

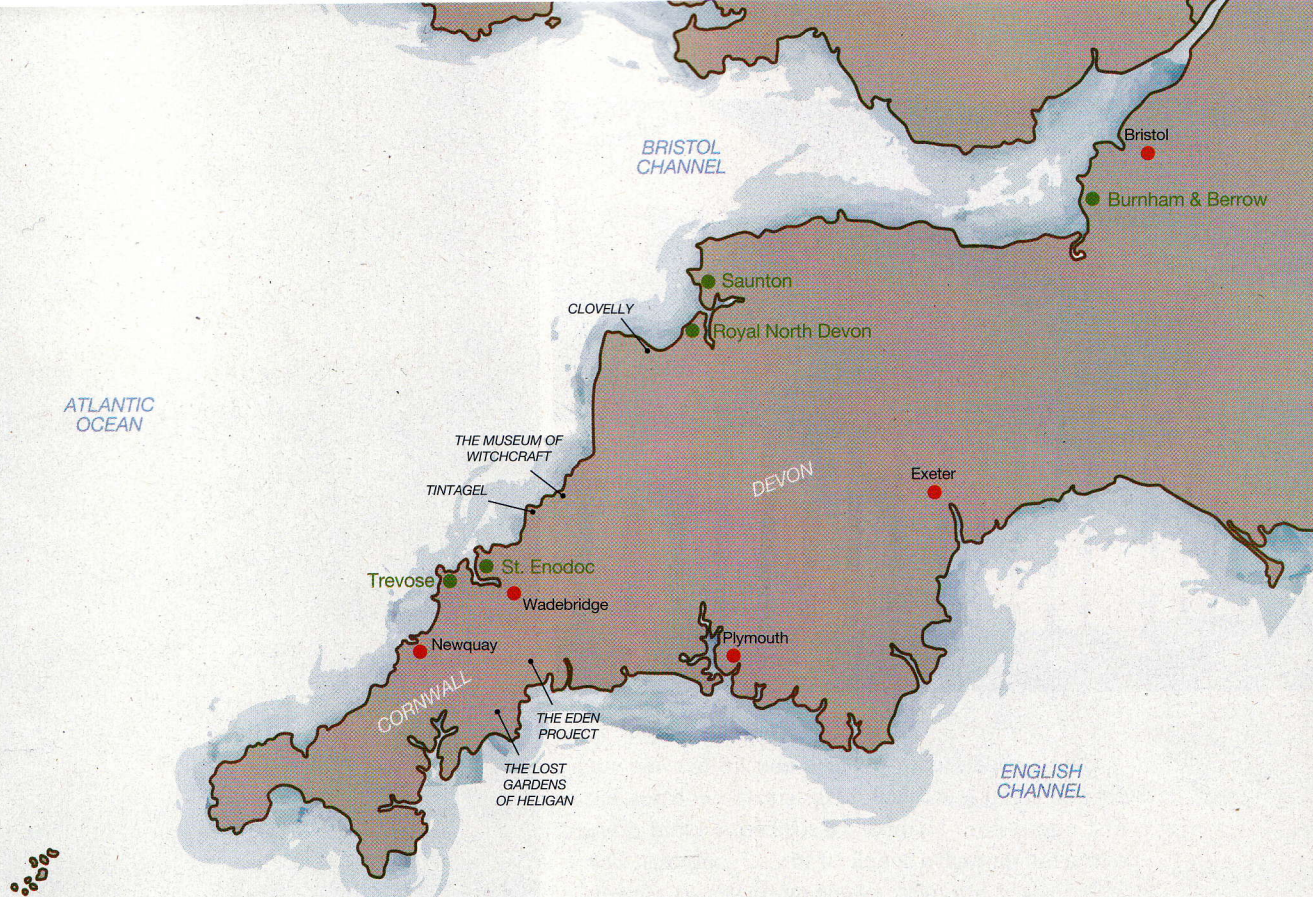


Aim for the sky

The Atlantic Links along the UK's coasts of Cornwall and Devon should be on every golfer's list

BY *Anita Draycott*

Saunton's golf course sits on Brauton Burrows, the largest sand dune system in England and a Unesco Biosphere Reserve.



