

# ADARE ★★

Trent Jones Snr 1995 €€€ H: M 28, L 36, J 36

✉ Adare Golf Club, Adare Manor, Adare, Co. Limerick, R01

☎ + 353 61 395 044

✉ golf@adaremanor.com www.adaremanor.com

🚗 ✈ Shannon: N19/N18 for Limerick, whence N21 for Killarney; Adare Manor on L after some 11km. Note: this course is part of the Adare Manor Hotel and Golf Resort, and is separate from Adare Manor Golf Club, whose entrance precedes.



	Y	P		Y	P
1	444	4	10	436	4
2	426	4	11	179	3
3	403	4	12	551	5
4	178	3	13	433	4
5	421	4	14	421	4
6	203	3	15	378	4
7	528	5	16	167	3
8	419	4	17	413	4
9	577	5	18	548	5
	3599	36		3526	36
				7125	72

Vintage Trent Jones Snr in grand-scale, majestic arboretum setting (especially back 9 – Jones at his best). Other tee positions compensate for length from back. Lavish, generally open-style bunkering and shaped greensites, often with narrow entrances. Maturity should improve weaker mid-front 9. Water aplenty.



Playing lengthily back to the manor, 18 is one of the most demanding p:5s in Ireland: only the bravest will bid to pass on a lay up to near our camera position . . .

Ireland is best known for its impressive and diverse hand of links courses – they hold all the aces and most of the picture cards. These have mostly been in play for decades, if not a century, but a growing number

*The view from back tee to green on dog-leg p:4 15, illustrates the beauty and tranquillity of Jones' design, even directly in front of the manor, which overlooks the river and green from the right.*



of clubs (the odd king, a few queens and jacks) are finessing the inland precedent set by the lakeside splendour of Killarney. Robert Trent Jones Snr's Adare has leapt into the rankings: water here too, but the magnificence lies in the splendour of the arboretum. Some tree gems here: true diamonds (note especially the superb specimen cypress front right of the 13th tee – but no rubber trees: wrong climate!). Jones weaves his course through it all most sympathetically. But it is not just beauty: despite the 3 yellow-rated holes (which may reduce in number with maturity), Adare is one of Jones' best designs in Europe – comparable, say, with Spain's *Sotogrande* ★★ (set in different scenery).

We understand that spades may soon be sharpened to implement Jones' design for a second Adare layout, but the original is no dummy: your game will be severely tested, particularly if you are ambitious in your choice of tee. All the characteristics of a Trent Jones classic are here, not least lavish bunkering, distinctly three-dimensional greens and, of course, water. After the streams and lakes of the front 9 (which includes, it has to be said, a blander section from 5 to 7), the river Maigue features spectacularly on the way home: to succeed in your contract with your opponent, the trick here is to keep your ball above the line (well . . . waterline) right to the end – including the long carry to the green of memorably challenging p:5 18 (see above). Only then, to your heart's relief (and surely with satisfaction), will you cross the final bridge . . .

## ARDEE

Unknown/unknown/Branigan 1911/1982/1990s? €

✉ Ardee Golf Club, Townspark, Ardee, Co. Louth, Rol

☎ +353 41 685 3227

✉ ardeegolfclub@eircom.net www.ardeegolfclub.com

🚗 ✈ Dublin: M1 north to exit for Ardee; L for Ardee on edge of town, straight over mini rbt after 300m, R after 50m (brown sign for Táin Trail); club 200m on L.

### Selected holes

	y	p
13	202	3
14	546	5
15	405	4
16	368	4

Total 6510 71

Parkland course with pleasant rustic routing and some nice movements in land. Generally good greensites, some raised. With less artificial mounding it might be a candidate for a higher rating . . . p:3 13 is one of the most challenging holes on the course, requiring a carry of some 180yds over water from the tee.

## ARDGLASS ➔

Shaw/D Jones 1896/2003 £ H: M 28, L 36, J 36

✉ Ardglass Golf Club, Castle Place, Ardglass, Co. Down BT30 7TP, NI

☎ +44 284 484 1219

✉ info@ardglassgolfclub.com www.ardglassgolfclub.com

🚗 ✈ Belfast Int: A26 south to M1 J9; M1 for Belfast, exit J7; A49 to Ballynahinch, whence B2 and R onto A7 for Downpatrick, then B1 to Ardglass (total approx 50 miles); club by sea in town centre.

