



## The Very Best

# Nine 9-Holers

Many short courses are no less challenging than their 18-hole counterparts. For golfers who prize time over distance, these venues are tops.

By Anthony Pioppi

**P**ITY THE 9-HOLE GOLF COURSES. WHERE ONCE THE BEST IN THE land were held in high regard — often considered the shorter equals of their 18-hole counterparts — nine-hole designs are now thought of by most golfers as inherently inferior.

It's an odd turn, considering nearly every early great designer — Seth Raynor, Alister MacKenzie, A.W. Tillinghast, and Donald Ross — laid out stellar short courses. Newport Country Club and Myopia Hunt Club hosted the U.S. Open when they were just nine holes. Yet, in the last 50 years or so, only a handful of regulation short-course layouts have been created.

Wonderful public nine-hole designs — not to be confused with par-3 pitch-and-putts or executive courses, but rather layouts that require the use of all 14 clubs in the bag — can be found across America. Here are nine of the very best that are well worth their greens fees.

*Anthony Pioppi is author of To the Nines, a celebration of memorable and notable nine-hole golf courses across the United States.*



### Marion Golf Course Marion, Mass.

Beautiful Marion Golf Course lies just off the Cape. For years the pedigree of this quirky layout was lost. As it turns out, George Thomas, who would go on to design such notable layouts as Riviera Country Club, created Marion as his

first endeavor. Thomas moved little dirt in constructing the course, utilizing the stone walls running through the former farmland, as hazards. All of Marion's par-3s are blind and require a tee shot that carries over a stone wall, even on the 115-yard, downhill ninth.

Few changes to the layout, none of them of any consequence, have occurred since Marion opened in the first decade of the 1900s. It stands as a wonderful example of early American course design, and today, as then, is a joy to play.



### Wawashkamo Golf Club Mackinac Island, Mich.

Designed by Scottish golf professional Alex Smith and not far from the shore of Lake Huron, Wawashkamo opened in 1898 on the site where a pivotal battle in the War of 1812 raged. Gravestones marking the burial places of British and American troops remain. During the Battle of Mackinac Island, British cannons rained down terror from what is now the first tee.

Little has changed since the links-style layout first welcomed golf. To enhance the feeling of stepping back in time, Wawashkamo, which means "to walk a crooked trail" in the tongue of Native Americans that once inhabited the site, rents hickory golf clubs.

The most distinctive feature on the course is found at the green of the 336-yard third hole, which is ringed in a foot-high, rough-covered mound.



### Sewanee Golf Club Sewanee, Tenn.

Few if any bishops can list "golf course architect" on their resume the way Albion W. Knight could. He was vice-chancellor and bishop at the Episcopal Sewanee College, now The University of the South, when this layout opened in 1915.

Way back then, it had tiny sand greens that were converted to grass in the 1960s. Albion Knight and a Mr. Eaton, a former newspaper editor and art critic, according to the Sewanee school newspaper, created the nine-hole routing, much of which remains intact, perched on the Columbia Plateau.

One of the best holes is the drivable 278-yard fifth, which ends in a natural punchbowl green.



### Northwood Golf Course Monte Rio, Calif.

Alister MacKenzie's name is synonymous with great golf architecture. He designed Cypress Point Golf Club and Augusta National Golf Club and made renovations to the Old Course in St. Andrews, Scotland. His only nine-hole effort, however, is located in the Russian River Valley some 100 miles north of San Francisco.

Not only is it a challenging layout replete with strategic bunkering and dastardly greens, but it is also visually stunning, carved out of a redwood forest where an errant shot can come to rest behind a 100-foot-high behemoth.

The sixth hole is the standout here. Although it is just 280 yards, the narrow green is bunkered left, right, and short, and demands a precise tee and approach shot in order for par or better to be attained.



MARION/COURTESY MARION GOLF COURSE / NORTHWOOD/COURTESY OF GAYLORD R. SCAAP GM FLAG ILLUSTRATION/STAFF

WAWASHKAMO COURTESY OF KATHLEEN M. CHAPPELLE / GLENEAGLES COURTESY OF GLENEAGLES GC / FLAG ILLUSTRATION/STAFF



### Gleneagles Golf Course San Francisco, Calif.

If you're looking for a fancy clubhouse, flowers around the tee boxes and a leisurely round, this is not your place.

If, however, you want to experience a layout that will test your skills from the opening tee shot to the final putt during a round that will be played in two hours, then Gleneagles is worth the visit.

Featuring views of Candlestick Park, Gleneagles, owned by the City of San Francisco, is downright tough. Uneven lies are the norm as are the winds that come off San Francisco Bay and the San Bruno Mountains and roll through the course from every direction.

Pay your green fees in the bar called Old Peculiar's, then return there for a post-round Scotch. You'll need it.





## Highland Links Golf Course Truro, Mass.

On the far end of Cape Cod, in Massachusetts, lies the small town of Truro and the Highland Links Golf Course. The course is situated 130 feet above the roaring Atlantic not far from the spot that Henry David Thoreau described as a place where, “a man can stand here and put all of America behind him.”

The 2,650-yard course tests not only players' skills, but also their resolve as it is buffeted by winds coming off Cape Cod Bay to the west and the open ocean to the east. Cape Cod Light stands watch over the round, and serves as an imposing backdrop to the par-3 ninth hole.



## Fenwick Golf Course Old Saybrook, Conn.

Catch a glimpse of Katharine Hepburn lacing a drive in the 1952 movie *Pat and Mike* and you realize that woman could play; she was a 4-handicap at one point. Hepburn learned and played the game while summering in Fenwick, a borough in the upscale Connecticut seacoast town of Old Saybrook.

Fenwick abounds in quirky, challenging golf. The first hole — originally the fourth — is a

difficult par-4 with a nondenominational chapel that can come into play. The walk to the par-3 second hole is a 300-yard stroll through a quiet neighborhood. The house to the right of the second was the summer residence of the Hepburn clan.

Challenging holes are plentiful at Fenwick, but none more so than the fourth hole when played as a par-5 from all the way back which demands the tee ball must carry South Cove. For those willing to take a large bite of the saltwater hazard, the reward can be the opportunity to get home in two.

## Midway Golf Course Midway, Kan.

In parts of the United States where a love of golf abounds but populations don't, there often can be found sand-green courses, which are easier to maintain than turf. At places like Midway Golf Course, located just outside of Hutchinson, there are no clubhouses or maintenance facilities and rarely is an employee on hand. To gain access to Midway, put your money in an envelope, stuff the envelope into a wooden box, attach a ticket to your bag, and head out. The fairways and roughs are cut at the same height; the grass is long and gnarly. The greens, which are smoothed before putting and raked after holing out, appear to be the size of a car hood until you are nearly on top of them. If a round takes longer than 90 minutes, you're playing too slow. In the end, however, it will surely be time well spent.

## Lazy Swan Golf Course Saugerties, N.Y.

Architect Barry Jordan has created one of the few noteworthy nine-hole courses built in the last 50 years and the 3,140-yard, par-35 layout has all the attributes of many of its finer older relatives.

Lazy Swan invites the better players to test their game while remaining a pleasurable experience for the less skilled. It is also a walkable course that presents lovely views of the Catskill Mountains. The

ninth hole is 505 yards from the back tee and can be reached in two shots, but only by those who produce a pair of crack shots that avoid a pond right and a stream left.