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OCEAN'S 13: Quivira's par-3 13th doesn't get nearly the attention the 5th and 6th do, but it's fair to say it would get plenty on any other course.

A Cabo Cliffhanger

Could Jack Nicklaus' Quivira be the most electrifying course you ever play?

BY TONY DEAR

EVEN DURING THE BOOM years of golf course construction, when faceless new facilities with formulaic names opened every week, Jack Nicklaus designs always attracted a lot of attention. After the economic bubble burst, however, and new course openings slowed to a trickle, news of an original, signature, mega-bucks Nicklaus project became disproportionately momentous.

Progress at Quivira Golf Club, located on the southern tip of the Baja Peninsula and Nicklaus's sixth project in the Los Cabos area, was therefore monitored closely—partly because there was little else for travel editors and course reviewers to write about, but also because images of the holes being built, specifically those on the cliffs overlooking the powerful Pacific Ocean surf, were nothing short of sensational.

Shortly before Quivira's October 1, 2014 opening, however, Hurricane Odile blasted over the peninsula with 140-mph winds that caused more than \$1 billion of damage. Thankfully, no one working on the course—or anywhere on the 1,850-acre Quivira community that houses two luxury Pueblo Bonito resorts and three private residential neighborhoods—was hurt, though the course itself did not survive fully intact.

Odile did its best to set the development back years, even destroy it entirely. But the best it could do was postpone the course's opening just a few weeks. The ribbon was finally cut on December 4th, by which time areas of vegetation lost to the wind had been replanted, bunker sand replaced, and the drainage infrastructure repaired.

"Odile did a lot of damage to the golf

course and our resort properties," says José Luis Mogollón, Chief Development Officer of Pueblo Bonito Oceanfront Resorts and Spas, which was founded in 1985 by Ernesto Coppel and owns four luxury resorts in Cabo San Lucas and two in Mazatlán. "We had hundreds of people working on removing the mess the hurricane left behind. Several tons of sand had been blown out of the bunkers and off the dunes, and scattered over the fairways and greens. It was a battle with time, because that much sand covering the grass would have had a very detrimental effect."

When Quivira did eventually open, the world got to see just how sensational those cliff holes were. The 5th was a short par 4 of just 310 yards from the back tee where the boldest (or craziest?) golfer might take a driver, aim out to sea, and take on the green set in the cliffs well below. The prudent approach was to position a hybrid or long iron on the fairway and follow it with a sand wedge that fell 50 or 60 feet to the now visible putting surface with the ocean beyond.

It was a breathtaking prospect. But quite honestly, the 5th was merely a taster, an alluring prelude to the time-stopping, heart-jumping, wow-inducing spectacle of the 180-yard par-3 6th hole where golfers would tread a chiseled path between the tee and green, set on a leveled terrace with cliffs rising to the right and plunging quickly to the water on the left.

Playing these two holes is incredibly exhilarating, but while you marvel at the view you also ask yourself how Nicklaus and his staff could possibly have built them. Senior



CLIFF DIVER: The short par-4 5th plunges towards the Pacific.

SQUEEZE PLAY: The green at the par-4 14th nestles in the dunes.



Design Associate Chris Cochran explains. “We built walls on the low side of the fifth fairway, the green and back tee, and another to hold up the tees at the sixth,” he says. “And we installed gabions (rock-filled metal cages) on the low side of the sixth green before any major earthworks began. As for machines, we really only needed two large excavators, a couple dozers and a few off-road trucks. Smaller tractors were used for the finish.”

The look and style of the course was dictated very much by what Nicklaus found there. “The entire site is sand with some rock outcroppings,” says Cochran. “Therefore it was a natural fit to continue with the sandy look throughout the property, and expose the rock when we found it.”

Nicklaus’ willingness to retain as many of the natural characteristics of the land as possible rather than dynamite the place to create an alien environment won him the job over Tom Fazio—the only other candidate.

“Nicklaus and Fazio raise real estate values better than anyone,” says Mogollón. “But we felt Nicklaus would be more disposed to using whatever the land offered. So he was our first choice.”

The obvious danger at a course like Quivira is that so much time, attention and money is allocated to so few holes (Nos 5, 6, and the equally enthralling par-3 13th) that the remainder of the course turns out mediocre at best, and that a golfer’s only lasting memories are forged at what the

marketers deem to be the “signature” holes. Nicklaus is well aware the aforementioned trio will always be front and center in people’s minds and editorial content. But he was careful not to make them the whole story.

“Actually, I think Quivira has an abundance of exciting holes,” he says. “I think of Pebble Beach, which is the course I’d choose if I only had one more round. If Pebble had 18 holes that played along the water, it would risk getting monotonous. When you have inland holes that work their way back to the ocean, you not only give the course variety but create a great sense of anticipation.”

The same could be said of Quivira, Nicklaus contends “There are some great inland holes that stand up on their own,” he adds. “They are full of strategy, playability, excitement, and great vistas which make golfers eager to return to the ocean.”

While Nicklaus won’t commit to naming a favorite hole, others are only too happy to offer their picks. “Besides the cliff holes, the 18th provides a really beautiful finish,” says Cochran. “And the right-angle dogleg par-5 10th, the par-5 12th which swoops down to the beach, and the downhill par-4 16th are also great fun to play.”

Director of Golf Antonio Reynante Vega, a native of Chihuahua but a graduate of the Professional Golfers Career College in Temecula, Calif., also mentions 18, saying it

is a strong closing hole as it plays directly into the prevailing onshore breeze. “The infinity-edge green is a wonderful place to conclude an amazing round,” he adds.

The golf course is an amenity for guests of the two magnificent Pueblo Bonito resorts at Quivira–Sunset Beach and the adult-only, all-inclusive Pacifica, which opened in 2005 and has been named among *Condé Nast Traveler’s* Best Places in the World to Stay four times since 2008.

Also highly decorated is the resort’s flagship restaurant–Siempre, where the head chef, Mexico City native Edgar Román Chávez, creates “Mediterranean-style cuisine infused with distinctive Mexican flavors.” Before coming to Quivira, Chávez oversaw five restaurants in town, each specializing in something different. He says the ceviches, and shrimp/lobster dishes are Siempre’s most popular, but his favorite dish to make is Catch of the Day mixed with Mexican herbs and served with sautéed tagliatelle with organic Tubers/Huitlacoche (corn mushroom) purée, and beet sauce scented with mandarin essence.

Like Quivira Golf Club, Chávez’s signature dish is truly special and a worthy addition to your “Must visit/play/eat/do before it’s too late” list. Indeed, the whole property is exceptional and a testimony to developer Ernesto Coppel’s flair, acumen, determination, and vision.

In 1998, Coppel penned a book, *The Road to Paradise*, in which he detailed his great-grandfather Isaak’s journey from Poland to New York City in 1854, and the family’s subsequent migration to Mexico. He wasn’t writing about Quivira obviously, but if he had been, the title would have been entirely appropriate. ●

Contributor Tony Dear’s most recent book is *The Story of Golf in Fifty Holes* (Firefly). For more information on Quivira, visit quiviragolfclub.com or call 800-990- 8250.



OVER THE EDGE: The superb finisher ends on a rolling, infinity-edge green.