Playability **7.1** Consistency **7.4** Presentation **7.5**
TOTAL 81.4

Recently toned down due to coastal erosion [five greens were washed away in 2014], but Doonbeg still a tough proposition. We loved the original by Greg Norman and are impressed by Martin Hawtree’s renovation. The loss of the bewildering par-3 14th is a shame, but its replacement is hardly boring.



41 GULLANE NO.1 GULLANE, EAST LoTHIAN

Design **33.2** Setting **11.6** Memorability **12.4**
Playability **7.8** Consistency **8.1** Presentation **8.3**
TOTAL 81.4

Very underrated and so often overshadowed by nearby Muirfield and North Berwick. No.1 incorporates a variety of holes that are not found at many more heralded links. Brilliant routing that works the landscape magnificently. Supremely conditioned yet admirably feels natural.



42 COUNTY LoUTH BALTRAY, CO. LoUTH

Design **33.2** Setting **11.6** Memorability **12.4**
Playability **7.8** Consistency **8.1** Presentation **8.3**
TOTAL 81.4

Few dazzling sea views on offer here, but some impressive dunes nonetheless. A good player’s links course. Traditional, no-frills layout that does not try to overwhelm you and just lets effortless holes sitting in the natural terrain do all the talking. Baltray is the choice of those in the know in Ireland.



43 HILLSIDE SOUTHPORT, LANCASHIRE

Design **32.9** Setting **12.6** Memorability **12.9**
Playability **7.8** Consistency **6.9** Presentation **7.9**
TOTAL 81.0

Starts flat and gradually becomes more and more hilly, it adds much to Southport’s portfolio. The back nine among towering dunes is epic, like next door Birkdale, but Hillside wouldn’t grace the top 50 if the front nine’s routing and tee locations weren’t also high class. It indubitably is.



44 MACHRIHANISH DUNES MACHRIHANISH, ARGYLL

Design **33.1** Setting **12.6** Memorability **13.5**
Playability **7.0** Consistency **7.9** Presentation **6.9**
TOTAL 81.0

The property stretches out over 270 acres, on a Site of Special Scientific Interest, the course built without resort to major earth shifting. The most raw course David McLay Kidd has ever built – and all the better for that. Supremely scenic and with some all-world holes draped across the linksland. **2**



46 ROYAL ST DAVID'S HARLECH, GWYNEDD

Design **33.5** Setting **12.4** Memorability **11.8**
Playability **6.9** Consistency **7.9** Presentation **8.2**
TOTAL 80.7

RSD has you on the drive through the village, with the most perfect glimpse of its linksland that doesn't disappoint. It lies between Harlech Castle and Cardigan Bay on terrific, rumpled land that was simply made for golf. One of the few great links to end with a par 3.



48 NAIRN NAIRN, HIGHLANDS

Design **33.0** Setting **12.5** Memorability **12**
Playability **7.6** Consistency **7.0** Presentation **8.5**
TOTAL 80.6

The host of many international events, from Curtis to Walker Cups, Nairn is a class act. The variety of holes here is wonderful, with the shoreside holes the scenic highlight, but there is also much to commend those that head inland, too. Its greens are like baize – few will be better in this whole list.



51 PENNARD SWANSEA, WEST GLAMORGAN

Design **31.3** Setting **12.6** Memorability **13.6**
Playability **8.0** Consistency **7.4** Presentation **7.7**
TOTAL 80.6

There is nowhere quite like it – cows, castle ruins and footpaths litter the course, but who cares when you are having such fun? A links set down on clifftops that is tremendously entertaining and a very unusual experience in terms of trying to classify a links that *does* sit on clifftops.



47 HUNSTANTON HUNSTANTON, NORFOLK

Design **33.0** Setting **11.9** Memorability **11.4**
Playability **7.3** Consistency **8.2** Presentation **8.4**
TOTAL 80.6

Renowned for the speed and quality of its greens. Hunstanton has the championship calibre to neighbour Royal West Norfolk's quirk and eccentricity. A consistent affair that's always in impeccable condition, with some fearsome bunkering and a tricky closing stretch.