My friend Clive Agran, a fellow golf travel writer who lives in East Sussex, prefers to put his own unique spin on things. When Clive first told me about a brilliant collection of ancient courses

scattered along the English coasts of Devon and Cornwall called the **Atlantic Links** (*atlantic-links.co.uk*), I was keen to pack my clubs. However, Clive being a fitness fanatic, undertook his Atlantic adventure by bicycling from course to course on two wheels: approximately 525 kilometres.

I don't recommend Clive's method of transportation, but I strongly suggest that you experience the Atlantic Links. The courses are grand, the scenery sublime and there are plenty of other temptations along the way including Devon cream teas, Cornish pasties, and some sweet villages and gardens.

All this at bargain prices with green fees almost half the cost of comparable courses in Scotland and Ireland.

Stay-and-play packages are reasonable, too. An eight-day itinerary including six rounds and four-star hotels (with breakfast), for example, starts at £843 per person in April. Atlantic Links will book your golf and accommodations.

BURNHAM & BERROW

My husband and I flew to Bristol and rented a car. (Yes Clive, we're wimps.) Half an hour later we pulled into Burnham & Berrow Golf Club, originally laid out by Charles Gibson in the 1890s. Herbert Fowler, the first "professional" course designer extended it to over 6000 yards in 1910 with more tinkering by Harry Colt and Alistair Mackenzie beginning in 1913.

Westward Hol is a popular family beach, but the wild sea bass in its waters attract anglers from around the UK.



Dune-lined fairways heave and ho like the sea beyond and a few marsh holes create a memorable first impression. Number 10 requires a blind drive over a hill through a couple of striped goalposts. The 18th finale is a longish sweeping dogleg to a green surrounded by four daunting bunkers.

The welcoming clubhouse served tasty toasted shrimp sandwiches and homemade tomato/basil soup. England's former reputation for bad food is long gone; West Country cuisine, we soon discovered, is worth the trip alone.

