

Whistling Straits-Irish
Kohler, Wisconsin

Architect: Pete Dye (2004)

	Par	Rating	Slope	Yardage
Black	72	75.6	146	7201
Blue	72	73.5	141	6750
Green	72	72.0	137	6366
Red	72	70.0	126	5109

Overview:

The Irish at Whistling Straits sits close to Lake Michigan with the Straits course between itself and the shores of the lake. As a result it lacks the links style character of the Straits, it does not have the vast wild look set among the rugged dunes areas strewn with hundreds of small bunkers and natural grasses. Rather it is a cute sister with a unique personality of it's own. Pete and Alice Dye sculpted the land to create a very original blend holes that share the influence of the Lake Michigan winds in a more parkland setting. There is a bigness to the scale of this course-the engineering feat and tactical drama they created easily equals that of the Straits it just does it in a slightly more demure way.

The Irish has a more manicured look with smooth edges and curves. Much like Pete's work at TPC Sawgrass there are more defined water hazards and vast manicured waste bunkers here that create distinct target areas collared by strife. The pressure is constant from the very first hole to make precise tactical decisions and execute specific shots. Mistakes translate into scorecard cash register ringing, so you are going to have to be on your game to protect your score from disasters. Once you have been through the course the first time, I think the shot lines are much less psychologically intimidating since you are better aware of the bordering parameters. Over the long haul your scores should be improve as a result.

Every Dye course I have played has the "startle factor" and this one is no exception. You stand on the tee of many of the holes and think "Wow!" usually followed by "Oy Vey!". He just has a way of laying holes out that are so splendid to the eye with the flow of the fairway, demarcation of the hazards, and uniqueness of the green complex presentation. At the same time you cannot help but feel intimidated by what he is apparently asking you to do. But, as with TPC Sawgrass, if you keep your wits about you, I think there is a fair and conservative line you can choose on every hole that is not an unreasonable challenge. Playing to your handicap is very doable on this course.

The three pars lack the stunning beauty of those on the Straits because they do not have the cliff hanging green sets against the lake backdrop. But the four pars more than make up for this drama through a very clever use of segmentation of the landing areas and sharp turns in the doglegs. Greens are very large, segmented, and have plenty of pitch and roll to them so you have to be very articulate in your approach shots to avoid lots of three putt drama. The biggest factor to your scoring will be the wind effect off the lake in conjunction with the large waste bunkers and water hazards adjacent to the driving areas. There are a number of partial forced carries you have to calibrate properly to minimize your risk. It is the cumulative effect of having to deal with this hole after hole that will wear on you.

This is a wonderful golfing challenge dressed up with splendid visuals. In the end the Irish will not assault your scorecard as directly as the Straits, but the net result is likely to be the same-a feeling of exhausted accomplishment after a day of sensory overload.

Hole-by-hole (Blue/Green tees):

#1 High Ground Par 4 387/369 yards

This is a nice middle length dogear left to start-drive it to right center to get the best look at the green that is set back to the left. The deep 35 yard green sits above a narrowing fairway bordered on the right by a string of bunkers and is angled 5 to 11 so a right to left curve on the approach is appropriate. Short and left of the green is a deepish recession so the bail out is short and right. As the yardage book says, probably an extra club for the uphill approach.

#2 Giants Leap Par 4 360/347 yards

Pete is grabbing your attention quickly-this has Florida penal driving area written all over it. As you will see all day he his intimidating you with the forced carry over the water that flanks the fairway all the way up the hole. Not a very long hole pick your angle to bite off what you would like to chew. The safest drive up the right around 120 out-this gives you more landing room but a more difficult carry line to the green complex. The thin green is wedged between bunkers front and back so you are going to have to bring one in high to hold on this narrow green angled back to the right.

#3 Sleeper Par 3 138/128 yards

This is a very basic forced carry three par with a 35 yard long green angled to your left. They were kind enough to put a "sleeper faced" bunker collaring the left of the green as a buffer to the hazard. This green is so large and undulating that the challenge is to put the ball in the right zip code for the flag to avoid a three-jack. Should make a par here if you are not too greedy.

