

■ The 10th hole on the picturesque Kernow course
PICTURE: Andy Hiseman



Fairway to heaven

THE journey to St Mellion is a tantalising taste of what's to come. Driving can be a chore these days - but not when you're motoring through West Dorset, then Devon and across the spectacular Tamar estuary, with Isambard Kingdom Brunel's wonderful Royal Albert railway bridge alongside, into Cornwall. Now, following a two-year £2m investment, the new Kernow Course at St Mellion International is complete - making this surely one of the finest 36-hole resorts not just in England, but Europe.

With nine new holes, and nine of the best from the original Old Course, this comprehensive redevelopment is bound to attract players in search of a new challenge.

The par-70, 18-hole Kernow (meaning Cornwall in Cornish) complements the mighty Nicklaus Signature Course, which also winds around St Mellion's spectacular wooded valleys. With stunning views and eight new USGA-spec greens, it's longer than the original Old Course, with many new tees and hundreds of new trees.

A staggering 250,000 tonnes of earth have been moved to provide a fresh golfing challenge which, while more benign than the notoriously difficult Nicklaus, still has plenty of teeth. Stand-out holes include the new first, a tricky par five that demands an accurate first tee shot of the day, and the new sixth, the hardest of the 18, featuring an



■ St Mellion hotel

unusual approach to the green over a traditional Cornish hedge. There's a new sequence of holes to start the back nine, which, while relatively short, offer up a series of exciting risk and reward decisions. But not all the holes are new - the picturesque all-or-nothing par three 14th is an old favourite featuring a shot across a lake, with a fantastic view from an elevated tee. Here, what you see is really what you get. Set in 450 acres of Cornish countryside, St Mellion is the only English resort to have had full European Tour golf staged on both its courses. Golf operations manager David Moon says he's looking forward to an influx of players keen to try out the new-look Kernow. "It has certainly undergone some spectacular changes," he says. "Because of new technology, players hit the ball further now, so the new course is longer and a little tighter. However, I believe it's still a fair and extremely enjoyable challenge for golfers of all standards." In 1976, the Old Course, as it was then known, was designed by J Hamilton

Stutt (who also remodelled Barton-on-Sea), and quickly established itself as a leading tournament venue, hosting its first major international event, the PGA Cup match between GB and Ireland, and the USA, in 1978, and its first European Tour event, the Benson and Hedges International, in 1979.

The Tournament Players Championship of Europe and the Weetabix Ladies' British Open brought professional Tour golf back to Cornwall in the following years.

The second course, designed by Jack Nicklaus, opened in 1987, and was fully refurbished and reopened last summer, along with a new 80-room four-star hotel with a luxurious spa complex including three swimming-pools - and the announcement that the European Tour will return from 2011, with the English Open.

KEVIN NASH

getting there

- ◆ St Mellion, near Saltash, is close to the villages, beaches and attractions for which Cornwall is famous. Call 01579 351351 or visit st-mellion.co.uk
- ◆ St Mellion International Resort is the flagship property in the award-winning Crown Golf group, which has 30 UK golf facilities and 50 golf courses in its portfolio. Visit crown-golf.co.uk