



The 9th green and Firth beyond at the Renaissance Club

THE SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

Rob Smith embarks on a mission to play every course on Scotland's Golf Coast in East Lothian in just under two weeks

M

y golfing taste buds were tickled more tantalisingly than ever last year with the suggestion of a trip to play not just a selection of the golf courses on Scotland's Golf Coast in East Lothian, but all of them! This 30-mile golfing utopia is said to have the largest concentration of championship links anywhere in the world.

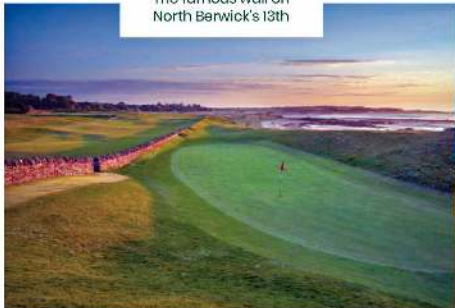
The trip would see me return to a few of the best courses in the UK, tick off several that had been on my hit list for way too long and play others about which I knew nothing. A total of 21 courses in one hit is a very big ask, and the October weather is not always guaranteed to cooperate.

Happily, I was able to leave the organising to old industry friend Graham Hesketh, who pieced together an intricate timetable of unlikely cunning that would also take in a selection of the excellent accommodation in the area...

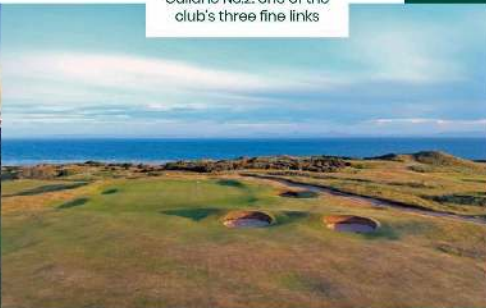
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The famous wall on North Berwick's 13th



Gullane No.2: one of the club's three fine links



Day 1

After visiting the Scottish Seabird Centre in the harbour at North Berwick, I arrived at the West Links for my first round. I had played it many years before and was keen to see whether my romantic first impressions would hold up. Happily, they certainly did as this is one of the most engaging old links courses anywhere. Yes, it's quirky, and yes, it has design features that no modern-day architect would dream of, but it's also a thrilling adventure that almost induces sensory overload. I even managed to avoid slicing my final drive into my car parked alongside the 18th!

Day 2

Refreshed from an excellent night at the Marine Hotel in North Berwick, it was time for my first 36-hole day and my debut at The Glen, the town's East Links. Despite taking numerous photos and a four-club wind, I was round in three hours. This is a really fun clifftop course with plenty of variety and wonderful views that I would recommend to anyone. I then headed inland to Haddington, which could hardly be more different. A pretty riverside parkland course, it is not so well known but is steadily moving forward. Less exposed and not so demanding, it made for a very pleasant alternative.

Day 3

The Next 100 course at Luffness New had long been on my radar, and with my untrustworthy

