If a course architect, constructor or greenkeeper is faced with a span to traverse on a golf course whether it be a lake, a river or stream, busy road or a gully, what are their options?

Well, you could go round the obstacle. But that could be time consuming for golfers and/or greenkeepers and, let’s face it, a little bit boring. A tunnel is sometimes an option, ideal for some situations as they are extremely discrete, but can be expensive to introduce. A ferry, as one used on the 18th hole at Brocket Hall, is another consideration if it is quite wide expanse of water, although this can be expensive and often labour intensive to run.

What else is there? Well let’s just think inside the box for a change. What’s the most common and most effective method to get from A to B across the sort of terrain we’ve been talking about? A bridge, of course!

A bridge can make a huge difference to a golf course. Imagine what the 18th on the Old Course would look like, or indeed, function like, without the famous humpbacked stone bridge upon which, in recent times, both Arnold Palmer and Jack Nicklaus have stood and waved goodbye to the adoring galleries. If the bridge hadn’t been there we wouldn’t have been left with those unforgettable images, while no bridge would involve a somewhat less dramatic walk around the burn.

Likewise the 12th hole at Augusta National. You’re leading the Masters on the final day but have had to play three from the wrong side of the creek having misjudged your tee shot and now have the time it takes to walk over the beautifully manicured bridge to collect your thoughts. They are probably the most famous bridges in golf and probably among the smallest.

At many clubs bridges, while often taken for granted, play a significant role in everyone’s regular round of golf.

Georgia-based, Creative Bridge Designs, has worked for some of the best known golf course architects in the US, including Robert Trent Jones and the aforementioned Palmer and Nicklaus providing an array of bridges in different styles.

“One of the main considerations before deciding on a bridge is budget,” explained General Manager, Richard Eunice.

“Once that is determined we can examine the options. We can supply pre-fabricated bridges, in whole or in sections but for club’s with larger budgets we will look at a range of options and different styles,” he explained, adding that in the US many bridges are installed to keep golfers out of protected wetland areas.

“The things we like to look at are from artistic perspectives we want to make a bridge look as natural as possible and we don’t like a bridge over a river to go from bank to bank we want it above the bank, ideally about 10 feet on each side.”

With golf in the USA suffering from a lack of money similar to the situation in the UK Creative Golf Designs has found a way of providing golf clubs with a more cost effective way of what they want.

“To save a dollar here and a dollar there what we have been doing lately is steel beams but decorating them with timber so that they look like a regular wooden bridge.”

Length of span has a part to play in materials as well.
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Length of span has a part to play in materials as well.
If you want to reach 200 feet in a single span for example you are definitely looking at a steel bridge; from 10 to 20 feet you are looking at timber and for 30 feet a lot of people like to use a glue laminated beam timber,” explained Richard, whose company, launched by Richard’s brother Brian Nuttall, in 2000, is hoping to offer its services to UK customers in the near future.

One of the other main elements to consider is weight as the larger the bridge the more that can be done with it – buggies, greenkeeping machinery etc.

“From our point of view a two ton bridge is a pedestrian bridge, a five ton bridge can take buggies and some lighter maintenance equipment while a 10 ton bridge is for large equipment and 20 ton for large vehicles,” explained Richard.

So next time you are traversing one of the bridges at your club just have a think about how life would differ if it didn’t exist.

Thanks to Richard Eunice, of Creative Bridge Designs, for his assistance with this article. See: www.creativebridges.co.uk

Let’s rewind to the end of April and a function room within the excellent Carnoustie Hotel, which overlooks the 18th green of this year’s Open venue. The annual R&A press conference has just finished and one man is surrounded by the nation’s golf writers, with a battery of dictaphones and tape recorders stuck inches from his nose.

John Philp, Carnoustie Links Superintendent, is the man at the centre of all the attention. Eight years ago he was identified as being responsible for the famous links being renamed “Carnasty”, when many players hit the rough in a warped attempt to make the players look foolish.

Carnoustie’s Health and Safety is another important issue and hand or bump rails, along with tightlier maintenance equipment while 10 ton bridges are for large equipment and 20 ton for large vehicles,” explained Richard.

For example, had they heard him talk about the work he and his staff have done to reward a player for finding the fairway, or ensuring consistency of bounce when the ball lands, they would have discovered a man as knowledgeable as he is passionate on the subject of fine turf and golf.

What those golf writers missed out on, however, was the opportunity to sit down with John at length and listen to his philosophies on golf course management and on his beloved Carnoustie Links.

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John coped with all the attention admirably, answering the questions as fully as he could and certainly giving as good as he got in a relaxed, honest, and upfront manner.

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For example, had they heard him talk about the work he and his staff have done to reward a player for finding the fairway, or ensuring consistency of bounce when the ball lands, they would have discovered a man as knowledgeable as he is passionate on the subject of fine turf and golf.

They would also have learned more about the reasons why so many of the world’s best struggled in ‘99.

Sitting in his office, close to the 10th green on the Championship course and 5th green of the excellent Burnside course, John first of all paid tribute to his team and outlined some of the work they have been doing since the Open’s last visit.

“I’ve got a wonderful team and, although they are split over our three courses, they combined over the winter to re-do over 90 bunkers on the Championship course. We have 26 greenstaff in total, as well as four in the workshop, some of whom were here in ‘99, but also a lot of lads working an Open for the first time. My staff produce the highest standards of workmanship and I’m very proud of their achievements.

“I am very fortunate to have very talented people in key positions. Sandy Reid is the skilful and committed head man on the championship course and Eric Watson with is wealth of experience leads the workshop team. I have worked with my Deputy, Paul O’Connor since 1990. He has an impeccable knowledge of links turf management and has been instrumental in the development at Carnoustie Links over the years.”

The team has spent a lot of time trying to get a balance on the fairways between low areas, which obviously can be a little lush and higher parts so that they will perform similarly.

“The ball is not going to sit on a crown, it’s going to roll into the hollows but we feel that the crowned area is the type of turf, providing a nice tight lie, that enables a player, with the skill to do it, to squeeze the ball out and get spin.”

For a good number of years the team has been verticutting and hollow coring to get as much sand into the low areas to give them the same playability quality as those higher areas.