

CHAPTER 9

THE OLD COURSE

During interviews for this book many long-time members said they would love to see photos of the original Old Ranch course. We could find no overviews of the original course but we were able to reconstruct a course map from old aerial photos which you can see on the two pages following.

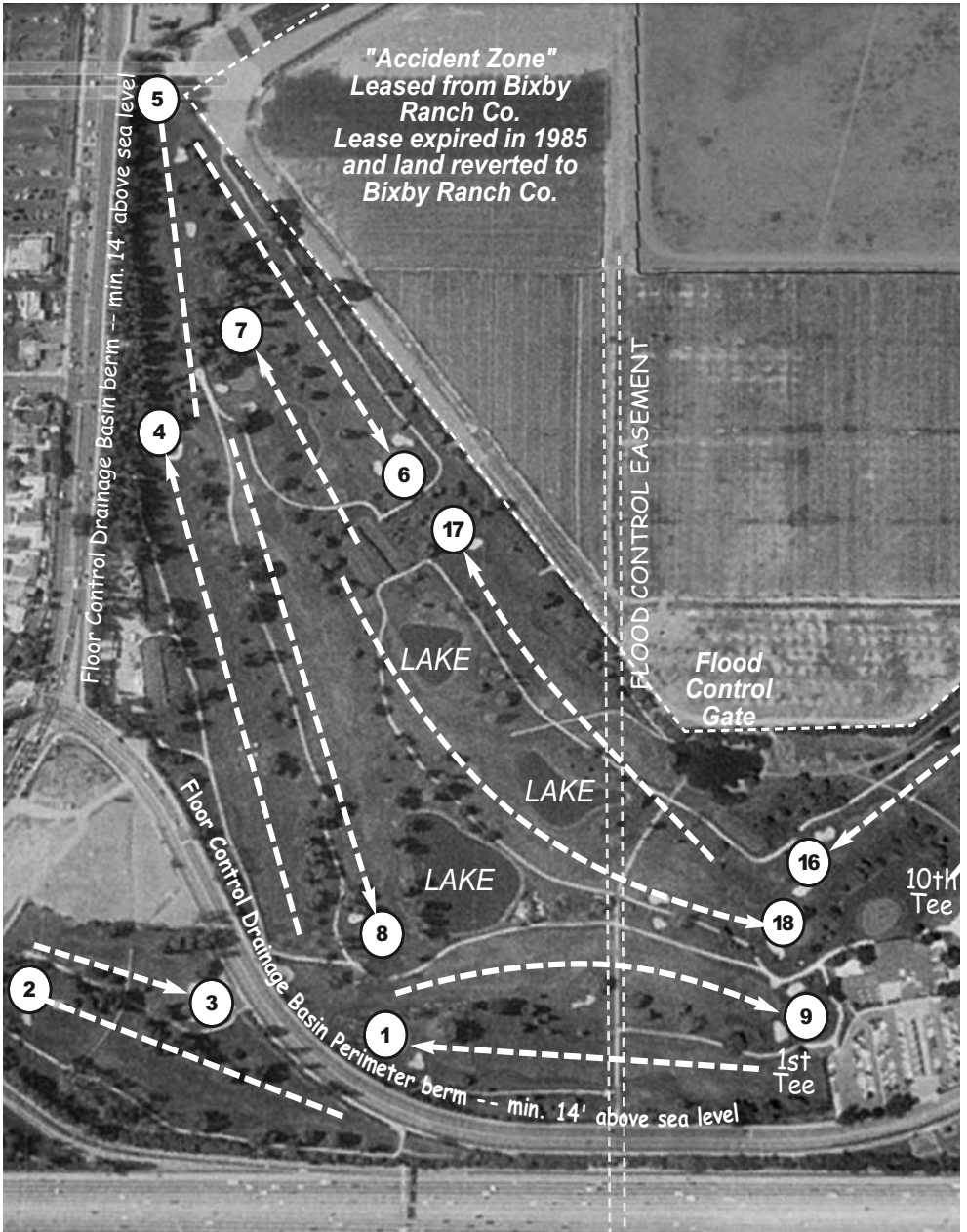
And fortunately, long time member Dave Scott took ground-level photos of each hole before the course was torn down for renovation in mid-1999. Each set usually contains a shot from the tee, and another approaching the green. Some have a third photo from behind the green.

