

**North Berwick Golf Club-West Links
East Lothian, Scotland**

Architect: (1832)

	Par	Rating Slope	Yardage
White	71		6506
Blue	71		6140
Red	74		5737

Overview:

When knowledgeable people discuss the true gems of links golf in the British Isles North Berwick always gets hearty mention. Much like Cruden Bay or Prestwick it is the hamish atmosphere at Berwick as much as the course itself that shape people's opinion of the place. This one has real history, A.J. Balfour, a prominent member of parliament, was one of the original patrons in the late 1800s. The place was frequented by prime ministers, members of parliament, church elders, military brass, and eminent educators from surrounding universities.

Ben Sayers was the pro at that time and represented the club in the Open Championship for thirty years starting in 1884-he was runner up in the 1888 championship. Sayers was well known as a club maker and teacher and his students included members of the Royal Family. In many ways he was responsible for the growth of the fame of North Berwick in the day.

As with so many links in Scotland North Berwick is an endemic piece of the small town from which it gets its name. The distinguished old club house sits wedged between the edge of town and the first tee box. Make sure to take the time to poke around the building, it is full of amazing memorabilia and a real sense of history. The paneled board room in particular is a real period piece-walls enamored with photos and lists of club captains, men's and ladies past champions, and wood members lockers with really famous names adorning them blend into the décor. You can just smell the history of this place in the room.

The course has no designated architect, but much of what we see today was the result of the efforts of David Strath, the greens keeper in 1876 who took the original 9 and stretched it to a full length 18-hole links layout.

The course sits close to sea level of the Firth of Forth and offers an unpredictable routing plan with some very unusual design features that include the full links repertoire of blind shots, long grass, burns, sod wall bunkers, and even some stone walls. An out-and-back arrangement includes hole sequences that criss-cross in each nine, so it presents seaside holes on both sides and full wind influence throughout. Needless to say trajectory control and using the ground as your friend is necessary if you are going to win your match around these dodgy old links holes.

As you can read in the link below to the Hole-By-Hole Analysis there are a number of unique holes on this links. The famous Redan Par 3 is #15 and it is probably the most copied architectural design for a short

hole in history. There are holes where stone walls that separate farm plots in Scotland are an intrinsic part of the design making for an equestrian challenge on some lay-up and approach shots. The most memorable of these is the short, quasi-drivable Par 4 13th where a three-foot knee wall cordons off the green complex a mere pace from the putting surface. Needless to say there are no pitch and run approaches into this one.

When you ask people who have played the famous courses like Royal Dornoch, The Old Course, or Carnoustie what their favorite track was in Scotland it is surprising how often North Berwick is at the top of that list. The holes are quirky, the challenges are often existential, and the elements are definitely a major factor in the outcome of your golfing day. But there is something truly magical about this collection of holes—the experience never fails to challenge the player but very often finds a way to please at the same time. This place is a must stop for any Scottish golf itinerary for golfers of all abilities and it will leave a lasting impression guaranteed.

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

#1 Par 4 322/312 yards Point Garry (out)

When you stand on this tee and look at the yardage on the scorecard it is tempting to think you could drive the first green, especially with the brisk wind at your back. But don't be so fast to take that bait because the fairway runs out at 200 yards from the middle tee and though you could technically fly the next 52 yards of sea grass and sand, there really is no available place to land it on the other side. Hit a 190 shot off the tee at the rock ledge and you will have a short blind pitch across the waste area to two-tier green perched some 20 feet above the sea. Take a short walk up to look at the landing area and the day's pin—you cannot afford to miss the putting area or a high number may be in the works.

#2 Par 4 429/414 Sea

The challenge stiffens immediately as the next two are a stern test, especially if the wind is out of the west. On this long Par 4 (Par 5 for the front tees) the beach is like a magnet so don't get cute cutting any corners. Drive left center for a look up the fairway that rises to the green. Your aim on the second is at the gap in the wall on the hill. This green is relatively flat with no greenside bunkers in play, the one on the left is 15 yards short of the putting surface. There are a couple of gatekeeper bunkers about 45 yards from the green that can catch long approaches bothered by the winds.

