



A wild day in Cornwall as waves pound the beach below the fourth green at the Trevoze links.

**TRAVEL**

edited by **STUART McLEAN**

## ATLANTIC LINKS

**If you're looking for an alternative links experience in the British Isles, good value and away from the traffic of golfing tourists, then exit at Heathrow and drive west to the Atlantic Links.**

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SUPERB LINKS COURSES ARE ABUNDANT IN BRITAIN AND IRELAND, yet it's fair to say that most golfing visitors to the isles include the same roster of renowned top links on their travels without looking for alternatives. Last year I travelled off the beaten track to the "Atlantic Links" of south-west England, and found enjoyable good-value golf in the sunny climes of Devon and Cornwall. ➔

The first advantage in playing there was being able to disembark at Heathrow after a long international flight, and not have to rush for a connection to Scotland or Ireland. Our destination on day one was only a two-hour drive west along the M4 and M5, which meant we had plenty of time to book in at our guest house, and then head for the Burnham & Berrow links in Somerset.

You may well have never heard of

Burnham & Berrow before, and that's understandable. The Open Championship has never been in this part of the country, and never will come this way, even though access would be easy from London. The courses are magnificent, but there's no space on them for tens of thousands of spectators, let alone tented villages and all the paraphernalia that comes with a big televised tournament.

Instead, Burnham & Berrow were last

year content to host the British Boys' Championship, and the Brabazon Trophy, so some future winner of the Open may possibly have been among the fields. In fact, a man who won five Opens in his time, John Taylor, was the professional and greenkeeper at this club soon after it was founded in 1890. He helped with the early design. J H Taylor, a member of the "Great Triumvirate" with Harry Vardon and James Braid, won his first Open in 1894 and his last as late as 1913.

To give some idea of the strength of the six courses which make up the "Atlantic Links," three are currently rated among the top 100 courses in Britain and Ireland by Golf World magazine. The other three are included in England's top 100. Burnham & Berrow is ranked No 70 out of thousands of courses, which makes it special, as we were to discover.

The links is something of an oasis amidst English suburbia. Its appeal only comes to light when you enter the clubhouse. From the lounge windows all you can see of the course is the first tee, the 18th green on the other side of it, and sandhills stretching off into the distance along the coastline. This alone would make it a non-starter for the Open. The opening five holes on this rugged Harry Colt design are in typical rolling seaside terrain, with views over the Bristol Channel. The course then ventures into flatter marshland, before turning for home at the par-3 ninth. The prevailing wind made for a demanding start over the opening nine, all the holes playing in the same direction into the breeze, but it was a pleasure to have the wind at our backs for the nine holes back to the clubhouse. There is a collection of great finishing holes among the dunes, played from elevated tees.

Our hosts that evening at their guest house were a South African couple, Peter and Glenda Botes, originally from Cape Town. Woodlands Country House Hotel is a quaint restored double-storey



The back nine at Burnham & Berrow moves inland past the local church.



The harbour at Padstow in Cornwall.

#### PLACES TO STAY

##### FOR BURNHAM & BERROW

**Woodlands Country House Hotel**  
Hill Lane, Brent Knoll, Somerset  
[www.woodlands-hotel.co.uk](http://www.woodlands-hotel.co.uk)

##### FOR SAUNTON AND ROYAL NORTH DEVON

**Yeo Dale Hotel**  
Barnstaple, North Devon  
[www.yeodalehotel.co.uk](http://www.yeodalehotel.co.uk)

**Saunton Sands Hotel** ★★ ★★  
Croyde Road, North Devon  
[www.brend-hotels.co.uk](http://www.brend-hotels.co.uk)

##### FOR ST ENODOC AND TREVOSE

**Metropole Hotel** ★★ ★★  
Padstow, Cornwall  
[www.the-metropole.co.uk](http://www.the-metropole.co.uk)

farmhouse hidden away on a narrow Somerset rural lane, a restful contrast to the plain streets of Burnham-on-Sea. One of those secret places which oozes English charm, and where you could happily spend a few hours relaxing in a cosy room with a good book. Peter was the chef, and an accomplished one. The meal he prepared that night was the best we had, and our trip included a visit to Rick Stein's Café in Cornwall. The couple have since sold the hotel and moved to Bath.

#### Westward Ho!

**T**HE "ATLANTIC LINKS" sells itself as a golfing trail which offers good value – and it certainly does that if you compare the green fees to those in Scotland and Ireland (the average round here is R750) – but it also comprises an interesting mix of courses. You will be hard to find one quite so unusual as Royal North Devon, or Westward Ho! as it has come to be known, after the neighbouring seaside village which took its name from a 19th-century bestselling novel by Charles Kingsley.

