

THE EUROPEAN CLUB
Wicklow, Ireland

Architect: Pat Ruddy

Phone: 0404-47425

	Par	Yardage	Rating
White	71	6690	72

Overview:

This course is owned and operated by Pat Ruddy and his family and, as one of the premier modern architects in Ireland, Pat has created here his personal testimony to golf course architecture. If you know anything of the man, Pat is a bit obsessed with the a traditional Spartan approach to course presentation-no yardage markers on the course, a yardage book without user friendly features, and actually twenty holes to play. When I asked his son who runs the golf shop about the “twenty holes” he simply said, the rest of the world will catch on eventually.

The yardage book reveals Ruddy’s respect for links golf design. As he says, “The links have been designed to perpetuate and modernize the traditional values of links golf. The combination of rugged dunes, deep bunkers, sea breezes, and large undulating greens calls on the golf to display strength of character, an ability to think, and shotmaking skills.” The design makes generous use of “calculated deception aimed at inducing white knuckles on the club” in an effort to play with the golfer’s mind and impinge his effort to swing out and hit precise shots.

This is a knock your socks off track-very difficult-not for the faint of heart. Breathtaking vistas, cleverly placed bunkers, huge rolling greens, and the links type serpentine tracking along the coast built on true links land. Straight driving off the tee is essential to handle quite a bit of optical illusion created by the tall dunes and long corridor fairways. Proper fairway positioning is crucial to get the most advantageous angle and some very difficult green complexes.

Since at least nine of the holes are in breeze shot of the Irish Sea the wind influence is significant. This leads to a couple of weather changes a round so be prepared for lots of dressing and undressing of your fair weather gear. The good news is that like most links courses there is open access to most of the greens. When the wind is up, and that is most of the time, the bump and run becomes a very effective method to getting your approaches close to the flag.

Sometime in the early 2000’s Pat must have intercepted a freight ship full of pressure treated lumber because the bunkers have more vertical sleepers than any Pete Dye course I have ever seen. I think he has fire extinguishers placed throughout the course in case a contagious sleeper fire should break out and threaten to burn down the course. This look of the vertical sleepers makes deep bunkers even more intimidating by articulating the potential pitfalls to the player from a long way out.

My favorite Pat Ruddy touch is on the scorecard where at the bottom next to the total score he has a huge oversized box which is simply labeled "What My Score Should Have Been". It is clearly his testimony to the delusional nature of all golfers who love to tell big fish stories over a Guinness after the round.

Hole-By-Hole:

#1 Par 4 370

A difficult medium length par four to begin gently rises to an elevated green. Drive across a ravine to center of fairway above you, three wood may be the best for the first swing of the day to make sure you are in play. Drive it between the bunkers leaving a mid iron to a diagonally angled the green above. Need to avoid the front bunker-you can aim at the bunker right of the green and the hill will turn it into a hook and feed it onto the green surface.

#2 Par 3 150

A short technical par three is next-this is a good example of his clever bunkering-three deep little ones in front and a eyelash bunker on the left. A deep green-you can bounce one in between the gap on the front left and feed it onto the green. This green is well below the tee and a club less for sure. It is important to make a par here to get some security in the bank early.

#3 Par 5 470

Short par five spills down toward the bay over heaving, undulating linksland. Landing area for the drive is ample but confined for the second with a good lean from left to right. Drive to center and then hit a wood at the green. The layup area at 100 is too canted to hold you approach you are better blowing it by the bunkers and let it tumble down to the right in front of the green.. 35 yard deep green so pitch aggressively to get near the day's flag placement.

#4 Par 4 410

Drive center to fairway with a cusped landing area next to a lone bunker on right you cannot see from the tee. Another 200 yard to a precipice green that is difficult to reach. Front left bunker is deep and needs to be avoided as you approach this long and narrow green.

#5 Par 4 385

This one reminds you a bit of the third at Lahinch. Drive across a big chasm over fairway bunker's edge on the left to keep the ball in the fairway. Two big mounds on the right to hold in the fade but not if you carry it too far. The hole now turns to the left with a fall off to the left and ramps up to the green that is 30 yards deep.

#6 Par 3 175

This is another very difficult downhill par 3 with a stream tight on the left collaring the green. Big wood trim bunker short on the right set off a good twenty yards from the green. For a downhill hole it plays the full distance for me. Must be careful not to come in left because there is falloff from the green to the stream-best shot is up the center and leaning right.