#3 Par 4 476/444 Trap

Like the last, a long Par 4 this plays as a five par from the front tee. Beach on the right is really not in play but drive to left center for the best angle for your approach. The second here must go over a stone wall that bisects the hole at 135 yards out. There is a nasty pit about 30 yards short of the green on the right and another stone wall encroaches the green from the right as well. This green has a bit of a crown in the back left and slopes from there to front right and into a collection area. If you have made two bogies on the last two you have not lost any shots to the field.

#4 Par 3 178/168 Carlekemp

The routing crosses over and you play inland holes over the next six. This is the first of the very endearing Par 3's at Berwick. There is a tunnel like effect to this one created by the gorse and scrub on the left into a 50-yard long narrow putting surface vice gripped between pots left and right. The green is stepped as it slopes from back to front so you have to work your tee shot into the proper section for the day's pin if you want a chance for a two-putt par.

#5 Par 4 371/359 Bunkershill

A bit of a respite here as this is a shorter Par 4 that dogears slightly right. Drive it at the chimney in the distance which will put you left center with a nice angle to the green set to the right. This round green has one pot bunker front right and grass hollows on the left. There is thick grass long so be careful clubbing your approach.

#6 Par 3 161/139 Quarry

Second Par 3 in the last three holes, this is very short but exceedingly tricky in the winds. Straight away look over a grass depression and quarry bunker that gives the hole it's name. Anything short is a major error. Four more bunkers encircle the green so the middle of the putting surface is always your target.

#7 Par 4 365/344 Eli Burn

What follows is a truly quirky Scottish hole here with lots of elements coming into play on the approach. Drive is to center at the end of the wall you can see left of the green. Your approach must carry the Eli Burn that fronts the huge 45-yard deep green. Three bunkers on the right and a stone wall with OB on the left, so the approach has very little latitude for error.

#8 Par 5 532/487 Linkhouse

First of three Par 5's in a four hole stretch as you approach the end the outward nine. Drive is over the bunker directly in front of the tee which should carry to just past the fairway bunker on the left. Lay up is center just short of the series of bunkers that litter the fairway the last 125 yards. The green is pinched by side bunkers so an elevated approach is preferred.

#9 Par 5 519/502 Mizzentop

Final hole before you turn back to the clubhouse is a real teaser. Shortest route is up the left but the center line bunkers and an OB wall on the left call for a very precise risk-reward drive. I like taking the longer route to the right of the center bunkers. Hole now turns to the left over depressions in the fairway and some bunkers up the right side the last 110 yards. The lay-up is left of the bunker at 110 which leaves another

elevation pitch into a raised table top with a shoulder pad up the right side of the green. This will influence shots from the right into the center portion of the green.

#10 Par 3 172/153 Eastward Ho!

We are back to the sea for a nice stretch. This short 150 yard hole is played from high in the dunes and is a beautiful beginning to the inward nine. Green sits below you on a diagonal from 5 to 11 with plenty of side sand to contain your eye. The green is banked from back right to front left so you can imagine the movement your ball will take once it is one the ground. Stay out of sand and making par is expected.

#11 Par 5 546/523 Bos'ns Locker

Here is your third five par in the last four as promised. Fairly straight long hole with a slight lean to the left. Drive to center and your lay up is toward the left side between two bunkers at about 120 yards. If you pass that point the ball runs into a dip just beyond. This is a long skinny green with a long skinny bunker shadowing the right. Most difficult task is getting the approach the right distance for today's pin and still keep in on the putting surface.