49 WEST LANCS BLUNDELLSANDS, MERSEYSIDE

Design **32.7** Setting **11.2** Memorability **11.9**
Playability **7.3** Consistency **8.7** Presentation **8.8**
TOTAL 80.6

Possibly tougher than its famous Merseyside neighbours. An unassuming club and an unfussy links. Always in terrific condition, West Lincs is not to be messed with – it will take anyone's game on and give it a match. The collection of short holes is sensational.



52 BALLYLIFFIN [GLASHEDY] BALLYLIFFIN, DONEGAL

Design **34.2** Setting **12.6** Memorability **12.2**
Playability **6.3** Consistency **8.0** Presentation **7.3**
TOTAL 80.6

Rarely plays without a stiff breeze – or stronger... Glashedy is a modern links that does very well to hang on to the traditional courses that dominate the top 50 of our list. It is characterised by large, testing greens and plenty of bunkers – tame her, and you have played extremely well.



53 CARNE BELMULLET, CO. MAYO

Design **33.2** Setting **12.8** Memorability **13.9**
Playability **6.6** Consistency **6.8** Presentation **7.0**
TOTAL 80.3

"More ups and downs than the FTSE 100," suggested one panellist. "Wild, wild, wild" said another. Both are correct. This is a remote links that's grand in scale and variety. Only the intrepid ever get here – but it's worth it. If high-octane links action is your thing, start planning a trip right now.



54 ROYAL NORTH DEVON WESTWARD HO!, DEVON

Design **32.5** Setting **10.9** Memorability **12.6**
Playability **8.7** Consistency **7.7** Presentation **7.9**
TOTAL 80.3

Famous for its bulrushes, on hand to gobble up an inaccurate drive, RND is known as England's St Andrews. It's not a silly comment, given the history of the course and also the strategic way this gently rippling links tests your game. A wonderfully historic clubhouse, too.



55 BRORA BRORA, SUTHERLAND

Design **31.4** Setting **11.9** Memorability **12.6**
Playability **8.6** Consistency **7.7** Presentation **7.9**
TOTAL 80.1

James Braid used the natural features to full effect. Tracks the coast and the small-to-medium sized undulations perfectly. Plays over near flawless links terrain with the added bonus of some dramatic elevation changes. Braid enthusiasts adore their man's Highlands masterpiece.



56 ENNISCRONE ENNISCRONE, CO. SLIGO

Design **32.5** Setting **12.9** Memorability **13.4**
Playability **7.3** Consistency **6.4** Presentation **7.6**
TOTAL 80.1

Rugged, remote links golf at its 'edgy' best. May lack a little consistency compared to the elite links in this list, but its best holes are very, very good. In a land so easy on the eye, it boasts some of the most dramatic scenes in Ireland, with undulating fairways lined by marram-covered dune ridges. **2**



MAJOR
REDESIGN

50 PRINCE'S SANDWICH, KENT

Design **33.0**
Setting **12.2**
Memorability **12.0**
Playability **7.9**
Consistency **7.3**
Presentation **8.2**
TOTAL 80.6

Former Open venue, recovering much of its original lustre after a major redesign. With three restored nines that are now equal in quality for the first time, this is once again one of GB&I's premier courses.

The host of the 1932 Open Championship is now a must visit for links aficionados. The Shore and Dunes nines had always been the premier combination at Prince's, which overlooks Sandwich Bay in Kent and has Royal St George's as its over-the-fence neighbour.

But after a significant overhaul by the R&A's preferred architect, Martin Ebert, of Mackenzie & Ebert, the Himalayas is now the equal of its sisters... if not even better.

Ebert's remit, which included work on bunkers, water hazards, green surrounds, out-of-play areas, tees and the clearance of trees, began on the nine in August 2017 and reopened in May 2019, to great acclaim.

The new nine features two new holes, the par-3 5th which plays out towards the sea, as well as the par-5

2nd hole which combines the second and third holes of the old layout and can be stretched to a monstrous 615 yards.

Mackenzie and Ebert analysed historic, pre-war and wartime RAF photography to discover interesting features that helped to restore some original elements of the course.

