

THE ALPS HOLE AT THE NATIONAL GOLF LINKS

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SIX or seven years ago when the National Golf Links was first conceived, all the leading golfers of Great Britain were asked to name the best holes in the world. They were almost unanimous in choosing the Alps at Prestwick as the best two-shot hole, just as most of them selected the Eden hole at St. Andrews as the best short hole. And this is curious, because the second shot at the Alps is blind from every point of view. Not only is the putting green invisible, but the very difficult cross bunker in front of the green is equally hidden from view. Perhaps that is why the hole is so fascinating. When the player hits his second shot across the summit of the saddle back hill called the Alps he is completely in doubt about the result. His ball may be on the green close to the hole, or it may have fallen just short of the green into a serious hazard, or it may have run over the green into thick bent leaving a difficult down-hill approach. The margin between the three results is so small that the

player is frequently pleasantly or unpleasantly disappointed when he comes to the top of the hill and surveys the result beneath him. The green lies in a hollow with the bunker in front and a high bank behind. If the ball carries far enough to get over the



The echelon bunker to be carried from the tee

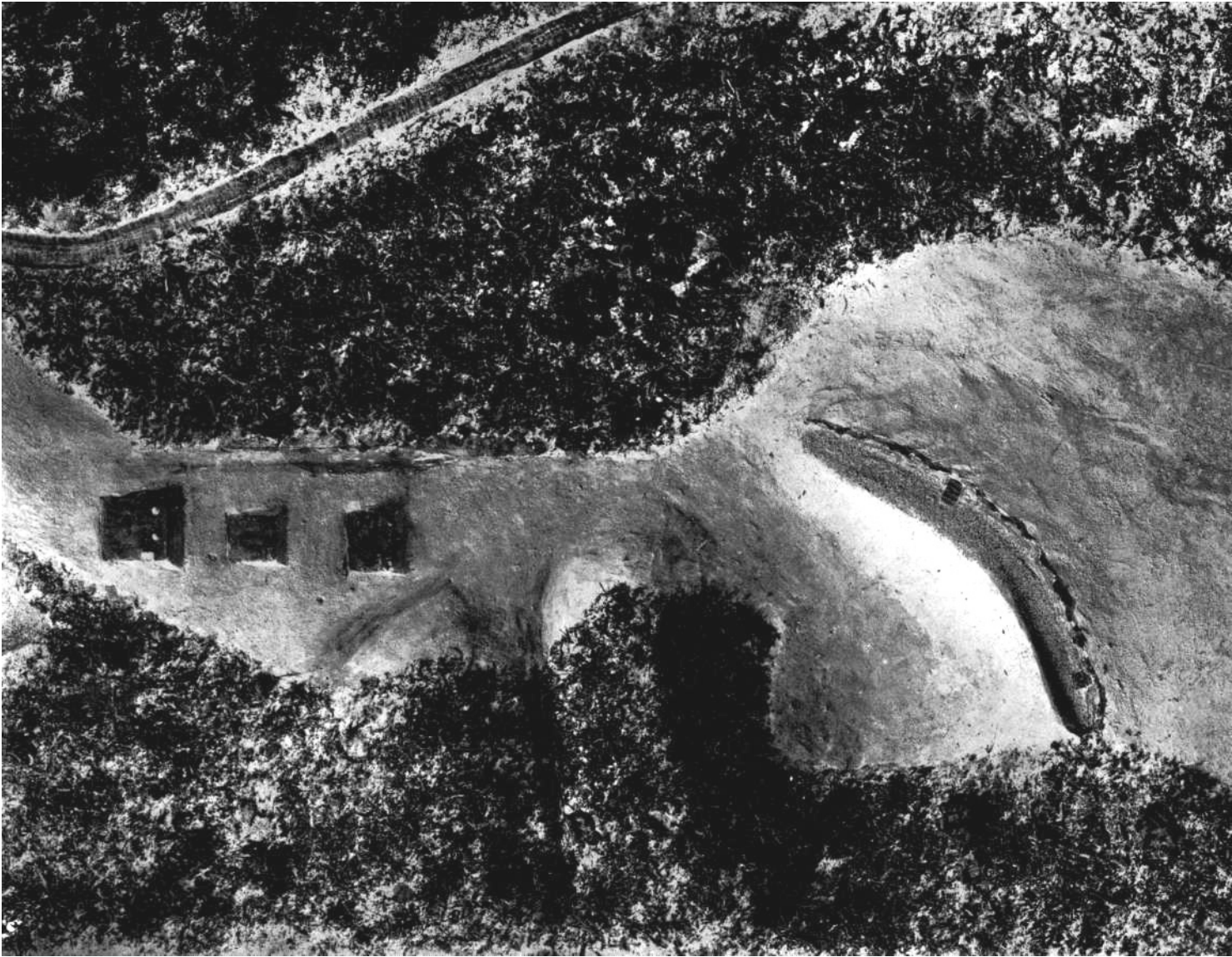
bunker by only a foot it gets a running fall and may go right past the hole into the bent beyond. Therefore the difference between being in the bunker short of the green or in the bent beyond the green is often the difference of two or three feet in the carry. And so the hole is so blind that it is calculated to produce the acme of uncertainty and anxiety in the heart of the player. The popularity of the Alps is a proof that not all blind

