

Gullane Golf Club-Course No. 1 East Lothian, Scotland

Architect: Unknown (1882)

	Par	Rating	Slope	Yardage
Blue	71	73.9	127	6873
White	71	72.6	126	6583
Yellow	71	70.4	122	6162
Red	74	75.0	131	5903

Overview:

We know that playing golf in East Lothian dates back more than 200 years and Gullane was one of the first organized attempts at creating a golf links in this region. There is no architect of record for this place, it kind of evolved over the years as the number of interested players grew. Archie Baird, the unofficial historian of this region, says in his book [Golf on Gullane Hill](#), “It was more nature than nurture as golf on Gullane Hill was a lucky combination of wind, sand, rock, rabbits, wool, feathers and gum”.

What has survived is a wonderful piece of golf architecture land management on one of the most challenging topographical canvasses in this region. Kind of reminds one of the back nine at Tralee without the trolls. In spite of the massive elevation changes they routed the holes straight up and down the inclines in such a way that there are almost no side hill lies to be considered all day. These same elevation changes provide startlingly beautiful vistas from the high points on the property where you take in views of the vast farmlands below and the long shoreline of the Firth of Forth on its way up to Elie and Crail.

The history of this place is evident through the town where the club resides, the artifacts in the historic Members Club House next to the first tee, and on these sprawling hills themselves. These distinguished links have played host to the most prestigious golf championships over the years, including the Scottish Men’s and Women’s Open and Open Championship final qualifying. With the wind as its accomplice you will see why this place is a firm true links test to players of all caliber.

In general the course is wide open to the eye but don’t be fooled by that, there are specific strategic lines you have to adhere to throughout the course. Make sure to get the cool yardage book in the golf shop that gives you precise detail of the architectural features of the course. It also shows a photo of the driving area on each hole and a separate green map with dimensions and contours. This photo includes the driving area parameters from each tee and aiming lines for your tee ball. It is an essential guide to playing the course effectively. You will find a link to a printable PDF of our hole-by-hole description and strategy for play at the bottom of this posting.

One further note is that unlike most courses we play where the handicap holes are disbursed evenly by even handicap designations on one nine and odd on the other, this convention is not adhered to at Gullane. As a result your handicap shots might be stacked a bit more on the incoming nine holes.

The first and the finishing holes are the only two on-level holes you will see all day. It is a comforting handshake to start and finish what will be an exhilarating rollercoaster trek up and down the steep contours of Gullane Hill.

The march straight up the hill on the second is a wake up call to what's ahead. After driving into a gentle slope the approach is a two-club extra shot into a narrow bowling alley of a green complex. If you make a par here you are one up on the field.

Stepping onto the third tee of a relatively benign five par you get your first look of the expanse of country side that East Lothian encompasses. Pause a moment to take it in because it is something to behold. The hole gets its name Racecourse from a time in the mid-1800's when training race horses on these hills was a very effective use of the land.

The first of the four great short holes at Gullane 1 is coming up. Only a short to mid-iron into is required into a raised coffee table of a green complex segmented front-to-back. If the wind is at your back controlling the roll out once on the green is a real chore.

There is no rest for the weary as a long Par 4's are the real guts of this course. The fifth is the #1 handicap hole and you will experience the elevation change within hole that adds a three-quarter stroke increment to whatever the card says.

In some ways the next two holes define the unique character of this old course. The first is a technical uphill short par four which tempts you to be too bold for your britches. It is a scoring opportunity as long as you don't play into temptation. This is followed by Queen's Head where you get your second breathtaking view of the outward nine staring down what looks like the Olympic downhill at Kitzbuhel to a green complex at the bottom of the world below. The challenge here is to control the run out of your ball on both shots which take full advantage of what gravity and tightly mown bent grass fairways provide.

Continuing the royal theme King's Chair is a wonderful sprawling four par that straddles a blind hill and leads to a long approach to a tightly set green complex. It is looking for a draw approach to work into a narrow green that flows away from you.

The outward half finishes with a slippery downhill three par that requires a flighted short iron feeding onto a green falling precipitously away from you. The green is tightly ringed by eight bunkers, so errant playing lines are punished severely. This has been an exhilarating experience so far but the ride is only half over.