The new 5th, named 'Bloody Point' after the naval battle in Sandwich in AD 851 on land where Prince's now sits, has the English Channel as a backdrop.



57 ST ANDREWS [NEW] ST ANDREWS, FIFE

Design **32.4** Setting **11.9** Memorability **11.0**
Playability **8.6** Consistency **7.9** Presentation **8.2**
TOTAL 80

Don't be lulled by the straightforward start, St Andrews shows its teeth later. It is in some people's eyes a truer and fairer test than the Old, which inevitably means it's not as characterful and quirky. But its placing at No.57 illustrates how highly we rate the little sister to our No.2.



59 ELIE ELIE, FIFE

Design **31.4** Setting **11.9** Memorability **12.3**
Playability **8.6** Consistency **7.9** Presentation **7.9**
TOTAL 80

Quirky [look no further than submarine periscope towering 10m above the starter's hut!] and great fun. Elie used to be Fife's forgotten course – not any more. Beautiful use of the terrain to create a links of rare class. Just enough quirkiness to see it rise above many more famous names in the list.



62 SOUTHPORT & AINSDALE SOUTHPORT, MERSEYSIDE

Design **32.4** Setting **11.2** Memorability **11.7**
Playability **8.9** Consistency **7.5** Presentation **8.2**
TOTAL 79.9

S&A incorporates a carefully weaved routing that ensures the wind is coming from different angles during your round. This two-time Ryder Cup venue unusually starts with a par 3 before winding through the dunes and pines so characteristic of this coastline.



58 ROSAPENNA [SANDY HILLS] DOWNINGS, CO. DONEGAL

Design **33.0** Setting **13.8** Memorability **13.1**
Playability **5.3** Consistency **8.6** Presentation **6.2**
TOTAL 80

If you like plateau greens, you'll love Pat Ruddy's Sandy Hills monster. Rosapenna's No.1 – the Old Tom follows later – is a serious, serious test. In inclement weather it is very tough and your short game will be tested to the limit around those greens, but you'll love taking it on.



61 THE RENAISSANCE CLUB GULLANE, EAST LoTHIAN

Design **33.2** Setting **11.6** Memorability **11.4**
Playability **7.5** Consistency **8.0** Presentation **8.3**
TOTAL 80

"The cliffside holes by the Firth of Forth are superb – it's just a shame there aren't just a few more of them," wrote one panellist. It might be true, but Tom Doak's routing is predictably masterful, the green complexes typically intriguing and the steady land used to its maximum.



63 BALLYLIFFIN [OLD] INISHOWEN, CO. DONEGAL

Design **32.0** Setting **11.5** Memorability **13.1**
Playability **8.6** Consistency **6.9** Presentation **7.7**
TOTAL 79.8

Ballyliffin's courses can never be more than a dozen places apart in any ranking [in this case it's 11 spots] – they are so close in quality. While the Glashedy enjoys the best of the higher ground, the Old has more than its share of crumpled fairways, clever bunkering and entertaining greens.



AVOID THE RAILWAY!

60

ABERDOVEY ABERDOVEY, GWYNEDD

Design **32.4** Setting **11.5** Memorability **13.6**
Playability **8.3** Consistency **6.5** Presentation **7.7**
TOTAL 80

The railway line is a very real and present hazard – and it's all the better for that. Bernard Darwin's favourite dishes up everything you'd expect from a proper links – bumps and humps, swales and hollows, tight seaside turf and prominent dunes. Not as consistent as some, but the highlights at the start and the end are splendid.



64 LUFFNESS ABERLADY, EAST LoTHIAN

Design **32.9** Setting **11.2** Memorability **11.7**
Playability **7.4** Consistency **7.9** Presentation **8.7**
TOTAL 79.8

Luffness won't blow you away, but it will test your patience and your ball-striking. Known as a 'Mini Muirfield', this pedigree links replicates the unobtrusive class of the revered Open host and boasts some stellar holes and lots of deep bunkers. Expect nothing else but a high-class experience.