**Purple 1:** Stunning seaside vista on leaving oldest clubhouse building in world (with cannons as starting guns), but this short linksy uphill p:4 is rather spoiled by the fact that the raised green is hidden behind a bunker. Could be gold or red, but blended they make . . . purple. Ardglass' remarkable cliff-top start only gets better: the 2nd (p:3 over cliffs) and 3rd (p:3 from cliff edge tee over hummocky ground to a raised green) are both close to gold – and the views from the next two tees aren't bad,



**Purple 7:** quirky p:3 down towards the water – you can't see the putting surface, and in place of bunkers there is a building as a hazard (another one on 16 . . .). Noteworthy.

	y	p		y	p
1	335	4	10	205	3
2	167	3	11	488	5
3	334	4	12	198	3
4	375	4	13	397	4
5	151	3	14	400	4
6	414	4	15	491	5
7	219	3	16	422	4
8	439	4	17	361	4
9	527	5	18	345	4
2961 34			3307 36		
			6268 70		

A dramatic and beautiful hotchpotch of cliff-top, open ground and shoreside golf holes, recently extended and woven together into an entertaining course with mountain and island views. Opening and closing cliff-top stretch full of character, greens included. Some blind shots, water and wind. Fun to play.

## ARKLOW

FG Hawtree & Taylor/Hackett/Connaughton 1927/1960s/1994– €

✉ Arklow Golf Club, Abbeylands, Arklow, Co. Wicklow, Rol

☎ +353 40 232 492

✉ arklowgolflinks@eircom.net www.arklowgolflinks.com

🚗 ✈ Dublin: M1/M50 south becomes M11/N11 to Arklow. Just after bridge as you approach Arklow, L to sea and follow signs.

### Selected holes

	y	p
1	405	4
2	419	4
3	198	3
4	368	4
5	441	4
6	420	4
7	139	3
8	306	4

Total 6383 69

A harbourside course to watch during a period (as we understand it) of gradual remodelling and 'linksification': on a primarily flat site with small dunes nearer the sea. The first 8 holes have ★★ well within their sights. After this, it turns into relatively disappointing (though not necessarily easier) parkland golf. If these later holes are linksified to the standard of 1–8, the future bodes well.



## ASHFORD CASTLE ★

Hackett & Mulcahy 1974 € H: M 28, L 36

✉ Ashford Castle Golf Club, Cong, Co. Mayo, ROI

☎ +353 94 954 6003

✉ ashford@ashford.ie www.ashford.ie

🚗 ✈ Galway: R339/N6 to Galway, leaving on N84 for Castlebar; at Headford R334 to Cross, whence L at church onto R346 to Cong; club on L just before Cong village.



p:3 9 - note the rectangular shape of the bunker left of the green (and, yes, the castle is pay and play, too!).

length, whose few bunkers may be exited by putter – a glorified municipal pitch and putt? We beg to differ.

Ashford Castle was designed by Eddie Hackett under the watchful eye of none less than Mr JA Mulcahy, shortly before he masterminded the links at Waterville. Ashford earns a ★ because it is a perfect design for its purpose – a place to relax and have a bit of fun: no titanium-drive-required-just-to-get-to-the-fairway golf here. Even so, it can be played at two levels: for fun and don't worry about the score, or set up as a serious challenge, especially with several raised greensites (e.g. 1–5 and 8).

But the highest marks are earned for the almost unique routing: you go round in two circles, with the final 4 holes intertwined around the first 5, all wonderfully fitted to the graceful folds of the land (especially at 2, which earns gold primarily for this). The aesthetics are superb – a park with occasional views of the castle and lake, and some majestic trees, especially the huge cypress beside the 3rd green/4th and 7th tees, which also forms a backdrop for the 6th hole. Strategic qualities as well – most notably at right-to-left sweeping dogleg p:4 3, where you can choose either to cut the corner through/over the trees (as Tom Watson once did), or to play the hole's full length by driving into a valley and then up to the green.

Christy O'Connor Snr was professional here in the opening years.



*The green at golden p:4 2, seen across and over the fold of land that swallows up mis-hit approaches . . .*

**Beautiful 9-hole resort course, set in undulating park with castle (hotel) and lake views. Played for fun, played seriously: a pleasure either way – minimalist 'sandpit' bunkers, surprisingly, work in this context. Unique routing.**

	y	p
1	320	4
2	340	4
3	381	4
4	128	3
5	354	4
6	494	5
7	370	4
8	279	4
9	161	3
2829		35

As you drive into this castle-hotel estate synonymous with grand-scale luxury, you would be forgiven for thinking that its tree-lined but generally roomy golf course with minimalist 'sandpit-at-best' bunkers is a

bit Mickey Mouse. This image belies what is one of the best examples of a hotel course we have seen – admittedly one that should be approached in the right spirit. You come to a place like this for true leisure: sumptuous accommodation, a bit of fishing, perhaps, but nothing too arduous – recreation rather than sport. You find a course without any rough (except for the very wild shot), not of any serious

## ATHENRY

Hackett/Connaughton 1991/2005 €

✉ Athenry Golf Club, Palmerstown, Oranmore, Co. Galway, Rol

☎ +353 91 794 466

⚡ athenrygc@eircom.net www.athenrygolfclub.net

🚗 ✈ Galway: R339 away from Galway; R onto N18; L onto N6 for Dublin; L on R348 to Athenry; under railway bridge and L, then L again, club on R.