#4 Sandbanks Par 4 443/432 yards

Number two handicap index tells all here. Enter serious segmentation of the landing area and the green set. The fairway is more generous than it appears since it's view is masked by the massive waste bunker that cordons the left of the landing area. Don't be greedy-aim right center and hole to be about 220 in from there. You may consider laying up on the second since the fairway tethers to a fairly fine ribbon with a fall off on the left the closer it gets to the green Aim at the left edge of the green if you go for it and accept an elevation pitch from down below up the length of the tiered green.

#5 Devil's Elbow Par 5 517/501 yards

This is the first really funky hole out here-it is a hard right folded par five that is just a series of target areas between lots of sand. Drive is left center off a massive waste bunker nestled in the corner of the first dogleg. Now you have to just punch one up the fairway short of the creek that crosses the fairway at about 150. The hole now turns back to the left and the long serpentine green is wedged back into the back left corner. For those foolhardy enough to try to reach this green in two you have another huge waste bunker up the left all the way to the green. You would have to have green seeking sensors to find this green with a fairway wood in your hand.

#6 Mulligan's Watch Par3 149/135 yards

This is essentially an island green par three-the green is floating in a sea of sand. The target is fairly small but you are only hitting it about 150 so what is the big deal. This green is flat by today's standards so a birdie chance is in the offing here.

#7 Troll Par 4 363/344 yards

This is a shortish par four with a generous landing area off the tee if you do not get greedy. You might hit a three wood the ideal place to end up is just off the bunker about 110 from the green. There is a distinct slope from the middle of the fairway to a low below the bunker on the right. So you have to make sure the drive carries up to the top of the ridge left of the bunker to have a good look at the green. Green is to the right but set on the 5 to 11 angle with more sand protecting the left. Be aware the creek meanders up the left of the hole behind the first row of bunkers and then behind the back left of the putting surface.

#8 Garden Creek Par 5 542/501 yards

This is another truncated par five which is just a series of target shots. Drive it hard up the left center and the layup has to engage a transition area that crossed the fairway from about 170 to 125 on the right diagonal. If you can layup on the other side at about 110 that would be idea. The green is severely sloped and set back on a diagonal to the left again. There is a chipping area short left but it slopes steeply back toward a very deep bunker on the front right corner of the green.

#9 Last Gasp Par 4 409/322 yards

Lots of anxiety in the last whole on this side. Again a creek bisects the fairway-the carry over the creek is longer on the left than the right. There is lots of room on the right of the landing area but this presents a much more confined look at the green that is set up the left in an alcove. Your second has to cross the creek again just in front of the green as that is where the danger is waiting.

#10 Shepherd's Post Par 4 387/378 yards

The next three holes are as close to The Straits course and the lake as you will get and as a result bear more similarity that what you have played so far. This one will remind you of 10 on The Straits-similar dogear left as your drive crosses a deep transition area from tee to fairway. Try to ignore the dunes on the right and the

sharp drop off on the left and lace one to center. Now the fairway ramps sharply up as you climb to a precipice green that sits on a 4 to 10 diagonal on the left. Green is accessible to a draw and is almost 40 yards deep so add a little to the effort on the way in to get to the flag in the middle or the back.

#11 Lamb Chop Par 3 193/177 yards

Here is an unusual sequence for you-both par threes on the inward nine are in the next two holes. The next three holes remind me of Lahinch in Ireland, not any particular holes there but the look of Lahinch. You may see the sheep grazing on the hills for full Lahinch-like effect. This one is a bit of a bender around a large dune on the left-the artistic presentation of this hole from the tee is a thing to behold. You have to carry your shot over a long waste bunker that swerves around the foot of the dune to the green that is 50 yards deep with two deep bunkers with nine foot walls masking them from your view flanking the left. Serious tiering in this green so you again need to pick your distance and carry the ball aggressively into the proper section of the green.

#12 Highland Trek Par 4 396/373 yards

Still in Lahinch mode this one seems fairly innocuous off the tee but you will note the plateau fairway kinds of hangs precariously off the big dunes on the right and you really don't want to miss this fairway left of you will have a serious elevation shot up to the green surface. The green is on a plateau as well still hanging out over the left-no bunkers protecting it but no bunkers really needed since anything missing this green is a big elevation pitch. You should get a good scoring opportunity here if your shots are not wayward.