So on the following pages we present Dave Scott's photos along with some commentary on each hole by the man who probably knew that course best -- head pro Bob Silver.

Silver came to Old Ranch in 1981 to be Bob Lovejoy's assistant pro. When Lovejoy left Old Ranch in 1985 to become the Head Pro at Big Canyon in Newport Beach, Silver assumed the top job of the Old Ranch golf operation, He held that job until he turned it over to his own top assistant, John Hall, shortly after the new course re-opened. .

When Old Rancho underwent its big renovation in the late 1990s, Silver was also quite involved in the design of the new course, working closely with architect Ted Robinson during the lengthy design process to resolve some issues on the original holes and the driving range. .

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY



During interviews many members said they would love to see photos of the original Old Ranch course. We could find no overviews of the original course but we were able to reconstruct a course map from old aerial photos.

And fortunately, long time member Dave Scott took ground-level photos of

THE OLD COURSE



each hole before the course was torn down for renovation in 1999. So on the following pages we present those photos with some commentary by the man who probably knew that course best -- Head Pro Bob Silver who was Old Ranch's Head Pro from 1985 to 2004.

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY

HOLE 1

330 Yards

Par 4



First tee was located where the divider fence is now between the driving range tee line and practice chipping green. This was one of the easiest holes on the golf course, except that it was the FIRST HOLE. Like most of the course, it played much easier in mornings than afternoons due to prevailing winds.

There was NO yardage markers other than tall Cypress trees which were planted at 150 yards from each green, throughout the 18 holes.

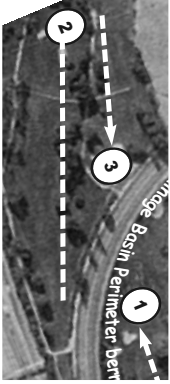
The green was located roughly where the middle of Public Range tee line is now. Tall Eucalyptus trees surrounded the green, which affected wind conditions.

THE OLD COURSE

HOLE 2

359 Yards

Par 4



The 2nd hole was one of the best on the course. But to reach it, you first had to navigate the very narrow tunnel that went under Lampson Ave. Golf carts would get banged up driving though.

Once on the tee, a good first shot was a must due to very narrow landing areas; left center was perfect; a dead right tee shot was a problem, with usually no good shot at the green.



The back tee markers were in a very tight area, next to a chain link fence. Just beyond that (to the left on bottom picture) the cars were moving full speed on the 405 freeway. Lots of Eucalyptus trees lined both sides of the fairway, but some balls would still hook onto the 405.

In the afternoon, you could not have much of a conversation, as the freeway noise was too loud. You waited until you were on the green or third tee to continue a conversation. Eucalyptus trees knocked the noise down once on green.

A large tree to the right of green that came into play on shots to green. The green had a lot of subtle breaks, but hole position on right side was toughest.

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY

HOLE 3

150 Yards

Par 3



Top pic is from tee, facing Lampson. Behind the green to the left was the tunnel to go back under Lampson Avenue to the fourth tee box.

Correct club selection was a MUST on this hole. The bunkers made the tee shots distance important, with not much room over the green which was more elevated from the fairway than the picture shows.

This was one of the better-designed bunkers on the course. Ted Robinson told me that not all the bunkers on the course were his design, but the third hole greenside bunkers were his. Many cars were hit on Lampson from shots going over the green. People would think they were shot at, if they didn't see ball hit them. The police department started to just transfer calls direct to me. Whoopee..