### Selected holes

	m	p
12	175	3
16	367	4
17	143	3

Total 5718 70

Mainly tree-lined, compact parkland course: two loops of 9 holes with four greensites recently enhanced. Note: two p:3s through woods (downhill 12, and 17), and medium long p:4 16 (straight away through trees over gently but interestingly moving land to a mounded and bunkered new greensite).

## ATHLONE

McAllister/F Hawtree/Hackett/Connaughton 1892/1972/1985/2005 €

✉ Athlone Golf Club, Hodson Bay, Athlone, Co. Roscommon, Rol

☎ +353 90 649 2073

⚡ athlonegolfclub@eircom.net www.athlonegolfclub.ie

🚗 ✈ Dublin: M1/M50 south; exit 7 onto N4/M4/N6 for Galway; from Athlone bypass R onto N61 for Roscommon; R to Hodson Bay after 2km; club on L before Hodson Bay Hotel.

### Selected holes

	m	p
2	140	3
6	177	3
11	390	4
13	396	4
15	300	4

Total 6175 71

A parkland esker course, recently partially remodelled, with some quite steep undulations, water and some testing greensites. As well as 13 (*below*) you may also have fun with p:3 2 (the roadside fence excepted), p:3 7 challenging over water and p:4 11 (greenside water).

**Purple – 13:** a memorable and spectacular esker (see Birr, p 55) roller-coaster hole, which would have worked well as an old fashioned 'bogey' 5, but doesn't really work as a p:4, because both drive and 2nd shot are at best semi-blind.



Ballinrobe's p:3 16, our favourite hole – see comments in the text below.

## ATHY

Larkin & Barret/Suttle/Howes 1906/1993/2004 €

✉ Athy Golf Club, Geraldine, Athy, Co. Kildare, Rol

☎ +353 59 863 1729

⚡ info@athygolfclub.com www.athygolfclub.com

🚗 ✈ Dublin: M1/M50 south; exit 9 N7/M7/M9 for Carlow; at Kilcullen (5km along M9) R onto N78 to Athy; on approach to Athy R at lights for Kildare; club 2km on R.

### Selected holes

	y	p
5	517	5
11	176	3

Total 6475 72

Set over rolling ground with a pleasantly natural feel, a partially tree-lined course, some of which has recently been enhanced by Howes. 5 and 11 are particularly memorable. Some water. Don't make the graveyard at 16/17 your own!

## BALLINROBE

Hackett 1995 €

✉ Ballinrobe Golf Club, Clooncastle, Ballinrobe, Co. Kerry, Rol

☎ +353 94 954 1118

⚡ info@ballinrobegolfclub.com www.ballinrobegolfclub.com

🚗 ✈ Knock: N17 south for Galway; 10km after Knock, N60 for Claremorris, where L for Galway/N17; then R onto R331 for Ballinrobe; approaching which after some 20km, club on L during a series of bends.

### Selected holes

	m	p
2	410	4
4	478	5
10	365	4
16	160	3

Total 6354 73

A generally fairly flat parkland course, locally well regarded, with some mounding and a few heathland features (such as gorse narrowing the entrance to medium p:3 7) and some grander sets of trees near and in front of the clubhouse – a period building, making a pleasant distinction from the many, albeit most often excellent, modern clubhouse buildings in Ireland. Some good greensites and nice bunkering – especially at our favourite hole, p:3 16, whose challengingly front-bunkered green is impressively set beneath a clump of trees (above).



# BALLYBUNION



✉ Ballybunion Golf Club, Sandhill Road, Ballybunion, Co. Kerry, Rol

☎ +353 68 271 46

✉ bbgolfc@iol.ie www.ballybuniongolfclub.ie

🚗 ✈ Kerry: N23/N22 to Tralee; N69 to Listowel; R553 for Ballybunion (9km), where follow road to seafront and round to L; club entrance 1km on R.