holes are bad; also that if you must have a blind hole it should provide as much uncertainty as possible. But there is also another reason why the second shot at the Alps is such a good one, and that is because to make sure of getting on to the green and staying there the player must make a high shot with a long



THE ALPS GREEN FROM THE RIGHT OF THE LINE OF PLAY

Note similar view of the Alps green on the Prestwick Links to be found on page 37



Tee

23 yards

47 yards

130 yards

190 yards

carry and very little run which is perhaps the most golfer-like stroke in the game. If he can make this stroke he can afford to carry well over the bunker, even past the flag, and still stay on the green within easy putting distance of the hole.

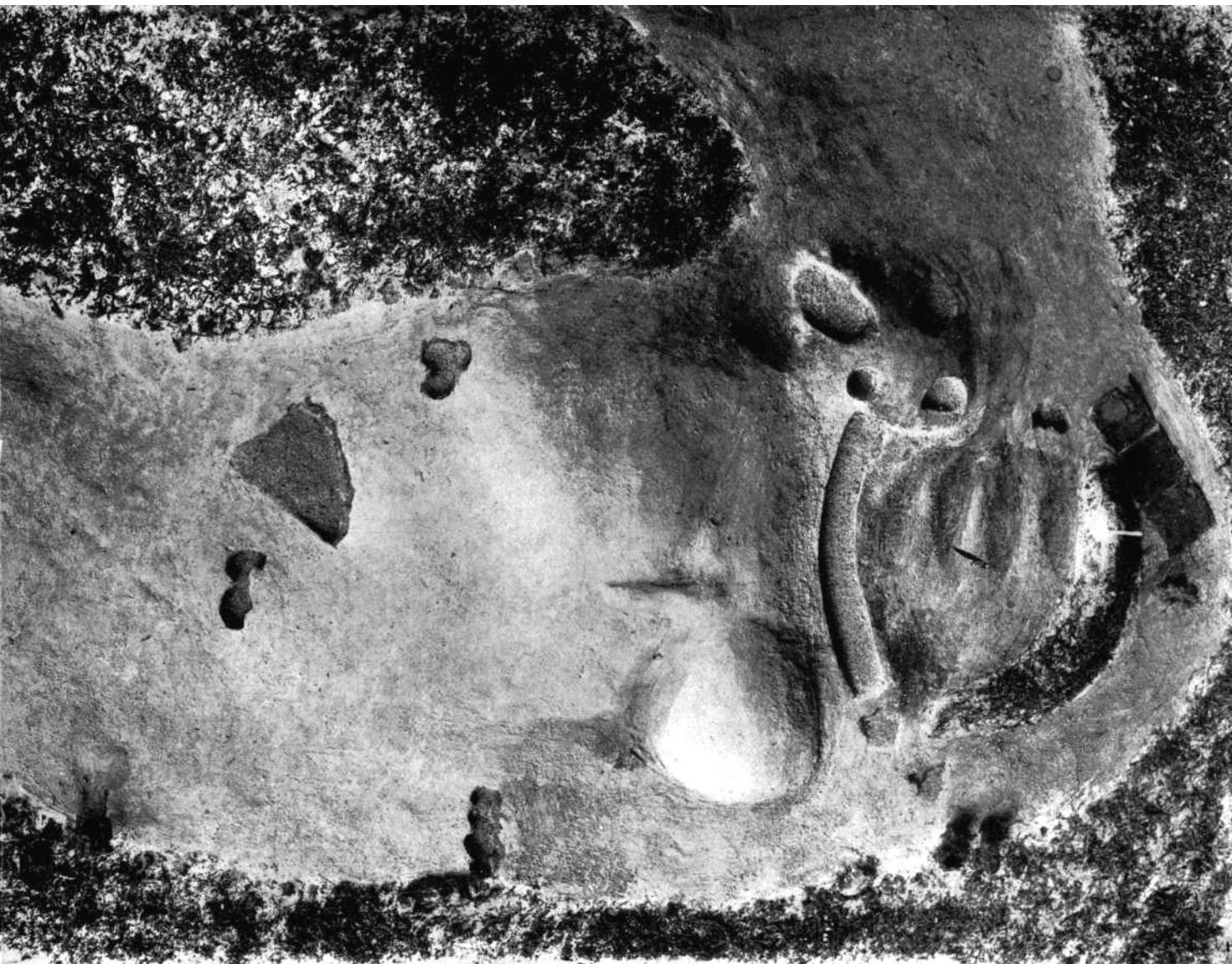
The Alps at Prestwick is about 380 yards at its extreme length, and therefore is a far better hole for the "gutty" ball than for the rubber-cored. In the old days it was a real achievement to carry the Alps in two shots; now the second shot is often a mashie pitch. And at Prestwick the hole cannot be lengthened because the green of the sixteenth hole is right behind the tee. In this respect the Alps at the National has an advantage because there is plenty of room for extension. From the back tee the distance is actually 413 yards. Moreover, the putting green at the National is on a higher level than the fair green in front of the tee which makes the second shot longer. Also the hill itself which represents the Alps is higher than the Prestwick hill, so that the second shot

