

An Architect's Opinion Initial Ideas on Golf Course Circulation

by Bob Lohman

One of golf's great attractions is that it is played on natural terrain, or terrain that has been modified carefully so that it seems natural. As an architect, I am always asked about the playability and strategy of a golf course. Most people never ask about circulation patterns or how they fit into the design of each golf hole.

With the increased amount of play and the heavy use of carts, as well as service vehicles, circulation patterns have become important elements of the total design. Safety for the players, natural flow of traffic, and maintenance of turf areas are items affected by the circulation patterns developed during the design or redesign of a golf course.

When designing a new golf course or remodeling an existing one, safety should always be considered. Even though it is practically impossible to stop people and carts from traveling all over the golf course, the proper use of design features can aid in circulation direction. One of the worst situations is where the layout of the golf hole forces players to walk back into the flow of play (Fig. 1). The best way to improve this situation is to remodel the golf holes so the tee is either behind the green or beyond and to the side of the green. With the addition of a bunker at the right front of the green, the natural circulation pattern is to the left and safely out of the play area (Fig. 2).

If the golf hole modifications cannot be made, then perhaps a series of mounds with heavy plantings can be placed along the right side of the golf hole to protect the players circulating from the green to the tee (Fig. 3). Safety is an important consideration and has precedence over the length of walk or ride from the green to the succeeding tee.

The easiest solution to any circulation problem is the one that allows for the natural movement of traffic. When remodeling an out-of-date golf course, it is critical to include circulation as part of the criteria that affects the final design of the golf hole.

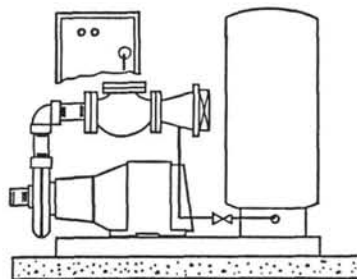
In the case of new golf courses, and remodeling jobs alike, circulation is studied from the preliminary design studies and is included in the final plans in either actual cart paths or as traffic patterns that develop naturally due to the placement of the other design features.

By properly placing the design features, traffic patterns will never seem forced. This also eliminates worn-out areas between greens and tees and areas adjacent to bunkers that are placed in the natural traffic pattern. Because of the concentration of traffic, the soil becomes compacted and worn-out, leaving bare spots that detract from the beauty of the golf course.

Cart paths should never dictate the design of the golf course, but circulation patterns should be part of the initial studies. In the intense-use areas adjacent to tees and greens, cart paths should be installed at the same time the feature work is being completed. This will minimize the cost and make the cart path seem an integral part of the total project and not an afterthought. Careful planning will ensure that the path is positioned properly to be functional and not detract from the aesthetic appeal of the golf hole or be a launching pad for a slightly errant golf shot.

Another practical application of cart paths is their use as service roads. When weather limits service vehicles from traveling on paths of the golf course, a good cart path system can provide access to all parts of the course at all times.

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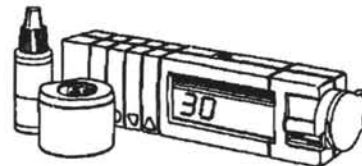
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