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MYSTIC LINKS OF IRELAND: SPANISH POINT

Road Holes — 01 October 2017 by Bob Sherwin



(Fourth of an 11-part series)

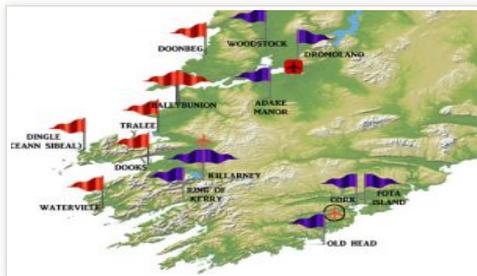
MILLTOWN MALBAY, County Clare, Ireland — For those who have played the hidden and humble gem of a golf course, Spanish Point Golf Club, you should consider yourself fortunate. You survived.

You wouldn't want to have been here just a scant four centuries earlier. If the local English enforcers caught certain people lurking around in the area, they had a nasty habit of

hanging them from what is now the eighth tee.

(Top photo: From Hangman Hill, looking toward the ninth fairway/green).

We've come a long way since, from tree times to tee times.



When you show up at Spanish Point, located along Wild Atlantic Way in southwest Ireland, you are virtually guaranteed a much better welcome. It's a laid-back, low-cost refreshing break from the nearby more prestigious golf institutions.

It's between Lahinch to the north, consistently one of the top 50 courses in the world, and the opulent Trump Doonbeg layout to the south.

"We're kind of between the two big giants,"

said Seamus McMahon, Spanish Point's captain.

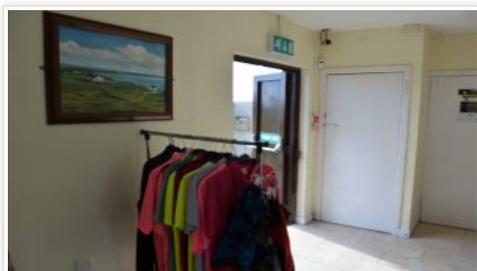
Little Spanish Point doesn't have the name to project, the membership to impress or the budget to compete with the big boys. It doesn't even have enough holes to compare, as it is just a nine-hole circuit. But the price is right (\$20 euros, all day), the maintenance is pristine and the folks are unfailingly amiable.

"It's a very budget-conscious golf course," McMahon said. "But we keep it friendly. We're starting to pick up (international players) coming in cars. We welcome anyone in. It's word of mouth at the moment. Our marketing budget wouldn't be so huge."

He added, "if they (big courses) do good, we do good."

Our foursome stopped at Spanish Point on the way to play Doonbeg. We had been scheduled to play the course two days earlier but bad weather in Chicago delayed our flight and denied the opportunity. We spent some time, instead, walking a short bit on the course and taking it in. It's exceedingly inviting.

"We're really happy with the greens. We think they're as good as Lahinch," McMahon said.



The parking lot is small, maybe 40 car slots, with more parking along the beach. The clubhouse is quite small, essentially one large room with an eight-seat bar at the far end. The merchandise area is unpretentious, consisting of one hanging rack next to the back door.

The logo, however, is awesome, depicting a Spanish galleon. That's when the hanging began, long before this site was first developed in 1896 for golf. Back in 1588, the Spanish Armada, at war with England, was

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World's Top 10 29TH OCTOBER 2017

This Week	Last Week	Player	Ctry	Points average
1	1	Dustin Johnson	USA	11.88
2	2	Jordan Spieth	USA	10.00
3	3	Justin Thomas	USA	9.16
4	4	Hideki Matsuyama	JPN	8.55
5	5	Jon Rahm	ESP	7.63
6	13	Justin Rose	ENG	6.86
7	11	Brooks Koepka	USA	6.58
8	9	Henrik Stenson	SWE	6.49
9	6	Rory McIlroy	NIR	6.44
10	7	Rickie Fowler	USA	6.34

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Virtually the entire merchandise inventory at humble Spanish Point consists on one rack.

The local Irish population, in sympathy with the sailors, hid as many survivors as they could. However, if the English found them first, the sailors were marched to what is now Hangman Hill (the eighth hole tee box) for execution. Kind of harsh.

They're not sure who exactly shaped and designed the course. The listed architects, working on the site around 1912, are Robert B. Barclay and Capt. Earnest Ellis.

"We shaped it within the dunes that are here," McMahon said. "These last three holes, they are our real little gems."

returning home but rough seas shipwrecked dozens of galleons. One such ship ran aground in the nearby bay and the Spanish sailors swam for their lives.



Looking down Spanish Point No. 1, with Hangman Hill in the distance



Space is tight, as are Spanish Point's practice bays.



"The Terror," Spanish Point's short but challenging eighth hole

The seventh, just a 309-yard, par-4, has a sharp dogleg right.

"You can't even see the green. You just see the shot disappear," McMahon said. "Half the time you're wondering where the ball went because the green is flat and hard to hold. You'll have a hard time holding unless you have a little bit of height."

The most illustrious hole is the par-3, 115-yard eighth hole. It's appropriately called "The Terror," but not because of its dark past.

"They call it 'The Terror' because it has wrecked scorecards," McMahon said. "You can't go right, you can't go left, or long. All you see in the top of the green."

The ninth is a pretty little 153-yard, par-3 gem that works its way just short of the clubhouse.

Your green fees cover 18 holes, so you are encouraged to play the nine again. Play it all day, if you want. Even if you have lunch and come back later in the day, you're covered.

For those also taking on the region's links giants, it won't kill you to stop here.

SPANISH POINT GOLF CLUB

Location: Milltown Malbay, County Clare
 Opened: 1896
 Architects: Robert B. Barclay, Capt. Earnest Ellis
 Type: Links
 Tees: Blue (2,665), Green (2,540), Red (2,338)
 Par: 34 (nine holes)
 Green Fees: \$15-20 (Euros)
 Memorable Hole
 No. 8: Par-3, 115 yards. 'Terror,' Trouble right, trouble left, trouble behind. One way to success.

WEDNESDAY: Trump Doonbeg

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ABOUT AUTHOR



Bob Sherwin

Bob grew up in Cleveland, an underdog city with perennial underdog teams, and that gave him an appreciation and an affinity for the grinders in golf, guys such as Rocco Mediate, Jhonattan Vegas and star-crossed John Daly. This is the 46th year for Bob as a sportswriter, the first 34 working for newspapers throughout the west, Tucson (Daily Star), San Francisco (Examiner) and Seattle (Times), and the past 10 years as a freelancer. He has covered just about every sport, including golf tournaments, Tucson Open, Bing Crosby/AT&T Pro-Am, the 1998 PGA Championship, the 2010 U.S. Senior Open, the 2010 U.S. Amateur the 2015 U.S. Open and the annual Champions Tour Boeing Classic. He also writes articles for golf magazines. For most of his 20 years at the Seattle Times his primary beat was the Mariners. He then picked up Washington men's basketball in the winter. He also was the beat writer for the Sonics, including 1996 when they played the Bulls for the NBA title. After a lifetime hacking on public courses, he finally gave in and joined a country club in 2011, the Members Club of Aldarra near Seattle. Despite (or perhaps because) of his 14 handicap, he won the "Super Senior" (65 and older) championship in 2017. He has a pair of aces – 37 years apart – and in 2009 came agonizingly close to his ultimate golf goal of scoring in the 70s when he finished with an even 80. He lives in Seattle, and spends part of his winters in Marco Island, Fla.

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