is altogether more formidable.

Another difference is the bunkering of the tee-shot. At Prestwick there is a long diagonal bunker, really an extension of the famous Cardinal, in front of the tee. The carry increases in distance from left to right. At the National there is a similar bunker, but the carry is generally a good deal longer. And the principle of the shot is different. At Prestwick the best line to play is a little to the left of the direct line to the hole. The reason for this is the existence of a steep grass mound right in the center of the course about 190 yards from the tee. This mound is sure to interfere



THE LONG TEE OF
In the foreground with the echelon bunker



377 yards

Green 413 yards



THE ALPS HOLE
to be carried in the middle distance

with the second shot if the tee-shot is played straight on the flag; consequently the best line is a little to the left where there is a narrow neck between the mound and a large bunker called Purgatory. The tee-shot is interesting because it must be very straight through the neck if the second shot is to be made easy. But since the best direction is to the left there is no object in taking the long carry off the tee; in fact the carry off the tee becomes almost negligible. At the National the conditions are almost opposite. A long tee-shot played directly on the flag or anywhere to the left of the flag leaves the ball at the foot

of the large hill called the Alps, and the second shot is then extremely difficult; for the ball must be raised abruptly and must still have a very long flight. The best line is to the right where the hill slopes down to the level and where the ball will get a longer roll and the second shot is much easier. But to get to the right the long carry must be taken off the tee, and when the tee is back the extreme carry is nearly 190 yards. Therefore although the Prestwick tee-shot has to be placed rather more exactly, the National tee-shot is more spectacular. And at the National the second shot is more difficult on account of the extra length and the higher position of the green. In other words the third hole at the National is an improved Alps, and as a test of golf it is beyond reproach. It is impossible to reach the green in two unless both the tee-shot and the second are real big golfing strokes, hit in the middle of the club, and that can be said of very few holes with a maximum distance of only 413 yards.