

Avoid that Trap

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In the world of golf, it goes by many names: bunker, sand trap or even known with the expression 'landing on the beach'. This last idiom does not mean a lovely view of the ocean while lounging in the sunshine. In golf, spending time on the beach has a very different meaning altogether.

Let's start at the beginning with the definition of a hazard. A hazard is an area of a golf course which provides a difficult obstacle, which may be of two types: there are water hazards such as lakes and rivers, man-made or natural; and other artificial hazards such as bunkers. Special rules apply to playing balls that fall in a hazard. For example, a player may not touch the ground with his club before playing a ball, not even for a practice swing. A golf ball in any hazard may be played as it lies without penalty. If it cannot be played from the hazard, the ball may be hit from another location, generally with a penalty of one stroke added to your score card. The Rules of Golf govern exactly from where the ball may be played outside a hazard.

Bunkers (or sand traps) are shallow pits filled with sand and generally incorporate a raised lip or barrier, from which the ball is more difficult to play than from grass.

How did they come to be in golf? We do know that the earliest courses were on linksland. Linksland is the strip of land that links land to sea. First, there's the beach, then a strip of sand and grass, then more fertile farmland. The middle strip, or linksland, wasn't much use to anybody so it was used for grazing cattle and sheep. That's where the game developed, on the linksland. Over time, these areas hollowed out to form the bunkers, or as we know them today, sand traps.

Whether we like it or not these hazards are integral parts of the game. In coastal, windswept terrains, bunkers 'erupt' naturally from the ground and play an important role in making these golf courses ideal for the game.

Ever since golf moved inland in the late 1800's we have strived to emulate the allure and visual attraction of the natural bunker. We do this to simulate the drama and excitement that comes with playing golf in natural surroundings.

With this in mind, there are three types of bunkers used in golf course architecture all of which are designed to be impediments to the golfer's progress toward the green. First, we have 'Fairway bunkers' which are designed primarily to gather up wayward tee shots on par 4 and par 5 holes; they are located to the sides of the fairway or even in the middle of the fairway. There are also 'Greenside bunkers' which are designed to collect wayward approach shots on long holes and tee shots on par 3 holes; they are located near and around the green and 'Waste bunkers' which are natural sandy areas, usually very large and often found on links courses.

The name alone would probably scare most avid golfers, 'The Devil's Asshole Bunker' in Pine Valley GC may not be the deepest bunker out there at 10 feet deep but it's the fact that it's so small that you can barely get a backswing that makes it so tough. The 'DA' as it is known is probably the toughest bunker in the world.

The 'Road Hole Bunker' remains the most famous golf bunker in the world. It is an institution in Scotland and is protected with more fervor than even northern seals or the redwood trees. No political statement intended.

The bunker on a golf course is an area that has been hollowed out usually by design. The area is then generally filled with sand and the shape of the bunker varies as well. There are no guidelines set forth in the rule book and therefore bunker designs are limited only by the designer's imagination. This has allowed all kinds of shapes from perfect circles to much more intricate designs now very common at golf courses around the world.

Admittedly, the natural bunker as designed by nature itself remains the most impressive. They come in many different sizes, from under 80 square meters to some that are huge and might stretch all the way from the teeing ground to the putting green. But more typical are bunkers between 30 to 90 square meters.

The depth of bunkers also varies widely, from almost level with the fairway or green to 3 or 5 meters below the surface of the surrounding area.

Surprisingly many amateur golfers will not even attempt to shoot out of a bunker because they simply don't know how to do it but with the proper technique and stance, bunkers can become less intimidating. The trick is to throw the sand along with the ball, let it be carried along for the ride using a sand wedge. The sand wedge is designed in such a way that with its open face will send the ball up when you hit the sand correctly.

Because bunkers are classified as hazards under the rules, there are certain actions that are prohibited in bunkers despite being allowed elsewhere on the course. As an example, your club must not touch the sand before you hit the ball as mentioned earlier. That's grounding the club which is prohibited in a sand trap.

Golfers must also anticipate the hardness or softness of the sand in the bunker, whether it is wet or dried hard and how will the wedge push the sand propelling the ball out of the hazard, even under ideal conditions.

Practice in golf will indeed make you achieve incredible drives, approach shots and putting. With time you will improve your game and find success. We occasionally forget that playing out of the bunker is very much part of the game. Perhaps spending time practicing your game from a 'Sand Trap' will help you avoid it altogether.

One of the very best players to exhibit 'short game and bunker trick shots' is Phil Mickelson. If you have not had the opportunity to check out his bunker shots, make it a point to go online. I can only imagine the time he has spent practicing them. It's so worth it!

ANOTHER SMILE MOMENT: Golf is a game, invented by God to punish those who retire early.

To book your next golf lesson, contact Lisa today via e-mail at lisalgolpro@gmail.com or by telephone at 506-232-0728 or visit her website at www.PrivateGolfPro.ca.

Lisa Elle is the PrivateGolfPro who teaches in the greater Moncton area and southeast NB. Her unique golf service assists all levels of players with their golf swing. Her golf articles have been published in print and on websites across Canada. She is also the face of the charitable trust 'Lisa's Fund - a breath for Cystic Fibrosis'.