

JIG-SAW IN GERMANY by F. W. Hawtree

THE new layout of 18 holes for the Düsseldorf Golf Club was planned in April and work has started on the practice ground. The rest of the course will be made after the harvest this month.

The site is seven miles to the east of the city and was selected from three alternatives. Its intrinsic advantages made it a natural choice, although farthest from the centre. Distance can be an advantage in these days of expanding suburbs and the tranquil rural atmosphere will more than repay a few extra minutes in the car. The soil is lighter, the landscape—with only a few distant houses in sight—ininitely more attractive than either of the alternatives, and from my point of view the planning presented an exciting challenge. All the elements were there—strong undulations, hills, valleys, streams, part wooded, part plain—the problem was to find the pattern of 18 holes which would dovetail into this picture to give the length required without steep climbs or blind approach shots and, above all, which would reproduce in play the tremendous variety and interest of the ground.

Well Hidden

I thought of Willie Dunn who was frequently consulted about sites for golf courses in the late 19th century and is reputed to have said of each one, "God obviously intended this to be a golf course"! The same intention could be assumed at Ratingen but it was carefully concealed. It therefore provides an excuse to try and answer a question which Mr. Rod Davies asked me in Birmingham two years ago and which has worried me on and off ever since. He asked what mental processes are involved in planning a new golf course and it was difficult to give a satisfactory answer because they all occur at once.

In the first place one gets under the skin of the site to feel what sort of a course it will give and what sort of layout is going to take the player round it in a natural, orderly fashion. There will be surprises on the way by all means but the land itself must produce the arrangement of holes not the layout be forced

unsympathetically on to the land. Where atmosphere or contour vary noticeably, the agreeable areas must not all be fired off in the first few holes. There is a strong and a weak way round each site (sometimes, too, there is an expensive and a cheap way—another factor to be borne in mind). How many courses are there where the 17th and 18th tail away after strong climaxes earlier on; how many where the 19th seems a long way up in the air as you stand on the 18th tee; how many where a frivolous hole exaggerates an anticlimax instead of providing a break in tension which emphasises other holes before and after it.

Compromise

These faults are often due to defects in the club-house position but when the choice is free, experience naturally provides some facility in determining a location which will compromise between layout, access, services, outlook, contour, and orientation. Some compromise! But once it is achieved, indeed, earlier, the 1st and 18th are taking shape and, one hopes, two other holes at the middle or a third of the round.

At this stage, the pieces of the jig-saw are still big ones—they will be subdivided later on—but they must already interlock. If one piece is neglected the pattern is never complete and another club will be condemned to live for ever saying "If only . . .". I use the words "for ever" advisedly because once the course is laid out on the wrong lines, it can never for practical purposes be put right in the future. Some are laid out more wrongly than others and no land will ever permit the abstract ideal. Nevertheless there is a practical ideal for each piece of ground and that is the only goal.

We can now start work on the detail in earnest, remembering that each detail is still vital in the broad picture. This will already be splitting up the site into areas and dictating profitable lines of investigation. Where hills are involved the general direction of the finish will be doubly important. Thinking about this

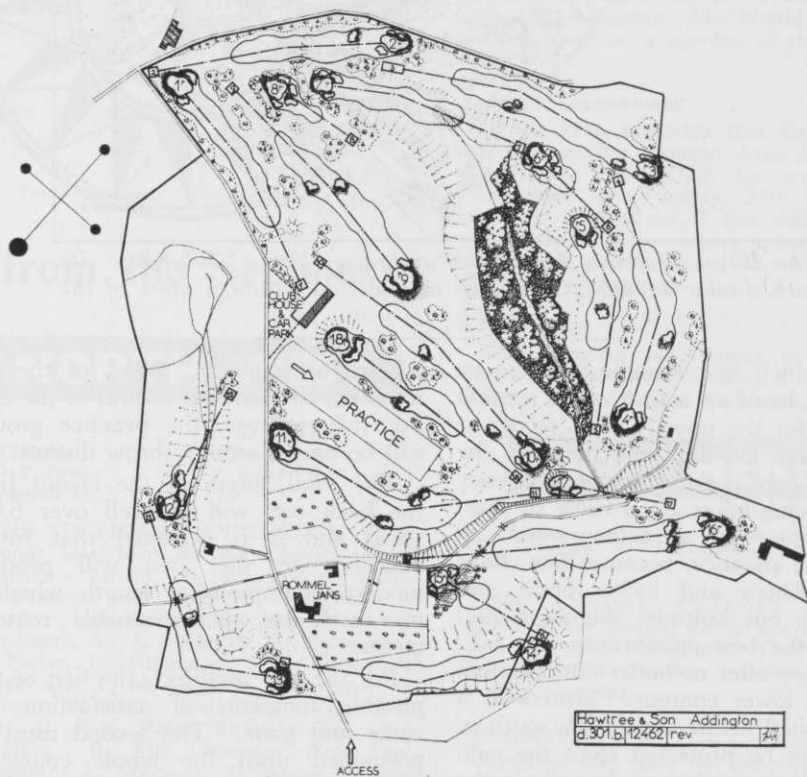
will already influence the start. The short holes must be the jewels but the 5-bogey holes can be boring if they lack feature. These and a host of other factors determine each move in the game but at the same time their interaction is building up the total effect.

