

Golf Course Photography

by Bob Maynard, F-Stop

Photographing your golf course can be a challenging undertaking; one that might lead to frustration and disappointment if not approached with the proper understanding of what it takes to succeed in capturing the beauty that you see there so often. There are a lot of details to be considered before a finished picture can be created. The purpose of this article is to familiarize you with some of the procedures that will increase your percentage of good golf course photographs.

The first consideration should be what kind of equipment to use. The larger format cameras, such as 102 and 4 x 5, will yield the best quality negatives and slides for enlargements and reproduction in magazines, but realistically speaking most people reading this article will be using some type of 35mm camera. Some of this equipment will be a fixed lens type with no options for changing lenses. Others will have the capability of adding wide angle and telephoto lenses to the equipment for increased flexibility. But no matter what type of equipment that you have at your disposal, you can get better photographs if you become more aware of what to do with your equipment. My recommendation would be to have no smaller than 35mm format with both wide angle and telephoto lenses when possible. I'll discuss the use of these lenses later.

The type of film that you will use will be determined by your primary end use of the images. If your primary use is for reproduction in a magazine then your choice should be slide or transparency film. Magazine publishers use slides or transparencies to make color separations for printing and can get the highest color saturation and detail from this medium. Slide film is more exacting in its exposure and therefore can be more difficult to get good results for the inexperienced photographer. Print film would be easier to use because the exposure isn't as critical and it will be less expensive for enlargements, but you will not be able to get the deep color saturation that you can get in slide films that are properly exposed. Remember that the lower "ISO" rated films will render the highest quality results, with finer grain structure for enlargements and reproduction. Proper care of your film both before and after exposure is very important to your color stability. Always refrigerate your film before and after exposure. Be sure if you do refrigerate your film that you allow a couple of hours for the film to warm up in the canister before using to avoid condensation. Have your film processed as soon after exposure as possible for the best color. Above all, do not store your film in your car during hot days.

Perhaps the single most important element in your photograph is the lighting. It makes or breaks a landscape photograph. Cultivating an ability to recognize good lighting when you see it could be your highest priority. Look at any photograph that you like and ask where the lighting is coming from and why it makes the photograph good. Study the direction of light every time you view a picture and become aware of its effects on the landscape. Low afternoon light can define shapes on a golf course that you were not aware of at noon. Dark foregrounds and brightly lit greens can lead the eye to the green which is the main subject. Undulations in the greens that are such an important factor in every golfer's game become well defined in the low angled light of late afternoon. The way that light strikes

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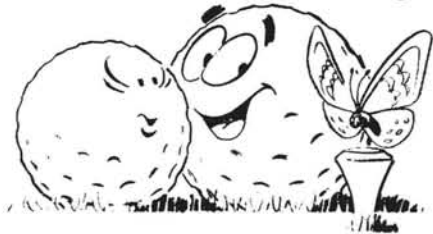
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a green or fairway of a golf hole can make a remarkable difference in the impact of a photograph.

Generally speaking, having the light source at your back or sides will render the best color saturation on your shots and will define landscape shapes. When shooting with the light at your back be careful not to get your shadow in the foreground of the photograph. Because the layout of your course doesn't change from hour to hour or day to day, the only variable that you have is to view the lighting on your course at different times of the day and determine what is the optimum time to photograph a particular hole. If you are dealing with late afternoon diminishing light as your optimum time for a particular hole, there may be only a few minutes during that time that the hole can be best photographed. Other holes can only be photographed in overcast days because the greens are always showing shadows from surrounding trees when bright sun is used. Being aware of this and taking advantage of the lighting will render the best possible image. Shooting on a crisp clear day that has a mixture of deep blue sky and white clouds adds another dimension to your photographs. Avoid those hazy bald sky days because there is no color saturation.

Your images should be well thought out for both lighting and composition. It is equally as important to know what to include as what to exclude. Try to compose your image to be as simple and uncluttered as possible, eliminating distracting elements and backgrounds so as to focus the viewers attention on the key element. Get in close, shoot from the back of the green with a wide angle lens, shoot from the tee with a normal lens, shoot from the fairway with a telephoto lens, get a high angle, or a low angle, shoot from every imaginable angle and you'll surprise yourself with the limitless possibilities that some of the holes present. Be selective about a certain feature that makes that hole unique. Sometimes you can even include two holes effectively in the same photograph.

Be careful to meter the landscape carefully for proper exposure of your film; bracketing your exposure by taking photographs at both the correct exposure according to your meter and at one Fstop above and below that exposure. This practice will show you, especially in slide photography, that one Fstop can make all the difference in a slides color saturation. A few extra frames exposed at the perfect lighting time for a hole is cheap insurance that you have the image properly exposed. Make notes of your exposure in a notebook for later reference. This will increase your knowledge for more predictable results every time.

Most important of all is to have fun trying to capture that special beauty that only a golf course can offer. The more that you shoot and evaluate what you shoot the better you will become at photographing your course.

Credit — "Through the Green", March/April 1990

Help Wanted

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