## CASHEN ★

Trent Jones Snr 1984 €€ H: M 24, L 36

	Y	P	Y	P
1	522	5	10	324 4
2	377	4	11	146 3
3	154	3	12	210 3
4	350	4	13	395 4
5	314	4	14	400 4
6	155	3	15	487 5
7	378	4	16	164 3
8	605	5	17	479 5
9	478	5	18	368 4
	3333	37	2973	35
			6306	72

American/links hybrid with rather narrow undulating fairways leading to generally raised, small, often tiered greens in stunning seaside setting. Long – but at some holes well-placed – drives will roll down hills, significantly shortening second shots. Some out-of-place artificiality, but nice echoes of less hilly, less scenic Old course (e.g. consecutive p:5s and p:3s). Wind!

With the possible exception of a Colt or Mackenzie, anyone accepting a commission to design a second course in the dunes alongside *Ballybunion (Old)* was risking trouble. It was somehow fitting that the opportunity was given to Trent Jones Snr, himself a hybrid (British born, yet the 20th century's most famous American golf-course designer), with

*Gold rated p:5 15 can play every which way, depending on the wind. Be careful: the approach shot is deceptive, as you'll often play it sheltered from the wind; anything short is marked 'return to sender' . . .*



*Short p:5 17 - one of the most exposed holes here. With a good score in the making, your heartbeat reflects the wind speed. On in two - for glory, or sheer lunacy?! Up to you . . .*

no track record with traditional links. He clearly relished the opportunity and the result, rather neutered by subsequent revisions, is fascinating. Some may argue that it is also an example – by exception – of how it sometimes pays to keep to one's core business. Jones thought it was one of his finest, a view apparently supported by many members of the club (a club which then changed it!). Others felt the mixture just didn't work.

We stand in the middle of the love-it-or-hate-it debate. True, the greensites are all but too small (yielding few chip-and-run links opportunities), but how can one criticise a course for being 'un-links-like' when it is so undeniably on links ground? For some, the holes are too long and the fairways too narrow for such a windswept site. For others there are some very cleverly designed holes and the stunning views from dunes (on an even bigger scale than *Ballybunion (Old)*) mitigate for the demanding length. Our mid-position is no cop-out: we see this course as

### For readers interested in Jones' original design, we summarise the changes made to it:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1 Tee moved from near entrance gate up to near clubhouse, turning hole into dogleg.  | 12 Was a short sharp left-to-right dogleg p:4 on top of dunes between current 11th green and 13th tee. The green, on top of the dune to left of current 12th, was driveable – over a perditious abyss. The climb from 11th green to 12th tee became known as 'heart attack hill' – perhaps explaining its demise. (Note that Jones' design thus did not include consecutive p:3s.) |
| 2 Tee moved away from above 8th green (i.e. near 9th tee,) to the left and lower.  | 13 Unchanged.  |
| 3/4 Unchanged.   | 14 Basically unchanged: fairway widened and smoothed out, removing some blindness.   |
| 5 Unchanged, except grass on direct line to green from tee is now cut rather than left completely wild.  | 15 Unchanged, though green is now perhaps marginally bigger on left.   |
| 6 Unchanged.   | 16 Unchanged (an experiment with tee on other side of the dune to give protection from wind was discontinued).   |
| 7 Erosion problems: fairway was too close to sea. It has had to be severely fortified to stop erosion, including banks added to left, closing off view of sea. | 17 Original tee was a little further back, and landing area for second shot has been flattened and widened.  |
| 8 Unchanged.   | 18 Landing area for drive has been widened and flattened.  |
| 9 Unchanged, except rough is gentler (as generally over whole course).   |  |
| 10 New green: original was lower, long and narrow green with friendly mounding, more exposed to sea.   |  |
| 11 Unchanged.  |  |

a demonstration of the difference between old-style British Isles links and new-style American target golf. Give the man credit: Jones had been around long enough to

understand what a links course was. He also knew that if you look west from Ballybunion, the next course is somewhere in America. His Irish links course does exactly that – it looks to the New World of golf, while acknowledging its historic location. So, for example, the mass of rough dunes grass (which is now cut shorter than Jones intended) in front of the shelf green at short

p:4 5 plays as fatally as the water in front of Jones' many American lakeside greens, while the shelves down which the fairway of p:5 13 cascades pay homage to the similar feature at *Ballybunion (Old)*'s famous p:4 11. Sure, you only have to walk out of the clubhouse the other way for evidence that Cashen is far from the greatest course in Ireland, yet, in the history of golf design, its statement is somehow unique.

