



Hills and thrills on Carne's new nine

BY ADAM LAWRENCE | 31 JULY 2013



The second green sits in an amphitheatre of huge dunes and blowouts (photo: Larry Lambrecht).

Adam Lawrence visits Carne Golf Links on the west coast of Ireland, heralded as having the biggest dunes in golf.

Remote it may be, but Carne Golf Links, out on the Mullet peninsula in Co Mayo to the far west of Ireland, is on the way to becoming a real destination for adventurous golfers, especially those who love the experience of playing in dunes. Because dunes, with apologies to Donald Trump, don't come bigger than at Carne.

Carne's original eighteen was the last course built by the venerated Irish architect Eddie Hackett before his death. Nine of Hackett's holes traverse the most massive dunes, while the front half of the course occupies land that is more sedate, though still extremely up and down.

For some years, the club has been pursuing a project to build nine more holes in the big dunes. American architect Jim Engh – a life member of Carne – originally routed the holes, but the project was put on hold as a result of Ireland's financial woes. Three years ago, it was taken on by Scottish-born, but Dublin-resident designer Ally McIntosh, a graduate of the European Institute of Golf Course Architects' diploma programme. It is McIntosh's first project as a lead designer.

McIntosh, along with Carne's *eminence grise*, Eamon Mangan, has refined Engh's original routing, producing a series of visually stunning, but also playable holes that traverse some of the most remarkable terrain in golf.

Starting with a lengthy par five that the biggest hitters might hope to hit in two, but which for most will be primarily a question of where to place the second shot for the best approach to the shelf green, the new course then hits one of its highlights. The second hole is a tremendous par three, from tees set high, across a chasm to an amphitheatre green surrounded by mountainous dunes and enormous blowout bunkers. With a following wind and a front pin position, it is only a short iron, but with the flag at the back of the severely sloping green and the breeze hurting, the hole will require a strong shot.

The downhill par four third could prove to be a work in progress. The club has hopes of acquiring more land behind and to the right of the existing green, and if this happens, McIntosh may build a new green, at least partially to shorten the walk to the fourth. As it sits today, though, the hole



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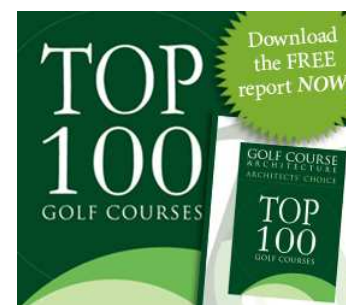
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is highly entertaining. The green is drivable, just, but the ground contours and a tricky bunker at front left mean that any such shot must be hit with absolute precision. For most, an iron or a hybrid off the tee will be preferred.

After another good par three, the second real highlight of the nine appears. The par five fifth is an Alps hole of sorts, with an uphill tee shot to a wide (and wild) fairway before the player must make a decision. A huge dune sits right in front. To its left is a strip of fairway, to its right a high saddle. Go left, and an accurate layup will leave 150 yards or so to the green; go right, over the saddle, and the green is almost within range, though bunkers protect the ground short of it.

The shortish par four sixth takes play back up to the high dunes, and to perhaps the course's single best view, from the seventh tee. This sits proudly, way above the fifth fairway, with the green 200 yards away and apparently isolated among vast sand hills and chasms. It is a terrifying shot, at least the first time, though when one realises that, concealed behind a small dune is an expanse of fairway, the fear subsides a little. Two dramatic par fours take the course back to Carne's pleasant clubhouse.

Those who know Carne will understand just how severe the terrain in those dunes really is, and should be amazed at how comfortable a walk the new holes are – significantly less demanding than the course's existing back nine. Although the fourth and sixth might be dismissed as connector holes by some, both are exciting and pleasurable to play, while the ninth is a significantly better finisher than Carne's existing eighteenth. Built for less than €200,000 by McIntosh, his partner James Coughlan, and the Carne team, with only one excavator and one small dump truck, it is a remarkable achievement. In a year or so, once the new greens – which were grassed with rough sod from elsewhere on the site – and fairways, which were simply mowed out of the natural terrain, have matured, it will be truly one of Ireland's golfing treasure.

Issue 34 of GCA, to be published in October, will include a fuller report on Carne's new nine holes. To get the magazine, visit our [subscriptions page](#).

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