Experience will generally show at once

adjourn for luncheon until the Hon. Treasurer reported one hole short.

But with all the experience in the world, on a good site (by which I understand one with a variety of natural feature and enough room to manoeuvre to use it properly), there is only one way to find the best possible series of holes—

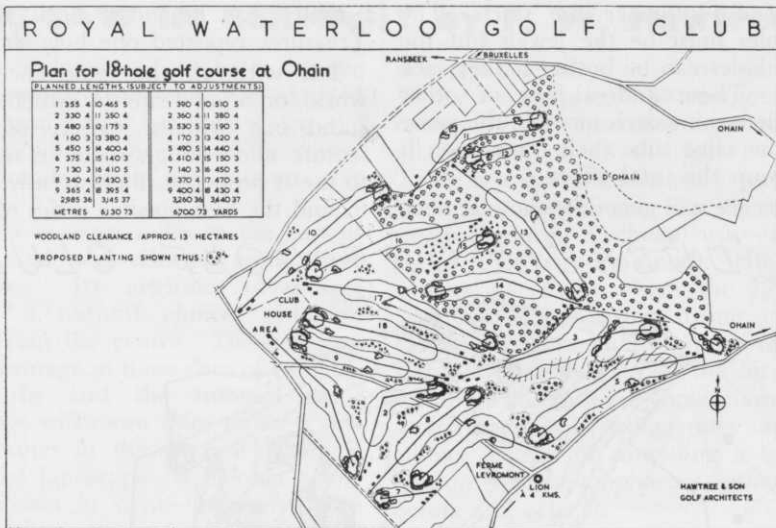
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what cannot be done and the implications, perhaps holes ahead, of any single step. And it is probably the only thing which will check the designer when, after making compromise after compromise, he reaches the point where he knows that if he goes any farther the total effect will be feeble and frustrating. Consequently, this stage provides an absorbing exercise with extreme pleasure if solved satisfactorily in the minimum number of moves. Perfection would be five minutes for reflection, one walk round the site, and there is the layout! They say of an eminent professional golfer no longer with us that he achieved this feat one morning and was ready to

that is to walk and keep on walking, twisting all the possibilities this way and that until suddenly the whole scheme clicks naturally into position. On this site the distance covered until that moment was $22\frac{1}{2}$ miles. On flat sites, a stroll through the middle may show the solution at once; on bad sites, the happy solution may never come; on good but difficult ones it is happiest when the work to find it has called for every resource the designer can command, constant adjustments of initial impressions as new ideas develop, and strict control of emotions ranging through fury and despair to relief and delight.

Looking back, as I like to do in order



The Royal Waterloo Golf Club at Brussels has a club-house site with similar advantages to these at Düsseldorf though more of the course lies in front.

to find which first thoughts had to be corrected, I can see a trap which is often prepared for the unwary. To recognise it now may avoid a few miles in the future. There is an instinctive tendency to site a club-house on a brow or crest commanding an attractive view all round. In practice, because there have to be kitchens and locker-rooms and because in our latitudes the south and west are the best orientations, the hill-top site may offer no better outlook than one on a lower contour. Moreover, a building sited below and to the south of a crest can be protected from the cold side, it will sit much more happily in the landscape without breaking up the horizon, and both internal and external planning can be more interesting and even more economical.

An old A.A. gun site provided the trap at Düsseldorf—a good field of fire all round but a poor length hole up to the boundary behind and a long climb up for the 18th in front. The solution was to move the club-house 100 yards down the slope. Then both 1st and 9th holes will acquire good length; the 18th, aiming at the club-house all the way, will end in a natural amphitheatre just below it without having to climb the whole of the slope; and the view from all the main rooms will be just as good,

indeed, outstanding. Most of the last nine will be seen and several of the first. For full measure, the practice ground will be only a stone's throw distant.

The total length of the layout from the back tees will be well over 6,000 yards and it is expected that future additions to the area will produce modern championship length which is now well beyond reasonable requirements.

For the golf architect, the first of two possible moments of satisfaction has come and gone. The second must be postponed until the whole course is modelled and green. In between, there will be many more miles over ploughed land in wet weather, hot weather, and probably snow.

For the group of Düsseldorf golfers whose scheme this is, the moments of pleasure are still to come. It can take up to two years to plan, build, and bring a golf course into playing condition. We hope to improve on that and in any event a practice ground will be ready for autumn. But at least they can be patient in the knowledge that they have a site of which any club could be proud and that there are some spectacular holes on the board which will test whether the practice they put in meanwhile has been earnest or not.