*You don't need perfect weather to enjoy the aesthetics of Ballybunion (Old), but you do need a steady nerve for your short game here: shortish p:3 8 rewards a well-aimed teeshot, but everything else will give you trouble, as is very evident from the tee. Most of us have our green-criss-crossing days: make sure it isn't one of yours when you come here! This hole wins gold on all counts. (The green on the right is the winter green.)*



*For many, medium long p:4 13 at Ballybunion (Cashen) is the best hole on the course. But its design is also an illustration of the modern trend towards tee to green golf being played in the air.*

## OLD ★★★

Various/Simpson & Gourlay/Watson 1893/1941/1995 €€€ H: M 24, L 36

	Y	P		Y	P
1	392	4	10	359	4
2	445	4	11	453	4
3	220	3	12	192	3
4	520	5	13	484	5
5	524	5	14	131	3
6	364	4	15	212	3
7	432	4	16	499	5
8	153	3	17	385	4
9	454	4	18	379	4
	3504	36		3094	35
				6598	71

**Fashioned by nature, world-class seaside links. Massive dunes, eccentricities and irregularities. Every hole different, yet harmonious and fair. Slightly blander townwards section comes early in a round which builds, through sometimes penal, short-game-testing shoreliners and undulations, to a roller-coaster climax. Wonderful greensites. Views. Wind!!**

Superlatives are commonplace in the consistent praise for Ballybunion (Old) ever since its late 19th-century inauguration. This is a links course that is different, yet one that, for those well acquainted with the genre, should come as no surprise. Different, because everything here is on a larger scale than anywhere else: not just in the height of the sandhills (which run rather more across the course from land to sea than on many links), but in the finesse it requires of your short game (e.g. the demands of the severe run-offs around the 8th and 9th greens). No surprise? Well, ultimately, there are no rules to links design, so you should expect anything and everything. And that is what you get.



A view of the seaside green of Ballybunion (Old)'s gold-rated p:4 7 (there is a winter alternative, inland). This green is more raised than it looks, and long. Take your par and move on quickly – if you can . . .?!

And yet, despite its incredible dimension, the fairways (played to scratch, as it were) are devoid of blind shots and of a kindly length. While comparisons are often made with *Lahinch (Old)* (its near neighbour – there is no right answer as to which is better), Ballybunion (Old) is the benchmark



Gold is earned at p:4 9 primarily because of the raised green and short grass run-offs.

against which all natural golf courses should be tested. (In saying this, we respect Viscount Castlerosse's 1934 wisdom, expressed in his *Sunday Express*, that 'The Old Course at St. Andrews . . . is not a golf course. It is a miracle.', and, in passing, mention the near perfection of Royal Melbourne.) So, measure the appealing eccentricities of a Cruden Bay, the fairness and honesty of a Muirfield, the remote challenge of a Royal

Dornoch, the windswept exposure of a

Royal St George's, the surprises and naturally irregular character of a St Enodoc, the dimension and bunkers of a *Royal County Down*, the seaside holes and views of a Turnberry, the dunes of a Royal Birkdale, the length and

p:3 15, seen from the tee, where you may need anything up to driver to reach the raised slopes of the green.



**Above** A sample of the roller-coaster finish (15–18: down-and-long; across-and-up; down-and-round; up-and-round). Viewed here with one's back to the sea, 16 is a sweeping right-to-left dogleg shortish p:5 up to a green perched between the dunes on a brow opposite the graveyard in front of the 1st tee. Cut off as much of the corner as you dare, but risk too much and your match will receive a premature burial . . .

threats of a Carnoustie, even the Kiwi understatement of a Paraparaumu: measure them all by reference to this remarkable links. And, when you have played all these (and no doubt many others), to which would you most want to return? If your answer is 'Ballybunion', you will be in the company of thousands of golfers, exemplified by no lesser linksman than Tom Watson.

**Right** The dimension of the dunes of downhill right-to-left medium p:4 17 has to be experienced to be believed. (The line of your teeshot (down towards the shore) will dictate how short your approach could be to a green (seen here from the dunes above left of the approach) that often seems as small as the bunker does large. Be careful: the slightest hint of a following wind can put you on the beach. (Conditions can change quickly here: this photo was taken within minutes of our shot of 16 - above.)



Research is inconclusive as to who was responsible for the design of Ballybunion (Old). It is generally accepted that the current layout was significantly influenced by the mid-1930s report of Tom Simpson (who considered it so perfect that he changed very little) and Molly Gourlay (look for the touch of a female designer, respected alike for her passion for p:3s and brilliant play), while (more likely) James McKenna, the first pro at Lahinch, and (less likely) Old Tom Morris and James Braid may have played some part. Surely the difficulty here is a compliment to Mother Nature, whose ingredients on site are so naturally suited for all that is golf that the course could almost be said to have, at the very least, routed itself – most notably at the roller-coaster finish? It goes beyond imagination, yet works.