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COURSE OF THE MONTH: CASTLEROCK

Those in the local know had long been telling me that Castlerock, on the County Londonderry coast not far from Portrush, was a links well worth playing. They weren't wrong.

The main Mussenden Links plays over varying terrain, from the relatively flat land by the railway to understated dunes

and then, from the 7th onwards, in and out of more impressive duneland closer to the Bann Estuary. The stroke-index-one 7th stands out early on, along with the long par-3 9th and its dramatic amphitheatre green. The 12th then boasts some of the most pronounced fairway

mounds I've ever witnessed – the proverbial buried elephant, or in this instance, a small herd of elephants.

All the while your eye is drawn to the coastline, and some magical-looking holes which thread their way through the highest sandhills in true

modern Irish links fashion. But you don't play them on the Mussenden Links – they're on the nine-hole Bann course, which has an intriguing history. It was created by farmer brothers, Jim and William Kane, who took their tractors up into the dunes in their own time and carved

Words: Jeremy Ellwood | Photography: Kevin Murray

out a course under the shrewd direction of Bobby Kelly, Fred Daly's former assistant and the Castlerock pro from 1960 to 2001. Its 5th hole has been described by Irish professional, David Jones, as one of the most scenic in all of Ireland. It looks wonderful, but time just didn't allow.

Such is the Bann nine's splendour that there has, at times, been talk of merging

the best holes on both courses to make one truly stunning layout. That may not happen any time soon, but once a year the Castlerock members do get to compete for the Estuary Cup, played over a composite course that takes in a loop of four Bann holes midway round.

On our recent visit, we finished in semi-darkness and in need of a decent meal ahead of a four-

hour drive south to Dublin that night, so we speculatively asked in the near-deserted clubhouse where we might be able to find somewhere to eat. "Right here, lads," we were told. "When do you close then?" we asked. "Just as soon as you boys have eaten and are on your way," came the reply. Now you don't get a catering service like that at too many clubs back in England.

ADDRESS: Castlerock Golf Club, 65 Circular Road, Castlerock, Co. Londonderry, BT51 4TJ
T: 028 7084 8314

W: castlerockgc.co.uk

STATS: Par 73, 555 71, 6,506 yards
GF: Mussenden Links: £65wd per round, £80wd per day; £80we per round, £95we per day

DID YOU KNOW: Fred Daly, winner of the 1947 Open, was Castlerock's professional back in the 1950s