



Hilltop Course Design Review & Assessment Report

By: Ryan Van Der Veen of RVC

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Introduction

The club has recently expressed interest in obtaining professional advice on how to improve the course from a design perspective. I would like to thank the Committee and General Manager for the opportunity to be involved in this process and look forward to a continued relationship. RVC (Ryan Van Der Veen Consultants) has been involved in golf course design and construction since 1993, working in over 10 different countries and 5 continents throughout the world.

Mollymook Golf club Hilltop Course began in 1977 and was designed by Bill Andriske. In the last 36 years the game of golf has evolved just as the Hilltop course has. There are slow changes over time like simply growth of vegetation and turf that can alter the original intent or design of the course. There are many ways to improve a golf course from design to playability to turf grass conditioning and management to general aesthetics and the overall golf experience. The following report is primarily design driven and is simply based on initial impressions gathered from my visit on May 9th, 2013. I am listing suggestions for further discussion without knowing the full background, budgets, soil types, maintenance challenges, golfer feedback, etc. Before any improvements are made to the course I would recommend all these factors be taken into full consideration.

General Comments

- The original course layout makes good use of the property with little wasted space. Although, some of the very strong dog-leg holes have become worse with tree growth over the years and decreased the playability of the course. This is why very hard dog-leg holes are not designed often today. This type of hole leaves very little option for golfers of all skill levels and is not desirable. Also there are four par 3's and three of them are 162m long. This is poor diversity. A strong golf course will require you to use every club in your bag throughout your round.
- At 6225m and a Par 72 the course is not long. This is normally the distance for general membership but not for tournament golf of today. Most new golf courses cater to all levels of golf which increases membership and diversity. This is best achieved by having several tee locations ranging in overall distance from 4600m to 6500m on average. Mollymook only ranges from 5300 to 6200m so this limits choice for golfers of all levels. I'd recommend a full review of tee locations and a program to place additional tees where possible. The current tee surfaces need to be reviewed and most laser leveled. It's frustrating when a tee is sloped or undulating as golfers will search for a flat area to hit from and not utilize the entire tee box. This increases wear and tear and leaves added challenges on the maintenance staff.
- Greens appear to be the original push-up type greens and probably date back to 1977. The profile of the green is most likely native topsoil (without confirmation from the superintendent). This typically results in ongoing problems from poor drainage and soil quality. Greens being the most important aspect of the golf course are typically the first item to be reconstructed on old courses to keep up with today's standards and maintenance practices. The greens at Mollymook are of varying slopes which makes it difficult to be consistent with course set up. When you have a green that has a severe slope like the 13th, this will dictate the speeds of all greens on the golf course. After further investigation, some players from 20 years back have stated that when the greens are rolling in tournament

condition, there are a few greens at Mollymook that are simply unplayable. These will be mentioned below in the hole-by-hole review and I'd recommend that these are renovated to match other greens on the course allowing the course to be set up better for tournament and daily play. A strategic plan by the club to renovate all greens drainage, soils and surfaces is recommended.

- Bunkers at Mollymook appear to also be from the early era. Some seem to have poor drainage which does not help the sand quality and others have deteriorating faces that also wash out and contaminate the sand. The bunker shapes are very simple but not necessarily maintenance friendly after big rains. They lack character and the placement of most bunkers only pinch off the approach to the green. This placement does not lend much to strategy, diversity, playability for the high handicapper, and ease of maintenance by helping spread traffic on and off greens. When bunkers are placed on each side of the green it asks for most people to walk in and out of the front of the green. This highly important area gets worn due to heavy traffic and is the most visible as you play the hole. There are no fairway bunkers at Mollymook which is ok due to the tightness of the tree corridors. There are a few holes on the course that by adding a fairway bunker it would greatly improve the strategy, diversity, and aesthetics. Many bunkers also have bumps or mounds in front of them which are a result of poor maintenance over many years. This makes the bunker fit un-naturally to the surrounds. A strategic plan by the club to renovate all bunkers is recommended.
- Is there currently a tree management plan in place for the golf course? Most courses that are heavily wooded have a management plan which is implemented by the maintenance crew and when large items arise an arborist works with the local council to take proper action. In 36 years trees can grow a lot and usually encroach on the golf course. As they expire they can become a significant safety hazard. From an agronomic point of view, the turf needs sunlight to survive. Usually this requires thinning of trees on the Eastern sides to gain morning sunlight. There are also many issues with playability of trees hanging over fairways or in front of tees. This forces golfers to concentrate taking shots from a certain side of the tee box so the grass is quickly worn out. A tree pruning review would help this situation. Tree roots are also an issue in turf and primarily on cart paths. Again, a root pruning plan can be advised by an arborist to eliminate ongoing maintenance issues. Courses like Royal Canberra have a tree management plan that is strictly adhered to and helps benefit the overall health of the golf course while being located in an arboretum.
- The cart paths at Mollymook are very unsightly. This is mostly because of things like drainage, traffic management, location of paths, and responsibility of membership to adhere to traffic rules. Many cart paths run directly out in front of tees in the sight line which is usually avoided whenever possible. On some holes there are multiple paths which make no sense because they might be only a few meters from each other. If paths are reviewed on each hole and some relocated where needed, along with better traffic management, this could help improve the golf course. The path entrances and exits could use some extensive leveling and smoothing as they are very rough in a golf cart which adds wear and tear on the carts.

