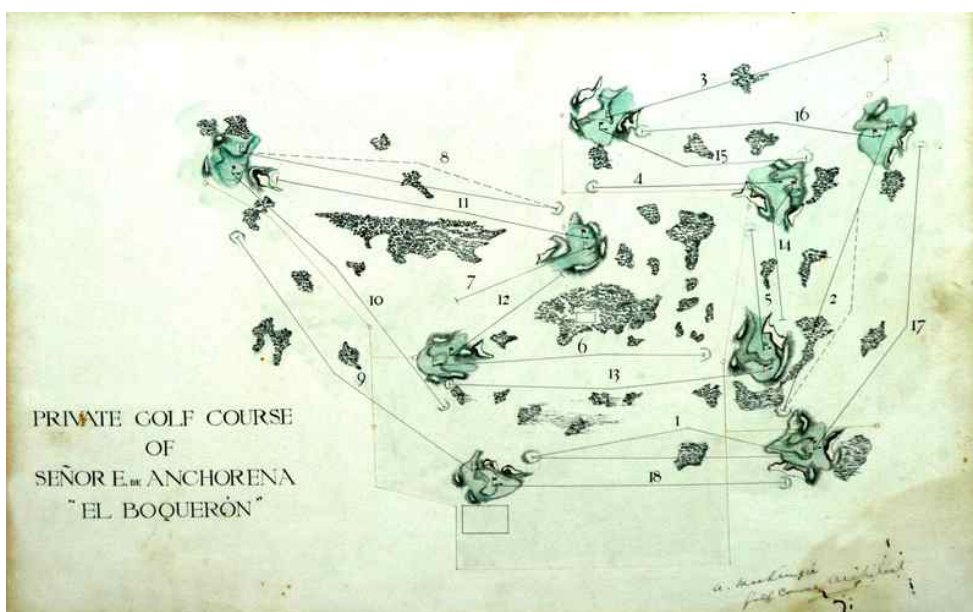


- Out & Back - <http://www.out-and-back.net> -**Mike DeVries: El Boqueron Green Sketches**Posted By [td](#) On March 18, 2009 @ 3:46 pm In [Featured](#), [Golf/Golf Architecture](#), [Media/Business/Politics](#) | [1 Comment](#)

One of the things I've noticed about golf architects over the years is that, almost to a man, they downplay their artistic abilities. This is probably because they know that producing back-of-the-napkin sketches is no predictor of success in the field, and that holds especially true for hands-on designers like Mike DeVries who constantly edit their own handiwork. Sketches are a great kind of visual shorthand for expressing aesthetic ideas and design principles, but most of all they're just fun to look at. This series is particularly noteworthy, of course, because DeVries has put his imagination to work envisioning the vast double-green complexes of [El Boqueron](#)^[1]—the "lost" Alister MacKenzie estate course, which the Good Doctor designed in 1930 but was never built. Until this spring, that is, when DeVries and company will break ground on a faithful interpretation of the MacKenzie routing plan.

As a point of reference, the MacKenzie plan is included below, followed by Mike's creations. Hope you like ferocious bunkering and killer greens!