THE OLD COURSE

HOLE 4

512 Yards

Par 5



Basically, the current second hole (par 4) is the old #4 (par5) laid out. Thus, it was a fairly easy par 5 except for a big Eucalyptus on right side of fairway about 75 yards out from green, which affected shots towards green. Tall Eucalyptus trees lined the left side.

The green had a dangerous pin placement on the right middle. Putts could be real fast, mostly due to slope of green which was steep-steep.

It seemed like more shots would be over the green than short, probably due to green's contour.

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY

HOLE 5

299 Yards

Par 4

The 5th hole was a short par 4, with a very tight (narrow) fairway.

The bottom picture shows a big Pine tree to the right, which caused some problems if you were behind it. There used to be big wide tree roughly behind that pictured pine that hung over half of fairway. That tree blew down during one of the big storms of the s. The tree was named after a past member that I think had planted there? Blum would probably know the name.

The green was very small in size, and greenside sand bunker would get a lot of activity. You had to hit a straight shot off tee, so many members used their irons.

The green is basically where a row of restaurant (Islands, etc.) are currently located now along the boulevard.



THE OLD COURSE

HOLE 6

362 Yards

Par 4



The 6th hole tee area was located roughly where the Target store is now. To the left was the sod farm which was on property leased from the air base. .

This hole required a straight tee shot. Tall Eucalyptus trees lined the fairway from the tee to about 150 yards out. After that the fairway opened up.

Prevailing winds would push a lot of tee shots to the right side of the fairway. If your ball went off the fairway you were often in tree trouble.



OLD RANCH AT FIFTY

HOLE 7

184 Yards

Par 3



The 7th hole tee was on an elevated area it shared with the #18 tee. It was divided by a planter of Oleanders (see photo on top of next page).

From the back tees, it played over 200 yards, so most used a long iron or wood type club. There was a lake to the left front side of green. It seems like missed tee shots were usually over the green, leaving a tough pitch/chip shot.

This was not an easy par 3, so getting par was always good.

THE OLD COURSE

HOLE 8

521 Yards

Par 5



The # 8 hole was a fairly simple par 5. The tee shot was a simple straight grip it and rip it right down the middle. The problems were on your shot to the green due to the tall Eucalyptus trees surrounding the green and the lake to the left of the green (pictured).

Shots hit left would either have tree problems or if your shot missed the trees, it was often in the lake.



OLD RANCH AT FIFTY



More photos showing the eucalyptus trees surrounding the 8th green. And the lake to the left side of the hole. Both of these hazards were also problematic for the golfers on the 18th hole which was immediately to the left.



THE OLD COURSE

HOLE 9

380 Yards

Par 4



The par 4 #9 hole, had some unique challenges. First, the tee area was very close to the 4th tee and 1st green so a player often had to wait to hit tee shots on #9 and #4. Plus, the hole played much longer in afternoon than mornings.

A shallow concrete flood control ditch was located about 150 yards from green and was often hit on tee shots.

There was also not much room between the back of the green and the walkway to the golf shop and 1st tee. Balls from #9 frequently hit the golf shop building and glass windows. Fortunately, the trees around the shop stopped many balls from breaking those windows overlooking the green. The cars in the parking lot were sometimes hit with over-hit second shots.

Many felt that the hole played difficult because it was viewed by so many either going to 1st tee or in the golf shop which was very close to the green.

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY

HOLE 10

347 Yards

Par 4



The Old #10 is similar to the current #10 except for the green complex which became much more difficult due to Ted's redesign contours. The back tee was squeezed between the bagroom/cart storage area and a lake circling the practice putting green.

Often you had to hit your tee shot while carts and players were coming from #9 green, people were practicing on the putting green, carts being washed, people getting clubs out of bagroom, noise from clubhouse balcony, and there was the lake positioned in front of tee. I used the tee to start Silver Cup Derby, which added to start suspense.

Tee shots left or right of the fairway was problematic due to the trees and a very small green surface which was a tough "up and down." (two strokes)

THE OLD COURSE

HOLE 11

126 Yards

Par 3



Old #11 was also very similar area as the current course except the driving range behind green is now a lake.

