



An Architect's Opinion IRELAND GOLF — A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

By Bob Lohmann

Having visited Scotland before, I had some knowledge of British golf courses. On the first trip, my time was spent viewing the magnificent countryside and golf courses, and visiting the historical sites of the country. But on this trip, I was prepared to evaluate the golf courses.

An advantage was having the opportunity to play the golf

courses with other architects, some of whom are familiar with British golf and the style of play. During the round, we would discuss the design and how it differed from American golf courses. It is easy to critique any design after it is completed, but our criticisms were based on the site, climate, budget, and the way the game was played in Ireland. Being the only golfers on the course, we had extra time to complete our design evaluations. British architects and contractors and greenskeepers made presentations and were available throughout the trip to answer questions and participate in our discussions.

Similar to the United States, the putting greens are considered the most important part of the golf course. A construction technique was developed that provides intensive drainage and a highly permeable growing medium. This technique, which has similarities of the USGA green, was developed in Ireland primarily for soccer and rugby fields.

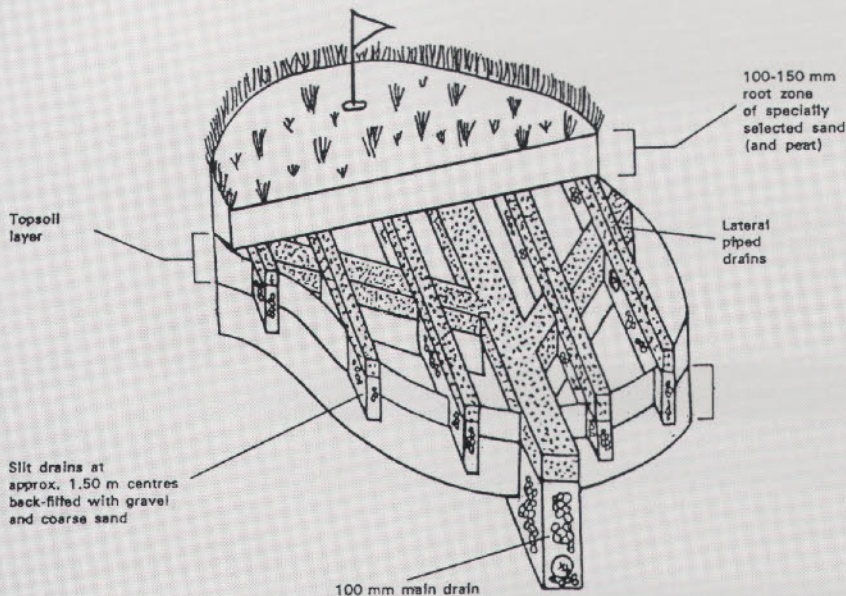
caddie doesn't quite make up for it. It is impossible to set up a strategy for playing the golf hole when everything is blind. Night golf has never been too popular. Playing a shot to one side of the fairway to have an open approach shot to the green, or cutting off a portion of a hazard to gain yardage and better position, cannot be accomplished if neither the fairway nor the hazards are visible.

The long grassed roughs, steep banked berms, and deep sand bunkers provide character and a uniqueness rarely found in American golf courses. Unless you are an avid golfer with good control of your game, or you enjoy "tortue on the golf links," the game is not pleasurable! But negotiating successful golf shots to these targets is a satisfying feeling, and the golf round is never monotonous. For the average or novice golfer, however, these areas are practically impossible to play. Some of these features should be included in the American golf course designs. Proper planning would limit the frequency yet maximize the effect.

One striking difference in these golf courses was the absence of trees. The use of high berms, long grasses, and heavy gorse provided the direction, definition, framework, and background that is needed for the golfer. The trees are not missed and the superintendent never has to worry about shade, roots, or lack of air movement.

It also was pleasant not hearing golf carts or seeing cart paths and worn-out areas throughout the golf course. Due to the rugged terrain, carts could not be used even if they were available. In some cases, a pull cart, known as a trolley, was hard to negotiate on the narrow paths up and down the steep banked sand dunes. It was amazing how the spectacular sites kept my mind off all the walking and climbing I had to do.

This trip was no doubt the best golfing experience I have ever had. The company of other architects, along with the chance to play the best golf courses was a dream come true for any golf purist like myself. As with any experience, there were both good and bad points, but, most importantly, I learned more about golf course architecture than anybody could possibly teach me.



One notable aspect of the golf courses that I visited was the spectacular sites. To describe the settings of Killarney, Bullybunion, Lahinch, and Royal County Down would exhaust superlatives. The breathtaking backdrops of mountains, the cliffs and beaches of the seaside golf holes, and the massive plantings of yellow gorse stress the point that nature is the real golf course architect. But the flat boring greens at Royal County

Down, the hidden water at Killarney, and the blind pot bunkers in the landing areas at Portmarnock could have used some design assistance.

It can be frustrating when you make a smooth swing, have good contact with the ball, watch it travel toward your target, and then end up with your next shot coming out of a 6 ft. deep sand bunker with a vertical face. The consoling comment, "that's a pity," from your