

Merion Golf Club

ARDMORE, PENNSYLVANIA



11

378 Yards • Par 4

*... a brook to babble
about*

The Merion Golf Club, that practically perfect example of American golf architecture, is about the only course that could rightfully offer two holes for anyone's Best 18. Merion's first hole began this dream course. Now the 11th, the historic Baffling Brook, the last truly competitive hole Bobby Jones ever played, follows as appropriately as the white sand follows a well-played explosion from Merion's bunkers.

Any course has its memorable occasions. The club may consist of nothing more than nine sand greens under a railroad trestle, but its members will recall every detail of the day young Joe Zilch finished 3-2-1 to set the course record, or the time Mrs. Hattie Sausage lost twenty-seven balls on the ditch hole. But Merion's memories are as classic as the course itself. It requires hardly more than a handshake for a member at Merion to inform you that this is the club where Bobby Jones completed the Grand Slam in 1930 by winning the U.S. Amateur while a special Marine detachment protected him from the crowd of 18,000. Or tell you that it was at Merion twenty years later that the world's most unknown unknown, Lee Mackey, shot a record 64 and followed it with a thorny 81 while Ben Hogan, recovered from his near-fatal automobile accident, was winning the U.S. Open in a three-way play-off, signaling one of the great comebacks in sport. If the Merion guest pauses long enough, he is likely to be taken out to the 18th fairway and shown the very spot where Hogan hit that one-iron, a long, piercing one-iron which

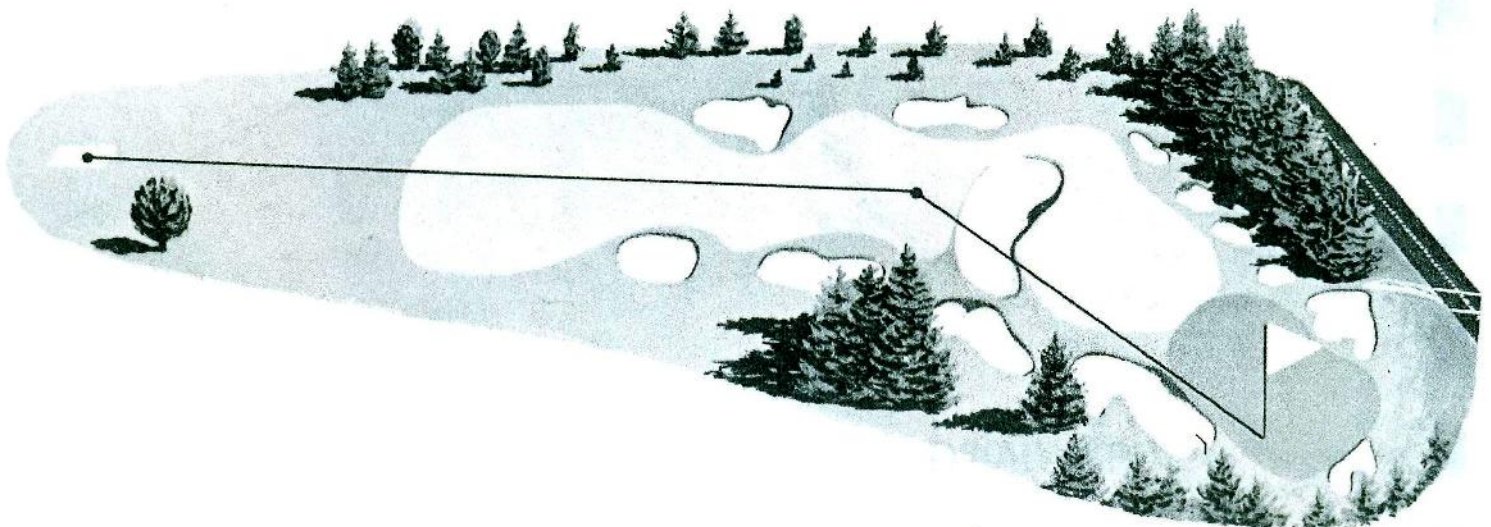
THE BEST 18 GOLF HOLES IN AMERICA

carried the green and got him a 4, enabling him to tie George Fazio and Lloyd Mangrum. And then he might well be led out to the 11th hole to see where Bobby Jones closed out poor Eugene Homans in the Amateur final to win the Grand Slam. Yes, memories are everywhere on this course, especially at the Baffling Brook.

The 11th first earned fame not for its difficulty or scenery, but, because of Jones, simply for its existence. It was only by the purest coincidence that Jones defeated Homans 8 and 7, and thus ended his agonizing pursuit of his Slam on a hole of such dramatic proportions. And for a few years the Baffling Brook was known only as the hole where Bobby, at the age of twenty-eight, retired from big-time competitive golf.

But its reputation grew during the U.S. Open of 1934, when it began to be as famous as a heavyweight fighter with a string of knockouts. The 11th was where Gene Sarazen arrived with a one-stroke lead in the final round, attempted to play safe with a two-iron off the tee, and hooked it wildly. He ended up with a triple-bogey 7, a disaster that cost him the title, for he went on to lose by only one stroke. It was also on the 11th that Bobby Cruickshank, the second-round leader, took a 6, losing a margin that might have made him uncatchable, and where something even more traumatic happened to him on the third round. Still in contention, the tiny Scot hit an eight-iron approach that looked as certain to land in the Baffling Brook as a pebble thrown from the bank. But just as Cruickshank was preparing to bend his club over his knee in disgust, the ball struck a rock beneath the surface and bounced high out of the brook and onto the green. Cruickshank was so elated he tossed the club in the air, tipped his cap, and said, "Thank you, Lord."

The early traps are more scenic than troublesome, as the drive should clear the hill and reach the lower level in front of the brook. But after that, the trouble is real — water, rocks, trees, sand and memories of Sarazen's 7.



Thereupon, the club came down and struck him on the head. Cruickshank did not recover from the shock of the shot — or perhaps the blow on the head — just as Sarazen did not survive his experience at the 11th, for Olin Dutra, playing with a queasy stomach, staggered home the champion with a 293.

The 11th further distinguished itself in the 1950 Open when Mason Rudolph, who was then but sixteen and the youngest player in the field, took a horrendous 12 there. He had the good humor to note that he had scored two touchdowns, but had missed the extra points.

Why all this trouble on a par-4 of only 378 yards? It seems impossible, and that is part of the explanation. You don't respect the hole, and you end up paying for your disrespect. You begin by thinking you have adequate room for your drive. But less than 100 yards down the fairway the terrain drops abruptly to a lower level, and this level, which is not visible from the tee, abounds with bunkers and trees. The green is far back in a shaded setting of oak, beech and gum trees, and is embraced front, right and back by Baffling Brook. There is almost no fairway between the area where a long drive might end up and the green itself — only a broad, rocky creek bed with water rippling through the middle of it. The longer the golfer studies his club selection for a high, biting pitch that must carry the creek, the stones and the wall in front of the green, the wider and deeper the brook becomes.

The average hitter can use a driver from the tee safely enough — if he keeps it straight — but the stronger man may wish to go with a three-wood, for many a well-hit drive has gone too far and wound up in the water or rocks.

From the far left corner of the fairway the entrance to the green looks pastoral, but only because Baffling Brook is hidden in the foreground.