Hole-by-Hole Course Review

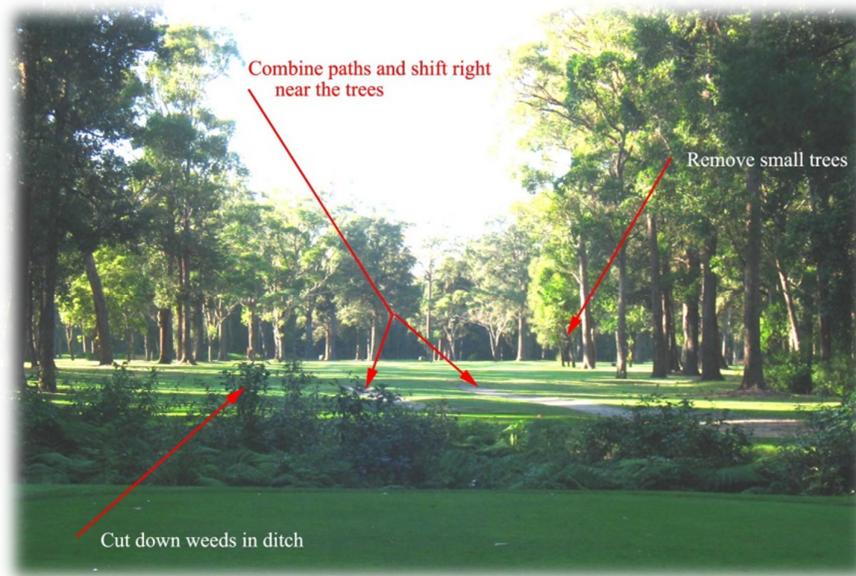
- The following is an individual hole review based on a day visit to the course. These comments are in addition to the general course comments above. The photos will help articulate the issues, and possible design concepts or solutions.

Hole 1 – Par 4 - 387m/337m

- The entrance and lead up to the path at the green is very rough and needs leveling and turf re-established.
- There is an old tree stump that is re-growing and should be removed near the left side of the green.

Hole 2 – Par 2 – 373m/327m

- There is an open ditch in front of the member's tee which has over grown vegetation that needs to be removed in order to see the fairway. See the photo below.
- Two cart paths exit coming off the tees and they run parallel and are only 3m apart from each other. There should only be one path located off to the right near the trees which is not so visibly impacting. See the photo below.
- There are a few small trees on the inside of the dogleg that should be removed to soften the corner and promote playability. See the photo below.



- On the front left of the green there is low area that is wet which in turn is worn and cannot recover quickly from traffic damage. The bunker left of the green also has a drainage issue. These areas could be drained and some traffic management or path location reviewed in the future.

Hole 3 – Par 4 - 365m/329m

- Due to the tree encroachment on the fairway, play only occurs on the right half of the tee. This tee could be shifted right and allow players to utilize the entire surface.
- The cart path could cross over and move to the right side of the forward tee and not be directly in the sight line of the hole from the back tee.
- A forward tee could be added on the right to increase the options of length for the hole.
- Again, there are small trees on the inside of the dogleg which could be removed to encourage the best line of play on the left.
- The mounding in the fairway on the right side is very un-natural looking and could be reshaped to better tie in to the fairway giving it a more right to left feel.
- The large trees on the right of the approach encroach on the 2nd shot to the green and make it very unplayable. The bunkers short of the green do not help allow run up shots for the higher handicapper and the slope of the approach kicks everything left. These are all issues that could be easily addressed with shifting of bunkers and reshaping the approach area. This will increase strategy and allow for more playability with the higher handicapper.