65 MORAY [OLD] LOSSIEMOUTH, INVERNESS-SHIRE

Design **32.0** Setting **11.5** Memorability **13.1**
Playability **8.6** Consistency **6.9** Presentation **7.7**
TOTAL 79.8

The Old here – the New is in our 'Next 50' – ends dramatically with a fantastically sited 18th green right under the windows of the clubhouse. Subtle links that is threaded between gorse towards delightful greens. The Old packs a punch right to the end, building and building to a fine finale.



66 TRALEE TRALEE, CO. KERRY

Design **30.0** Setting **14.1** Memorability **13.8**
Playability **7.3** Consistency **6.0** Presentation **7.8**
TOTAL 79

Cliff-top-links laid out by Arnold Palmer that possesses bags of drama and breathtaking scenery. The nines are somewhat imbalanced [the best holes are on the back nine], but coming home is a truly epic experience. Tralee loses a few marks here for its less-linksy cliff-top character.



MY FAVOURITE LINKS COURSE



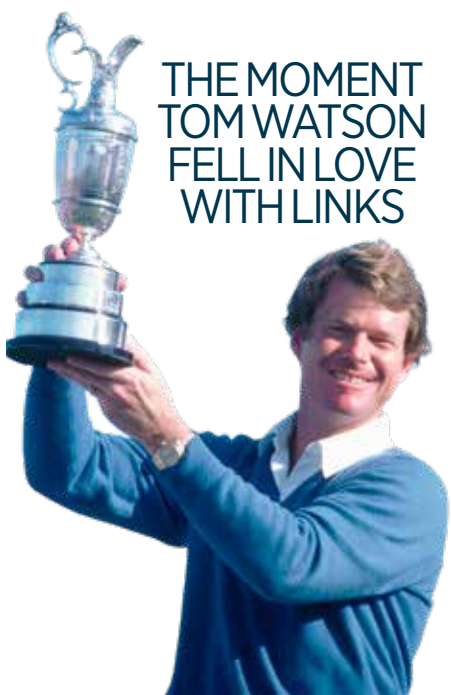
"If I think about memorability, I think about Muirfield. It is a good, solid, honest course. It is a good mind game. But you better play well there!"
Sir Nick Faldo



"St Andrews is a fabulous place. It's just a treat to play the golf course. I love it. It does not get better than the Old Course."
Annika Sorenstam



"I put Royal Porthcawl in the same category as Turnberry and Royal Birkdale. If the weather plays its part, it's a super test."
Colin Montgomerie



THE MOMENT TOM WATSON FELL IN LOVE WITH LINKS

“The first time I played the Old Course was in 1978. I really didn’t like it. It was too blind and there were too many bounces and variables. I didn’t like playing the game with so many variables. I liked to be in control. I didn’t grow to love links golf until just prior to the 1981 Open at Sandwich. My epiphany came during a wonderful series of rounds I had with my friend Sandy Tatum. We started out at Ballybunion in Ireland and had a glorious time there. Then we flew over and played Prestwick and Troon in one day, before taking a helicopter up to Royal Dornoch. On the 16th hole, I said to Sandy: “This is about as much fun as I’ve ever had playing golf.” That’s when I truly fell in love with the links style of golf.”



71

PORTSTEWART PORTSTEWART, DERRY

TOUR
CHANGES

Design **31.0** Setting **13.1** Memorability **13.5**
Playability **7.4** Consistency **5.5** Presentation **7.3**
TOTAL 77.8

The back nine was sharpened up for the recent Irish Open, but it still represents a slight letdown after a stunning opening half. Inconsistent, but at its best on the front nine, peerless excitement amid some giant dunes.



67 DUNDONALD IRVINE, AYRSHIRE

Design **32.8** Setting **7.7** Memorability **12.3**
Playability **8.0** Consistency **8.6** Presentation **8.5**
TOTAL 77.9

A modern links design, with some of Scotland’s deepest bunkers. Kyle Phillips is one of the great modern architects and while Dundonald lacks seaside panoramas, it makes up for it in drama and is poised to get even better with architect Tim Lobb overseeing.