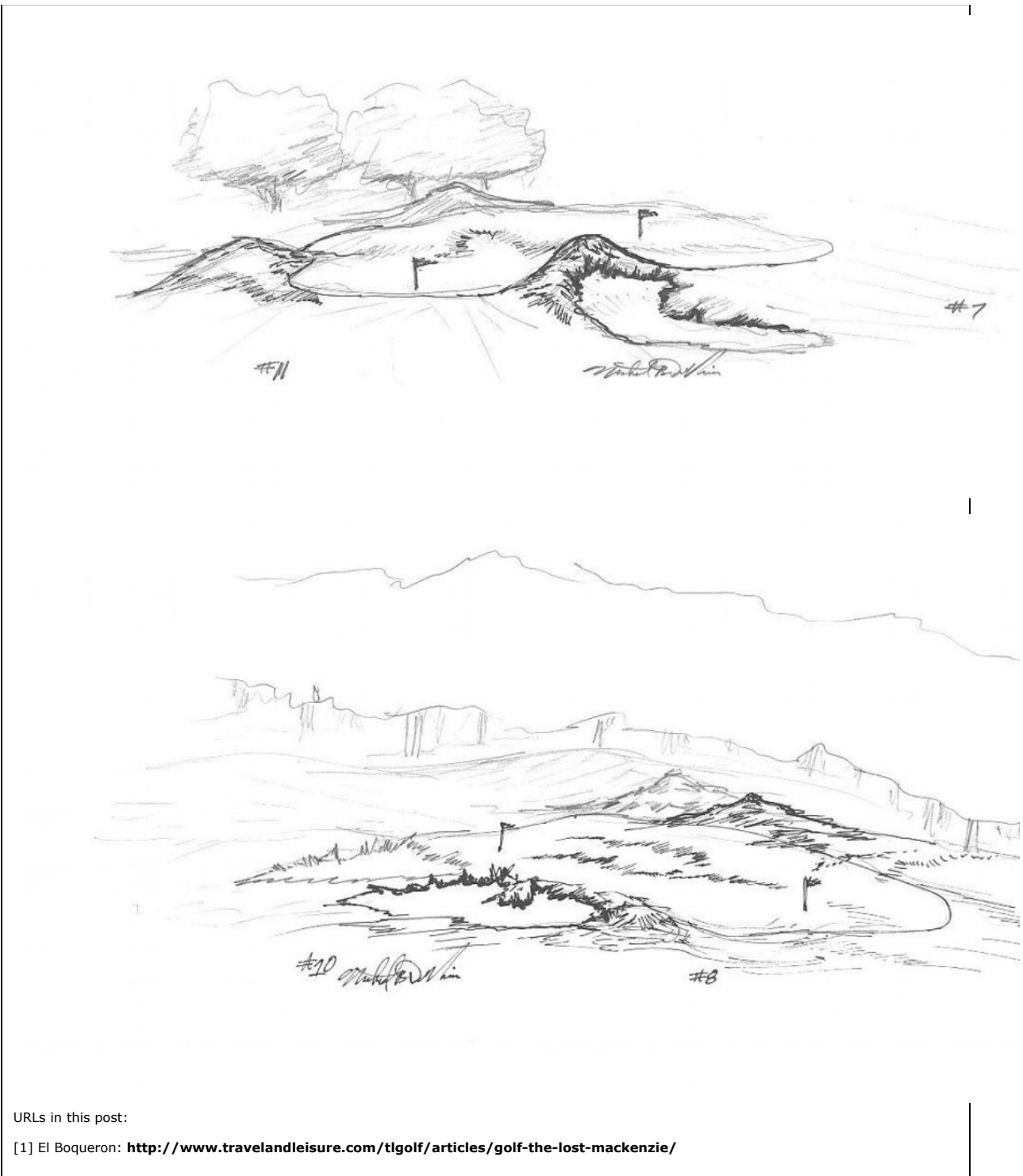
Update 4/1/09: I interviewed Mike a couple of days ago while he was on the road in Texas and he provided some additional insight into the green sketches and El Boqueron in general. Unfortunately, my tape of our conversation was marred by a loud, annoying static-hiss, rendering some of his comments inaudible. The end result was something that wouldn't work as a coherent interview, but there was still more than enough material to add some captions to the sketches.



TD: Looking at 1-17, this is a really graceful drawing, and the green has a great boomerang look to it. Where would this view be on the course? MD: That's coming up 17, or 16 on the original plan. From that angle you don't see any bunkers at all but there are a couple on the far side of the green. There's a bit of a rise coming into the green on 17—on the site it's pretty cool. There's also this flattish crowned area on 1, you're actually down low and playing uphill through a stand of trees that are already on the property, and then the green's in this open landscape and you'll see both pins right there, one behind the other.

