

100**CASTLEBAR****Where:** Castlebar, Co. Mayo

Designed by Peter McEvoy, this parkland course makes tremendous use of nature: mature trees, streams and lakes, rolling terrain! The Par 4 1st hole gives a taste of what is to unfold. It offers a generous fairway -- with trees lurking for errant tee shots - but then requires an accurate approach to a green that has water in play for any loose shots. It is a course that has great variety, with an emphasis on good course management.

99**WOODENBRIDGE****Where:** Woodenbridge, Co. Wicklow

This lovely course in the Vale of Avoca -- which the poet Thomas More immortalised as the 'Meeting of the Waters' -- has overcome two hurricanes (in 1965 and 1986) to earn its place among the top parkland layouts in Ireland. When Patrick Merrigan carried out an upgrading to 18 holes in recent years, he also raised the riverbank by some three feet by the susceptible 8th fairway so that any future hurricanes wouldn't ravage the course. The 18th, a Par 5, which requires a drive over the river, is a fantastic finishing hole to a course that always captivates.

**98****BLAINROE****Where:** Blainroe, Co. Wicklow

The Hawtree family name is one that has left its imprint on courses all over continental Europe, as well as in Britain and Ireland. So it was that Martin Hawtree was brought in to upgrade the work of his father, Fred, when Blainroe decided to modernise the course. His design philosophy is, as he puts it, "unashamedly rooted in the history and traditions of the game." Blainroe is a fine parkland course located atop 70 feet high cliffs overlooking the Irish Sea. Rounds cost €50 midweek and €70 at weekends, but a special "dawn" and "sunset" rates of €35 are particularly attractive. The Par 3 15th, a tiger of a hole that plays over 220 yards off the back stakes (downhill, thankfully) to a green guarded by water and bunkers.

97**DUNGARVAN****Where:** Dungarvan, Co. Waterford

A beautifully maintained parkland course offering views of the Comeragh Mountains and Dungarvan Bay, Dungarvan also has a number of water hazards that accentuate the challenge. Although it opens and finishes with Par 5s, there is a great variety of shot-making required with some very well-designed Par 4s, most notably the dogleg seventh which has water in play on the approach to the green while the Par 3 16th (with the green protected by a pond) starts a tough finishing run home.

96**ROYAL TARA****Where:** Royal Tara, Co. Meath

In a wise, and progressive, move, Royal Tara extended from its original nine holes layout to a new facility of 27-holes, with the 18-hole championship layout - consisting of the Cluide and Tara -- designed by Des Smyth. It is a course that will test without leaving you battered and bruised. In other words, it is a fine challenge, with the course wonderfully maintained. Smyth has made good use of the mature trees on site, as exemplified by the Par 5 14th, where it is necessary to thread your approach through a narrow opening flanked by trees.

95**CHARLEVILLE****Where:** Smiths Road, Charleville, Co. Cork

Not overly long by modern standards, the main hazard -- and attraction -- on this wonderfully maintained course are its trees. What this course provides is a very enjoyable test of a player's ability, with the onus on course management rather than on brute force. The trees will ensure that waywardness is penalised. There is variety, as contrasted by the doglegged Par 4 10th, the Par 5 13th that doglegs its way to 533 yards and short Par 4 12th.

**94****BALLYCASTLE****Where:** Ballycastle, Co. Antrim, Northern Ireland

One of the most interesting courses, in terms of terrain, in Ireland. The opening stretch of holes played around a 13th century friary are pure parkland, with two rivers, the Margy and the Carey, coming into play on the 1st and 2nd holes. From the 6th hole, however, this course incorporates links and moorland terrain in to what is a very good test of a player's ability. The onus, for the most part, is on iron play with approach shots to the green - a real second shot course - very important.

**93****HEADFORT (OLD)****Where?** Kells, Co. Meath

Set in a mature, parkland setting, Headfort's Old Course - the original of the species - is a pleasant surprise, offering a superbly maintained course in a beautiful sylvan setting. Is there a truly weak hole? Probably not, although this is not a course that will batter and bruise you. Rather, it is what golf is all about: good fun, and a good test. The Par 3s are excellent.

