



Above: 2nd hole (Par 4 - 427 metres) - view down the length of the 2nd hole
Top (l to r) Bob Brian - Brian McHenry (General Manager - Riverside Oaks Golf Resort) and Bob Harrison standing in fairway bunker on 3rd hole
6th hole (Par 3 - 195 metres) - view of 6th green from forward tees
9th - 5th Hole (Par 5 - 482 metres) - looking down on the second half of the hole
Below: 7th hole (Par 4 - 312 metres) - view from 17th tees overlooking 7th hole in foreground with Hawkesbury River in background

New Bungool Course

BY BOB HARRISON

As you drive towards the clubhouse along the private entrance road at Riverside Oaks, the existing course, built in the 1980s, is on your left. To the right lies a beautiful landscape which has often prompted the suggestion that it should have been used for the golf course.

This land is bounded on one side by the Hawkesbury River, and is the site of the new Bungool Course – the second 18 holes at Riverside Oaks. Nine holes of this new course are already open for play, and the second nine is planned for opening in late March 2014.

Some of the new holes are located along the river bank, with spectacular views of the river and the substantial cliffs which are common in the upper reaches of the Hawkesbury. The more inland section of the course lies adjacent to an extensive forest of natural bushland, and the landscape picture is completed by a series of wetlands and ponds which will serve to divide the playing areas of the course from the forest. There are many natural advantages, and it was possible to develop an outstanding golf course for a comparatively low cost.

From the very back tees the new course will be measured at somewhere between 6900 and 6950 yards, which is a very pleasing feature to me, even on a course where Nanshan's intention is to host prominent tournaments in the future. There are four par-4s – the 3rd, 7th, 11th and 16th – which will occasionally be driveable from the tee – but only for players choosing that the risk of negotiating severe hazards is worth the reward, and then executing superbly. These are often the best holes on courses, and notable examples elsewhere would include the 12th at the Old Course, 9th at Cypress Point, and the 10th at Royal Melbourne.

The course has three par-3s and three par-5s, which is one more of each than occurs on the Old Course at St Andrews, and is yet another example that the 'rules of design' do not require the perceived four holes of each category. As most par-5s are these days, the three 'three-shotters' will be reachable by professionals. Once again, only after making risky

choices and delivering the goods. The comparatively short length of the course was partly ambition, but also followed from allowing the holes to 'fall where they did' to make best use of the natural landform.

The playing areas of the course are generally very wide, with preferred lines of approach and difficult and appealing obstacles to be negotiated to achieve these lines. The surrounds of greens are deliberately generous and will be mown at fairway height. If you miss in some locations you will be faced with a very delicate chip or pitch, but you will be playing from a nice lie, and you will have options.

The natural landform and the routing of the holes make this course particular easy to walk. While Nanshan will allow carts for commercial reasons, it is important to ensure that walking is part of the culture of this golf course.

The landscape is beautiful and spectacular in places, but it also has a certain ruggedness to it as well. This ruggedness suggested a more earthy and less pristine style for bunkers but one which is still oriented to attractive patterns of shape in the bunker faces – and without pristine edges or finishes. So the bunkers will have a certain wildness which fits the overall appearance of the course. As part of this concept, the colour of the sand should not be white but a little 'earthy' – and the chosen sand has degrees of yellow, red and brown.

This emphasis on landscape is important. The combination of a beautiful perimeter landscape and a general openness to the course is appealing, but requires great care to ensure that the small amount of introduced landscape – which will take time to mature – does not detract from the 'finished' appearance of the total scene.

I've paid great attention to the green sites in the hope that they will be truly interesting – perhaps a little quirky in some cases – while fitting continuously into the general landform. As a result of this approach, three or four of the greens run downhill – away from the approaching play. Sadly, this concept is

often criticised in modern times, which is unfortunate because it can readily lead to interesting strategy. Perhaps the most noticeable example of this idea is the downhill slope in many of the greens on the Old Course which largely dictate the way in which these holes should be played.

While this was not a sandy site – the best of all worlds – it did have the advantages of a substantial cover of common couch and a land profile consisting largely of loamy material. The aim was therefore to make best use of the naturally appealing parts of the course so that these remained largely undisturbed. This allowed us to meet Nanshan's requirement that the course be constructed for around \$4.5 million, even though the greens were constructed on the USGA model, and the bunkers are built as if they were in clay country. This result is particularly pleasing in a period when expensive golf course construction costs would be one contributing factor to the lessening number of new projects (outside of China!). Another result of this approach is that the Bungool Course will develop and improve over a number of years, in contrast with some new projects in where the condition of the course on opening day is the best it will ever be – with gradual decline thereafter.

Riverside Oaks already has good facilities, but Nanshan is currently extending the accommodation by developing new lodges and villas with the intention to eventually include a resort hotel in the future. During the development of the new course they have placed great emphasis on preserving and enhancing two Heritage-listed buildings, one of which will be the starting point for the new course, and a five- to six-star restaurant. With 36 holes to offer on the fringe of Sydney, and substantial contrast between the two 18s, and with clubhouse and attached accommodation, this project is well-equipped to satisfy the golf conference market as well as interest from golfers in general.