

Haugaland GK, Norway- A rocky experience.

Denne artikkelen er skrevet av golfbanearkitekt Svein D. Olsnes-EIGCA Senior member, og kan leses i sin originalversjon i boken *Golf Architecture: A worldwide Perspective Volume 4* som ble utgitt av den australske golfarkitekturforfatteren og redaktøren Paul Daley på Full Swing forlag i 2008.



The 380-meter par-4 opening hole, as seen from the fairway. It takes a drive of at least 230 meters to cross the diagonal burn, so most players aim toward the right, wider side of the fairway, where the water is not in play. When executing the approach shot, a golfer's skill and creativity will be challenged if the flagstick is near the greenside bunker.

Golf in Norway is a relative young activity. Oslo Golfklubb was founded in 1924, but as late as 1976, there were only four 18 hole golf courses in the country. Now there are 55 18 hole courses, a little less than our neighbour country, Sweden, with 280.

Norwegians have always loved outdoor life, hiking in the mountains in the summer and skiing in the winter. Why golf was never widely popular in Norway before the boom in the late 1980's, is a little mysterious, but maybe part of the reason is that Norwegians have never been used to paying much for any organised physical activity, either if it is indoor or outdoor, or that the English idea of closed men's clubs has never been a big hit in Norway with its no-class society.





This 510-meter, par 5, ninth-hole view awaits golfers on their second shots, but only after a well-placed drive. The green can be seen on the far side of the lake.

Popular sports in Norway are skiing, speed skating, handball and ice hockey in the winter and soccer, rowing and sailing in the summer. Soccer is the sport that most people practice or follow, even if the playing season is short.

The short summer is maybe the main reason why only 120 000 of Norway's 4,6 million inhabitants play golf, but with the cold winters the Norwegian greenkeepers have a heavy task in keeping the golf grass alive and the golf courses in good condition.

The climate is very different in the south and the north parts of Norway. The Arctic Circle divide the country in two, and north of this, the golf season can be as short as five months with good playing conditions only in three. The upside is that during the summer, you can play golf all night if you want.

In the west and south west parts of the country, the coast that is closest to Scotland, you can normally play golf all year round, but the winter months can be very rainy.

The coastline south of the town of Stavanger reminds of the eastern coast of Scotland, with white beaches and sand dunes. It would be perfect to build golf courses there, but the use of the sandy areas is restricted, and hardly any golf ball will be hit along the shores of the North Sea in the near future.



The golf courses in Norway are either on cultivated areas or on grazing land closer to the mountains. Most of the courses are private financed, built and owned by the members of a golf club who is part of The Norwegian Golf Association.

A golf club building a golf course, if built according to certain standards, will receive, along with any other sports arena, a certain amount of money taken from the income of the national lottery. This is a great help, but since Norway is not the first choice of the world's golf tourists, it is the members' annual fees that keep the club going and decide the maintenance level of the golf course.



A 335-meter par-4 that doglegs to the left, from the elevated third tee, observe the fourth fairway and the lovely highland terrain. Taking the direct line involves a carry of some 250 metres over water-if you dare!

Haugaland Golf Klubb is a different matter. The golf club is situated near the little village of Sveio in the county of Hordaland two hours by car north from Stavanger.

The politicians of Hordaland have a policy to spread different regional sports arenas to different parts of the county, and the local council of Sveio was in 1997 asked if they possibly could build a 9 hole golf course.

Early in 1998 I was contacted and asked if I was interested in designing a 18 hole golf course there.

When I first arrived at Sveio, I was shown a beautiful landscape of marshes, rocky hills, small lakes and brooks all framed by snowcapped mountains in the distance. What a lovely place, almost like the Scottish Highlands.

Studies showed us that the marshes were very deep, almost like big pockets filled with water. It would be impossible to cultivate or drain them so it was decided that the only way was to fill the marshes with rocks. This would be expensive and we had to get hold of rocks, really a lot of it.

Norway, the land of fjords, rocks and mountains has a long history of constructing roads, railroads and tunnels, both through mountains and below fjords. Therefore we have capable engineers and blasting specialists.

Lucky for us, there was a big tunnel project 20 kilometers from the golf course site, and the politicians closed a deal of deliverance of rocks, they would only pay for the transport. That sounded like a good deal, but to get the big trucks to the different parts of the course, we first had to build solid roads, and a lot of money was spent even before we started to fill the marshes late in 1998.

In rocky terrain it is always a problem to get enough topsoil, but parts of the shallow marshes contained good soil, so we stockpiled enough for later use on the fairways.

After 6000 truckloads of rocks, each containing 20m³, the marshes were filled and we could see the rough contours of each golf hole. Rock fillings are difficult to fineshape, so you have to be accurate from the first truck load.

The good thing though is that they drain well. It is not necessary to use subground drainpipes. Instead the fairways are shaped to drain the surface water towards catch basins, the lakes and the brooks. It is always necessary to put a layer of gravel and small rocks on top of the rock fillings to fill the gaps to prevent flooding damage to the topsoil. Before we put the topsoil on the playing areas, the soil was mixed with sand.

The government had many restrictions on the use of the land, and we were not allowed to put pipes in any part of the brooks because it would prevent the trout to wander from one lake to another. This had big influence on the layout, and a lot of time was spent to minimize the number of forced brook crossings, especially because at this golf course there would be many golf novices.

Because the golf market in Norway is small, only a few producers make sandbased top soil according to the USGA specifications, but drainage gravel and bunker sand are easier to obtain from local producers.

The topsoil for the greens was transported by boat from the eastern part of Norway, 750km away, to the harbor at Sveio, loaded onto trucks and transported to the golf course.



Because of the rough climate, the selection of golf grass are limited. Some courses have good results with Creeping Bent, but most courses have Fescue greens.

At Haugaland, the greens were seeded with a mix of 85% Fescue and 15% Brown Top Bent. The fairways and the tees have a Fescue and Bluegrass mix.

This part of the world gets its good portion of annual rain, 1200mm, and only few of the golf courses need fairway irrigation, except during the grow-in period.

At Haugaland GK, during the first weeks after seeding, there was no rain. The greens had good growth and looked healthy, but the fairways were still brown and dry. Then it rained for weeks which caused some troubles. After that there were no problems at all and the golf course opened in the summer of 2000.

After opening, Haugaland Golf Klubb had some problems operating the golf course. Therefore a stock company was established with the local council of Sveio and Haugaland GK as the two stockholders.

After a couple of years, the club had got enough sponsors and members to think about building 9 more holes. The message from the club was that even if the construction method was uncertain at that time, there would be no transporting of rocks from the outside.



This rocky specter is destined to be the challenging, 520-metre, par-5 twelfth hole; but there's still some work to do before grassing.

When the glaciers melted some 10 000 years ago, sand and gravel were left behind. We call that moraine sand. Under the future fairways of the last 9 holes, a lot of moraine sand was found, and it was ideal for constructing the playing areas together with a base of rocks taken from the same areas.

Even if the terrain was not as hilly as on the first 9, we still had to blast away 50 000m³ of solid rock to modify the slopes and prevent too many blind golf shots.

Construction of the last 9 holes started in 2005. Opening is set to summer of 2008.

Haugaland Golf Klubb at Sveio is a very special place for golf. Every visitor is struck by the contrast between the playing areas and the untouched highland terrain.

How lucky we are, the few of us, who have been part of the team that has created this golfcourse.

