

THE LOOK OF A HOLE

Patrick Smart

There are several ways of surveying a hole from the teeing ground, depending on the skill of the player.

It should be a matter of thinking, and there can be bad thinking even among the shorter handicaps.

One thing is certain. The designer has not set out to make it simple for the golfer. It occurs to me, having written that, some of the most difficult holes I have known were simple. Flat, featureless, dull. There is no incentive to try, and that induces sloppy stroke making.

Standing to his ball, the long handicap will look down the fairway, ignoring the geography of the hole, and hope he can knock one down the middle. It is a waste of time to decide on which side of the fairway he should place the ball. He knows that to be beyond his compass.

Perhaps he misses something here. There is fun in examining the problem before us, and in a sense reading the architect's mind. We shall come to that later, and the aesthetic pleasure of gazing upon a really good lay out. That can only be done in a carefree round.

It is a principle that there should be two routes to the hole. The one enforcing accuracy, combined with an element of risk. The other, for the higher handicaps, leaving them—providing the drive is in play—with two comparatively easy strokes to the green. No large carry to overcome. I

say two more strokes, because if they try to get up with the second (and try they will), it may lead to an 8. or more, when a 6 was possible.

It is one of golfs facts that the handicap player will not accept that he has spare strokes from his allowance. By all means let the youngster have a go. It is fatal to instil into him a defensive attitude. He will learn the hard way. Which is the only way. The elderly, good golfers when younger, have the experience to fiddle their way round.

We come to the better average club members, giving a fairly wide margin, say 11 down to 6. Here, I believe, the handicaps could be reduced by several strokes if they would take a good intelligent look at the hole they are about to play.

On their home course, they consider they know all about each hole. It can be that they have been adopting the wrong strategy on certain holes. Hence the stationary handicap. On a strange course, there should be a pause to study the design, reasoning: "Now, what devilry is the designer trying to entice me into." Just a little care can make a lot of difference.

On many courses the greens are either angled away from the centre of the fairway, or guarded by bunkers that call for placing the drive. Hence the need for correct tactics. The fall of the ground comes into this. It will govern the roll of the ball, and the middle can be ignored. The fader, or the puller can use that slope to his advantage. To clarify that. A right to left slope will help the fader. If the prospect is the other way, then he who puts draw on the ball will benefit. The ball will not run into trouble. The 6 handicap should be capable of putting the ball approximately where he intends.

I once wrote of the drive being the most important stroke, a good start

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in any game or sport is helpful. The second shot to a hole, to a narrower target, requires careful consideration. A cool assessment of the possible (let us leave percentages to the Stock Exchange) may ward off disaster. The question of attempting to carry, or play short of a lateral stream is one. The pin placement may make attack dangerous. Once again, he has his handicap.

The most tricky courses are those where, incorrectly, trouble lies behind the greens. These even for me, are old fashioned. I know one well.

A test of a good, interesting lay out, is that after one visit the holes remain in the mind. A dull course leaves no memories.

And now for the pleasure of looking at a fine hole. The famous have been described before; the public without seeing them have come to know them. Come with me to a links that deserves to be better known. It is Pennard, on the Gower peninsular, west of Swansea. I told the late Bernard Darwin I was going there. He replied: "I have it on the best authority, James Braid, that it is one the finest natural links in the country."

Like Muirfield it lies above the sea, the Bristol channel. There are mountainous, terrifying dunes. One hole stands out, though after twenty five years I can remember them all.

You stand on a high teeing ground. Below, all the way to the green is sand. On either side buttress of great dunes elbow their way in. The green, 200 yards away, is perched high, cut out of the side of a dune. It is green, or purgatory. According to the wind, it can be anything from a No. 4. iron through to a driver. It brings to mind the famous Calamity Corner on Royal Portrush.

It strikes terror into the hearts of some, a tingle of excitement at the challenge in others. A short hole, it has majesty. You cannot ask for more than that.



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