Tee shots could be 2 to 3 club differences depending on wind conditions. The sand bunkers saw a lot of activity even though they were not positioned in front of green.

Before the driving range back fence height was extended part of playing hole quickly in afternoons was avoiding range balls flying over fence and hitting green.

I lobbied the Board for the funds and thanks to Tom Mahoney, chairman of board at time, we were able to access a Bixby slush fund and get the fence raised an additional 40 feet, which made a difference with the play of the hole and safety.

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY

HOLE 12

364 Yards

Par 4



#12 is roughly the same today except for green redesign. Bixby also bought a number of full grown trees to line the right side of the tee area to the drainage ditch. This directed tee shots away from Lampson where many balls had hit cars or landed in homes.

Otherwise, the hole plays similar today, although the length has been increased a little, the green contours are different, and you can no longer hit tee shots left to play it safe because the current ground cover is gnarly.

When I would go out with Ted Robinson on old course from time to time, he would always point out sand bunkers that were not his. Apparently, during construction Bixby workers would add a bunker here and there. It was amazing after all the years that Ted would remember where he put bunkers and where he did not. He would say “that bunker doesn’t make sense.” The bunker on left side of #12 was one of those.

One day with Wadsworth people, we spent a half hour going over the bunker position on the right side on new course. Ted wanted it done correctly this time.



THE OLD COURSE

HOLE 13

353 Yards

Par 4



Like #12, the new par 4 #13 is basically the same as old 13. It's a short hole requiring a straight tee shot. To the right found trees and a drainage ditch, which was a tough shot even after taking relief. However, unlike the new version, the green was fairly flat,

One Saturday morning during the Lovejoy era, I opened up and was alone working the counter. The first group coming in complained that there is a big hole in the middle of #13 green. I figured someone took a divot out on the green. Then a second group came in and said it was a big hole. I decided I have to check it out. Got the bagroom worker to watch the counter for a minute. I went out and in the middle of the green was a hole dug about 4 feet x 4 feet, about 2 feet deep!

It turned out that a disgruntled grounds crew employee had quit that day and wanted to leave his mark.

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY

HOLE 14

503 Yards

Par 5



The old hole played similar to current #14 except there was no water in front of the green, which made the hole much easier than today.

It required good tee shot, which other than afternoon winds, was the only tough part of hole. If you hit decent shots from then on that is,

THE OLD COURSE

HOLE 15

160 Yards

Par 3



#15 was a good par 3 from any tee. Prevailing cross winds often played havoc. Tee shots to the right could go out of bounds along the Navy base fence.

The lake in front of the green usually directed shots long and over the green, making for a tough up-and-down. Poa grass caused all old course greens to have some wiggle to the roll (making the course two to three strokes harder) but the putts seemed to wiggle a lot more on this green, especially short putts late in day.

The front trees created a goal post affect. Hit one of those trees on tee shot, your ball was usually in the lake.