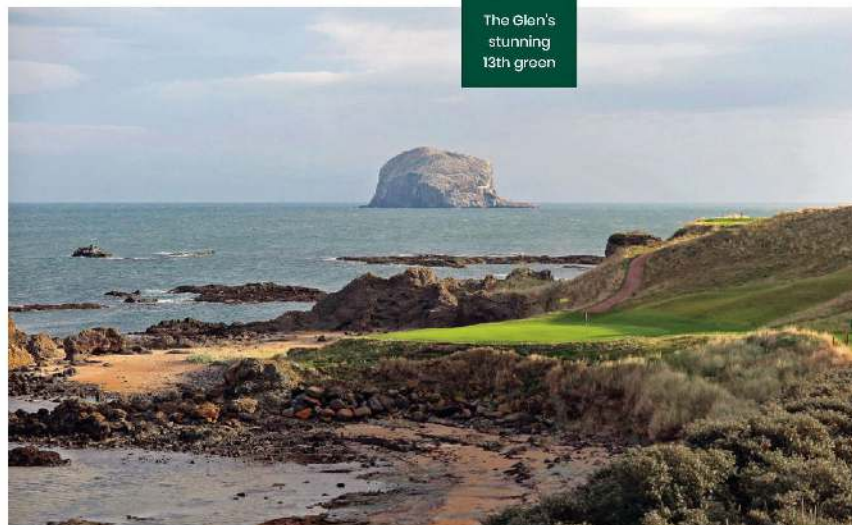


The entertaining links at Luffness New

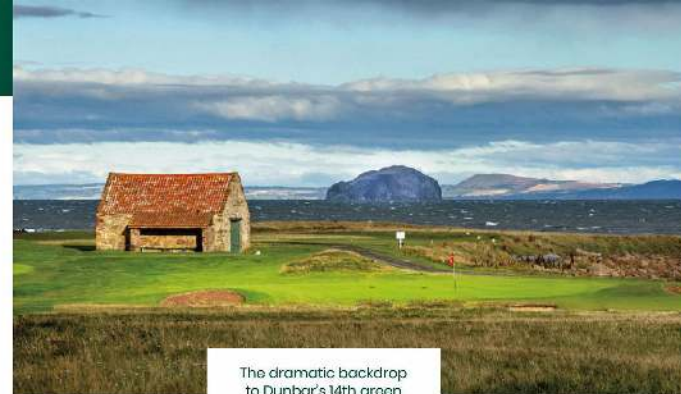
swing I headed out with its captain, Peter Grant. Happily, any nerves evaporated as I birdied the 1st and thoroughly enjoyed the company of my welcoming host. This is a cracking links; demanding, entertaining and kept in excellent shape. Following a drink in the world's snuggest spike bar, I again headed inland, this time to Castle Park. This is very much a course of two halves and I enjoyed it greatly for its setting, especially the back nine.

Day 4

Not far from my excellent B&B at Garleton Lodge, it was another early start to play Gullane No.2 and 3. Each is jam-packed with charm, variety and stop-and-stare views over to Fife and in towards Edinburgh. First out on No.2, I was back in the excellent visitors' clubhouse soon after 11am. After my tasty and very well-priced lunch, I enjoyed the delightful Gullane No.3 almost as much. These are two seriously entertaining and stimulating courses!



The Glen's stunning 13th green



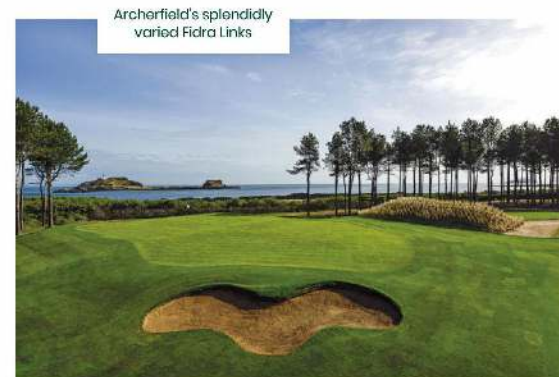
The dramatic backdrop to Dunbar's 14th green

Day 5

Sunday morning, and my return to Dunbar for a game with three members was enormous fun all the way. This is a challenging links, very tight in places, but also memorable and distinct. I then played Winterfield for the first time, a short but very interesting course with some hugely demanding par 3s. If there's a tougher opening one-shotter in golf, I've yet to play it. The back nine is particularly enjoyable, especially the holes at the end of the promontory. Slightly damp, I enjoyed reviving back at the Dunmuir Hotel, a short drive from both clubs.

Day 6

Archerfield is home to two modern links, although sadly the front nine of the Fidra Links was undergoing some TLC, which meant it was the only course I couldn't play fully. However, the back nine was more than enough to demonstrate that it is quite different from the Dirlton Links, which I had played once before. With trees lining half the holes, plus expanses of waste bunkering, it has more variety. This is a top-notch club with state-of-the-art practice and teaching facilities and a pair of very strong courses that will play differently every day.



Archerfield's splendidly varied Fidra Links

Day 7

I had heard mutterings of tricky green sites at Craigielaw, but I became an instant fan. It sits just inland from Kilspindie and is a fine modern links that looks more mature than its tender years. Yes, you may face some fiddly shots if you're on the wrong side of the greens, but isn't that often the case at well-designed courses? I'd heard good things about Gifford, a pretty nine-hole in the Lammermuir Hills, and it more than lived up to expectations. The club is very much part of the local community and I greatly enjoyed playing with long-standing member John Scott. In the evening back at Craigielaw, I met up for an entertaining and filling dinner with *Golf Monthly* Top 100 panellist Michael Graham.

Day 8

For the first time in a week, I was scheduled for a single-round day. Obviously, I couldn't let that happen, so after breakfast I

Five rooms with a view

There is a brilliant spectrum of accommodation in East Lothian and something for everyone. I stayed at a perfect cross-section of five, and would happily recommend them all.

Craigielaw Golf Club

The Lodge here is smart, light and airy. The food is plentiful and well priced, the atmosphere informal and buzzy. A complete golfing resort in one.

Duck's Inn, Aberlady

With an excellent menu of mouthwatering food and the friendliest service, this characterful and lively golf-centric pub with rooms is a wonderful place to stay.



The Dunmuir Hotel, Dunbar

This Victorian, red-sandstone, ever-improving family hotel is very welcoming and blends old-world charm with a modern approach.

Garleton Lodge, Haddington

An extremely well-appointed, stylish and comfortable B&B/small hotel set up in the hills, with sensational views along Scotland's Golf Coast.

The Marine, North Berwick

Resplendent again following an extensive refurbishment, this classy hotel and restaurant overlooking the West Links offers a taste of the high life.