Hole 4 – Par 4 – 398m/366m

- After review of the yardages on this hole, a forward tee could easily be added for diversity.
- A fairway bunker out long and right could be added to help turn the hole right to left. This could be set up well out of reach for the shorter hitter and only come into play for the pros hitting 300m drives off the back tee.
- The front right greenside bunker sits several meters from the green edge and appears very disconnected from the green complex. Many bunkers on the course are way off the green edge which could be due to encroachment and shrinking of greens over a long period of time.

Hole 5 – Par 3 – 147m/121m

- While standing on the back tee, you can't really see the bunker on the left of the green and you pick up just a sliver of the right side bunker. Since the roll that is well short of the green blocks everything you lose dimension and a feel for distance on this hole. If the back tee was raised 1-1.5m then you would have a much better perspective. The middle tee could be separated and raised 500m and the forward tee could remain and extend forward bringing the length down to 100m.
- I would recommend creating a grass low on the left side of the green, more like a bailout area.
- I would make the right greenside bunker tuck a little more into the front right of the green and become smaller. This would allow plenty area for traffic flow behind the bunker on the right side of the green and increase the strategy of a right side pin placement.
- The right pin on the green seems to have a strong left to right cross slope. It should be no more than about 2% slope to allow a player to actually hold a ball on the green without rolling off in the right hollow.

Hole 6 – Par 5 – 467m/408m

- The back tee should shift right as far as possible and sit on the edge of the small drainage swale.
- All tees could shift right where possible and a forward tee could be added further forward and right of the current cart path. The path could then stay out right and not be in the sight line.
- The plants in the wetland are way over grown and need to be slashed. You cannot see the green or fairway after placing a perfect tee shot in the fairway. If poorer players hit their second shot within 5-10m of the wetland, they cannot lift the ball over the plants. It's enough of a penalty being a water hazard. Slashing about 2/3 of the plants might be just enough. See photos below.



- The carry over the wetland could be changed to a fairway cut to reward the carry and not slow the ball down more. These fairway lines should flow smoothly and not be highway straight.
- The green complex and layout does not really suit a short par 5 for longer hitters. For those good players attempting to reach the green in two, there is not enough depth over the bunker to even hold the ball on the green coming on from 180m or so. This green could be reshaped and bunkered to better suit the strategy of the hole.

Hole 7 – Par 4 – 352m/274m

- The tees need to be shifted as far right as possible opening up the best angle of play. Again there are 2 paths which need to be combined into one and moved as close as possible to the trees. A new forward tee can sit on the current path and not be so far out to the left.
- Another almost 90 degree dog leg in the fairway with trees encroaching heavily. This could be a spectacular short par 4. You could take about 25m off the overall length and pull the green closer to the great natural ditch. There could be a natural fitting bunker from the edge of the ditch to the front of the green. It is recommended to have 1 bridge and not 3, along with new cart paths that better direct traffic and minimizing players back tracking to the 8th tee. This can be discussed further and conceptual drawings could be provided in the future.

Hole 8 – Par 5 – 516m/412m

- This hole has very good setup and potential for added fairway bunkering to challenge the better players or longer hitters on the tee shot and 2nd shot.
- The green is an issue. The slope back to front is greater than the standard maximum 3% for pinable surfaces and makes it very unplayable when surfaces are firm and fast. The green could use resurfacing to fix this problem. If I could rebuild the green complex, it would fit in much more natural to the surrounds and tie in to the tree that is front left of the green. This would change it from feeling like an un-natural pushed up green that ties in to nothing around it.

Hole 9 – Par 3 – 162m/145m

- This par 3 needs more diversity in teeing distance. There is only 17m between the back and forward tees on the card. They should be at least down to 110m or less for the forward tee.
- There is an issue with safety and the proximity of the green to the clubhouse. When standing on the tee the player does not get the impression of how close the clubhouse is and the impact of a stray shot to the left because the trees screen it visibly. It is a good setting for a green and fortunately there is plenty space around the green. I would recommend shifting the entire green to the right and using the natural slope that is available. This could be a more dramatic and exciting finish to the front nine. This idea can be discussed further and conceptual drawings could be provided in the future.

Hole 10 – Par 4 – 358m/334m

- Left of the green there is an issue with traffic management and turf wear as seen below. There is a possibility of extending the cart path up the hill and stopping cart traffic around the green.



