

HAVE CLUBS WILL TRAVEL ENNISCRONE



Michael Rees

From the very first time I visited Ireland, I was enchanted by the quality of the links courses, east west, north and south, they abound on the Emerald Isle. There are only 150 true links courses in the world and more than fifty of those are in Ireland.



Thanks to the publicity surrounding Jack Nicklaus and Tom Watson, who would religiously come to Ireland to prepare for the Open Championship, many of the links are famous. A glance down the list of best courses in the world will include the names, Royal Portrush, Royal County Down, Ballybunion, and the more modern additions at Old Head and Doonbeg.

There are many many more just under the radar, and I have always been rewarded whenever I have crossed the Irish Sea with clubs in the boot, thanks to listening to the tales of wonderful golf waiting to be discovered. The North West Coast in particular is blessed with some of the most spectacular, and I have quite a list to explore.

The latest trip certainly lived up to expectations, and we were well rewarded after a drive to County Sligo and the Eddy Hackett creation at Enniscrone. Hackett was the renowned creator of superb courses, it is said his genius lay in his maxim that you should not change something that is already perfect.

Enniscrone was established in 1918, it began as a nine hole course near the picturesque seaside resort. The Championship course created by Hackett dates to 1970, aptly named The Dunes, it is a 7033 yard championship layout with a demanding par of 73. It is said and few would question that he built some of the best holes of his long career at Enniscrone.

In traditional links style it is nine holes out and nine holes home, and each hole follows the natural contours of the land, with spectacular views of the sea at various points on the course. This is real links golf, elevated greens well bunkered and with challenging run offs. It will reward those who can adapt and play the bump and run approach shot, and punish those wayward with shots to the greens.

Twelve of the eighteen holes are in the highest dunes, six new holes were created when Donald Steel did an upgrade of the course in 1999, though it is impossible to tell which of them are new. Each hole is individual and most of the time the only hole in view is the one you are playing, overshadowed by the rising dunes covered with marram grass. The final four holes border the Atlantic, and ensure that you will



Photographs courtesy of Miroslava Dulova



take time to pause and take in the panoramic views that are breathtaking, Killala Bay, Bartra Island, sandy beaches and with Mount Nephin and the Ox Mountains forming the backdrop.

A new clubhouse was built in 1974, Eddie Hackett drove the first ball to commemorate the opening, and this was followed by an exhibition match involving "Himself" Christy O'Connor Senior and John O'Leary. This clubhouse was extended when the newly renovated course was opened in 2001, following the work done by Donald Steel.

It is virtually impossible to select a signature hole from among eighteen great ones, but if pressed I would nominate the 16th, named The Long Bank, with the short 17th called White Horses a close second. Both part of a superb finishing stretch that will necessitate the use of every club in the bag.

It is no surprise that Enniscrone has been chosen to host the Irish Close Championships, the West Of Ireland Championships and many other Golf Union events. In a land of spectacular courses, such recognition is fame indeed.

If you are feeling energetic after your round of golf, and have been refreshed with nourishment in the clubhouse, you can extend the enjoyment by playing the other nine holes, the splendid Scurmore Course, which is said to be a fitting monument to the dedicated members of the club who gave their time and expertise throughout the decades to see Enniscrone boast one of Ireland's finest links. There could not be a more fitting reminder.

If like me you have a passion for fishing, you can stay at Mount Falcon Country House Hotel or rent a chalet. This brings the added

bonus of game fishing. Ballina the nearby town is the mecca for anglers, for the River Moy which runs through the town is the best and most famous salmon river in Ireland. With huge runs of Atlantic salmon, sea trout and fighting wild brown trout. Fisherman make the pilgrimage to the river Moy from all over the world and are rarely disappointed. The average salmon catch on line over the last ten years is over seven thousand three hundred fish per year.

Visitors drive to the town just to cross the bridge and watch the anglers wading in the pools, guaranteed to see sport that rivals fishing anywhere in the British Isles. The perfect combination, fabulous links golf and fishing that you can only dream about.

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