#7 Par 4 400

Now the difficulty ratchets up considerably- the meat challenge is in the next six holes. Wind is generally in your face because you are heading for the sea. Unlike most links courses this one has a water hazard all the way up on the right and a huge marsh to the left. Ruddy defends this approach in the yardage book saying that brooks and burns abound in links courses all over the world. The marsh is unreachable unless you are Tiger. The drive should be aimed at the tallest dune on the left and trust that the hole is wider in the landing area on that side. The second is then hit between the adjacent the water hazard and the marsh-the closer you get to the green the narrower it gets. The shmootz from the hazard on the right collars the green so there is no room to miss there. Another deep green will help you control your distance in the wind.

#7A Par 3 114

First of the alternate/alternative holes. This par three is gently uphill into a green that leans steeply toward you. Good time to take a break and hit a driving range short club into the middle of the green. The sea is at your back so like the wind is behind you so control your trajectory to be accurate here.

#8 Par 4 395

Now you are moving back inland toward the club house and a thirst quenching lemon spritzer. A long dogleg right plays into the valley of dunes. Good drive gives you a look at the elevated undulating green. If you do not make it into the valley consider a layup. The approach to the green is through a funnel-short right or left gets eaten by tall grass on sheer inclines. The green is a two tier affair.

#9 Par 4 375

Drive to right center on dogear left. Three new sleeper bunkers crowd the right-aim should be at the last one from the right. Green is set back behind a gap between two dunes and it is very deep. You are going to have to maneuver one between the lone bunker short left and the grassy hollows on the right. If you stop for a snack try the homemade apple tart with ice cream.

#10 Par 4 395

Now that you have had some refreshment he is going to race you back to the sea in the next two holes. Drive here is to center across the cross bunker to a fairly generous landing area between dunes. Again the green is above and set on a 7 to 1 diagonal behind two dunes. This approach sets up for a high cut but make sure to account for the wind that is probably coming into you from the sea behind the green.

#11 Par 4 375

This is a medium length four par where you drive to right center at the two eyeball bunkers through the fairway. If you hit it to the right spot you get a look at the green that is set back to the left around the dune. Another long green that will help you to use the ground to control the length of your approach which is likely into the breeze. The walk from this green to the next tee is pure "beam me up Scotty"-you are headed to the flight deck.

#12 Par 4 400

Now it gets very scenic from a precipice tee box on a long par four playing along the Irish Sea and gently turning to the left. Best drive is at England with a draw working with the breeze off the sea. This should result with the ball working up the hole will and leave a reasonable approach to a massive green that is between 100 and 135 yards long depending on the size of your feet. This is clearly a Ruddy statement-he wants to bring the long three-putt back into the game. There is a hidden indentation in front of the well protected green where there are two nasty little bunkers. The indentation creates an illusion that the green is closer to you than it really is.

#12A Par 3 170

Second of the alternate/alternative three pars. It is a well struck middle iron across the heather valley to a green slightly above. Very majestic hole-this would be a standout par three on any course.

#13 Par 5 530

Drive from a bit of precipice tee toward the sea again. Now the hole swings around to the left and works its way up to an inverted horseshoe green of immense proportion that sits between a sea of bunkers. This is a cleverly proportioned par five. If the pin is on the left side of the horseshoe you have little to shoot out. There is actually a deep bunker that bisects the horseshoe so a pin on one side of the green and a ball on the other side will result in a pitch from green surface to green surface. The pin on the right has more room to play with.

#14 Par 3 155

Typical pretty linkland three that has the feel of the Valley of Tears at Donegal. Carry over a chasm to a green above-very deep-set among dunes. This is a difficult par to make.

#15 Par 4 365

These last four are as grueling as a finish you will find anywhere. This has a drive area similar to 12-drive to right center with a draw that rides the wind off the Irish Sea. Now the shot is into a small green that hangs precipitously above the cliffs to the sea. There is no missing to the right unless you have climbing ropes and a rubber dingy. Wonderful challenge here.

#16 Par 4 345

Tee off the cliff's edge behind the 15th green-don't let the crashing of the sea on the sea wall distract you. Dogear right around a sleeper bunker in the elbow of this dogear right. Drive to left center at the bunker through the fairway. Hole turns uphill through a narrow fairway to a long and accessible green. One more bunker short and left of the putting surface.

#17 Par 4 375

As visual as it gets-a bit of Arizona here. Lofty tee looks at the sea on the left and the gorse. Drive falls endlessly into pleasant valley. Fairway is almost 80 yards wide though it does not look it from the tee. Green is cloistered by sand and high rough banks and demands a full carry shot into one of the smallest greens you have seen today.

#18 Par 4 385

After much criticism of the original hole, Ruddy relented and redesigned this hole to the good. Dogleg left that plays through a narrow strip of fairway between a forest of sleeper bunkers. Now you have a long forced carry over a stock market dip burn that front the green. If you go for the green miss short on the left or right of the punch out. Laying up is ok and leaves a pitch across the stream to a wide but shallow green that is hard to hold.

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