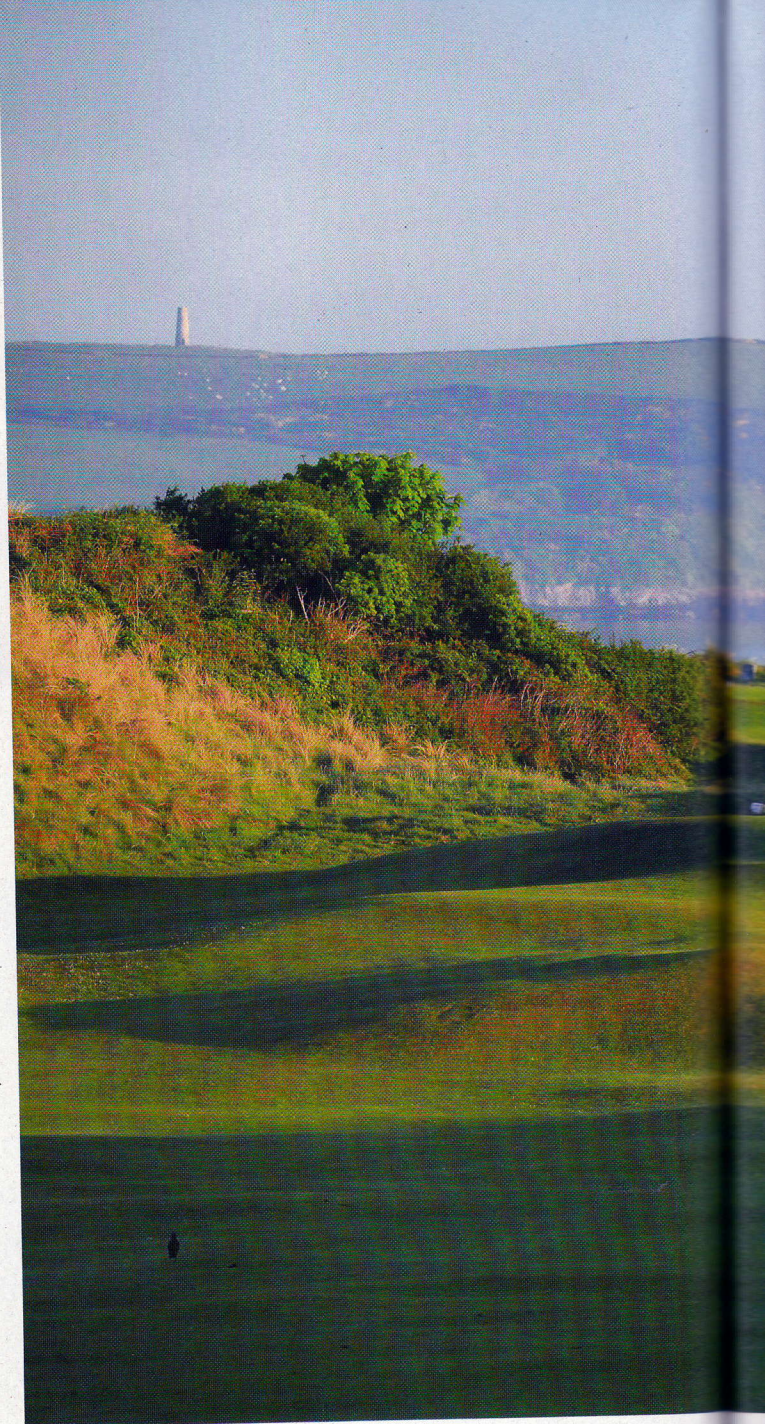
SAUNTON

We could have saved time by taking the M5 to our evening destination, Saunton Sands in Devon. Instead, we took the coastal route past cute villages and patchwork fields of green and gold. Often the roads were barely wide enough for Clive's bicycle, let alone four wheels.

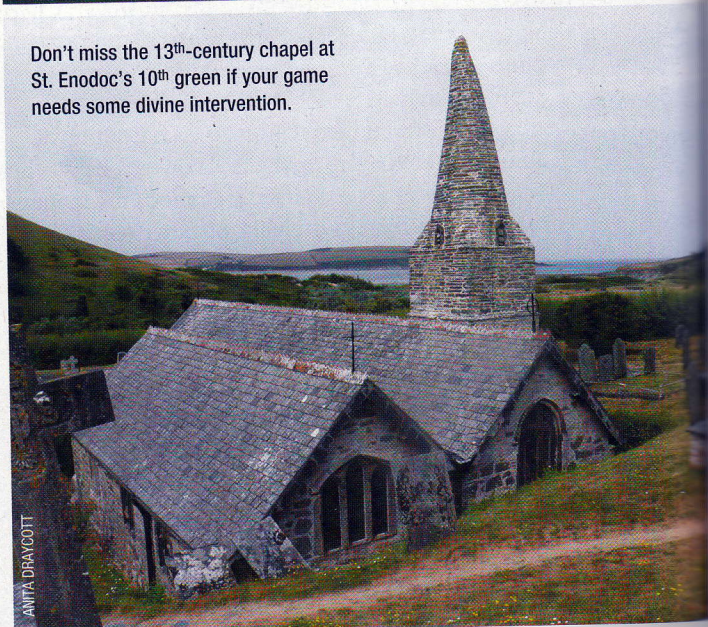
We arrived at the white, art deco Saunton Sands Hotel, with commanding views of a long golden strand, in time for an alfresco dinner of lamb Provençal and strawberries topped with Devon's decadent clotted cream.

We were booked to play the Saunton East and West courses the following day. North Americans accustomed to using carts or buggies as they're called in the UK should take note: these courses are meant to be walked. Make sure you have comfortable shoes, and be prepared to shoulder your bag or haul a trolley up and over the dunes. You can rent battery-operated trollies at some clubs, which I highly recommend, especially if you're tackling 36 holes a day. Mea culpa, Clive.

We played the East course, circa 1897, with members, Danny and Ann Wallace. So lofty are the dunes, it feels like each fairway is your private play-



Don't miss the 13th-century chapel at St. Enodoc's 10th green if your game needs some divine intervention.





