

Rancho: A Model Public Course

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To Southern Californians, especially to Southern Californians interested in the progress of public links golf, the opening of the Rancho Golf Course for the USGA Amateur Public Links Championship, July 9 and 11-16, represents milestones on a number of counts:

It marks the completion of a 13-year effort to obtain the old Rancho course property for a Los Angeles municipal course and park.

It marks the first large-scale expansion of Los Angeles municipal golf outside the Griffith Park area which has for more than 30 years been the site of the only Los Angeles-owned courses.

It brings the Public Links Championship to Southern California for the first time. Southern California has contributed four individual titleholders in the last nine Championships and five team winners in the last 12 competitions.

It presents a brand-new course, a far cry from the old Rancho which was an agony of hills and valleys and tiresome walking. It is designed for heavy play by players with all degrees of skill. When it is opened to play following the Public Links event, it is expected to have capacity play.

Complete Reconstruction

Rancho in the Twenties was an active course, but the federal government later took over the property for a tax lien of \$831,703. From 1936 until 1944 the City of Los Angeles negotiated for the property and finally obtained it on payment of \$200,000.

Course construction was started in 1946 and involved complete regrading of the area, with tremendous amounts of earth being moved to fill in some of the deeper canyons and to level steeper hills.

A pitch-and-putt course was opened last September, and a driving range will be available when the full course is

open. In addition, enough space was salvaged for a swimming pool, playground facilities, a community building, baseball and football fields, tennis courts and park picnic grounds.

Financed by Public Golf

The financing of the project, including the purchase from the federal government and the development of the golf course, has been handled by the Los Angeles Playground Department out of revenues obtained from operation of the city courses in Griffith Park. It was not necessary to use any city tax money for the project.

W. H. (Bill) Johnson, who has been manager of Los Angeles municipal golf since 1932, designed the new Rancho course with the aid of William P. Bell.

Their designing followed this theory: make it easy for the high handicap players and difficult, while being fair, for the low handicap golfers.

Yardage for the course is 6,283 from fronts of tees to fronts of greens, 6,643 from the medium markers and 7,003 yards from the extreme backs of tees to the backs of greens. Par will be 71, divided 35-36.

Rancho is in the west section of Los Angeles, not far from Santa Monica Beach. There is a fairly steady westerly breeze which can become quite rugged in late afternoons and will materially affect the play of many holes.

Taking into consideration that many of the players who will use the course in future years will be high handicappers who slice rather than hook, the course has been laid out so that most shots going to the right will remain in bounds.

To players seeing Rancho for the first time, it may appear a rather barren spot. But some 20,000 trees and shrubs have been planted, and within a few years they will make it a beauty spot.



General promotional committee for the USGA Amateur Public Links Championship. Standing: Dudley Shumway, H. O. Lester, George Dann, Fred Buck, Harold Dawson, W. T. Brown, Sam Davis, Bill Johnson, J. C. Cunningham, De Armond Schmitz, Carl Kirstein, Harry Winters, A. H. Mauer, Harry Von Beaver, Oliver Sleppey, Robert McCallum, Sam Friedman, Seated: George Hjelte, Bob Fahy, Charles Lacey, Ronald Pain, Maurie Luxford, Tony Pereira, Harry Packham.

Although the course has been completed for several months, no regular play has been allowed until the start of practice rounds for the Public Links Championship. A group of Southern California golfers tested Rancho late last spring to establish the handicap rating and to list the holes in order of difficulty for the score cards.

To illustrate what a fair golfing test it should provide, the group, ranging from professionals to a 16-handicapper, produced scores which were uniformly on the fringe of par after deducting their handicaps. Willie Hunter, professional at Riviera, and John Dawson, runner-up in the 1947 USGA Amateur, scored 70s. A 7-handicapper scored 77. A 12-handicapper scored 82. A 16 handicapper had 87.

Dawson has high praise for the course. "It is one of the fairest courses I have ever seen," he comments. "Tee shots will be at a premium, since there are so many hogback fairways. A well-placed drive is going to pay off. It will also help in the approach shots to the greens, which are unusually large and average about 8,000 square feet. There are large mounds near the greens, frequently taking in part of the greens, and they will make

the placing of the approach shot very important. A good putter and chipper will get by very well".

Rancho's fairways were seeded from June to August of last summer and were being mowed regularly by September. Southern California experienced its coldest winter, which retarded growth of the turf, but by this spring the fairways were almost fully grown.

The fairways may not compare in luxuriant growth with other Southland courses for some time, since most of these courses have Bermudagrass. This is a natural growth in this area and appears to invade all courses in time, providing a lush, thick carpet particularly in the warm summers when its growth is at a peak. Until the Bermuda invades the Rancho area, the fairways will consist only of the planted grasses, meadow fescue, alta fescue, red top, bluegrass and a small amount of bent.

A noteworthy fact about the course is its convenient arrangement from the gallery's point of view. At several places it will be possible for the gallery to cover a number of greens with a minimum of walking, and from a golf writer's point of view, that is just about the highest recommendation that can be made.