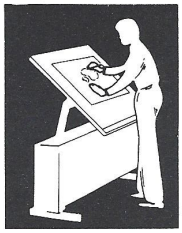


WATER: STRATEGY, FUNCTION AND BEAUTY

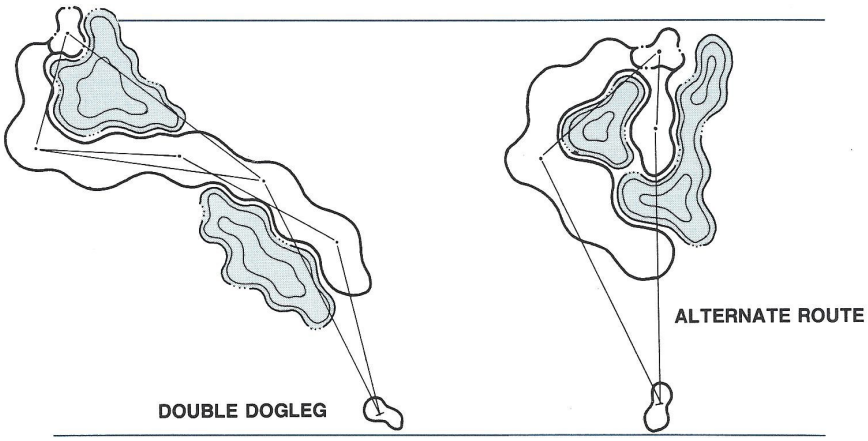
By Bob Lohmann and Jim Rodgers

A golf course consists of many elements that create settings of great beauty. Features such as rolling terrain, sand, trees, and mounds can provide breathtaking scenes and challenging golf holes. However, there is no view as scenic or intimidating to a golfer as a pond tucked up close to a green, or a lake that must be cleared on the drive.

Water has always been the most powerful feature in the design of golf courses. One of the best known examples of a water hazard is the infamous No. 17 at the Tournament Players Club in Sawgrass. Despite measuring only 132 yards from the back tees, the isolated green in the middle of a large lake intimidates even the pros. No doubt, this hole would look spectacular on any calendar, but it is just too demanding for a large number of golfers. The only conservative way to play this hole is to putt the ball across the earthen bridge leading to the green.

Another famous water hole is the 16th at Cypress Point. It offers a spectacular view of the ocean and demands a great tee shot to reach the green. However, the difference between these two holes is that No. 16 offers a safer route of play to the left of the green. The golfer may not make par, but he can play the hole with some dignity.

During the initial stages of laying out a golf course, it is important to determine where water would be best located on the site. When a coastline is available, it is desirable to route as many golf holes along it as possible. Because the most dramatic holes will be located here, it is preferable to use the coast on both the front and back nines. An excellent example of this is the Pebble Beach Golf Links on the Monterey Peninsula. Here, the golfer is led to the ocean on two separate occasions. Holes No. 7 — 10 run along the rocky coast; then the golfer heads inland before returning to the ocean on No. 17 and 18. This kind of routing creates balance throughout his round. Where no coastline is available, water should be located in lowlands and flat areas where drainage might become a problem.



When using water as a design feature, it is important to consider the average golfer's perception of water. To him, a pond will appear three times the size it really is. He can try to put it out of his mind and play his normal shot, but more often than not, he will send his ball to a watery grave. The fact that it will cost him strokes is bad enough, but it also represents money out of his pocket in terms of lost balls.

Often water serves only to terrify the average golfer and to offer no deterrent to the low handicapper. It is best not to position water right in front of a tee. This leads the duffer to top his drive into the water and cause him even more frustration than he already has. Whenever possible, ponds should be placed laterally to the golf hole, near the ideal position to approach the green. The pro then has the option to flirt with disaster in order to set up an easier second shot. More importantly, it gives the average golfer the option to play safely away from the hazard. He may require an extra shot to get to the green, but he can keep his ball dry.

