

# Northwest Ireland

## Golf In Its Purist Form Awaits

By M. James Ward, Contributing Writer

**O**n the bucket list for many dedicated American golfers is a visit to Ireland. The Emerald Isle is home to a number of engaging courses regularly cited among the finest one can play.

Many making the trek will often times pick out two destinations. The first being the southwest corner and the connection through Shannon Airport. The other comes when visiting the immediate Dublin area and the international airport there.

Both locations have a slew of nearby golf options of note but there's another area that takes you off the beaten path and exposes the riveting beauty of the country. The northwest corner of Ireland is more rural, harder to access, yet provides a payoff providing memories lasting a lifetime.

First stop—Belmullet in County Mayo and the famed Carne Golf Links. One doesn't get to Belmullet in anything remotely close to swift time. And that is what makes the northwest corner of Ireland intoxicating. The anticipation for what lies ahead and the wherewithal to relish such moments when they do.



Carne Golf Links

### CARNE GOLF LINKS

Carne opened nine holes in 1992 with an 18-hole layout completed in 1993. The product of Eddie Hackett, Carne was the final links course designed by the famed Irish architect.

Hackett smartly created holes working within the flow of the dunes land.

An additional nine called the Kilmore Course opened in July 2013 -- a par-35 layout

just under 3,300 yards. Ground broke in 2004 but only opened nine years later as funds to complete the project were an ongoing issue. American Jim Engh did the original routing, later completed by Dublin-based architect Ally McIntosh.

The combination of nines was changed in recent years and it's best to schedule the layout called Wild Atlantic Dunes. Playing at Carne is a magical experience -- rolling terrain accentuating a rollicking adventure with fun golf front and center at all times. Those fortunate to play at Carne when the sun is shining brightly and a light wind encountered will believe they are experiencing heaven on earth.



Enniscrone Golf Club

### ENNISCRONE GOLF CLUB

Fifty miles from Carne is Enniscrone. Great golf design often involves an evolutionary process and Enniscrone has gone through much since its inception in 1918. In 1999 architect Donald Steel added six new holes within the native dunes area encompassing the main layout along with three new holes in the adjoining flatlands when creating the Scurmore 9-hole course.

The Championship Dunes Course provides a refreshing and striking design, starting off with a compelling start and concluding with five holes stretching alongside the Atlantic Ocean. Two marvelous short par-4's come in succession with the uphill 12th and the downhill 13th respectively. The former plays uphill to a delightfully placed green and the other plunges downhill with the green tucked blindly behind dunes land.

The Dunes 18 stretches to 7,029 yards and plays to a par of 73. Enniscrone starts in dunes lands before featuring a series of holes on flattish land before working its way back into the dunes.



The Point

### 'THE POINT'

Just 40 miles north of Enniscrone is the majestic County Sligo Golf Club at Rosses Point. When you pull into the club entrance you won't see much of the 7,259-yard par-71 championship course.

The revelations happen gradually.

The first two holes are a mere appetizer for what awaits. When standing on the championship tee at the par-5 3rd you fully appreciate the totality of how the land and Sligo Bay magically intersect at Rosses Point.

The main 18-hole course was crafted in 1927 and is chiefly the handiwork of architects Harry S. Colt, Alister Mackenzie, and Charles Hugh Alison, with various improvements made over the years. A 9-hole Bomore Course was added in 1999 and is a pleasant counterpoint to the championship links.

Golf at "The Point" is a changeable product because of varying weather conditions. Docile at one moment -- hellish to the extreme at other times. The Point provides a scintillating array of holes -- combining a routing mandating the best of plays at all times.







Rosapenna

### ROSAPENNA HOTEL & GOLF RESORT

Rosapenna in Downings, County Donegal, is off the beaten track and takes a bit of time to get there. However, the stunning coastal scenery pays you back in grand fashion.

The most exciting news came on July 21, 2021 with the opening of the 18-hole St. Patrick's.