Hole 11 – Par 4 – 380m/276m

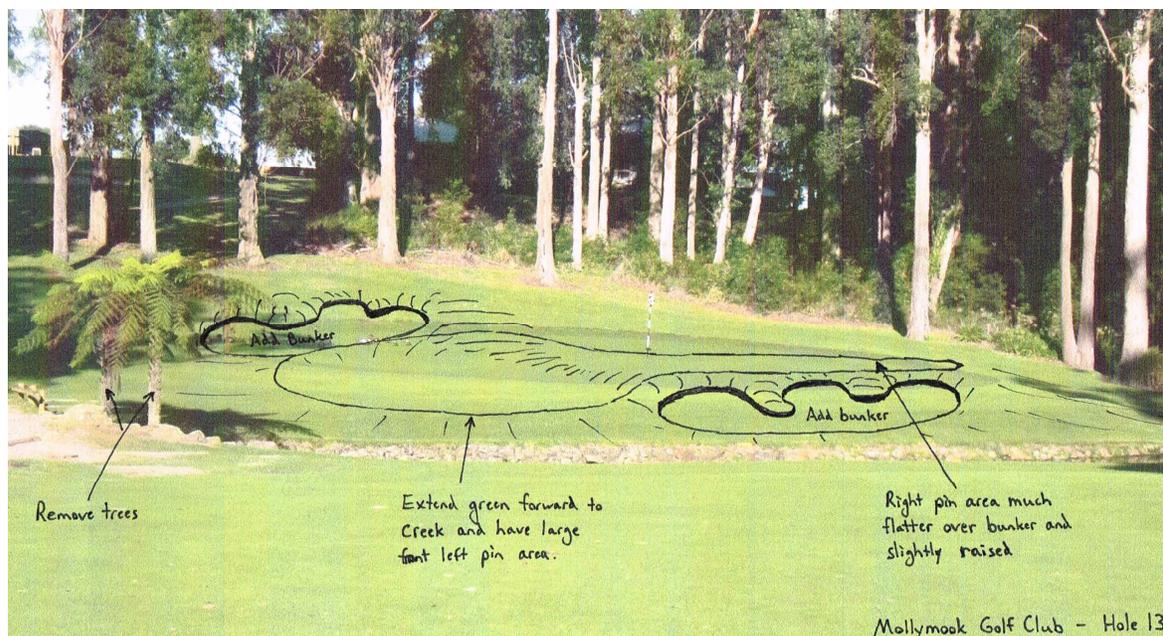
- The back tee across the water is under shade most of the day. It may be worthwhile changing the turf grass type in order to get proper coverage year round. A cool season shade tolerant grass is suggested.
- Remove the small bushy stump on the inside left corner of the dogleg that appears out of place with the surrounding vegetation.
- The green complex is small and out of character to the other greens on the course. A big issue is that the water hazard is not visible from the fairway so you don't even know that missing the green to the right would land you in the water. If the green was to be renovated, I would recommend raising it and moving it left. Place the left edge at or near the current cart path and place bunkers to take up the elevation and space between the water and the green. The maintenance path could become the actual path and tie back in to the path at 12 tees.

Hole 12 – Par 3 – 162m/116m

- This par 3 has the most potential of the four par 3's on the golf course. There is plenty of room to gain some yardage and build a new pro tee and the green sits well in a great natural setting. Bunkering and a new green with plenty pin options could make this easily the signature hole. The green currently has a fast slope from back to front that I would recommend fixing at the very minimum to make it more playable
- Remove the fern trees along the bank that block views and don't fit with the surrounding trees.

Hole 13 – Par 5 – 500m/427m

- The back tee is very wide and never really used so it could be minimized by keeping the left half of the tee. Review the other tees as well for space and alignment.
- Add a fairway bunker on the right hand side cut in below the top of the hill. This will be a carry bunker and only sit about 180m off the back tee.
- Fill in the old bunker (grass depression) on the right which is around 150m from the green.
- The green has the most severe slope from back to front of any green on the golf course. This green needs to be rebuilt in order to create a playable green surface that has several pin areas. The fern trees on the left near the green should be removed. See below for a concept sketch of the green complex.



Hole 14 – Par 4 – 359m/319m

- The swale and pipe to the right of the forward tee cannot handle the storm events which have washed out the path and a large area from the 14th tees through to the approach on hole 13. Drainage solutions need to be reviewed and discussed. It's probably best to create an open ditch and just have culvert crossings for the cart paths. This doesn't restrict the water flow and minimizes scouring and damage. While doing this it would be recommended then to reposition and construct new tees for the 14th and add a forward tee. The white tee should be expanded to take the majority of play. See damage created in the photo below:



- Remove the newly planted tree on the left side of the fairway which is about 220m from the back tee. This is a perfect place for a fairway bunker on the inside edge of the hole. It would become a carry bunker for the good player who wants to try and take on the inside corner.

- The green appears to have a strong right to left slope and should be reviewed. This green could be softened to the required minimum of 3% slope or less to make it more playable.

