

where to play

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Off the beaten path in North-East England



James Braid was a five-time Open champion who designed or revised more than 400 courses in his lifetime around the British Isles. Carnoustie, Brora and Dunbar are among links associated with Braid in Scotland. But it's a Braid links just south of the border in North-East England that entranced me on a trip last year to play courses of architectural merit I had never seen before.

GOSWICK LINKS
The raised green of the par-5 sixth hole appears to be surrounded by sand hills stretching towards the North Sea coastline.

I've been fortunate to play hundreds of courses in Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England, yet such is the wealth of outstanding classic layouts in these countries that I can still flip through ranking lists and pick out new gems to explore. The older the course the better because these offer the most interesting and quirkiest holes. There's nothing more exciting in golf for me each year than to choose

half-a-dozen arbitrary courses to play for the first time, usually with members or friends.

Goswick Links was one. It's a course I had heard mentioned favourably by friends who belong to the James Braid Golfing Society in the UK. Members meet up a few times a year to play Braid courses in a certain area, and there's so many it would take decades to visit them all.

In the years between the world wars, such was the growth and popularity of golf, Braid was kept busy travelling around the UK on a variety of commissions. He would design or revise a course inside a day, walking the terrain and using his instinctive knowledge to imprint his design philosophy and establish where every green should be sited. A construction team would then follow his detailed plan and build

either 9 or 18 holes. Over time they would evolve into courses of significant quality or less. Very different from today where designers are all about creating "masterpieces."

Revision of a course was common. This was different from the modern "upgrade." Many courses had basic beginnings, and it took a trained eye to suggest how best to improve them. At Goswick, founded in 1890, Braid

altered 13 holes which remain largely intact to this day.

Goswick is 10 kilometres south of Berwick-upon-Tweed, the border town, in an isolated area of wild dunes not far from undisturbed beaches. Lindisfarne or Holy Island is offshore. A narrow lane takes you to a modest clubhouse from the main road. However, it's not a tranquil retreat. The main east coast railway line passes behind the clubhouse, and

after playing 18 holes on a Sunday I can vouch that it is extremely busy.

Dan Miller is the club's marketing manager, an American who fell in love with life in Northumberland and golf at Goswick and relocated to the area. He's positive that Goswick would be better known, and attract more tourists, if it was on the Scottish side of the border and not in England. But you can't have it both ways. This deserted coastline

PHOTOS COURTESY OF GOSWICK AND SEATON CAREW GOLF CLUBS



GOSWICK LINKS
The par-4 12th green is at the opposite end of the Goswick Links to the sixth. The green cannot be seen from the fairway due to the ridge of dunes.

stretching south to Bamburgh Castle is magnificent linksland. And yet it's alone out there.

Goswick is ranked in the Top 100 in England, but not those of the UK & Ireland, which is probably correct. The dunes are low, and there's limited movement among them. The holes are challenging and varied though, and it's been a regional qualifying venue for the Open Championship. Strong par 4s

abound, and at 6 262 metres it's similar in length to Humewood. A breeze made it severely testing, especially playing the last few holes back to the clubhouse. After all those lengthy holes, there was a joyful surprise at the end, a short 4 (245m) 18th at right angles to nearly all the holes, filled with bunkers and bordered by fierce rough which could be seen from a raised tee. An exhilarating hole on which to finish.

THE 10TH OLDEST GOLF CLUB IN ENGLAND

Compared to Scotland, there's a paucity of links in North-East England. From Goswick I drove 150 kilometres south to my next one, past Newcastle and Sunderland and under the River Tyne to the seaside town of Seaton Carew. An even older golf club (1874) than Goswick, in a working-class area, and the contrast in its surroundings couldn't

have been more pronounced. The clubhouse is in a street of amusement arcades, fish-and-chip shops, ice cream parlours, and hotels. It had just hosted the 2024 English Amateur as part of its 150th anniversary celebrations.

The links was alongside the Tees estuary, and chimneys, cranes, and chemical industrial sites framed the landscape. Being in the evening, this I played on my own when the beautiful

rippling undulations on the fairways were revealed by the setting sun.

Seaton Carew is a flat and authentic old-fashioned links, with low rugged sand hills running through the middle into which all three of the par 3s have been inserted, unusually close to each other. The bunkering was an outstanding feature – old, characterful, forbidding, unexpected, and stylish. They captured my admiration.

I usually have a sense of where to go on a strange course, but the routing was confusing early on due to greens revealing themselves here and there. If it wasn't for a passing dog walker, I might never have found the eighth tee. And playing No 8 I set out on a line to the tenth green, before realising my error when I ventured into thick rough. The two greens are adjacent to each other.

Seaton Carew might not be as

SEATON CAREW
Wind turbines and the mouth of the Tees Estuary frames the 12th hole in the dunes.

 **VISIT WEBSITE**
Seaton Carew Golf Club - Old Course





SEATON CAREW
The greens of two par-3 holes, Nos 6 and 15, adjoin each other in the middle of the links, played in opposite directions.

TEAMING UP

Goswick and Seaton Carew are collaborating in 2025 to jointly host the first-ever North England Women's Amateur Championship on May 27-28. The R&A has approved it for the awarding of WAGR points that are used in calculating the world amateur rankings.



SEATON CAREW
An Alister Mackenzie-designed green at the 17th, called Snag.



SEATON CAREW
Two greens separated by large bunkers at the far end of the links, Nos 8 and 10.

well-groomed today, yet once had a high social standing in English golf, attracting the Prince of Wales and Walter Hagen in the 1930s, and before that the legendary triumvirate of Open champions, Braid, Harry Vardon and JH Taylor. An equally impressive claim to fame is a connection with famed architect Dr Alister Mackenzie. In the 1920s he moved part of the course further towards the coast into the sand dunes that had been formed. The raised two-tiered green at No 17, the signature hole called Snag, is unmistakably a Mackenzie creation, something you would expect at Augusta National, surrounded by five bunkers.

This was a fabulous links experience, not as scenically attractive as Goswick, but wilder and more rugged, and deservedly ranks above it in England's Top 100. A golfer who grew up in the area was the 2017 SA Open champion Graeme Storm, who memorably beat Rory McIlroy in a playoff at Glendower.

A pleasant surprise was discovering a video flyover of each hole on the club's website and hearing the familiar voice of Peter Alliss describing them in his inimitable fashion. Watching this later added to my confusion as the routing of the course I had played was different from the one about which Alliss was narrating. My six and seven were his 12th and 13th, and two other holes I had played were not even on the video. I learnt from club manager Roy Leonard that there are 22 holes out there, and five different ways of playing them!