#13 Blink Man's Bluff Par 3 160/152 yards

Last bit of Lahinch and probably the most ill-conceived notion of it yet. Alice gets the blame for this one because apparently she was adamant that they should have a blind par three on this course. I personally think she was having blinding migraines when they conceived of this. From the tee there is a huge mound they erected to obscure your view of the huge green that sits about 50 feet below you. It says "partially blind" which is a lie-it is totally blind. It is so blind that they had to use a 20 foot fiberglass pole for the flagstick so that you can see the flag if you stood on top of the blinding dune. Just get a distance, pick a piece of the dune top to aim at, let it fly and float it's way down to the putting surface. Plenty of missing room to the right but missing left brings the creek into play. The only thing I am sure of is that you will have a monstrous putt on this hole.

#14 Tullamore Dew Par 5 520/508 yards

The rest of the way will remind you more of the first nine-maybe that is a good thing but don't think that means it will be a cake walk in. Another quasi-truncated five par here which means you have to control your distances. Drive is straight away over another massive ash tray but the landing area is generous. Now you want to hit a shot to lay up around 100 yards left center. The creek bisects the landing area diagonally from the left so beware the best layup is closest to the creek. Now the fairway is jogged to the left and the green is snuggled up behind a bevy of bunkers on the right and one seriously mean sod wall pot bunker short left of the green.

#15 Frog Water Par 4 459/416 yards

The heat is ratcheting up quickly-this is the number one handicap hole and that is no misnomer. This is a long and difficult par four fraught with peril. You drive across a bit of an abyss to a fairway that points up the dogleg to the right. Safest drive line is to the left but that lengthens an already long hole. If you are on short grass it is a long approach to a green set back to the right hiding behind more abyss. Safest approach would be short left which would give you a look up the length of this 44 yard long slender green. The green actually tumbles away from you so even a short pitch on the third will be dicey. A bogey is a good score here-just be glad if you end up pulling the same golf ball out of the hole that you teed off with.

#16 Deep Dye Par 4 436/424 yards

To me this is a vintage Dye hole-the hole begins up the left-side steps to the right and finishes up the right. It is like a hyphenated dogleg. Drive straight away to the wide fairway in front of you-cutting the corner of the hyphen on the right makes no sense since the landing area over there pitches off further right. Your second will be across the corner of the water that juts into the hyphenation but you want to aim at the left edge of the green because there is serious 20 foot falloff to the right short and right of the putting surface. There is also a large waste bunker from 100 yards in on the right which you may not mind if you hit one wayward right because it could keep you out of the worst stuff.

#17 Irish Mist Par 4 355/335 yards

Ignore the name of this hole-you won't see anything like this in Ireland. This is actually your classic cape style hole you would see on a marsh course in South Carolina. Drive is over the corner of the water on the left to a wide landing area on the right. If you can avoid the big hook you now are looking across the water to a green that is set tight to the hazard in the typical cape configuration. Green is long and narrow with a nice bail out area to the right of the green. There are some waste bunkers up the right but they are set well off the green surface. Likely way to make a par is miss right into the chipping area and then get up and down. Likely way to make a double is bite off too much on the approach across the cape.

#18 Black and Tan Par 5 536/523 yards

The finishing hole is a real dilly-you have to hit a whole bunch of articulate shots in a row to make a par here. The drive is across the lake to a landing area set on a diagonal to the water. The trick here is that the second shot to the layup area is blinded on the right by a hill and a bunch of badness so the best drive is close to the water on the left if you have the kishkas to do that. Now you have lay up across the corner of the dogleg to the right into an area at about 125 before a creek that crosses the fairway. From there you have a serious elevation short iron to one citadel of a green setting-it has everything but trolls pouring hot oil over the edge so you have to hit a very crisp approach to hold it on top of this green complex. Missing left it falls 20 feet down to a waste bunker you do not want to hit from. Missing right will tumble to a low area but at least you can play a shot from there. Not clearing the front edge will reject the ball back down 30 yards to the bottom of the hill fronting the green. I think you are starting to grasp the difficulty of finishing with a par.

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