The inward nine begins with two long and challenging Par 4s. The tenth plays to its #2 handicap designation and the drive must carry the ridge in the middle of the playing area leaving you a long club across a cross bunker feeding downhill to a green complex with an accessible opening. This is followed by a sweeping downhill hole that is likely playing into a headwind from the sea below which will make it a three-shot hole. From a drive position right center of the pot bunkers you see from the tee you are likely looking at a lay up down the right to give you an open look up the green angled to the left.

Some relief in store as the next Par 5 probably plays shorter than the two holes you just played. The narrow green approach here is tricky with one nasty pot bunker pinching from the right. This corner of the

property still bears evidence among the seaside foliage of massive concrete barriers the English put in place to deter a potential tank invasion the Germans might have had in mind during WWII.

The course turns back toward the clubhouse with a tidy uphill Par 3 fronted by fierce sod wall bunkers on both sides and a moated collar above the green to capture overzealous tee shots. The green has a bowled contour that feeds the ball to the center so just make sure to pick enough club to clear the front edge.

Number 3 handicap hole is next with a very long slightly uphill Par 4 which is only reachable in two with wind help at your back. As you plan your fairway wood on your second be aware of the two pot bunkers respectively 70 and 30 yards from the green which can gather a tepid approach and bring a double into play.

Continuing the climb back up Gullane Hill this uphill three-shot Par 5 unfolds in front of you. From the center of the driving area your lay up approach is just past the pumphouse on the right leaving you a one club more pitch up to the green tucked into the hillside above.

When you cross the ridge behind the 16th green and step onto the tee of the penultimate hole you are graced with another breathtaking view of the expansive farmland that surround the town of Gullane. Now you are playing straight down the steep incline you traversed on the adjacent 2nd hole at the beginning of the day. Your tee ball will enjoy a huge roll out as a result and it is 320 yards to the end of the fairway short of the diagonal shishlink cross bunker arrangement 60 yards from the green. The approach shot requires a deft pitch where the incline in front of the green is your friend in trying to tumble one down close to the day's pin.

As I said in the beginning this exhilarating ride ends with an on-level Par 4 where control of your tee shot across a rumpled fairway should leave a simple short iron approach into a bunkerless green next to the first tee and the golf shop.

When you are done make sure to check out the Members Club House and bar across the street for a cold one and a chance to recall what a joy it was to traverse these hills of Gullane.

Footnote to consider: There is a quaint museum adjacent to the golf shop which houses the amazing personal collection of golf artifacts of Gullane historian Archie Baird. This collection of old clubs, balls, and Scottish golf memorabilia is well worth a half hour of your time but it requires calling ahead of time for an appointment through the Gullane Golf Pro Shop. Click on this link for our review of the *Archie Baird's Heritage of Golf Exhibition*.

Hole-By-Hole Analysis: (White/Yellow)

#1 Par 4 302/287 yards First

Friendly short opening hole, one of the few on level holes you will see all day. Lay up 200 off the tee just off the right bunkers for best approach angle. Leaves about 75 in to a flatish green on a 4 to 10 angle that has right to left lean in it. Likely the face bunker left front you will have to work around.

#2 Par 4 390/345 Windygate

Don't look now but a stiff hole in contrast to the first. Plays a 100 yards further than the card as it marches straight up Gullane Hill. Wind blows straight down the hill which makes standing up a chore. Drive to center and take two extra clubs up the hill for the narrow approach. Greens is a long bowling alley with gutters, no bunkers. It needs a pin setter. A par here is a miracle and puts you one up on the field.

#3 Par 5 496/479 Racecourse

This shortish par five gets its name from the days when training race horses was a competitive endeavor to golf on the hill. Beautiful view of the Firth of Fourth from the elevated tee. Drive is down the back side of the hill you just traversed to a narrow fairway with 8 pot bunkers on each side. There are five more flanking the sides of a green set on a 5 to 11 angle to the approach line. The green is relatively flat and accessible to a ball moving right to left.

#4 Par 3 144/134 Island

First three par is a table top rectangular green surrounded by short grass fall offs on both sides. No wandering supported. Two eye ball pot bunkers frame the tee shot and the green steps up in the back third. All approaches should land on the lower level and then feed up to the day's pin placement.

#5 Par 4 450/436 Murray's Hill

The #1 Index Hole is a strong four par that doglegs left around some bunkers in the corner of the turn. Drive to right center and then you will play across the brow of the hill as the fairway rises to a large green cut into the side of the hill. Likely not reaching in regulation you will need an excellent pitch on to a surface that banks steeply from back to front. The bunker front right and front left have a false front between them which creates a moating effect to the front entrance.

