

DEEP BUNKERS ARE SAFEST IN A THUNDERSTORM

by PETER HEFFORD

The tragedy which befell a Hertfordshire man while on a golfing holiday in Norfolk a few weeks ago reminds us sadly that golf is not always a safe and tranquil game. Playing in a four-ball at Thetford Golf Club, Richard Clarke, of Harpenden, was struck by lightning and killed. Maurice Robson, of Sarratt, was badly burned and taken to hospital.

The coroner at the inquest on Mr Clarke commented that the only safe thing for a golfer to do during a storm is to go off the course and go indoors.

Naturally this is the soundest advice — but it is not easy advice to carry out on the average golf course.

The nearest shelter is usually a mile or so away. It is not considered safe to stand beneath trees. Although the golfer has a bag full of steel shafted clubs he is disinclined to abandon such valuable property in the middle of the course.

The record books include an unfortunate number of cases of golfers struck by lightning — enough to be significant. The most widely publicised case in recent years was that of the brilliant Scotland and Tottenham Hotspur footballer, John White, who was killed on the course while playing at Enfield.

Some players complain that most golf courses do not have small hut shelters at certain points off the fairways. It would give some psychological comfort to be able to take cover in

such a shelter — but official advice states that such places are dangerous in a storm.

In fact, most places seem to be unsafe. Isolated trees, wire fences, hilltops and wide open spaces are to be avoided. The rules of golf specifically allow discontinuation of play if there is any danger of lightning — but where to go?

The United States Golf Association, in a guide to personal safety in thunderstorms, recommends seeking shelter in one of the following places — a cave, a depression in the ground, a deep valley, the foot of a steep or overhanging cliff, dense woods or a grove of trees.

It is regarded as dangerous to raise an umbrella or golf club above one's head — the umbrella ribs or the steel shafts may attract lightning. It is also advisable to lay one's bag of clubs flat on the ground.

While it may sound rather drastic and uncomfortable, it has even been suggested that golf shoes with metal spikes should be taken off.

The main fact arising out of all this advice is to make oneself as inconspicuous as possible, to merge in with larger objects or to lower oneself below the level of the surrounding ground.

It is not easy to do such a thing on, for instance, the flat and open spaces of seaside links, but I imagine one could do worse than lie flat in a deep bunker if a storm becomes desperately bad.

An all-weather putting course on the Hoe at Plymouth will be ready for Mayflower year. The course will not only have a service of "extruded polypropylene felt" but nineteen holes into the bargain.

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Dornoch in East Sutherland is debating a plan to build a second 18-hole golf course with golf chalets, enlarged clubhouse, swimming pool, indoor recreation centre, restaurant and licensed air strip.

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