

How to Navigate the Toughest Holes at Royal Troon

Royal Troon Golf Club has roots dating all the way back to 1878, when it originally opened up as a 5-hole golf course. This year, Royal Troon hosts the 145th Open Championship and the season's 3rd major. This will account for the 9th time Royal Troon has hosted The Open and is sure to test both the mental and physical limits of the world's best golfers.

Playing at a respectable 7,190 yards from the Championship tees, the par-71 golf track has an array of very tricky golf holes where even some of the best ball strikers in the world are going to struggle.

Below is an in-depth look at a few of the hardest holes around this majestic track as well as some insight into how the players will approach the 145th Open Championship.

Hole No. 8 — The Postage Stamp, Par 3, 123 yards

Don't let the yardage fool you here. The 8th stands at only 123 yards, but besides the famous "island hole" at TPC Sawgrass, The Postage Stamp may be the most daunting short par three in all of golf. A lot of how to play this hole depends on the wind direction, as players could play anything from a sand wedge to a 7-iron depending on the wind strength. The main goal here: hit the green. Five deep, grave-like bunkers surround every angle of this green, and finding one of them leaves a brutal up-and-down. There is no bail out and no safe way to attack this pesky par 3. Players will gladly take a score of par in the hope of walking over to the 9th tee without giving up a stroke.



The Postage Stamp

Hole No. 10 — Sandhills, Par 4, 451 yards

Royal Troon's version of "Amen Corner" starts right here at the difficult par-4 10th hole. Standing at 451 yards and usually dead into the wind, a blind tee shot kicks off the back 9. Players will be picking a spot on the side of the hill up the left side, but must make sure not to pick off more than they can handle. Gorse surrounds the left side of the fairway and even the slightest pulls off the tee will nearly eliminate any chance at making birdie. Nicknamed "Sandhills" due to the large sandhills covering the fairway, simply avoid those obstacles to open up a fairly straightforward approach shot, as there are no bunkers protecting this accessible green. The gorse continues all the way up to the left side of the green, leaving the only bail-out zone just short right of the green for an uphill chip shot. The number one goal on the 10th: find the fairway to have a clear shot at the green.



Sandhills

Hole No. 11 — The Railway, Par 4, 482 yards

Dubbed “The most dangerous hole I have ever seen” by the 1962 Open champ, Arnold Palmer, the 11th hole at Royal Troon is sure to give the players all they can handle. Railroad tracks and 4 feet of stone run down the entire right side, making any shot that is over cut down the right an automatic re-tee. Another semi-blind tee shot will make players 100% commit to their line and trust their swing if they are going to find the fairway. The gorse covers both the left and right sides of the fairway and there is no real conservative way to approach this beastly hole. Some players may try and lay back with a rescue or 3-wood, which is a smart play, but it will leave well over 200 yards to one of the tightest landing areas in The Open course rotation. Walking away with bogey here may not be the worst feeling for many, especially considering it used to be a par 5 until 1997. Main goal on the 11th: take a big number completely out of play.



The Railway

Hole No. 12 — The Fox, Par 4, 430 yards

Another brutal par 4, weighing in at 430 yards, the 12th was the 2nd hardest hole when The Open was played at Royal Troon in 2004. The first hole of the back 9 that doesn't have a blind tee shot, this slight dogleg right can be played in a few different ways. The longer hitters will bomb driver down the right, leaving them just a flip wedge into the green. Other players may elect to hit 3-wood or a long iron off the tee as the fairway runs out down the left at 271 yards, like every other hole at Royal Troon, finding the fairway is of the utmost importance. The green is perched back in the furthest corner of the course and is relatively open. There is one strategically placed bunker that will eat up any ball running up the right side of the green. Main goal on the 12th: find the fairway and you can go pin hunting with your approach.



The Fox

Hole No. 18 — Craigend, Par 4, 458 yards

The final test at Royal Troon presents many options off the tee. Pot bunkers are placed at 262 yards, 307 yards, and 326 yards throughout the left and right sides of the fairway. The conservative play: take a long iron or rescue off the tee to stay short of the 262-yard pot bunker. This will leave roughly 200 yards into the longest green on the course (38 yards from back to front). If the leader comes into 18 with more than a 2-shot lead this may well be their strategy.

The aggressive game plan: rip driver up the middle-right, but make sure to avoid the bunker sitting at 307 yards. Five bunkers line the front of the 18th green from about 40 yards all the way in, making the carry and front edge yardage crucial to club selection. If the pin is in the back portion of the green, look for players to play conservative and stay well short of pin high. The clubhouse comes right up to the back edge of the green—anything long is out of bounds. Main goal on the 18th: pick your strategy off the tee and commit to it, no need for second-guessing on the final hole of a major championship.



Royal Troon will test the best players in the world throughout the 145th Open Championship, and these holes will be sure to play a major role in determining who will hoist the Claret Jug come Sunday.

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