#6 Par 4 324/299 Roundel

Cute uphill short one as you navigate your way to the highest point on the property. This takes two technical blows so don't try to bully it. Drive short of pot bunker on the left which leave 110 yards up the hill to a perched green. This is a mini dell green set 5 to 11, that leans back right to front left. Once on the green the putts going up the hill will be very slow but any downhill will be streaky fast.

#7 Par 4 398/398 Queen's Head

This tee is on top of the world, you will swear you can see Edinburgh. The look down the hole is exhilarating as entire world seems to sit below you. Challenge is picking out the hole you are playing. Just let loose a drive to center and watch it fly as it tumbles down the hole toward the bunkers in the fairway about 65

yards from the green. Second is a delicate downhill pitch to the first third of the green and let it feed to the day's flag. This is a scoring opp.

#8 Par 4 414/398 King's Chair

This is a relatively uphill dogear rightish. Drive at the bunker of the left at the top of the hill. Once on top you have open access to a narrow green with shoulder bunkers on the left and right. A draw approach line follows the angle of the green.

#9 Par 3 175/141 Corbie

A cliff perched teeing ground that plays to a steeply pitched green below necklaced by eight bunkers. Since the deep segmented green is banked away from you the front pins are impossible to get at. All pins must be approached on the ground, landing short or in the front third and releasing to the hole. You are likely to have a putt back up the "Stairway to Heaven" toward the front of the green.

#10 Par 4 466/434 Thucket Knowe

The back begins with a long one, the #2 Index Hole, calling for a slightly uphill drive to left center. Now you elevate a 175 to 200 yard shot over the cross bunker at 115 yards where you can feed the ball to an accessible open front green. There is only one greenside pot bunker half way up the left side of the green. This green has serious interior contour so pay attention to your read.

#11 Par 4 471/427 Maggie's Loup

Followed by a sweeping downhill Par 4 toward the sea that plays as a three-shot hole unless the wind is at your back. Drive just right of the pot bunkers. Now lay up over and beyond the bunker at 90 yards on the right. You are left with a downhill pitch to an open green arrangement that leans away from you.

#12 Par 5 480/423 The Valley

The tee is high above the beach as this shortish par five bends to the right. The hole actually plays shorter than the Par 4 you just finished. Drive left center and this leaves you an open access line to the green set slightly below you. Long narrow figure eight green banks back to front with one pot bunker guarding the front right.

#13 Par 3 170/160 Hole Across

Another awesome Par 3 with a perch tee playing from one hilltop to another. Note the cement anti-tank blocks just to the right of the tee are relics of the feared German invasion of WWII. Green complex looks like a

skee-ball game with six sod faced pots across the front. There is also a moated collar above the green that will collect overly aggressive approach shots. This is a saucer shaped green that feeds to center.

#14 Par 4 435/409 The Shelter

#3 Handicap Index Hole is another strong straight hole with a slight rise from tee to green. Drive to left center and you are face with a full fairway metal approaching from the left of the pot bunker out at 30 yards from the green. This is a big green that banks left to right.

#15 Par 5 537/487 Pumphouse

The road home starts with a long hole that starts out level but begins to pitch up to a tiered green tucked into the hillside. Drive center and then lay up to 100 yards past the pumphouse that gives the hole it's name. One club more as you pitch it up to the green set behind random pots. This green is super steep back-to-front.

#16 Par 3 186/177 Traprain

This three par plays the same club as you played on the 13th. Narrow rectangular green with a bumper hill left and a fall off heel print hollow to the right. Green again pitches hard back to front.

#17 Par 4 390/390 Hilltop

Now you turn away from the sea and head for the town. From the top of Gullane Hill it is a beautiful view of the farm fields below. This hole is straight down the hill you trudged up on the 2nd. You can hit a prodigious one here without much effort. Short pitch left into the green across shish-link bunkers about 40 yards from the front edge. You can feed your approach down the slope landing it short and let gravity take it on to the green if it is a front pin.

#18 Par 4 355/338 Kirklands

A straight away lovely finishing hole akin to the first with pot bunkers framing both sides of the fairway. Drive to center and you have an approach over a tempest of hollows the last 100 yards. The green has no sand bunkers but lots of natural grass indentions which will gather your ball.