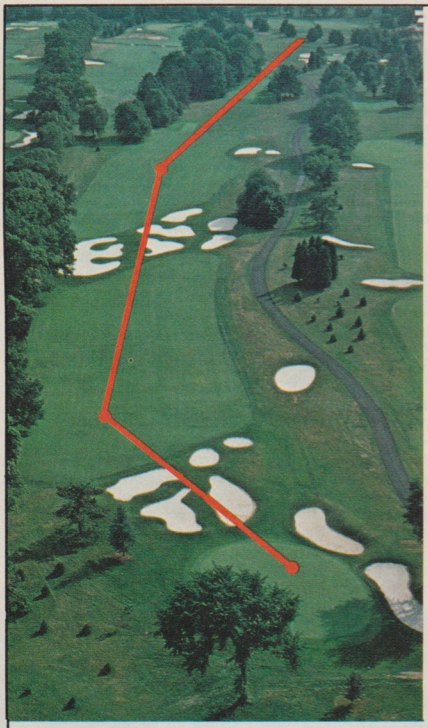
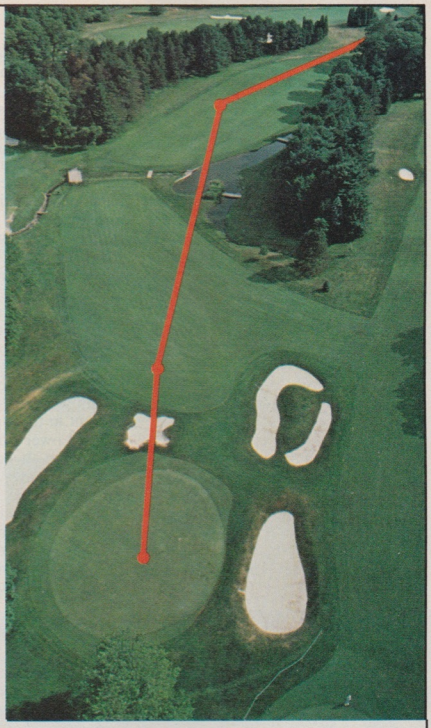




17TH HOLE
PAR 5

18TH HOLE
PAR 5

THE FINISH AT BALTUSROL

Arthur W. Tillinghast, the late golf course architect, is not noted for his great par-five holes; indeed, many consider them to be his weakness as a designer. The two finishing holes on the Lower Course at Baltusrol, however, are quite exceptional, and the only two five pars on the course. They make Baltusrol the only course in U.S. Open history to end with consecutive par fives, and the only major tournament layout since Royal Birkdale hosted the British Open (1976) to provide such a finish. These final holes at Baltusrol are the two longest back-to-back holes on any major course in the world, and measure only 18 yards less than the final three par fours at Inverness, last year's U.S. Open site.

And they are quite different, following two distinct design strategies. The 17th is the longest hole in U.S. Open history. Measuring 630 yards from the back tee, with ample hazards, this uphill hole simply cannot be reached in two blows. Its chief hazard is the "Sahara Desert," a group of bunkers that cross the fairway completely, some 375 yards from the tee. The second shot must carry them—a tough task if the drive finds the always-deep Open rough. Laying up short of this "Sahara" puts the green out of reach on the third shot, forcing the player to lay up again, short of the deep bunkers that front the green. Yet, surprisingly, despite its fearsome hazards, this hole proved relatively easy for the pros in the 1967 Open, when the scoring average was 5.11, including 60 birdies in 428 rounds.

The 18th, measuring 542 yards with a downhill drive, is designed to tempt the professional to go for the green in two, which requires an all-out drive and a perfect second over a water hazard and deep greenside bunkers to the elevated green. Once again, missing the fairway with the drive may force the player to lay up short of the principal fairway hazard, this time water, but the green is still reachable from that point. In the 1967 Open, Jack Nicklaus missed the fairway with a one-iron off the tee and had to lay up with an 8-iron, but recovered with another one-iron and a 21-foot putt to birdie the hole.

—Tom Doak