73 DUNBAR DUNBAR, EAST LoTHIAN

Design **31.0** Setting **12.3** Memorability **11.0**
Playability **8.2** Consistency **6.9** Presentation **8.2**
TOTAL 77.6

Springy fairways by the Firth of Forth. Dunbar may begin and end relatively modestly, but everything in between is magnificent with holes that get you right down to the shore. Some of the best fescue in this list.



68 SOUTHERNESS SOUTHERNESS, DUMFRIESSHIRE

Design **32.4** Setting **11.5** Memorability **11.9**
Playability **7.8** Consistency **6.9** Presentation **7.3**
TOTAL 77.8

The pride of Dumfries and Galloway, albeit with views to the south over the fells of the Lake District. The par 4s on the back nine would sit comfortably among the top-20 links in this list. Gorse is a very clear and ever-present threat for those straying from the fairway.



74 CASTLETOWN CASTLETOWN, ISLE OF MAN

Design **30.2** Setting **12.8** Memorability **12.3**
Playability **7.7** Consistency **6.9** Presentation **7.7**
TOTAL 77.6

Some spectacular scenes and holes on this Manx links. The skills of Old Tom and Mackenzie Ross have combined to create a stellar links on the Isle of Man. Rugged, raw and dramatic. One of the best settings in the second 50 of this list.



69 GLASGOW GAILES IRVINE, AYRSHIRE

Design: **32.9** Setting **11.5** Memorability **11.9**
Playability **7.6** Consistency **6.9** Presentation **7.0**.
TOTAL 77.8

A driver’s course cutting through swathes of gorse and heather. A generally flat links course with some really good holes, Glasgow Gailes offers a nice flow and sequence, a stringent test with no real weak holes in sight. Improved markedly of late to more than justify its place here.



75 LITTLESTONE LITTLESTONE-ON-SEA, KENT

Design **30.5** Setting **11.2** Memorability **12.0**
Playability **8.2** Consistency **7.9** Presentation **7.7**
TOTAL 77.5

Fast running and windswept – a delight on a sunny day. Runs fast in summer... in fact it plays on firm land all year round as befits its location in the driest part of Britain. Bags of character and terrific use of the gently undulating terrain.



70 GOSWICK BERWICK-UPON-TWEED, NORTHUMB

Design **31.0** Setting **11.5** Memorability **12.1**
Playability **8.6** Consistency **6.9** Presentation: **7.7**
TOTAL 77.8

James Braid was typically astute on this links land. The fact Goswick is a relatively isolated high-class course should not deter you from making the journey to this charming links (conveniently just off the A1) which boasts a diverse set of holes overlooking Holy Island.



76 HAYLING HAYLING ISLAND, HANTS

Design **31.0** Setting **11.8** Memorability **11.9**
Playability **8.1** Consistency **7.2** Presentation **7.5**
TOTAL 77.5

A true gem, one of the only true links on the south coast west of Rye. A links played over interesting terrain that gets better as the round progresses. Terrific fescue turf gets it a few extra nods from the panel. A wonderful variety of holes.



72 SEACROFT SKEGNESS, LINCOLNSHIRE

Design **31.0** Setting **11.5** Memorability **12.0**
Playability **8.7** Consistency **7.4** Presentation **7.2**
TOTAL 77.8

A relatively unheralded gem, Seacroft is a really enjoyable links overlooking The Wash just south of Skegness. Brilliantly set down across dune ridges on the Lincolnshire coast. Fascinating, playable and pure out-and-back links, one of the few on England’s east coast.



77 PANMURE CARNOUSTIE, ANGUS

Design **31.2** Setting **11.1** Memorability **11.3**
Playability **8.3** Consistency **7.7** Presentation **7.9**
TOTAL 77.5

Slow start and finish, top quality in between. Great history and some brilliant holes. A pleasing middle-section of holes over more rumpled land is right out of the top drawer. The turf is a particular joy to strike irons off.

MAJOR OVERHAUL

78

TREVOSE PADSTOW, CORNWALL

Design **30.1** Setting **13.5**
Memorability **11.2**
Playability **7.7** Consistency **7.5**
Presentation **7.5** **TOTAL 77.5**

Leave the family on the beach and escape to play this delightful Cornish links. Has improved enormously in recent years without losing its Colt legacy. The work of Tom Mackenzie of Mackenzie & Ebert has helped this links on the edge of the Atlantic punch its weight. Trevose's iconic 4th received a major overhaul so that now, standing on the green, the glorious views behind are in sight. Half of the other holes have also been extensively re-worked and Trevose is now threatening a return to our GB&I Top 100 ranking.