Hole 15 – Par 4 - 319m/300m

- I would recommend raising the back tee as much as possible to get a view of the green from the tee. There should be a forward tee added since the current difference between the forward and back tee is only 19m. This would add options for all skill levels of play.
- Trim up landscape on the right hand side of the path at the tees so you can drive a golf cart on the actual path without running in the landscape. This is now causing carts to drive off the path and continuously wearing out the surrounding turf.
- Over the fairway drop off in the direction of the bridge, the turf is now being cut at fairway height. This being a blind area on the tee shot makes it even more unplayable. I would recommend leaving this area in front of the water hole and bridge as rough cut. This will help slow balls down from rolling out of play or into the water.
- This is another hole that has a perfect green setting and could be a spectacular short par 4. There are a multitude of options available but if the green was lowered it would sit in the natural setting and not be so impacted by the houses behind it. Bunkers and landscape could be installed behind the green which would help take your eye of the houses. It would also be worth extending the pipe through to the bridge on the right side of the approach, removing the lone fern tree, and filling in the tiny water hole. This would increase playability on this blind hole and solve a few traffic issues.

Hole 16 – Par 4 – 366m/328m

- The tees are very small and get worn quickly. Reshaping the entire tee complex would benefit from better surfaces and more options for wear and tear. The tees could be lowered to minimize the walk up slope to the tee from the path. The path is also very steep and could be slippery when wet. If this is an ongoing safety issue, I would think about shifting the path to the right near the toilet and down a softer grade along the trees. This would open up plenty room for new larger tees as well.
- The greenside bunkers need to be rebuilt and reshaped. The bunker on the front left could be removed and I'd recommend decreasing the size of the bunker on the front right to allow the majority of traffic to enter and exit the right side of the green.
- There is a pretty strong cross slope on the front right of the green which leaves very little pin options that you would normally want to have directly over the bunker. The current front right pin is very unplayable and too steep under fast green speed conditions.

Hole 17 – Par 3 – 162m/108m

- While standing on the back tee and back half of the middle tee I noticed that you can't actually see the front edge of the green and the bunker on the front left because the landscape/hedge is over grown blocking the view. This is a great example how poorly planned landscaping can quickly ruin what could be a great par 3. It kills your first impression of the hole. I'd recommend removing the landscape and replacing with turf or a flowering ground cover. See the issue shown in the photo below:



- The turf on the green is in poor condition. Not know the soil profile of the green, I'd estimate that there are substantial issues with drainage, shade, soils, and player traffic which are all contribute to the condition. This green needs to be renovated and the bunker locations and traffic patterns should be reviewed.
- The vegetation in the creek in front of the green should be trimmed before it gets too high and is difficult to cut at a later date. It is also beginning to block views and line of play.

Hole 18 – Par 5 – 452m/380m

- The white tee is very small and should be expanded. There is plenty room in front to add on to this tee so it can take the wear and tear better from weekly play.
- The cart paths and walking paths in and around the white tee are a complete mismatch compared to other paths around the course. It is important to review the necessity of these paths and drain the area in question after the tee is reshaped.
- Tree limbs encroach heavily on the right side of the fairway making a second shot into this tiny green very unplayable. These need to be reviewed and trimmed back to get the original strategy of the hole back.
- An 18th hole should be an impressive and memorable finish to you round. This green complex and surrounds are lacking just that. The tie-ins around the green are not good and the bunkers lack character. A dramatic finishing hole could be constructed to tie into a new green on hole 9 that has shifted right as proposed above, making it a memorable and unique finish for both the front and back nine.

Conclusion

Mollymook Golf Club Hilltop Course has some great potential to be a top ranked golf course and sits on a piece of property that is full of great natural features and interest. It is important for the committee to develop a five year strategic plan for the golf courses future, and decide how they would like the course to be positioned in the current marketplace. Many golf courses in Australia have recently embarked on renovation projects to help them rebrand, increase memberships, update the strategy, and improve the quality of the course while adding long term value. RVC would be honored to assist when the need arises for a design consultants at Mollymook GC. We can also help provide construction and management on the smallest of projects like a single bunker rebuild, to large projects like an 18 hole green renovation. Having worked in the past with companies such as Troon Golf and Turnpoint is another key factor in the success of any future change implemented at Mollymook GC. Should you have any questions regarding the above design review and assessment report, please feel free to contact me at ryanvdv.golf@gmail.com. I look forward to the possibility of working with the club in the future and again thank you for this opportunity.

Best regards,

Ryan Van Der Veen - RVC

May 28, 2013