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# Letters

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**We are delighted to receive letters from readers, and the best in each issue will be rewarded with a GCA golf shirt. Send letters by post to 6 Friar Lane, Leicester, LE1 5RA, UK, or e-mail us at: [letters@golfcoursearchitecture.net](mailto:letters@golfcoursearchitecture.net)**

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## Dear Editor

When asked one's favourite heathland layout, many golfers mention the classics of Sunningdale and Walton Heath, and are invariably torn between the two. Maybe you appreciate the charm of the exclusive New Zealand, or perhaps the rivalry between the three Ws. However, the course that never seems to be praised in the same breath is the unsung hero of the south, Crowborough Beacon. So I decided to find out about this classy gem for myself. Perched on an incline just off the A26, the clubhouse stands proud, dressed with wisteria, facing south and keeping a close eye on those approaching the eighteenth green.

I headed out on to the first; a medium length par four, just shy of 400 yards, defined by trees to the left and a plethora of heather on the right. The tee shot promotes a left to right shot to hold the left sloping fairway. After a reasonably struck fairway wood or long iron, the player is faced with a mid iron to a green rolling gently away from you, with the road standing sentry to the left. From the opening holes a pattern emerges: Crowborough was definitely designed with the words 'just right' in mind. Not too much length, a little room for mistakes, enough trouble to make you think. For me, it points the way forward for much future design, and helps to pull the reins on power junkies who relish five hundred yard plus par fours that require two perfect blows to reach the destination. Sure, there are some long holes, but all are possible to conquer.

Early on are many intriguing holes, such as the third, aptly named 'The Baby', at just 147 yards. The green, nestled into the hillside, incorporates a bank running away on the left from which an unpredictable bounce may follow. A slight hump towards the back causes a few short game errors. The deceptively long green means it could either be a wedge up to a six iron wind depending.

It seems that the club has matured like a fine wine: The original ingredients still remain, but it has moved with the times just enough to

accommodate the modern society. There are rumours that most of the holes were modified under the eye of Dr Alistair MacKenzie. A course with numerous elevation changes, it is one he would have relished. It is no coincidence that pits of heather and grass bunkers are in play at the normal driving distance, or that the wide fairways provide more than one angle of attack.

The seventh is a great example of a hole that could be a template for designs where length is required, and done without the use of a single bunker. This par five starts with a tee shot hit a through a chute between trees to a generous, gently contoured fairway that meanders to the left. The Sweethaws road, which gives its name to the hole, crosses diagonally around 270 yards, separating the fairway in two. This makes long hitters doubt the driver as the right choice. Most drives will hit the short stuff then filter down to the left. From here, it is nigh on impossible to see the green, although it is usually reachable for most. Up and over we go, hitting across the road to the second fairway, only visible at the top of the ridge. The members will tell you that 'up the right is best', and only shots with enough legs will pass the collection area some forty or so yards short of the green. Mortals will play short to the narrower, flatter part of the fairway ninety yards from the green. The challenge is not over yet, however, for the two tiered green requires exact distance control to get the ball on the right level.

The shot making rollercoaster continues right to the eighteenth. The 443-yard par four sweeps around the left hand dogleg, not requiring too much length for risk of running into the clingy heather. Once around the elbow the second shot climbs to the green protected by a couple of bunkers at the foot of the clubhouse.

To sum up Crowborough is hard, though certainly 'fair' and 'aesthetically pleasing' come to mind. Everything that is great about classic golf is encompassed. The odd blind drive here and there, uneven lies, forced carries and subsequent layups. The heather, thick enough to stop you in your tracks, but manicured enough to let you get on your way. Every shot deserves care whilst a short moment to enjoy the extensive views around the course must not be missed. While sauntering around on my adventure in no more than three hours, I imagined Conan Doyle and his pals dressed in tweed waistcoats and matching jackets knocking it round with their brassies and Vardon Flyers. It is hard not to think that there is something romantic about the way gentlemen and golf are associated, and how well it is intertwined at Crowborough.

Yours sincerely

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Photo: James Bignell Photography