



The Golf Chronicles

The story of golf at Reading Country Club and in Berks County

Number 10 • June 29, 2015



The view from the valley shows the outcropping that appears to have been built to support a tee for the 6th hole.



Granddad's 4-wood and two Top Flights await a spring day. Note how close the Shelbourne Road guard rail is to the tee.

The Mystery of Number 6

The 6th hole at Reading Country Club is a treacherous par 3. The golfer is required to hit across Antietam Creek to an elevated green. The creek poses little threat; most players could throw the ball across. The shot measures about 160 yards from the blue tees, but plays a club longer because of the elevation change. A shot missed left will roll into a grass bunker well below green level. A shot missed way left will find a small forest of trees. A bogey four is an acceptable result from left.

Miss right and, with luck, you are in a small sand trap. Or your ball may land in a tangle of grass and rocks. Or it may cross the cart path and enter the realm of the unplayable and lost. Miss short, by even a foot, and the ball will roll down the hill into a grass bunker that was formerly a sand trap. Miss long and you are faced with a down-hill chip shot to a green sloping away. A tee shot that lands on the green is not always safe. A large mound on the left side marks the dividing line between the green's front and back tiers. Balls landing on the upslope have been observed rolling back to the front of the green and, in extreme cases, off the green and down the hill.

Alex Findlay, the golf courses; architect, describes the hole: No. 6, 160 yards – An iron shot over the stream and valley to the hill-top, large trees to right, deep trap in front and pits at each side of green. A well placed shot will reach the flag on the fly, a grand test of golf and a nice par 3.

The playing of the hole is no mystery at all. Hit a good shot. Stroke a good putt. Move on to number 7.

The tee on the hill. The mystery is what appears to be a long-abandoned tee on top of the ridge along Shelbourne Road, which runs parallel to the eastern edge of the golf course behind the 15th green, 16th tee, 6th tee and 5th green and fairway. The houses hugging the hill across the road give that side of the golf course a decidedly alpine look.

Leroy Oudinot has been around Reading Country Club since 1947 when he started caddying. Leroy became an accomplished player, winning the club championship in 1968. He never experienced the hill-top tee as a caddy or player, so it predates '47.

Alex Findlay's description fits the hole as played today. A hill-top tee would have played more like 200 yards. Aerial photos from the 1920s and 1930s shed little light on the tee location.

But still, there is something there and nature has a way of revealing secrets. In February 2015, nature's way was snow. The editor was tooling down Shelbourne one fine winter day when his gaze ventured slightly to the right. He did not take his eyes off the curvy road, at least for not more than a few nano-seconds. With this quick glance, he espied an area just on the other side of the guard rail. The snow cover provided just the proper contrast against the trees and briars that outline the flat surface.

Granddad's 4-wood. A few days later—February 24—he returned with a camera, a few golf balls and a persimmon-headed 4-wood. For those who came in late, persimmon is a wood that was used widely for golf clubs. Wooden headed woods fell out of favor in the 1980s with the development of the oxymoronically named metal woods. This particular club was owned by the editor's grandfather, so it seemed appropriate to take it on an adventure aimed at discovering the past. Granddad never played RCC, but that is hardly the point.



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Here is the view from across Shelbourne Road. The 6th green is on the hill at the top of the photo. According to Tom Morgan, Director of Golf at RCC, the residents of one of the houses across the road used this area to park their car until a new guard rail blocked access.



The cleft in the hill may be the location of the steps connecting the tee to the valley. The bridge across Antietam Creek is at the top of the photo.

Not natural. This flat surface does not have the look of a natural feature. When you move to the side and survey this area, you can see how the flat spot was fashioned by adding fill to extend the length of the tee. From the bottom of the hill, the bump is evident in winter. The absence of leaves on the trees and bushes provides an excellent view of the outcropping.

The abandoned tee aligns perfectly for a shot to the 6th green. The mystery remains: Who built the tee? When was it built? When was it last used? We might even ask, was this flat spot really a tee at all? Alas, no document of provenance has been found.

The second mystery is, if the tee was on the hill top, how did the golfers and their caddies ascend? While finding no old wooden or stone stairway, the editor did note a cleft in the slope that would have held steps. A steep climb, indeed, but once at the summit, the golfers would have been afforded a splendid view of the 5th, 6th, 16th and 15th holes. After striking, in Findlay's words, "A well placed shot [that] will reach the flag on the fly..." the climb down would have been much enjoyed.



This aerial photo is from 1924. The 6th green is inside the ellipse. The sand trap at the bottom of the hill is evident—but, alas, no more because it is now a grass bunker—but the tee is outside of the frame.