Westward Ho! is the oldest seaside course in England (1864), and for a South African it's peculiar to say the least. It was designed by Old Tom Morris on flat open pastureland known as the Burrows, separated from the beach by low-lying dunes. Today the land is still grazed by horses and sheep.

Golf has been played here

for almost 150 years, so like the Old Course at St Andrews there is a pervasive sense of history around you when playing the links. A set of hickory-shafted clubs and gutta percha ball would seem more appropriate than those of titanium and graphite. It is unchanged from a century ago, and thus you will find some quirky old-fashioned hazards such as the vast cross-bunker on the fourth, shored up by timber, which must have been forbidding to carry when playing with ancient implements. Giant sea rushes are also a menace. You won't find wider playing areas in the whole of the golfing kingdom, yet several of the greens have been designed so craftily that they can only be approached with certainty from one part of the fairway.

The modest clubhouse, packed with memorabilia – many related to J H Taylor, who was born nearby and became the club president at

the age of 92 – and racks of old clubs, overlooks a scene which might have you heading back to your car if you knew no better. It hardly resembles a golf course, let alone a leading one. The first and 18th holes run parallel to each other to and from the sea, with a burn dividing the first tee and 18th green from the common land.

This is a relatively remote area of England, and the beaches and sandhills of the Braunton Burrows – the largest sand dune system in England – were chosen by the US Army as a training area for the Normandy landings on D-Day in 1944. The Saunton golf links, both of them, were appropriated by US troops in 1943, along with the giant

dunes which border the sandy beaches, and disappeared under concrete and barbed wire. The dunes are so vast that you could build another half-dozen courses within them, but today they are a Unesco biosphere reserve. One of the links was restored in the 1950s and the East Course at Saunton Golf Club has gone on to become one of the finest championship links in Britain. It ranks No 21, ahead of more famous layouts such as Troon and Wentworth.

"If the East Course were located on the coast of Lancashire or Kent it would have hosted an Open by now," says Nick Faldo, a fan since playing there as a boy.

A second links was built in

the 1970s, the West Course, and the two layouts lie side by side across the ridges and valleys of beautiful linksland, complementing each other quite strikingly. What a wonderful place for a day's golf. Many of the great links clubs in Britain often provide a second course to play, but often it's far inferior to the main one. Not at Saunton. The East is quite unique in having 14 par 4s in a total par of 70, so it's a demanding challenge from the opening hole which measures close to 450 metres. The slightly easier West ventures closer to the big dunes, and is a good morning prelude to the tougher afternoon round.

A golf club with two magnificent links such as



The clubhouse at Saunton.



Catching the Camel River ferry for golf at St Enodoc.

#### COURSE GUIDE

##### Burnham & Berrow GC

**Burnham-on-Sea, Somerset**  
Championship Course  
£75; £95 for 36 holes  
Has another 9-hole links, the Channel course  
[Burnhamandberrowgolfclub.co.uk](http://Burnhamandberrowgolfclub.co.uk)

##### Royal North Devon GC

**Westward Ho!, near Bideford, North Devon**  
£55; £70 for 36 holes,  
£30 after 4pm  
[Royalnorthdevongolfclub.co.uk](http://Royalnorthdevongolfclub.co.uk)

##### St Enodoc GC

**Rock, near Wadebridge, Cornwall**  
Church Course  
£67; £93 all day golf;  
£250 for five rounds in 7 days  
[St-enodoc.co.uk](http://St-enodoc.co.uk)

##### Saunton GC

**Braunton, near Barnstaple, North Devon**  
36 holes: East and West courses  
£77; £99 for two rounds  
[Sauntongolfclub.co.uk](http://Sauntongolfclub.co.uk)

##### Trevoze G&CC

**Constantine Bay, Padstow, Cornwall**  
Championship Course  
£68; £45 for residents  
(accommodation starts from £120 a night in summer for a two-bed dormy flat); [weekly rates](#)  
Also has the 9-hole Headland course  
[Trevoze-gc.com](http://Trevoze-gc.com)

**NB:** Because these are members' clubs, green fees can be more expensive on Saturdays.



The 18th green on the East Course at Saunton.



The first green at St Enodoc, with its magnificent backdrop.



these would be jam-packed with tourists from around the world if it was in Scotland or Ireland, but the beauty of the Atlantic Links is their relative quietness during weekdays, even in the height of summer. We had Saunton mostly to ourselves on a Wednesday in July, and this was the case at all the courses we played on the trip. Members were out enjoying the good weather, but the pace of play was brisk.

