Hawaiian lava beds form bedrock of new Nicklaus course

Hualalai is the first course where he faced the challenge of working entirely with lava. He said in a prepared release that he wanted to maintain the drama of the lava, but also keep the resort course generous for vacationing golfers.

"Every time I came out to see the project, we kept widening the landing area," Nicklaus said. "You want to keep the lava just out of play physically, but in play visually. It can be a great feature visually, but it can also be a pretty stiff mental hazard. I don't care how far you push the lava, people are going to get into it."

The course, which opened in late January, is contoured with a 5-degree slope to the ocean and includes parts of the historic King's Trail, an ocean-side pedestrian highway for the pre-western Hawaiian natives that lived along the coast.

The 7,000-plus yard course starts and ends at a 14,000-square-foot clubhouse that overlooks the ocean. The clubhouse is scheduled to be finished in September 1996 to coincide with the opening of the 243-room Four Seasons Resort. The 625-acre Hualalai resort complex will also have a sports club and spa and a range of homes, townhouses and villas.

With five-star accommodations and a Tour-quality golf course, The Hualalai Golf Club also opens with the distinction of being named the first PGA Tour Resort. As a result, the resort will be promoted by the PGA Tour and used as a destination for certain Tour functions.