Article printed from Out & Back: <http://www.out-and-back.net>

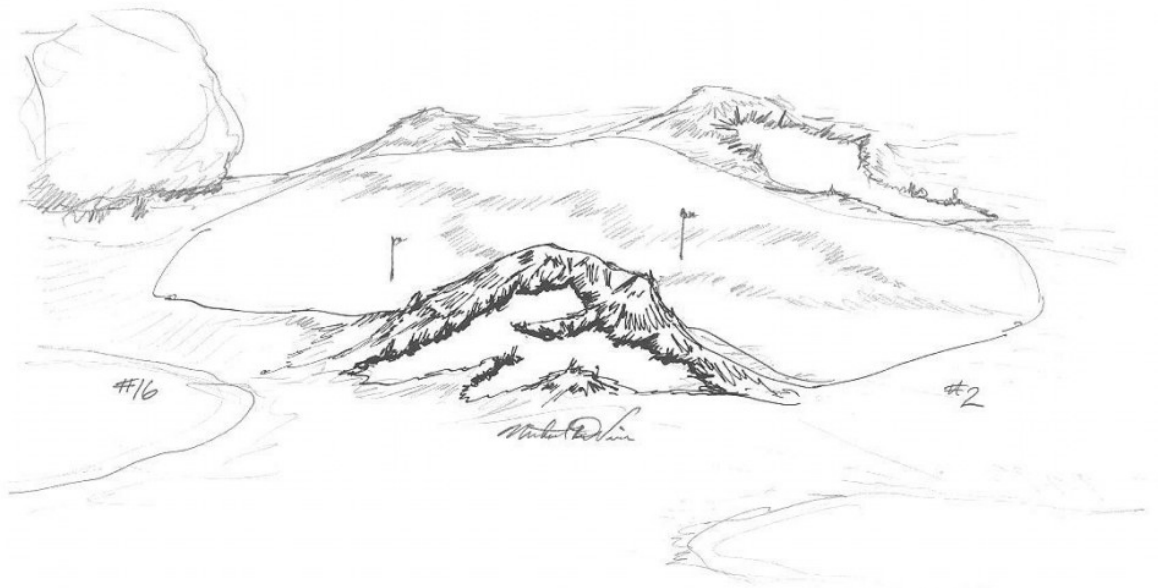
URL to article: <http://www.out-and-back.net/?p=186>



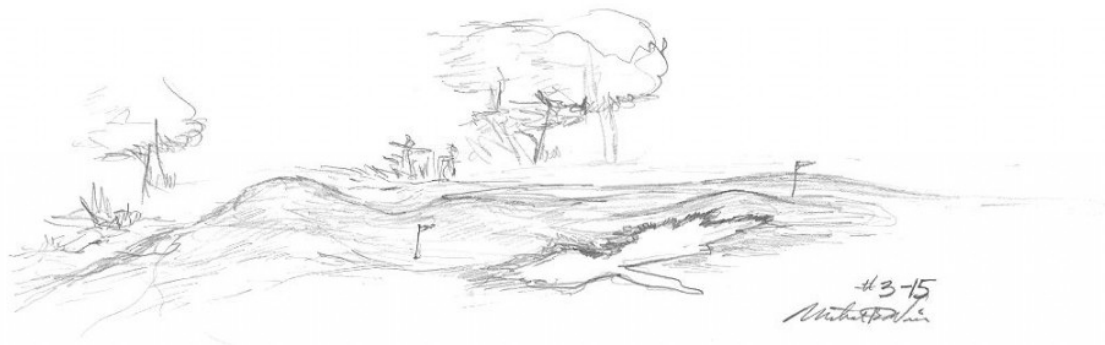
URLs in this post:

[1] El Boqueron: <http://www.travelandleisure.com/tlgolf/articles/golf-the-lost-mackenzie/>

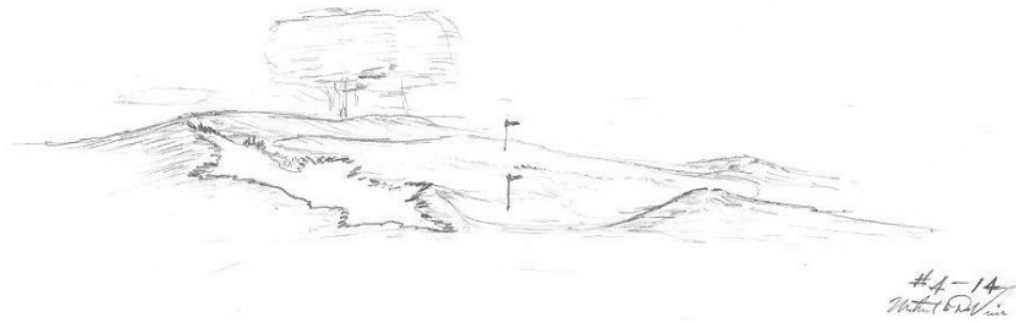
Copyright © 2010 Out & Back. All rights reserved.