GOLF
WORLD
TOP
100



79 FRASERBURGH ABERDEEN, ABERDEENSHIRE

Design **31.5** Setting **11.7** Memorability **11.5**
Playability **8.1** Consistency **7.4** Presentation **7.3**
TOTAL 77.5

Records suggest golf was played on these rumpled, narrow fairways even before the 1780 date which is noted as the birth of the club. What isn't for debate is how fabulous Fraserburgh is. A couple of our panelists absolutely rave about it and would have it 20 places higher.



80 WALLASEY WIRRAL, MERSEYSIDE

Design **31.7** Setting **11.1** Memorability **11.8**
Playability **7.6** Consistency **7.6** Presentation **7.7**
TOTAL 77.5

Much more than *just* the home of Stableford. Characterful holes and a fast-running experience on a links that rarely gets the credit it warrants. You can routinely expect firm, slick greens here. Wonderful front nine view over the sea and the Port of Liverpool.



81 ROSAPENNA [OLD TOM] DOWNINGS, CO. DONEGAL

Design **31.3** Setting **11.8** Memorability **11.6**
Playability **8.1** Consistency **7.4** Presentation **7.3**
TOTAL 77.5

Expect two very different feeling nines on Old Tom, with the front nine relatively sheltered and sedate, and the back nine more exposed to the wind. It is a great contrast to Sandy Hills – and some may well prefer the No.2 here. Really enjoyable, straightforward links golf.



82 MONTROSE [1562] MONTROSE, ANGUS

Design **30.1** Setting **13.5** Memorability **12.4**
Playability **7.7** Consistency **6.3** Presentation **7.5**
TOTAL 77.5

A classic links course that can be a severe test, particularly in windy conditions. Plenty of variety that is bettered only by the history of one of the world's ancient playing areas. Erosion threatens this links so get there soon to play it as close to what was originally intended as possible.



83 GULLANE NO.2 GULLANE, EAST LoTHIAN

Design **31.3** Setting **11.0** Memorability **11.5**
Playability **7.5** Consistency **7.7** Presentation **8.5**
TOTAL 77.5

Just because there is No.1, it is easy to overlook No.2. To do so is a tragedy as the second course here really must not be under-rated. Once on top of Gullane hill you are rewarded with fine views and some sufficiently varied holes. Less drama than No.1, but will still be a fixture in this list.



84 PORTSALON FANAD, CO. DONEGAL

Design **30.0** Setting **13.4** Memorability **11.4**
Playability **8.6** Consistency **6.6** Presentation **7.4**
TOTAL 77.4

Somewhat hard to find, very easy to enjoy. Donegal is packed with quality links and this is the secret find, as befits a course that crept into our GB&I ranking earlier this year. The 2nd tee offers one of Ireland's best views – and that is some statement. Inconsistent finish costs it a few places.



85 SEASCALE SEASCALE, CUMBRIA

Design **30.0** Setting **13.0** Memorability **11.2**
Playability **8.5** Consistency **7.5** Presentation **7.0**
TOTAL 77.2

Do not dare go to Silloth and not experience Seascale during the same visit, as they're on the same tricky-to-reach stretch of Cumbrian coastline. Funky terrain, babbling brooks, great greens and terrific turf... this is one of England's most under-rated golf courses.



86 ROYAL COUNTY DOWN [ANNESLEY] NEWCASTLE, CO. DOWN

Design **29.2** Setting **13.1** Memorability **11.2**
Playability **8.8** Consistency **6.9** Presentation **8.0**
TOTAL 77.2

Martin Ebert's work here has transformed the Annesley from an after-thought into a must-play when in Newcastle. Offers even better access to the bay, and Ebert's work has been a huge success – witness this position. One of the few clubs with two courses on this list.