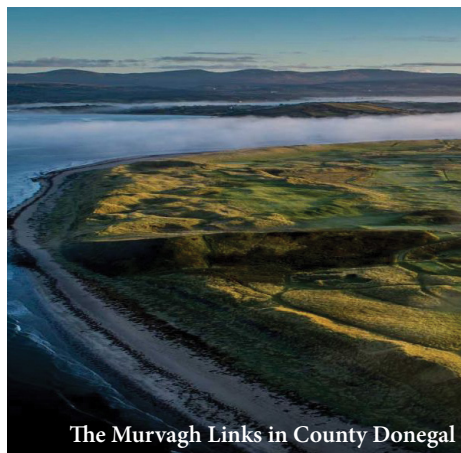
Rosapenna had a glowing reputation prior to the unveiling of St. Patrick's but the Tom Doak design is a magical journey working in and through some of the finest natural dunes one can imagine throughout all of Ireland.

The course is situated on 300+ acres and while there had been past plans to create golf on this terrain -- it was spirited by the Casey family which owns Rosapenna. The early reviews have St. Patrick's among the top of the golfing charts for all of Ireland.

Rosapenna is blessed with three 18-hole layouts and the legendary figure of Old Tom Morris can be seen with a bronze statue showcasing the famed golfer with club in hand and the role he played when the club was just beginning.

If you're up for the challenge take on the second 18—the Sandy Hill Links. Opened for play in June 2003, Sandy Hills is situated on land between the two nines of Old Tom Morris Links and provides incredible views of nearby Sheephaven Bay.

The high dunes that bracket the holes are grand spectacles. Cloaked in marram grass that can quickly strangle your efforts in navigating the verdant passageways. Total attention and flawless execution are a must. Sandy Hills is golf without the clutter -- no distractions taking you away from the golf experience. At 7,255 yards from the back tees, Sandy Hills does not suffer fools gladly—pay heed or pay the steep price.



The Murvagh Links in County Donegal

### DONEGAL/MURVAGH

The Murvagh Links, located on the Murvagh peninsula in County Donegal, was designed to test the strongest of players. The course is devoid of the mounding found at Carne and Enniscrone and doesn't have the hole variety provided at County Sligo. However, the course is well-bunkered and varying wind velocities only add to the inherent demands.

The Murvagh is a muscle course - playing 7,456 yards. Getting consistent results off the tee for both distance and accuracy is a must requirement. The par-73 layout is not as beguiling as the other courses, but it's certainly one that will not suffer foolish plays with faulty executions. In sum - be ready to play the moment you step on the 1st tee. **GRD**

### IF YOU GO...

- Fly into Dublin International Airport. The best flexibility for travel schedules and provides a range of big city options either prior to departing or returning from your time in the northwest.
- Pack high-quality rain gear. Irish weather is renowned for being fickle. Be sure to include two pairs of golf shoes so one can dry out as you use the other.
- Leave sufficient time for driving between locations. Irish roads are routinely curvy and quite narrow in spots. Driving 30 miles can take an hour or more in Ireland. Plan your time smartly.
- Avoid night driving. Roads are partially marked and can be difficult to see when weather is less than optimal.
- Book caddies with your golf reservation. Power carts are not as readily available as in the States. Be sure to bring a lightweight bag so you can either carry yourself or take a pull cart whenever needed.
- With a large group—four or more—consider reserving ground transportation with a driver handling all your logistical needs. Costs more than a basic car rental but you need not worry about all the minor details and hassles associated with road detours and the like.

*For more information or to plan a vacation in Ireland, go to:*

IRELAND.COM

#### THE AUTHOR

*M. James Ward resides in Clifton, New Jersey, and has played over 2,000 golf courses globally. A member of the Golf Writers Association of America (GWAA) and Met Golf Writers Association (MGWA). Served 17 years as national course rating panelist for Golf Digest and has reported on golf in a variety of forums since 1980.*