The rugged beauty of Dartmoor leads down to rolling hills and coastal golf, as Rob Smith discovers...

1
TEIGNMOUTH
Teignmouth is ten miles south of Exeter and blessed with a most fabulous setting up at 800 feet, with panoramic views out to sea, over the town and estuary and inland towards Dartmoor. The course was laid out by Alister MacKenzie a decade before he went on to design Augusta, and with the exception of the 13th, it is still largely his handiwork. The most obvious reminder is the trademark two-tiered greens surrounded by humps and bumps, and it is a delightful place for golf with masses of variety including six diverse and testing short holes. The view from the 1st tee is so appealing that you can easily forget the reason you are here!

Unusually, I would suggest playing from the yellows as this softens two tough par 4s at 6 and 10 into manageable par 5s making five in all. My favourite holes were the beautifully formed par-4 8th, the testing par-3 11th played over a hidden quarry and the very demanding two-shooter at 15. Beware the closing hole, a 230-yard par 3 up a slope to a wickedly contoured green! The course was presented in excellent condition and I would recommend a visit to anyone.

Stats: par 69, 6,082 yards
W: teignmouthgolfclub.co.uk
GF: Round: £40wd/£50we; Day: £50wd/£60we
2 Thurlestone
If ever there was a playing configuration of contrasting halves, Thurlestone has it, with the front nine playing to a par of 33 and the way home containing four par 5s in its total of 38. This is due to its cliff top location which amply compensates for any imbalance with enjoyable golf from start to finish, as well as outstanding views out to sea and over to Burgh Island.

Harry Colt extended the course from its original nine holes and the wind is often a feature which can make short holes long, and vice versa.

Opening with a reachable par 4 and a lovely par 3 surrounded by a septet of bunkers, the early holes run along the edge of the world before you head onto slightly higher ground for the return. The finishing three holes are all strong, and even if you are off your game, it is impossible not to enjoy the ride.

Stats: par 71, 6,179 yards
W: thurlestonegolfclub.co.uk
GF: Round: £50; Day: £70

3 Bovey Castle
It would be hard to imagine a more archetypal English country garden setting for a golf course than this beautiful tract of land on the edge of the moor, and the opening holes at Bovey Castle are, quite simply, as pretty as several pictures.

JF Abercromby laid out the original design in 1926 and it was sharpened up by Donald Steel and Tom Mackenzie about 13 years ago. It's very easy to be distracted by the stunning surroundings in the early stages of your round, but beware the beautiful babbling brook which threatens to claim your ball at any of the first eight holes.

The back nine doesn't quite match the front, but it is still very attractive and has some fine holes. Make sure you don't forget your camera!

Stats: par 70, 6,299 yards
W: boveycastle.com
GF: £70 per round, £49 residents

4 Tavistock
As a huge fan of natural golf courses, I found the 18 moorland holes at Tavistock a complete delight. Surrounded by rolling hills that look as though they go on forever, this gorse-lined layout has evolved over almost 130 years into a course that entertains, is totally fair and challenges just enough without ever threatening to beat you up. It runs over wonderful, crisp, free-draining linksy turf and the greens are very true and fast running. Take care at the double green shared by 6 and 14; I left myself with a putt from 140 feet!

Stats: par 71, 6,531 yards
W: tavistockgolfclub.co.uk
GF: Round: £40; Day: £60

5 Yelverton
One of the greatest golf architects of all time, Herbert Fowler, designed this excellent test, which is surrounded by glorious moorland, back in 1920.

A number of hazardous ravines, probably a throwback to ancient tin mining, come into play at various points, especially in front of the 13th and 18th greens, and I was very taken with the two cracking short holes on the back nine. Offering excellent value, this forward-thinking club has already adopted a policy of ‘ready golf’.

Stats: par 71, 6,302 yards
W: yelvertongolf.co.uk
GF: Round: £30wd/£35we
DARTMOUTH

This was the youngest and most modern-looking on my tour, and a testimony to its build quality is that immediately after many hours of torrential rain, it had drained perfectly. As to its golfing quality, it has great variety and challenge, some glorious scenery and several excellent holes, including the four thrilling par 3s. I particularly liked those at the 3rd and 5th, the former played from an elevated tee over a lake and the latter just a short iron to a lovely green beside a pond.

Stats: par 72, 6,637 yards

W: themouthhotel.co.uk
GF: Round: £46wd/£52we; Day: £60wd/£72we

The par-5 15th

STAY

The Old Forge, Totnes
This characterful B&B is perfectly located just a short walk from a number of pubs and restaurants in this bohemian market town. The rooms are well appointed and comfortable and the breakfasts are just what you would want before a hard day’s golf.

W: bedandbreakfstatnes.co.uk

EAT/DRINK

Rugglestone Inn, Widecombe in the Moor
What could be better than a characterful listed building in a beautiful village, friendly people, delicious food and, crucially, a variety of excellent local ales all served directly from the barrel? Also, there is a lovely garden where you can take in the views of Dartmoor.

W: rugglestoneinn.co.uk

VISIT

Buckfast Abbey, Buckfastleigh
Next year, the building will celebrate its millennium and it is now the only English medieval monastery to have been restored back to its original purpose. Founded by King Canute, it is situated on the edge of Dartmoor and visitors will enjoy the Lavender, Physic and Sensory gardens. The shop is packed with country wines, biscuits, fudge and preserves.

W: buckfast.org.uk