87 MURCAR BRIDGE OF DON, ABERDEENSHIRE

Design **30.2** Setting **13.2** Memorability **11.0**
Playability **8.1** Consistency **7.3** Presentation **7.4**
TOTAL 77.2

Shorter and less penal than Royal Aberdeen, the course it shares a boundary with to the south. Murcar impressively holds its own in stellar company on Aberdeenshire's glittering coastline. A playable seaside classic.



88 KILSPINDIE ABERLADY, EAST LoTHIAN

Design **28.2** Setting **12.4** Memorability **12.0**
Playability **8.9** Consistency **7.8** Presentation **7.7**
TOTAL 77

Quirky old design and while the balance of holes is slightly odd, it adds to the quirkiness. It's short and looks relatively easy, but the beauty of Kilspindie is that it can make anyone, of any skill, look silly. The epitome of the short-but-charming Scottish links that seduces us so easily.



89 NARIN & PORTNOO PORTNOO, CO. DONEGAL

Design **30.5** Setting **12.2** Memorability **12.4**
Playability **7.1** Consistency **7.2** Presentation **7.4**
TOTAL 76.8

A towering stretch of dunes sits at the heart of this Donegal links, with its holes routed around and through it. Leading American designer Gil Hanse's know-how and nous has recently added to the allure of this links of great variety. It would not be out of place in the 60s – the margins are that fine.



90 ASKERNISH SOUTH UIST, OUTER HEBRIDES

Design **30.4** Setting **12.7** Memorability **13.4**
Playability **7.1** Consistency **7.5** Presentation **5.6**
TOTAL 76.7

A stunning links running along the coast with holes winding between dunes and sheep maintaining it in winter. Originally laid out by Old Tom Morris in 1891, the course fell into decline in the 1920s but has been nursed back to full health. A proper pilgrimage for any links connoisseurs.



91 PERRANPORTH PERRANPORTH, CORNWALL

Design **28.4** Setting **13.7** Memorability **12.7**
Playability **7.1** Consistency **7.4** Presentation **7.4**
TOTAL 76.7

Riotous fun above the town on undulating, elevated fairways. Its elevation invites the wind to ask additional questions of your game. Firm greens so expect to be going through the back if you try to fly all the way on, but Perranporth is all about fun and bewildering, undulating fairways.



96 CASTLEROCK [MUSSENDEN] CASTLEROCK, CO. LONDONDERRY

Design **29.4** Setting **12.1** Memorability **12.6**
Playability **7.3** Consistency **7.5** Presentation **7.6**
TOTAL 76.5

A very competent and often breathtaking links near Portrush – Castlerock is now getting the recognition it deserves. Some stellar holes over raunchy terrain that deserves a place in the 90s. The Bann is also superb and together they offer a pair of tracks as fun as any club can offer.



99 DUNAVERTY SOUTHLAND, ARGYLL

Design **27.4** Setting **13.1** Memorability **13.4**
Playability **8.2** Consistency **7.3** Presentation **7.0**
TOTAL 76.4

Requiring just enough creativity, and with plenty opportunity for ones own adventure, Dunaverty is the sort of golf course to be played all day, every day. Views, creativity and drama are a potent mix and you'll find them on this neighbour to the Machrihanish courses on Kintyre.



92 SAUNTON [WEST] BRAUNTON, DEVON

Design **30.4** Setting **11.2** Memorability **12.4**
Playability **7.5** Consistency **7.4** Presentation **7.8**
TOTAL 76.7

Less punishing and with more variety than the more famous East, according to one panellist. Enjoys a passage through Saunton's larger dunes, even if the West lacks the craft of the older and more venerated East. A fabulous 36-hole day is on offer at this Devon club.



93 SEATON CAREW SEATON CAREW, CO. DURHAM

Design **31.6** Setting **9.2** Memorability **11.8**
Playability **7.9** Consistency **8.2** Presentation **7.8**
TOTAL 76.5

A classic out-and-in links with hardly a weak hole. The contours of the final third are full of interest. Willie Fernie's routing introduces variety with just the right amount of adventure as it tackles parallel dune ridges. Its setting is modest, but the holes do the talking.