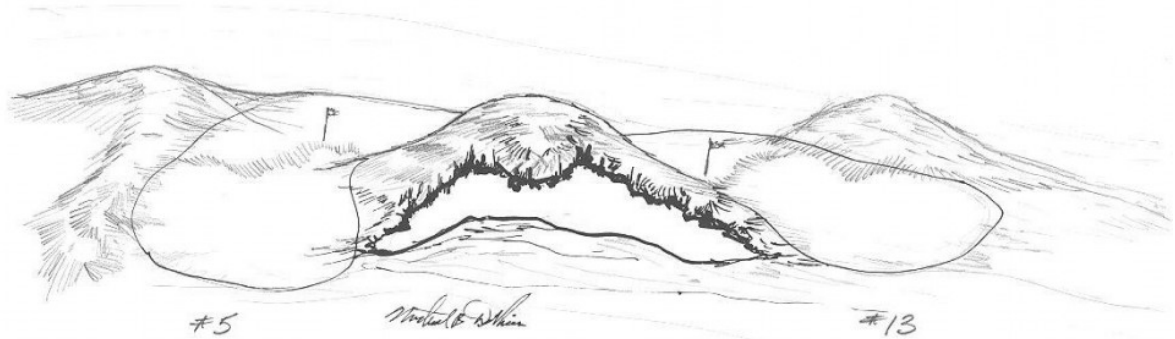
TD: On 2-16, it looks like you focused on the bunkers--the jagged edges and hairiness of the one in the foreground and then another one on the right side coming into 2. It also looks like there's a lot of back to front contour to this green. MD: Yeah, and on the site it's fronted by a dry creek, too. Some 50-60 yards short of the 2nd green there's this chasm cutting across, so you better be sure to get over or you're gonna have some issues. That's the one green that we had to move because of a feature in the landscape--if you'd done a precise overlay of the MacKenzie onto this property, the green would've fallen at the bottom of the creek bed and it wouldn't have worked. But I think the creek system is actually a big improvement to the routing and flexibility of the golf course, in the sense that it adds another element. On the original plan, 3 and 16 were both short holes and they were kind of scrunched together. For a modern course that will get more play, it just seemed too dangerous to keep the original 16th tee where it was.



TD: On 3-15, I can see by the cape of the bunker that we're approaching the third green. MD: Yes, it's a long par-three--almost even a short-four--that'll play into the wind the majority of the time, so that'll be a pretty difficult shot.