The closing hole at The Musselburgh



Kilspindie sits right next to Craigiellaw

nipped round Craigiellaw's excellent six-hole par-3 academy. This is ideal for practice and introducing people to golf, on top of which even I couldn't lose a ball! It was then on to Top 100 favourite Gullane No.1, and what a course! This captivating, one-of-a-kind links boasts several memorable holes, plus dreamy panoramas both down over the course and beyond.

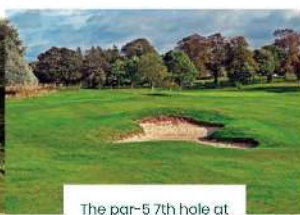
Day 9

The Musselburgh is a great alternative to the lure of the links. It's an attractive James Braid parkland design and former Open qualifying course that is the westernmost on Scotland's Golf Coast. It was then on to Kilspindie, another that had long been on my radar. After lunch in the delightful clubhouse, I set out on the short but exceptionally sweet links in another four-club wind. Yardages were irrelevant, and I amazed myself by keeping the same ball throughout. The short par-3 8th is worth the green fee on its own.

Day 10

Soon to host its fourth consecutive Scottish Open, the Renaissance Club is home to a very different

Majestic Muirfield has hosted 16 Opens



The par-5 7th hole at inland Haddington

and special type of club. Here, I played with Malcolm Duck, one of the area's great golfing characters and proprietor of my accommodation for the last few nights of my tour, Duck's Inn in Aberlady. The course is an extremely varied Tom Doak design that manages to seamlessly blend elements of parkland, heathland and links. The four holes around the turn are visually stunning, and the course is kept in tournament-ready condition.

Day 11

My second Saturday and a return to Musselburgh Links, the oldest course in the world still being played. It hosted six Opens up until 1889 and is a living golf museum. No-one will suggest there is any wow factor, but the experience of walking its hallowed turf makes it a very special place. In the evening, back at Duck's and fuelled by some of the excellent local ale on offer, I succumbed to the fun of Malcolm's legendary bar stool putting challenge.

Day 12

Muirfield is one of the finest courses in the world and I was very much looking forward to a return after 30 years. With its reputation for exclusivity, I was slightly nervous about playing foursomes with one of the club's dignitaries, Douglas Connon, a former chair of Scottish Golf. Things did not start promisingly when, with my very first blow, I managed to lose his ball! Happily, my game improved, and I even holed an implausibly long putt for

a two from just shy of the 13th green. Both the welcome and the lunch were first class, and with its hosting of this year's AIG Women's Open, the club is very much moving with the times. Its superb, flowing and expansive links is packed with exquisite bunkering and brilliant greens and is a must-play. An absolute highlight in a trip jam-packed with highlights!

Day 13

My final day and Longniddry, a very interesting hybrid course; part links and part parkland. Here, I played with Fraser Johnston, one of the club's very friendly professionals. With no par 5s on the men's card, the course is

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Gullane No.1 is a one-of-a-kind links

Competition

Rob's eclectic eighteen

With each hole matching its numbering on its respective course and each course allowed just one entry, here is a 6,368-yard East Lothian layout that would be hard to beat

Hole		Par	Yards
1	Craigiellaw	4	327
2	Gifford	4	355
3	Gullane No.1	5	496
4	Longniddry	3	194
5	Musselburgh Links	3	183
6	Dunbar	4	386
7	Haddington	5	541
8	Kilspindie	4	167
9	Luffness New	4	407

10	Archerfield (Dirleton Links)	5	489
11	Renaissance	3	155
12	The Glen	4	458
13	North Berwick	4	400
14	Winterfield	3	202
15	The Musselburgh	4	327
16	Gullane No.2	5	527
17	Castle Park	4	338
18	Muirfield	4	418

Marker's Signature

Player's Signature

defined by its excellent two-shotters, eight of which are over 400 yards. And so to my final round, this time with David Cockerton, who owns Garleton Lodge and who had also been instrumental in putting my trip together. Dating back to 1774, Royal Musselburgh is one of the oldest golf clubs in the world. It's a Braid design with later modifications and is lined by mature, dense woodland, meaning that you really only glimpse the Firth at the 15th. It also has an amazing clubhouse, Prestongrange House.

So there it is - 13 amazing days packed with first-class golf and brilliant accommodation. Scotland's Golf Coast is a truly exceptional stretch of golfing heaven, with incredible variety and the very highest quality. Since returning home, I have very much enjoyed making sure there are full reviews and plenty of photos for all of these courses on the *Golf Monthly* website. There is something for every golfer, and whether you want to tick off a trophy course or two, or simply treat yourself to a few fabulous hidden gems, East Lothian has it all. Despite any pre-tour concerns about my intensive schedule, and walking for 18 of the 21 rounds, the adrenaline rush of such magnificent golf meant that not once did my ageing body complain. Repeat the invitation, and I would do it all again in a flash!



No par 5s on the men's card at Longniddry