

A GOLFER'S GUIDE TO EAST LoTHIAN'S HIDDEN GEMS

There's plenty of good golf to be found away from the mighty championship links and grand newcomers

▼ HADDINGTON

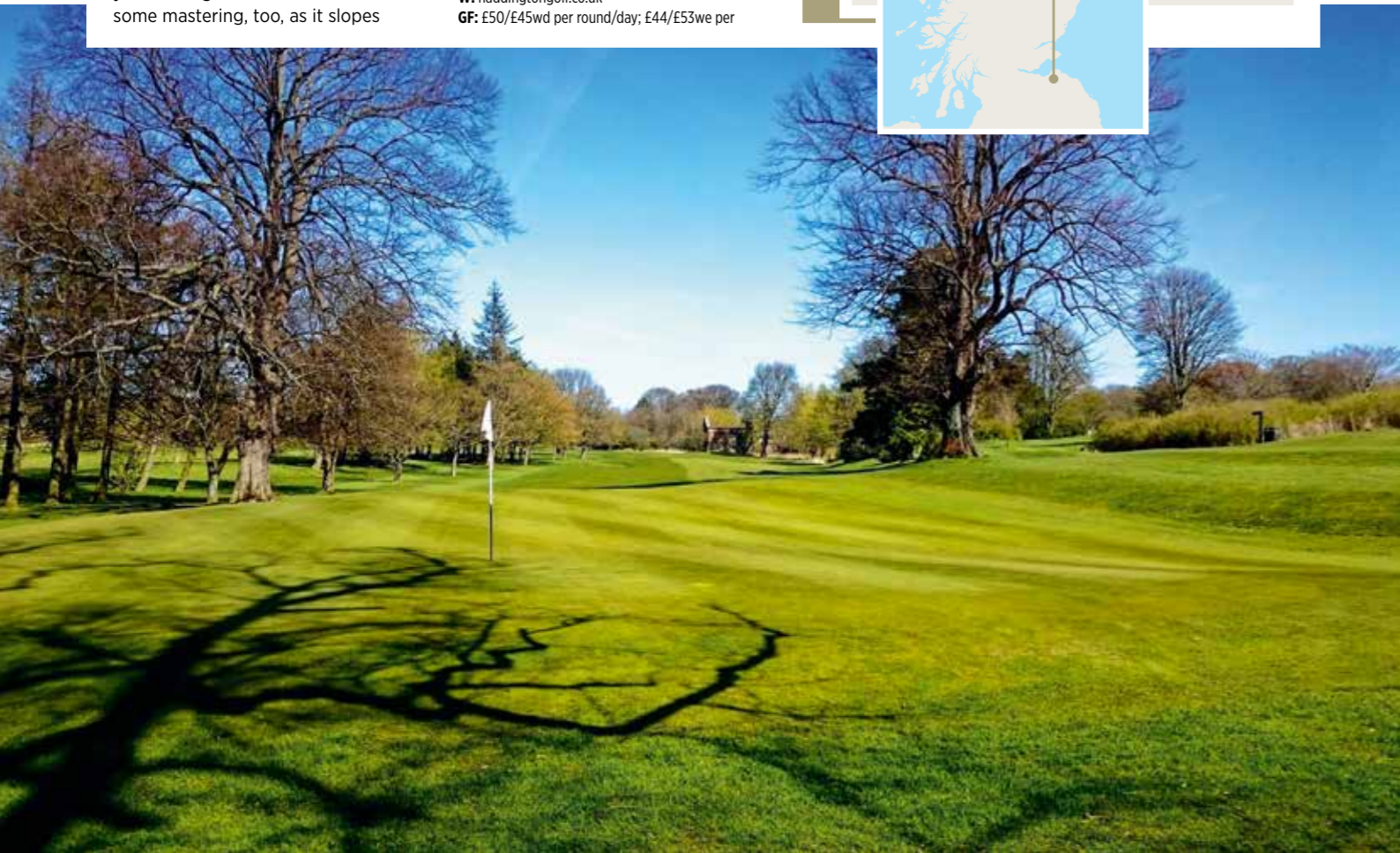
On previous visits to East Lothian I'd driven past countless signs for Haddington, which is partly what inspired me to focus on inland golf on my latest trip, a return visit to Kilspindie notwithstanding.

Haddington dates back over 150 years, playing over rolling terrain by the River Tyne (no, not that one!). The green on the opener is beautifully framed, and angled towards you to encourage a confident first approach, but the 2nd from the elevated back tee is a shock to the system at 468 yards. The green on the 4th takes some mastering, too, as it slopes

viciously down from left to right. The 7th and 9th are both good downhillers bookending an unusual par 3 up and over a 30ft bank short of the green.