94 DOOKS GLENBEIGH, CO. KERRY

Design **28.3** Setting **13.8** Memorability **12.5**
Playability **7.1** Consistency **7.4** Presentation **7.4**
TOTAL 76.5

Terrific setting and holes that have been significantly improved by the leading architect Martin Hawtree in a worthwhile overhaul. Dooks is 'location, location, location'... plus some wonderful variety in the holes. The secret sensation of the Ring of Kerry easily gets in our list.



95 TENBY TENBY, PEMBROKESHIRE

Design **28.2** Setting **13.3** Memorability **12.4**
Playability **7.3** Consistency **7.5** Presentation **7.8**
TOTAL 76.5

Get it on a summer's day and you are in links heaven. Tenby is a pure, pure, pure links. Bouncy, brown and bewildering at times, this is the links course we used to never want to leave as a child on holiday. A host of classic features include a punchbowl green that is adorable.



98 DONEGAL MURVAGH, CO. DONEGAL

Design **32.2** Setting **10.2** Memorability **12.2**
Playability **5.9** Consistency **8.2** Presentation **7.8**
TOTAL 76.5

The sensational holes five to seven stand out and will live in the memory long after you leave. We always use words such as bold, brawny and challenging about Donegal, and we aren't misleading you. A serious examination among the dunes that's not for the faint-hearted.



100 PYLE & KENFIG BRIDGEND, MID GLAMORGAN

Design **29.9** Setting **12.6** Memorability **13.5**
Playability **7.2** Consistency **5.9** Presentation **7.0**
TOTAL 76.1

The back nine is bewitching, the front nine less so. It's fair to say the front nine is the warm-up for the awesome back nine, but it's good enough to sneak in here. The best holes are immense, the more modest ones perfectly adequate. One not to miss, because the highs of P&K are immense.



97 SHISKINE BLACKWATERFOOT, ISLE OF ARRAN

12
HOLER

Design **27.4** Setting **13.2**
Memorability **13.4** Playability **8.2**
Consistency **7.2** Presentation **7.1**
TOTAL 76.5

There is nothing ordinary about Shiskine, and that is all for the better. The connoisseur will appreciate the strategic blindness of the 'Road Hole', the 'Shore Hole's' testy punchbowl green, and the sneakily frustrating double-blind green at 'The Hollows'.

A blind par 3, a par 4 with a railway signalling system to indicate when you can play your second shot, glorious views and fascination at every turn... this is surely what golf should be about. Just the 12 holes, but in that dozen there is plenty of excitement to get Shiskine into our Top 100.

Willie Fernie's design dates back to 1896 and is laid out on terrain which rises and falls significantly and is never anything less than interesting.

There are many 'blind' holes with evocative names such as the 'Crows Nest' and the 'Himalayas'.

The two burns which cross the course mean you are frequently factoring it in your calculations, but with only one hole over 400 yards you are mostly just enjoying the sensational island setting.

BUBBLING UNDER...

Not every links in GB&I can get into the Top 100... so here's 50 that stand a chance next time...

Royal Portrush [Valley]

Lundin

Conwy

St Annes Old Links

Monifieth

Strandhill

Irvine [Bogside]

Golspie

Connemara

Tain

Leven

Fortrose & Rosemarkie

Archerfield [Dirleton]

West Cornwall

Ashburnham

West Kilbride

Crail [Balcomie]

Portmarnock Links

Royal Dublin

Bude & North Cornwall

Moray [New]

Carnoustie [Burnside]

St Andrews [Jubilee]

Peterhead

Gullane No.3

Porthmadog

Naim Dunbar

St Andrews [Eden]

Ballybunion [Cashes]

Royal Troon [Portland]

Borth and Ynyslas

Kilmarnock Barassie

Cleveland

Turnberry [King]

Robert the Bruce

Durness

Newburgh on Ythan

Hesketh

Cullen

Weston-super-Mare

Spey Bay

Littlehampton

Hartlepool

Prestwick St Nicholas

Wigtownshire County

Pwllheli

Powfoot

Carnoustie [Buddon]

North West

Castlerock [Bann]

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The first Top 100 ranking
of the country's greatest
courses and resorts