#12 Par 4 401/363 Bass

Slight dogear left with a tight driving area just off a nest of four bunkers on the left. From that drive position you have only 110 yards remaining as the hole turns toward the left to a green wedged between a mounds on the right and the beach on the left. Fidra Rock stands sentinel in the distance as a back drop to the approach look. If you do not hook your approach a par is in order here.

#13 Par 4 387/362 Pit

From here to the house the course gets very kitchy. You will never forget this next one because you have not witnessed anything remotely like it anywhere in the world. Standing on the tee the green is offset to the left wedged in a hollow created by a low stone wall abutting the left side of the fairway the last 75 yards in. Drive is to right center aimed at the next tee and the ball should fall to the left leaving a short iron distance. The green is set against the backdrop of a tall dune with the stone wall hugging the green's right apron. Nothing other than a dose of Xanax can mitigate the psychological difficulty of playing this approach shot which must land dexterously on this sliver of a 40-yard green.

#14 Par 4 374/358 Perfection

I kind of like the name of this one since that is what it requires to negotiate the two blind shots on this hole. Drive on the left edge of Fidra Rock into undulating washboard terrain with sand on the right and long rough left. Approach is a shortish club over a diagonal ridge 50 yards short of a green set on a low plateau right at the beach. You can play this approach to about 40 yards and let it feed down the slope onto the front of

the green. This may help to mitigate the indecision on club selection because you are likely dead into the wind and have an oblivion waiting behind the blind target.

#15 Par 3 190/178 Redan

Not much else to say except that you are about to play the grand daddy Redan of them all, the original that all the others try to emulate. Yet it is so unlike the ones you typically see that came after. You have the standard Redan elements of a carry drive into a green that sits on a 5 to 11 angle banking to the left and away from you with a hellacious sand pit below and left of the green. But unlike what I have seen elsewhere, the landing area is blinded by a fronting hill and a hidden graveyard dip the last 50 yards so there is lots of faith required in picking the club and hitting the shot with conviction. The slope of the green will funnel the proper approach landing on the front edge into the heart of the green and left. Getting it to stop anywhere near the day's cup position is an existential crap shoot. Standing on this green looking back makes the required approach much more intelligible so you will have that valuable insight for the second time around.

#16 Par 4 378/360 Gate

Here is another one that you have not seen the likes of which before. This is a level hole with a hurdle burn crossing the fairway 200 yards from the tee that must be cleared on the drive. Your aiming line is the white gabled house right of the green. If you are on short grass for your second you have an approach into a green complex set to the right that is quite unique. A Biarattz green set on a 4 to 10 angle with a distinct back plateau, front plateau, and a deep trough between. When you miss the putting surface on the right-missing left in the bunkers is death-you will have a very dicey recovery pitch onto the operational table top lobe for the day. I imagine there are plenty of folks who have a beach volley ball sequence of pitches back-and-forth across the green before putting out for a seven.

#17 Par 4 428/405 Point Garry (in)

Of all the holes down this final stretch this is the most bizarre of them all and demands flawless execution on both shots. Drive it at the right edge of Bass Rock into a level area at the foot of the hill leaving a on the long, uphill approach to a green surface you cannot see. If the approach is too far lay up your second short of the cross bunker that diagonally bisects the fairway starting at 50 yards out. Any subsequent shot out of that bunker is virtually unplayable so avoid it at all costs. The green sits below in a bowl about 40 yards past the center of the cross bunker so once again you have to hit a blind approach and trust your visualization of the shot is correct. A bogey is a par here so just try to avoid the triple or worse.

#18 Par 4 277/269 Home

Much like the Old Course the home hole at North Berwick is very expansive, simple, and eminently playable. From the tee box the clubhouse and the town create a real Kodak moment so take a second to enjoy it. The driving area is massively wide with the town road bordering the right but the best approach line will be well to the left. Your target on the second is a bunker-free plateau green sitting on the diagonal with hollows in front

and falls offs behind. The approach is short enough that a clever pitch will give you a real birdie opportunity to end the day.