Coming home, the 14th is a pretty one-shotter, while the cascades in the Tyne flanking the tough 15th will catch your eye. The 16th was my favourite hole, though: an excellent dogleg right with an old Victorian summerhouse standing down the left of a fairway that demands an accurate drive.

Stats: par 71, 6,384 yards
W: haddingtongolf.co.uk
GF: £50/£45wd per round/day; £44/£53we per



▼ GIFFORD

Gifford is a quite delightful little nine-holer – just the kind of course I would have gone round at least five times in a day on one of my early golfing holidays! The 1st and 2nd both play to a backdrop of pines, with the 2nd playing down and up over a stream 60 yards short. My playing companion told me you couldn't miss these two greens left, but my balky swing failed to take

heed, although I did somehow get up and down both times. The 7th has perhaps the prettiest green complex of all, framed by pines, bunkers and gorse. And £35 a day? That's just £7 (or even less!) per loop.

Stats: par 71, 6,129 yards
W: giffordgolfclub.com
GF: £25/£35wd per round/day; £30/£42we



▼ ROYAL MUSSELBURGH

The first thing you'll notice is the clubhouse – Prestongrange House, a grand Scottish baronial affair – though quite how permission for the monolithic modern extension was ever granted is beyond me! This is a very pleasant place to play golf, with a couple of gentle openers easing you in ahead of a trickier 3rd that plays back along the magnificent clubhouse. After

the well-bunkered par-3 6th, you're out into more open terrain. From here, the course is blessed with great character, with the 15th's rollercoaster fairway posing the sternest challenge on the inward nine.

Stats: par 70, 6,254 yards
W: royalmusselburgh.co.uk
GF: £45/£60wd per round/day; £50we per round



▼ KILSPINDIE

Here is living proof that the scorecard yardage doesn't have to start with a '6'! Kilspindie plays right along the Firth early on, then climbs away and back down around the turn before the final run for home. Along the way, there's just one par 5 and several short par 4s, any of which – depending on the wind – could bring hopes of a birdie or two. What's not to like?

The 162-yard 8th is a cracker, with out of bounds perilously adjacent in the form of the beach. Play East Lothian's famous links by all means... but don't overlook Kilspindie on account of its modest length.

Stats: par 69, 5,502 yards
W: kilspindiegolfclub.co.uk
GF: £49/£70wd per round/day; £60/£80we

▼ LOCAL KNOWLEDGE

Ducks Inn
Aberlady
T: 01875 870682
W: ducks.co.uk

Run by larger-than-life golf enthusiast, Malcolm Duck, this traditional inn midway along Scotland's Golf Coast in the heart of Aberlady is the ideal base from which to tackle any of East Lothian's excellent courses, with Kilspindie and Craighielaw right on the doorstep. There are 23 ensuite rooms, but you're more likely to spend any downtime in the cosy bar decked out with sporting memorabilia, perhaps even having a go at the putting challenge, which fittingly involves a duck's back.

Ducks Inn
Aberlady
W: ducks.co.uk

The Ducks Inn rightly has a fantastic reputation for its food under the



Ducks Inn

culinary expertise of Michal Mozden. This is true whether choosing from the a la carte menu, the bar menu or the five-course tasting menu (available Thursday to Sunday nights). I always seem to eat more fish on my travels, and the sea bream with green beans and salsa verde was a particular highlight of this trip.

Tweeddale Arms
Gifford
W: tweeddalearmshotel.com

This popular, traditional black-and-white painted pub lies in the pretty village centre just a short walk from Gifford Golf Club. It offers a cosy, snug bar with log-burning stove plus a good selection of real ales on tap, with the garden a pleasant spot to unwind with a pint after a late afternoon nine at Gifford or any of the other courses within easy reach.

OTHER COURSES

Aside from the famous old links at **Muirfield**, **Gullane** and **North Berwick**, and the grand newcomers at **Archerfield** and **Renaissance**, there is much more fine golf along this stretch of hallowed golfing turf. North Berwick's other club – **The Glen** – features a quirky opener then some wonderful views once you've made the climb. **Dunbar**, further east, is a classic links playing over the very narrowest of golfing strips, while **Craighielaw**, right next to **Kilspindie**, boasts some testing green complexes. Harry Colt's **Longniddry** has no par 5s and a mix of links and woodland holes, while **Musselburgh Links**, which hosted six early Opens, hires out hickory clubs to really get you in the mood for some nostalgic golf.