Who cares if St. Enodoc ranked 99th? It still made *Golf Digest's* World 100 Greatest Courses in 2014.

ground. The East is no walk in the park. Eight par fours exceed 400 yards and the par threes demand pinpoint accuracy. The West is shorter and a bit easier, but still a worthy challenge.

At Saunton, as at all the other clubs, we were impressed by the warm welcome we received and the pride these folks take in their clubs' pedigrees. Sir Nick Faldo once remarked that Saunton East is "the finest course never to hold an Open." I'd venture to say that most of the Atlantic Links courses are worthy of a major event, but none have the infrastructure to host upwards of 50,000 spectators per day — which is part of their charm.

The best fish and chips in North Devon is reputedly served at **Squires** (1 Exeter Road; *squiresfishrestaurant.co.uk*) so we absolutely had to make the short, five-minute drive to the Braunton restaurant after a round. We're glad we did. Chef Mike's light crispy batter lived up to its reputation.

ROYAL NORTH DEVON

Wild and windswept, Royal North Devon at Westward Ho! is England's oldest course dating back to 1864. It was the first club in England to have the title "Royal" conferred upon it by the Prince of Wales in 1865 and became the world's first true ladies' golf club in 1868.

Originally laid out by Old Tom Morris, it hasn't changed much — except the sheep are fatter. This is

Trevose is located on the rugged North Cornish coastline where towns huddle in the cliffs for protection against the sea.



JUST FOR SPORT

You came to play golf, but here are a few side trips not to be missed.

The seaside village of **Clovelly** (clovelly.co.uk), 20 kilometres from Westward Ho!, has donkeys, but no cars, or individually-owned houses or hotels. It has been the property of only three families since the 13th century. Steep cobblestone lanes lead down to an enchanting harbour. Enjoy Devon cream tea here, and don't miss the short movie about Clovelly's history and residents.

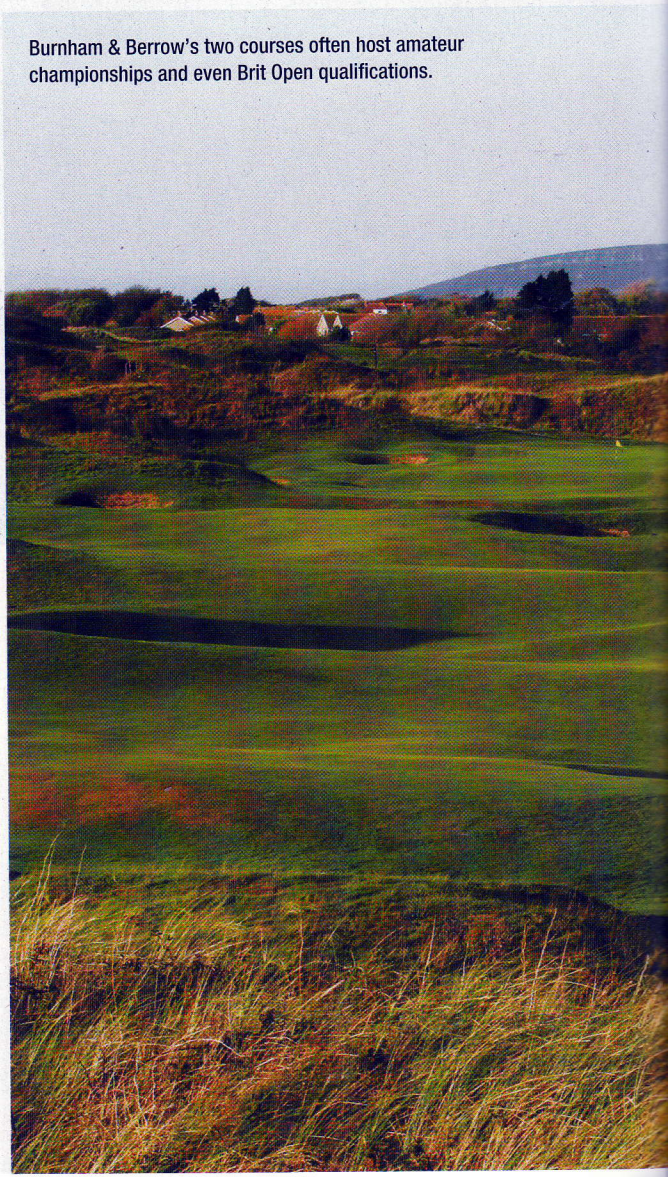
Learn all about curses and spells at **The Museum of Witchcraft** (*The Harbour, Boscastle, Cornwall*; museumofwitchcraft.com), 29 kilometres from St. Enodoc. It houses the world's largest collection of artifacts related to sorcery and black magic.

