

Ballyliffin-Old Links Northern Ireland

Architect: Eddie Hackett (1973)

	Par	Yardage	Rating
White	71	6612	

Overview:

The Old Links name is a bit of a misnomer since it actually dates back only to 1973 when the famed Irish links architect Eddie Hackett expanded nine holes into a classic old style links course. What makes it old style is the lack of elevation changes but there is just enough hide and seek of the landing areas to keep you off balance. Distinguishing characteristic of this course is the uneven fairways-there is not a level stance to be found. You get the full washboard effect-rumpled wavy fairways, undulating and full of wrinkles and furrows that will do unexpected and unpredictable things to your bouncing golf ball.

Nick Faldo heaped the highest praise on this course when he first visited it in the 1990s. He fell in love with the course and offered to buy it, but was turned down. They did employ him to make some changes to the links renovating bunkers and moving some tees. The par 5 14th is his original and it is one of the real distinguished holes on the course.

What this one lacks in feature it makes up for in pure links tactics. Since the land is relatively flat and there are not any high dunes to block the wind you get maximum effect from the winds that seem to blow constantly off the Atlantic. A low lofted club is a must here to keep it under the wind and help manage the length of your shots. If you have an old one iron in the closet, bring it with you for this day because it will serve you well.

The green settings are pure links as well. Generous when they need to be to help control the low struck approach depending on the wind direction. The bunkering is not overdone but landing in them has it's price to pay so maneuver the ball carefully. What I found more than anything is that the raw distance means nothing here it is a circumstantial shot makers course-you have to carefully consider all the factors before planning each shot. At the end of this round you are mentally exhausted from the tribulations of the day.

This venue is way out there on the end of the Inishowen Peninsula about as northern most as it gets in Ireland before falling off the island, but it is well worth the trek. This is one of two great courses at Ballyliffin and you need to play them both.

Hole-By-Hole:

#1 Par 4 393

Medium length opening hole. Dogerar right-so play left center for an angle in.

#2 Par 4 422

Straight one-smoothly uphill-a real challenge. Play straight away and then you need to work one in from the left to an elevated green-bunker short right.

#3 Par 4 354

A sharp dogear to the left so it is right center off the tee and looking back at the green setting.

#4 Par 5 491

Dogear right-so hit a gentle slider off the tee. Now you sooth one down into the layup area or take a shot at the green if the wind is behind.

#5 Par 3 176

Wow! A classic links three par. Called "The Tank" as the green lies precariously on the high ground between two dunes. Ariel Sharon would feel at home on this one. Long iron into a table top green must be precise to hold this tight target.

#6 Par 4 378

A right to left leaner sets up for working it against the pitch of the fairway. Bunker on the left of the driving area can be a magnet for drives without fervor. Open access to the green so you can hit a low one in if you need to.

#7 Par 3 211

Flat one-green is tucked between mini-Hershey Kiss dunes.

#8 Par 4 409

Right to left longish par four. Nothing fancy, drive straight away. Green is nestled in the mounds.

#9 Par 4 389

Another pretty straight one-bunker on the left of the driving area. Green set below the clubhouse coming in is quite picturesque.

#10 Par 4 334

Leaning dogear to the right. Drive to center. Small green makes an accurate approach paramount.

#11 Par 4 395

Hard dogleg to the left. Loop a slinger around the corner of the mound to end up in the center of the fairway. Green has a bunker short right you do not want to deal with.

#12 Par 3 206

Another long par three this green masked by mounds between tee and green. Green is set in an amphitheater arrangement between the mounds.

#13 Par 4 426

Sweeping, long dogleg left through the dunes. Hit a hard slider off the left fairway bunker for the best position off the tee and a wide. Green is set up into the left so you will have to turn one over to reach this green.

#14 Par 5 535

This was Faldo's gift to the Old Links-great par five. Drive from a high tee into this threading landing area. Now meander your way up to a green perched in the sandhills. Classic links look to this five par.

#15 Par 4 435

Long bender to the right. Need to turn one around the mound on the corner. Mounds continue all the way to the green.

#16 Par 4 344

Dipping dogear left. Drive to center. Super wide green here.

#17 Par 3 160

Short hole but it is a table top green-many bunkers. You are going to have to throw a lawn dart at this one to stay on the green.

#18 Par 5 554

Big finishing hole-slinging left between the low dunes on the right and the high dunes on the left. Like nine the green setting is lovely in site of the clubhouse.

(I apologize for the minimalist detail on this one but the wind was howling at 35 mph this day and it was the second for us. I found little reserve energy for taking notes).

6/25/2002