

Selecting a Site for a Golf Course

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One cannot study American golf courses long without realizing that too many of them are unfortunately located; their sites have not been well chosen with a view of securing fully satisfactory results. A golf course is a permanent or at least a long-time investment, and it is folly not to exercise the greatest care and discrimination to secure a really desirable site. Several factors are highly important in determining choice, namely:

1. Convenience and accessibility.
2. Topography.
3. Landscape beauty.
4. Sufficient area.
5. Soil resources.
6. Water supply.
7. Price.

Opinions will differ as to the relative importance of these seven factors, and indeed it is out of the question to attempt to decide by a score-card system. Every one of the factors is highly desirable. A single one of them is not rarely that on which decision is based. For example, in parts of the west an ample supply of water for irrigation is fundamental. On the other hand, one factor may practically be discarded, provided most of the others are sufficiently attractive. For instance, the National Links can scarcely be scored very high on the basis of convenience and accessibility, but its otherwise superb features have made it a Mecca for golfers. To locate a superlative site for a golf course requires much knowledge and often long search. More and more devotees of the game have acquired the habit of laying off a mental golf course on every piece of interesting topography they see. It would probably be a good investment for a shrewd man to buy a really desirable piece of land for a golf course and hold it to sell to the club that sooner or later would be sure to come along and want the land.

Of the seven factors mentioned, the one of soil resources is too often neglected. It is very difficult or very costly to grow good turf on very poor land. Perhaps one reason why such land has so commonly been purchased by golf clubs is due to a lower price; but in the end such land is very costly to any club. Building up poor land so that it will grow satisfactory turf is not a cheap process and usually costs far more than it would to buy good land in the first place. Now and then it happens that an area with only poor soil has highly desirable topographic features, which may be the deciding factor. In such a case the club should realize in advance that a great deal of money must be spent for soil improvement before it will ever secure good turf.

It will perhaps be conceded that the best of all soils for golfing purposes is a fine sandy loam. The least desirable are stiff clays at the one extreme and coarse sands or fine gravels at the other. The stiff clays puddle and bake; the coarse sands leach water and fertilizers too readily to maintain good turf except at great expense. Where an area of good sandy loam cannot be obtained, particular attention should be paid to the

soil resources that a given tract contains. If sand, clay, and humus materials are all available on the tract, soils of almost any desired type can be built up at moderate expense. If any one of these must be purchased or brought from a distance, the cost becomes high. Therefore if the land is, in general, sandy it is important to locate supplies of clay; if it is clayey, a sand quarry is a great asset. In either case a source of humus is essential. Sometimes this is present as deposits of peat. In any forested area leaf-mold may be obtained if enough land is purchased to maintain some of it in forest. It is unwise to purchase too small an area of land. One hundred and ten acres is about the minimum, and more is better, especially as land values usually increase about a country club and any land not needed can later be sold at advanced prices. Too many clubs have made the great mistake of laying off an 18-hole course on 70 or 80 acres of land. Where the land is poor this is doubly unfortunate, as there are no surplus soil resources to be drawn upon.

Regardless of the type of soil, good drainage should always characterize the tract chosen.

Every farmer knows that good land is worth more than its price as compared with poor land. In other words, it costs more to build up poor land than it does to buy good land. Many golf clubs were ignorant of this basic consideration and have learned it to their cost.

The character of the climate is also to be considered. Under very favorable climatic conditions good turf can be grown even on very poor soils. Witness the sand-dune courses of Great Britain. On the other hand, the more unfavorable the climatic conditions are, the more necessary is it to have good soil features. To an appreciable degree high quality of soil offsets unsatisfactory weather conditions.

The whole matter may be summed up briefly. Accessibility, landscape beauty, and water supply can be adjudged by most intelligent men. The golf architect should be asked to decide on the desirability of the area chosen for a golf course; or still better the choice of two or more prospective sites. In any case the soil resources should be carefully investigated, preferably by securing the advice of a competent expert. The cost of upkeep on poor soil is necessarily so much higher that such land should never be chosen unless the prospective resources of the club will stand the expense. Poor soil is a mighty poor investment for any club but a rich one.

Important

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Golfers are beginning to discuss golf architecture. This spells improvements in countless poor holes.

A woodland border to a golf course greatly increases the country atmosphere.

An artificial lake may easily become a mosquito nursery.