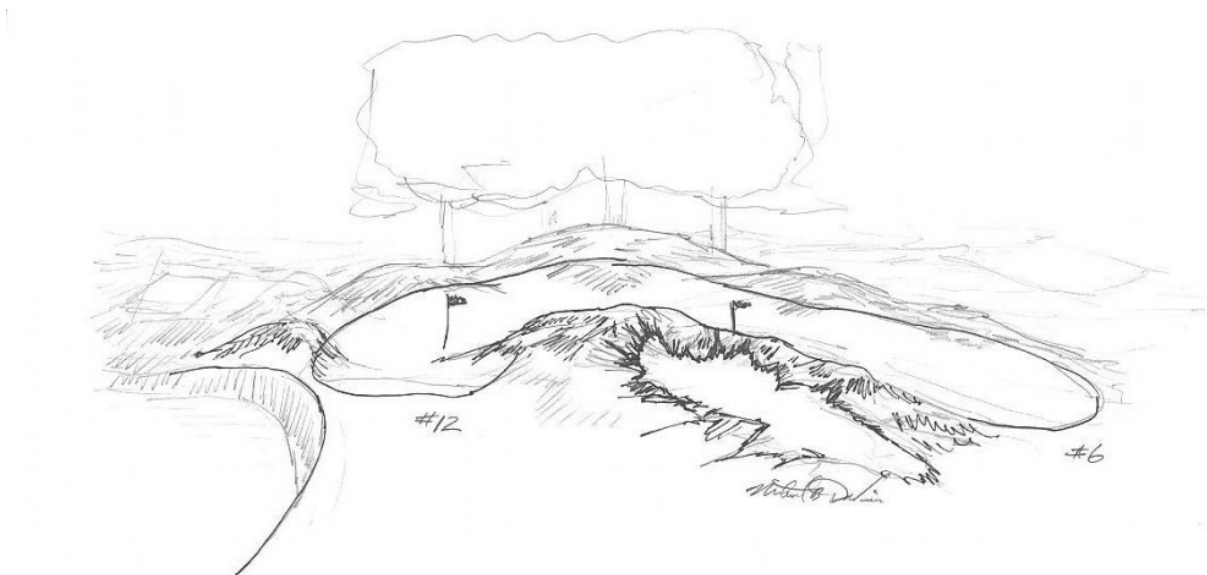


TD: 4-14 is 5-13 on the MacKenzie plan. MD: Here you have a par-three, uphill to this narrow little shelf of green, and then 14, coming back in, is a medium-length par-four. The green has a bunch of different levels. TD: So from this perspective, you're a few yards short of the 4th green and the golfer will be seeing the flag of the 14th in the background. MD: Yeah. Maybe we'll do white and red flags, or whatever, but there'll be times where we flip 'em, put them on the other side. The flexibility is there, so I think it'll be good to mix it up and have them try something different now and then. TD: Looks like you're indicating some pretty serious back-to-front contour here. Do you have a sense of what the drop will be like? MD: It depends in part on what we do with our final grass selection, but yeah, because the complexes are so large, I could see certain sections of the green being 3-5 feet higher or lower, albeit probably not in one drop. I don't see that as being an issue. On a Jack Nicklaus triple-tiered green, you might have a flat area, then a sharp drop, then flat again—that's not how MacKenzie built stuff. We'll be thinking about how to transition effectively across those areas, maybe there's a little mini-shelf in there, maybe not. They're going to be fairly severe, though, with the sheer size of the double greens and the ground game being a major factor in the design.



TD: 5-13 is a dramatic sketch. I think I'd be pretty excited to confront this yawning hazard. MD: You've got to try to put a little fear into 'em. The bunker will be playable, but you'll have to be either creative or really good with the sand wedge to deal with it. You know, this is a fairly gentle property, and there are only fourteen bunkers on the golf course, so I think they need to be really outstanding. I'm not looking to add bunkers—I don't think that's in the spirit of what El Boqueron was about. Some people might say, "Oh, you need to add more bunkers for definition." Well, no. You don't. I want there to be a lack of definition so that people will figure it out for themselves, plot their own way. That's part of what this design was all about. Just like the Old Course—even though it has a hundred and twenty some-odd bunkers, it's not dictating a single strategy of how you want to do things. So those fourteen bunkers that we do have, they have to be pretty substantial, they have to stand out, present themselves, and provide a clear penalty and a degree of risk for players seeking to overcome them. TD: And these hazards are such that they're constantly inflicting quarter- and half-shot penalties just by getting into the heads of people doing anything they can to avoid them. MD: Sure. Play way out to avoid the bunker, and the pin's tucked hard against it you've got to deal with that. TD: Fourteen bunkers is a fascinating thing in the historical context. After all, when MacKenzie came back and designed Augusta National, there were only something like thirty bunkers. What pushed him in this direction? MD: Part of it was his adoration of the Old Course, that led him to think a lot about width and short grass and strategy. He'd embraced those principles for a long time, but in an estate course setting like at the Boqueron, he knew you weren't going to have dozens of guys out there maintaining the place, so he was looking for something that would do well with minimal maintenance. It just wouldn't make sense for there to be eighty bunkers out there. This is especially true today as bunkers demand a lot of

maintenance, but I think it was relevant back then, too, given the economic climate of 1930. I think MacKenzie looked at bunkers as an essential part of a golf course from a visual and a strategic standpoint, but he also looked at how to maximize their impact. At El Boqueron, it was all about the green complexes--large double green surfaces, bunkers in very appropriate spots, and plenty of short grass and mounding features to tie it all together.



TD: You certainly get a sense of short grass on your sketch for 6-12, as you indicate with some light shadings a melding of the putting surface and its surrounds. The thing that strikes me are those big, lumpy mound-like forms behind the green. MD: They're an integral part of that complex. When you have that boomerang action, which is pretty accentuated on 6 and 12, you have to think a lot about playability, not just with the putting surface, but with incorporating tilts and slopes and mounds, and you've got to be able to gauge that in terms of speed and angle of attack and how the ball's going to release. I did a lot of that at Kingsley, where the ground game is prevalent as well, but this is really a roots-of-the-game kind of thing. TD: The sixth is a mid-length par-3, but you're not firing it at the flag, you're trying to feed it off this slope. I get the sense that it really is about playing away from the target—choosing a secondary target and letting the ball release. MD: Absolutely, unless you're really good and can cut the ball in there and spin it. TD: I also looks like the kind of green where you might even be able to putt it into the bunker—almost a Road bunker type of scenario. MD: In some cases, if we shave the turf tight, then yeah, that's not inappropriate. And it makes the hazard that much bigger. Even if it's a smaller hazard and you're only a short distance away, if you're out of position and that's how the contour of the ground works, unless you have just the right speed you might overcook it through the green or get swept into the bunker itself.