Neighbouring **Tintagel** (tintagelweb.co.uk) is reputed to be the site of King Arthur's castle and the Knights of the Round Table. Take a hike out to the castle ruins that cling to the rugged coast.

Sir Tim Smit created his version of Utopia out of a reclaimed clay pit. **The Eden Project** (*Bodelva, St. Austell, Cornwall*; edenproject.com), 34 kilometres from Trevose, is a 14-hectare living laboratory. Huge biomes (domed ecosystems) house vegetation from the around the world. Trek through a rainforest, discover Mediterranean vines, olives and cork.

The Lost Gardens of Heligan (*Pentewan, St. Austell, Cornwall*; heligan.com), which date back to the 18th century, are nearby. Once part of a 404-hectare Victorian estate, the gardens were discovered by Sir Smit in 1990 and have been restored to their former glory.

Burnham & Berrow's two courses often host amateur championships and even Brit Open qualifications.





Squires in Braunton reputedly serves the best fish and chips in North Devon.

common land where the livestock get lifetime memberships. Hole number one resembles a petting zoo.

You'll have to let it rip to clear the massive Cape Bunker on number four and don't let that pesky creek on 18 ruin your score.

Be sure to have a cuppa in the atmospheric clubhouse filled with antique golf memorabilia, mashies (or clubs) and featheries (balls).

ST. ENODOC

We bade farewell to Devon and crossed into Cornwall. In the small hamlet of Rock, where the likes of Prince Andrew come to play and party, we found St. Enodoc Golf Club, designed in the early 1900s by James Braid.

You can play 36 holes here, but if time is short, make the fabled Church course your first choice. It was recently included in *Golf Digest's* inaugural ranking of the "World's 100 Greatest Courses" proving that shorter and quirkier — it's a par 69 and 6557 from the tips — can be sweeter.

The quality of the links and the views of the nearby town of Padstow and the Camel Estuary make for an enchanting round. The first three holes are blind with plenty of oddities and obstacles — plus lots of walkers with their dogs. I think every third person I met in Cornwall had a dog. Number six boasts the Himalaya Bunker, reputedly the highest in Europe.

Don't miss a small detour to the 13th-century chapel tucked behind the 10th green. At this point, you might feel the need for a bit of divine intervention. The gravestone of poet laureate Sir John Betje-man, who penned beguiling verses about his beloved game of golf, is buried beside his favourite course.

We took a quick ferry over to Padstow, a harbour town nicknamed "Padstein" because British restaurateur, Rick Stein, has several eateries here. For a splurge, book a table at **Seafood Restaurant** (*Riverside, Padstow, Cornwall; rickstein.com/the-seafood-restaurant.html*).

Or, go local with an award-winning Cornish pastry from **Chough Bakery** (*3 The Strand, Padstow, Cornwall; cornishpastry.com*). Pasties began as a meal-in-one for Cornish tin miners. One end housed the savoury part, usually steak, turnips and potatoes; the other, dessert. The crescent-shaped meal had a crimped pastry handle so the miners could hold it with their dirty hands and then toss the crusty edge away.

TREVOSE

Our last round on the Atlantic Links was at Trevose, located high on a promontory overlooking Constantine Bay. We stayed comfortably in a self-catering cottage just a pitching wedge from the first elevated tees of the Championship course.

We won't forget the par-five fourth where the sea froths and crashes against the headland. This masterpiece, another by Harry Colt circa 1925, requires every club in your bag and the wind is a mega factor.

Trevose's Constantine restaurant, with its sunset views and scrumptious local scallops, made the ideal grand finale. It was also a fitting place to toast "cyclopath Clive" for introducing us to this splendid collection of links, and some of the best scenery and hospitality in England. 🍷

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