After golf, it's worth turning left out the car park, and taking the scenic coastal road past the Saunton Sands Hotel to Croyde Bay. This is a popular holiday spot, with a wide sandy beach, popular with surfers. We stopped for a meal at a local pub, The Thatch, and were amazed at the capacity of the staff to serve hundreds of diners. There's a surfing theme, and while the beach is a few hundred metres away, you can watch the wave action at [croyde-surf-cam.com](http://croyde-surf-cam.com).

### Rick Stein country

**F**ROM THERE, we travelled south into Cornwall, and the harbour town of Padstow, perhaps familiar to BBC Lifestyle viewers who are fans of the celebrity chef Rick Stein. He appears to own a fair chunk of it, judging from all the shops and restaurants that have his name on them.

This is an enchanting place, on the estuary of the Camel River, and the narrow streets were teeming with holiday-makers, seemingly intent on gorging themselves on Cornish pasties and ice cream. Pasty shops were everywhere, offering every possible filling.

Across the wide estuary lies the rambling links of St Enodoc, ranked No 38 in the pantheon of great courses in Britain and Ireland. It takes an hour to drive there from Padstow, on a roundabout inland route, so instead we slung our bags over our shoulders and walked from our hotel to the

*How straight it flew, how long it flew,  
It clear'd the rutty track  
And soaring, disappeared from view  
Beyond the bunker's back –  
A glorious, sailing, bounding drive  
That made me glad I was alive*

An extract from *Seaside Golf*, by Sir John Betjeman, a former Poet Laureate of England, and member at St Enodoc: he was buried in the churchyard in 1984.

harbour. A small open ferry sails every 30 minutes across the estuary, to a beach on the other side, and from there we walked about a kilometre to the clubhouse in the village of Rock. It had taken us about 20 minutes, and felt like the epitome of summer holiday golf. We were like kids again, making our own independent way to the golf course for the day.

The previous day we had played at the busy Trevoze links south of Padstow, and afterwards over a pint resort owner Peter Gammon had suggested we might be disappointed with St Enodoc in comparison to his exceed-

ingly delightful course. On the contrary! Trevoze, a Harry Colt design from the 1920s, was indeed an easier walk over gentler terrain, and far friendlier towards mid- to higher handicaps, but for a dramatic links experience St Enodoc is not to be missed. In fact, you need to allow for more than one round there, in case you go home and thought you dreamt about it.

If you come away from the Church Course at St Enodoc not having been thoroughly entertained, and ready to do it all again after lunch, then perhaps you should be heading elsewhere for your next

Visit the Atlantic Links website ([atlantic-links.co.uk](http://atlantic-links.co.uk)), and find a package where you can play all six courses along with accommodation. **London Golf Tours** ([londongolftours.com](http://londongolftours.com)) is the preferred golf tour operator of Atlantic Links, and can tailor packages for clients.



The Metropole Hotel in Padstow towers over the town.

## backswing for health

Most causes of back pain and lack of flexibility are due to the health of the discs that separate the vertebrae

- Relieve back pain & help discs regenerate
- Improve posture, flexibility & range of motion
- Strengthen ligaments & joints

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golfing holiday.

St Enodoc is exceedingly eccentric by the standards of modern golf, and therein lies its considerable charm. This is not some formulaic design, even by the principles of ancient course architecture thinking. It rambles through the countryside, up and over the wild Atlantic dunes. You hit drives across roads, past an ancient church, brushing up against a seaside cove, climbing hills, all the time being presented with breathtaking views of the Camel estuary, before finally finding yourself



The St Enodoc links, with Padstow on the other side of the river. Left: Peter Botes at Woodlands Country House Hotel.

back at the clubhouse.

All 18 of the golf holes are terrific, and each one holds a surprise in its variety from those played previously. You begin with the longest, an undulating par 5 with a gem of a green set against the backdrop of the entrance to the wide estuary, and high headlands, with small boats

and yachts going about their business on the water. On the front nine you are asked to play several risky shots, including one over a gigantic bunker built into the face of a towering dune at the sixth. This is what the challenge of links golf is all about.

Good trips like these are over all too soon. We dined

at Rick Stein's Café in the back streets of Padstow (the cheaper of his restaurants, and you need to book well in advance for a table), enjoyed the comforts of the majestic Metropole Hotel, with its grand views, took one last evening stroll around the harbour, as the week came to a close. 🇬🇧



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