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#1 SHOE AND GLOVE IN GOLF

100 *Hidden Gems*

Not every course is destined to make our authoritative biennial Top 100 list, but each and every golfer holds at least one 'unsung hero' as close to their heart as any of our most renowned courses. Here, we present 100 of the British Isles' finest hidden gems...

Compiled by Rob Smith, Jeremy Ellwood, Fergus Bisset, Tom Clarke | **Photography** Kevin Murray, Mark Alexander, Getty Images, Paul Severn, Willie Peat, © Crown Copyright (2011) Visit Wales, Geoff Ellis at www.artworking.co.uk, Andrew Roberts, Studio Zed Photography by Paul Hope



hidden gem

• adj. + noun

a golf course that embodies fun from start to finish; one where the scenery, the atmosphere and the feel-good factor count for more than the severity of the test or the flawlessness of the presentation



Bamburgh Castle in Northumberland

WHAT IS A HIDDEN GEM?

We think the above definition sums it up perfectly. Quite simply, it's the type of course where the permanent smile on your face will more than compensate for any you inflict on your golf ball. It's the kind of course that is neither going to beat you up nor leave a huge dent in your pocket, since most are very reasonably priced, especially for all-day visits.

In this list, rather than the more exclusive, resort-style venues, we were looking for those friendly, welcoming clubs (often off the beaten track) which warrant a much closer look. All our hidden gems have made the grade for a number of reasons, whether views, history, ambience, strong design, stand-out holes, sheer variety, quirkiness, or simply for being different – in essence, all the reasons we love golf. Last year, in recognition of the fact that we are blessed with so much wonderful golf, we

expanded our biennial top 100 list to include the next 100, but these premier 200 courses have been excluded here, as we wanted to home in on the kind of clubs unlikely ever to achieve such lofty status, but where golfers will have a great day out and will want to return again and again.

HOW OUR LIST WAS COMPILED

Project coordinators Rob Smith and Jeremy Ellwood have been golfing for more than 30 years and between them have played more than 1,200 courses of every conceivable style and stature. While it is unlikely that other lists have been compiled using such a wealth of personal experience, we were keen to make the process as comprehensive and democratic as possible, so sought additional input from a number of different sources – representatives

of all the county and regional golf unions in the British Isles; the widely travelled senior panellists who carry out our top 100 course assessments; and the growing number of keen and frequent golfers from all around the country who contribute eagerly to our ever-popular website forum.

To reflect the huge variety in topography, and the immense strength in depth of golf courses throughout the British Isles, we were also keen to make the list as geographically broad as possible, while reflecting the ratio of courses in each of the individual nations (currently England 63%, Scotland 18%, Ireland 14% and Wales 5%). Finally, we acknowledge that although some of these courses may not be quite so hidden within their own counties, often their fame remains relatively local, and we were eager to alert golfers from further afield to their presence.

OBSERVATIONS

While compiling the list, we gave no conscious thought or preference to who had designed the courses. So we were interested, though perhaps not surprised, to find that two names cropped up time and time again – Harry Colt and James Braid. Between them, they also have 20 courses in our main top 100, which clearly identifies them as masters of their craft at all levels, with a broad golfing legacy that has truly stood the test of time.

On a similar theme, we found the majority of our hidden gems were archetypal members' clubs, typically with a yardage between 6,000 and 6,400 yards – just the kind of club at which many of us are members and which, despite being shorter than most newer designs, still pose a sufficient and, dare we say, more enjoyable test than those which rely predominantly on length.

SUBJECTIVITY

Such lists can never be definitive, relying on a degree of subjectivity, but we believe this is inevitable and desirable; it sparks debate and tempts golfers into visiting pastures new. If you know of a course you feel we should have included, please let us know (see page 124). In the meantime, we firmly believe you'll enjoy playing each one of our 100 hidden gems.

GREEN FEES

We have quoted the standard summer 18-hole weekday fee up to the weekend day rate, which may not be available at all clubs as each has its own policy on when it accepts green fees; some offer early-bird or twilight rates, some offer special rates for fourballs or groups; some are affiliated to one or more of the various discount schemes. For more details, please phone the individual clubs or visit their websites.

Put Yourself In Their Shoes

TOUR INSIGHT

Top pros all have courses that are special to them, whether where they learned the game or where they spent many a happy hour in their youth. Over the following pages, the world numbers 1, 2 and 3, plus other FootJoy brand ambassadors, sing the praises of the courses that hold great memories for them.