A good example of lateral placement is the cut-off hole. With good distance and great accuracy, the golfer can shave distance off the hole and require a shorter iron to the green. However, he may elect the more conservative route leading to an easy bogie. This strategic positioning of water makes not only a challenging golf hole, but also a fair one.

Another situation where strategic water placement makes a good golf hole is on a double dogleg Par 5. Here, the golfer has the option to approach the hole in three different ways.

1. He can go for broke and maybe reach the green in two.
2. He can play conservatively, trying to position his ball for a Par 5.
3. He can play well away from the water and take bogie.

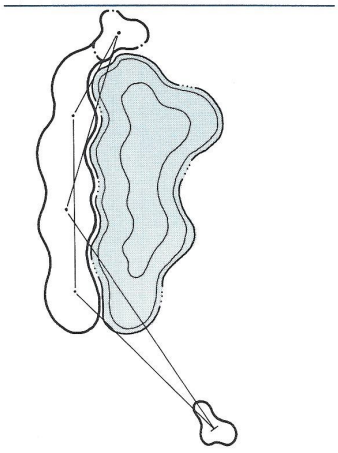
Once again, playing the hole requires thought and proves challenging to all levels of golfers.

The most intriguing use of strategic water placement is an alternate route golf hole. Here, the golfer must make a definite decision as to how he wants to play the hole. If he successfully drives his ball into the landing area surrounded by water, he has a much easier second shot and a good chance to make birdie. Yet, the option to play safe always remains.

A Par 3 makes an excellent hole to use water. The contoured green can follow the water's edge on one side

and allow for a variety of pin placements, ranging from relatively easy to very difficult. If an extra degree of beauty is desired, the water's edge can be defined by a retaining wall or rocks.

Sharp doglegs that offer no deterrent to going for the green often slow down play as golfers must wait for the group ahead to reach the green, and then perhaps spend more time looking for their balls somewhere in the rough. To prevent this, one might be tempted to plant a large number of trees. But, it will take 20 years for them to develop into a suitable deterrent, and golfers will still spend time looking for their balls. One solution is the construction of a pond at the corner of the dogleg which can provide an immediate hazard. If balls are hit into the water, golfers know it right away and can continue to play, which will alleviate slow play.



CUT OFF HOLE

In addition to the aesthetic benefit, ponds must sometimes be excavated to solve drainage problems. Because land values are steadily increasing, golf courses are often constructed in low flat areas not suitable for any other purpose. As a result, greens become flooded and fairways never dry out properly. This problem can be solved by digging a pond and using some of the excavated soil to build up the fairways. This method, coupled with the installation of draintile in key locations, can alleviate the problem.

One primary use for a water hazard on a golf course is to have it serve as the source of an irrigation system. When constructing an irrigation pond, it is important that it be of adequate size and depth so it does not become an eyesore. Irrigation ponds that do not have sufficient square footage can have a significant drop in water level during peak irrigation times. As a result, an unsightly edge that takes away from its beauty is produced. Also, a pond should be constructed at least eight feet deep to prevent sunlight from reaching the bottom, and causing weed growth.

A water hazard placed near an access road also becomes an excellent calling card to the passer-by. The picturesque setting can first capture his eye, then make him realize that a golf course with water can pose a formidable challenge.

In summary, when introducing water to a golf course, it is necessary to locate it where the site dictates. Always make sure the water becomes a strategic element in the design of the course and not a monster ready to devour the intimidated golfer. In addition, a pond should be properly constructed so there are no detractions from its potential beauty. These principles will lead to water that provides a challenge to the golfer as well as a splendid view that he will remember long after playing the course.

Editor's Note: A native of Illinois, Jim Rodgers received a Bachelor of Environmental Design from Miami University in Ohio in 1985. For the past year, he has worked on the staff of Lohmann Golf Designs, Inc., actively involved in designing, building, and remodeling golf courses.

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