OLD RANCH AT FIFTY

HOLE 16

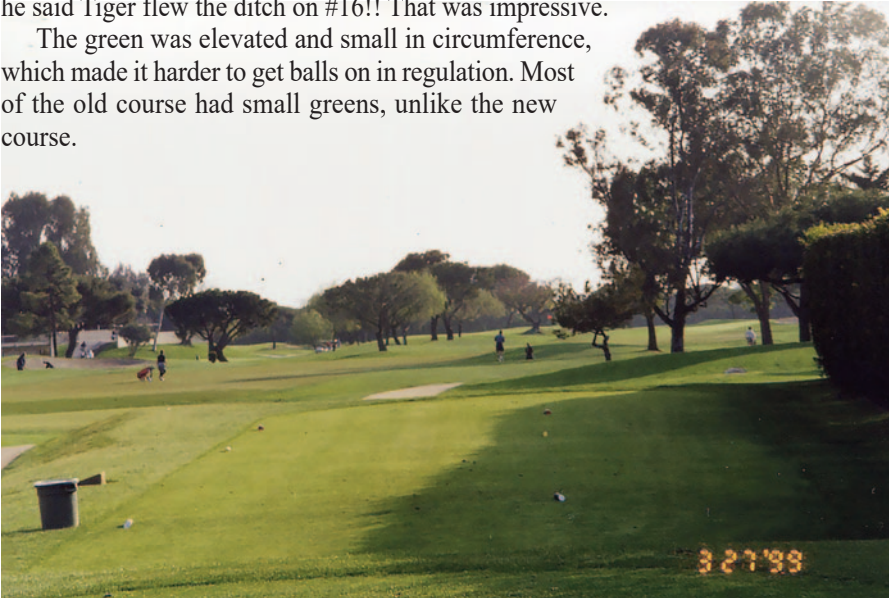
352 Yards

Par 4

#16 was directly into wind, so the hole played very differently in the afternoon than morning -- a two-to-three club difference.

The tee box was very close to #15 green. It was a slight dog-leg right, but tee shots pushed to the right would often go out of bounds over the Navy Base fence. There were two drainage ditches on the hole. One ran across the fairway about 290 yards from the back tee. Few players reached the ditch, especially in afternoon. But one afternoon Rudy Duran brought Tiger Woods, then a high school teenager, out to play and came into shop afterwards to thank us for allowing them to play. Shaking his head, he said Tiger flew the ditch on #16!! That was impressive.

The green was elevated and small in circumference, which made it harder to get balls on in regulation. Most of the old course had small greens, unlike the new course.



THE OLD COURSE

HOLE 17

380 Yards

Par 4



The #17 tee was elevated to the same height as the #16 green, which meant the fairway was much lower.

Tee shots pushed right would either be out of bounds onto the sod farm (on the Air Base) or a golfer would have to deal with a ditch situation similar to #16.

The Best tee shots favored the left side, which gave a better angle to the green, and avoided the sand bunker protecting a middle to right pin placement. That sand bunker in front of the green was definitely one of Ted's original designs, and had a real purpose to it.

This flood control easement ran through the fairway which was thus very low and flooded a lot during storms, staying muddy for a long time.



OLD RANCH AT FIFTY

HOLE 18

504 Yards

Par 5



THE OLD COURSE



I felt old #18 was an excellent finishing hole because it required a good tee shot pushed right to set up your second shot.

Three lakes came into play on this hole. Tee shots pushed right could find the lake next to the #8 green which covered a lot of #18 right side fairway. Plus, the Eucalyptus trees surrounding the #8 green seemed to catch a lot of right tee shots.

Tee shots going left usually found the large bending left lake that was very close to the fairway. If a tee shot found the fairway, next shot just needed to be in fairway in front of green because green was slightly elevated, guarded by two sand bunkers, which usually did not come in play.

Behind the green was the lake surrounding the practice putting green.

Also, the putting green on #18 was probably the flattest surface of any green on the course—still small in size, but a very flat contour

OLD RANCH AT FIFTY



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Larry Strawther has been writing professionally for over forty years. His television writing and producing credits include *Happy Days*, *Laverne & Shirley*, *Night Court* and the cult classic *Most Extreme Elimination Challenge*. He also was the head writer on *Jeopardy!* in the late 1970's.

He has also written for movies (*Without a Clue*, *The Mighty Ducks*), radio (various projects with Rick Dees including *The Rick Dees Weekly Top 40*), and was a sportswriter for a daily newspaper in the Bay Area.

In recent years he has indulged his lifelong history in local history with two local histories: *A Brief History of Los Alamitos and Rossmoor* and *Seal Beach: A Brief History*. Both were published by the History Press and some of what he wrote is actually true. The same holds true for this book.

Larry lives in Rossmoor with his wife, Nancy. They have three children: Megan, Michael and Mallory. None of them laugh at Larry's jokes.