

# The vertical hazard

Shannon Fisher explains how a recent thunderstorm illustrated that vertical hazards can be integral to a golf hole's strategy

In June 2016, a severe thunderstorm rolled through Central Virginia, bringing with it high winds and many downed trees. One tree that was lost in the storm was on Kinloch Golf Club's fifteenth hole, and integral to the short par four's strategy.

Golf course architect Lester George, who designed the course at Kinloch, said: "The original tree was so domineering that we flagged it during clearing as a select tree to keep. It was in the perfect spot to offer a risk/reward decision for the tee shot, and the fairway was designed around it."

The stricken tree forced players to consider not just the length of tee shots, but also the height. "The tree forced players to make a decision about whether to play one way or another depending on which tee you were playing, which way the wind was blowing, and your desire to risk playing between two trees straight to the green with your tee shot," said George. "With the tree gone, there were no consequences to most shots from the tee."

Kinloch explored many options to find a hazard that could replace the lost tree,



"A small sapling or modest size tree would take 30 years to grow to the size needed," said Jonathan Ireland, Club Manager at Kinloch. "We needed a 60-foot tree to go in that spot." The team consulted tree relocation specialist Erik Hess, to discuss the viability of transplanting a large tree on site at Kinloch.

of the tree," said George. "We turned it so the longest limbs closed down the left route like the old tree did, and golfers taking the conventional route do so on the side with higher, shorter limbs."

After orienting the tree accordingly, they began the process of filling the cavity around the roots. They also filled in the hole on the twelfth hole, regraded it, and sodded the area. Hess back-filled the hole up to six inches below ground. This is where the Kinloch maintenance team took over, adding topsoil and replacing the turf. The tension wires helping the tree stay vertical will remain in place for the next 18 months to allow the root structure to fully rebuild and cement the tree in its new location.

"The fifteenth hole at Kinloch has been called one of the best short par-four holes in the country," says Ireland. "Replacing the large tree enabled us to maintain the strategic options for which Kinloch is so well known." **GCA**



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including bunkers, water hazards, mowing and grading line changes, and turf changes involving tiers of rough. None of the ground options were a good fit because of the configuration of the hole: an uphill first shot and downhill second. Shorter hazards either couldn't be seen from the tee or would not create enough of a reward for taking a risk from the tee. The tree was part of a specific strategy, and the only way to restore the strategy was a vertical hazard. It had to be a tree – and a big one!

The team did research into purchasing a suitable tree from a nursery, but it quickly became apparent that a 20-30 foot tall tree was the maximum height that could be transported and imported from a nursery.

Hess said he had never lost an onsite transplant and suggested that they find a specimen tree on the property that was planted in similar soil conditions.

"Jonathan and I spent days going around the course looking at trees. We finally decided upon a tree that was sitting out in the open on the perimeter of the twelfth hole," said George. "It was very similar in size and shape to the tree that was lost on the fifteenth and was not integral to the design of the twelfth."

Before moving the tree, George identified exactly where he wanted the trunk to be located. "We had to protect the aggressive risk route with the longer limbs, and the hole needed more coverage on the left side