

Local Rules for Water Hazards

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Golf balls have a perverse way of seeking out water hazards. Some water hazards have an equally perverse way of not lending themselves to application of the Rules of Golf in a fair or reasonable manner.

For example :

A ball came to rest in a water hazard immediately behind a putting green. On the far side of the hazard was a boundary line. Where should the player drop a ball in order to observe Rule 17 (2a) ?



Blank & Stoller

Isaac B. Grainger

Another ball drowned itself in a lake paralleling the line of play. The lake was a quarter of a mile wide. Should the player drop a ball so as to keep the last point at which the ball crossed the hazard margin between himself and the hole?-even if he could hit a quarter-mile shot across the lake ?

Local rules are necessary to take care of such situations. A case recently came to the Rules of Golf Committee which embodies some of the most troublesome points connected with special procedure for water hazards. It is re-printed below in the hope that it will help club committees prevent unnecessary tangles and in the further hope that local authorities will realize the necessity of careful survey of such situations.

The Questions

No. 48-46. R.17(2); LR

We have a meandering barranca (small creek, usually dry in summer and wet in winter) which parallels several fairways and practically encircles several greens. The barranca is played as a hazard.

On a number of shots the barranca is parallel to the line of play and it is customary to lift for a penalty of one stroke, dropping the ball opposite the point where it first came

to rest in the hazard, on either side of the barranca. We take it a local rule is necessary to cover this situation.

Our principal question, however, has to do with shots to several greens which, if long, may go over the green into the hazard. I have drawn and enclose herewith sketches of holes Nos. 3, 16 and 18, where this most often occurs. For example, at No. 3, if a shot crosses the green and rolls into the hazard, we would like to be sure that under Rule 17(2) the proper procedure is to drop on the far side of the hazard in order to comply with Rule 17(2) (a), keeping the spot at which the ball crossed the other margin of the hazard between the player and the hole. To do this requires dropping on the margin of No. 4 green. In the case of a shot over No. 16 green, it may require dropping on the edge of No. 18 green, or possibly on the far side of No. 18.

It has been suggested that in these situations the ball should be dropped, not on the far side of the hazard, but on the near side, perhaps taking the ball back across the green so that it is not nearer the hole. It seems to the writer that this would not be in accordance with Rule 17(2) (a).

We, of course, understand that the player could play in accordance with 17(2) (b), but this ordinarily results in an extremely difficult shot.

Can you confirm to me the proper interpretation of the way to play a shot under Rule 17 (2) (a) ? If you can give us any suggestions as to a good local rule, we will be grateful.

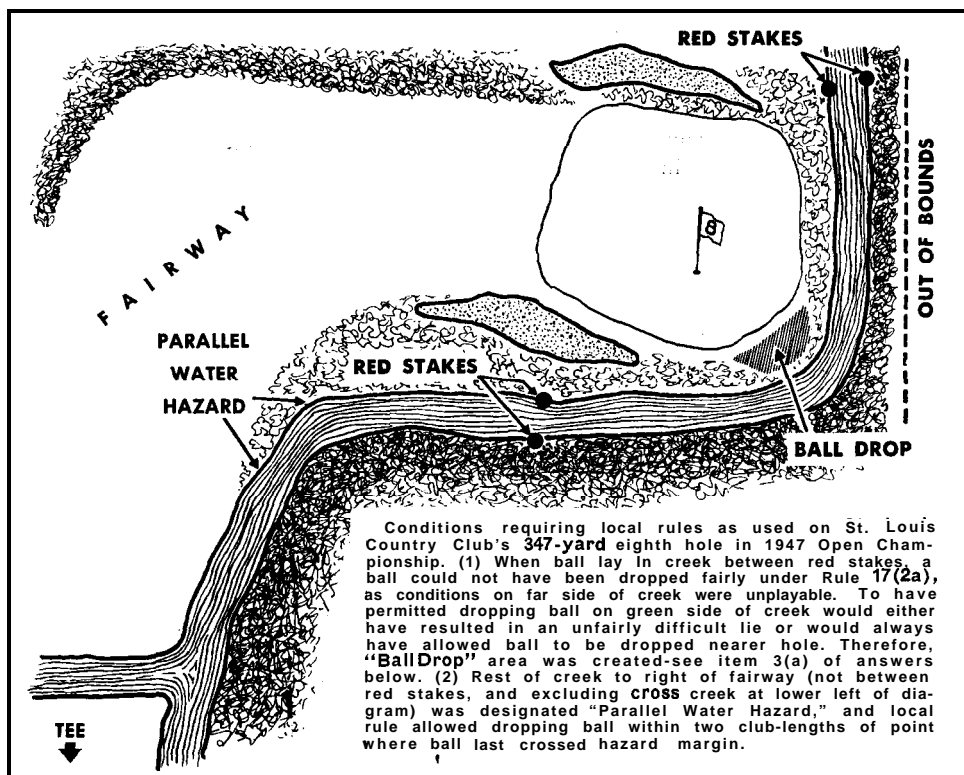
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The Answers

A fundamental principle of Rule 17(2a) is that the water hazard must be kept between the player and the hole. The last point at which the ball crossed the hazard margin determines the line on which a ball shall be dropped.

However, there are many instances where it would be more equitable to allow different procedure by local rules (see Recommendations for Local Rules for Water Hazards, 1 and 2, on page 58 of 1948 Rules of Golf booklet). Thus, we offer the following comments on your particular cases:

1. Distinctive means should be used to mark off sections of the water hazard for which special rules are made.



2. Your procedure regarding sections of the barranca which parallel the line of play is generally proper but a local rule is necessary. We suggest the following local rule:

Hole No.-: Ball in parts of water hazard marked by red stakes (or marked "Parallel Water Hazard")—a ball may be dropped within two club-lengths of either side of hazard opposite point where ball last crossed hazard margin, not nearer hole, under penalty of one stroke.

3. Regarding a ball in a water hazard behind or to the side of a putting green, you are correct in understanding that in order to observe Rule 17(2a), it would usually be necessary to drop a ball on the *far* side of the hazard; only such procedure would satisfy the fundamental principle of keeping the water hazard between the player and the hole. There is no limit on how far behind the hazard a ball may be dropped.

However, where conditions make such procedure inadvisable, the following possibilities are suggested:

(a) Establish a special area marked "ball drop," possibly on the near side of the hazard, so that balls might be dropped thereon under the following local rule:

Hole No.-: Ball in water hazard between red stakes near putting green—a ball may be dropped upon the area designated "Ball Drop," under penalty of one stroke.

In such a case, it is advisable for the "ball drop" to be in a location which minimizes the possibility of a ball being dropped nearer the hole than the spot where the original ball last crossed the hazard margin. It is fundamental that a ball may not be advanced except by striking it.

(b) As an alternative to the above, adopt a local rule as follows:

Hole No.-: Ball lying in the water hazard between red stakes may be treated as unplayable under Rule 8. (Rule 17(2a) for water hazards need not be observed.)

No Provisional Ball

A popular misconception exists that a provisional ball may be played when you think your ball may be in a water hazard. However, that is definitely prohibited by Rules 17(2), fifth paragraph, and 19(e).

The subject has been covered in decision 48-24, which was published in the June issue of the USGA JOURNAL, page 25. We suggest that you look it up.

It should be pointed out that the Rules for water hazards apply also to casual water in a hazard which is not a water hazard.