

A close-up, low-angle shot of a golf club head, likely a wedge, resting on a lush green lawn. The club head is positioned on the left side of the frame, with its shaft extending upwards. The grass is vibrant green and shows some texture and shadows. The background is a soft-focus expanse of the same green lawn.

A PLAYER'S GUIDE TO THE RIVER COURSE

COURSE NOTES BY DYLAN THEW

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HOLE #1

Right out of the gate, Tom Fazio makes you think with this short dogleg left. Longer hitters want to take an aggressive line down the left to leave a short wedge onto the green. Any shot that fades too far right could be blocked out by trees. However, overdraw too far left and you risk the lake and severe fairway bunkering. Hit a shot that curves gently to the left in order to situate yourself in the middle of the fairway with a good line to the green.

The left side of the green is guarded by water and sand. The right side is guarded by a short, steep bunker, which is actually not a bad spot to miss. This is a two-tiered green. The safest bet is to play to the right center of the green. If the flag is on the front, utilize the slope to spin the ball back. Distance control is crucial when attacking the back flag, as anything long of the green will leave an incredibly challenging chip shot.

**The River Course opened in 1995 but was substantially renovated in 2005 and again in 2015.

hole #2

Good scoring opportunity here! It's a reachable par 5 with a fairly demanding tee shot. A huge bunker guards the right side of the fairway, and the left is bordered by trees and a water hazard. The aggressive play is to hit driver. The fairway narrows in the landing zone, but hitting the downslope will get some extra yardage. The widest part of the fairway is the safest play. You will have a long second shot no matter what, but it's very gettable! The layup is protected by bunkers that jut into the fairway. If you can't carry the bunkers, stay focused. You're forced to lay up into a tight area, so choose your club wisely.

This is a very wide but shallow green - typical of a Tom Fazio par 5. Because of the width, you can miss left or right. If you're coming in with a short approach shot, watch your distance control. The green slopes severely from the back to the front and is separated into three undulating tiers: a high tier on the left side, a slightly lower middle tier, and an even lower tier on the right. Landing in the correct quadrant will leave you a good chance at making the putt. There is a very high waste area on the left side of the green and a small pot bunker just short to force you to take more club. Remember, short is better than long. Don't be fooled.

**The tunnel on this hole is left over from when the Kuwaitis owned Kiawah Island. They originally intended to design a second course to play from the Turtle Point Clubhouse.

HOLE #3

**The USGA Mid-Amateur Championship was played on the River Course and Cassique in 2009!

The first of four beautiful par 3s. This hole often plays into the wind, so the length can be difficult. Tee the ball up on the right side of the tee box. There are some overhanging trees on the left-hand side that you must avoid, especially if you hit butter cuts.

The size of the green surface area is quite forgiving. There are three prominent pin locations: front, middle, and back. There's a hollow in the center of the green that funnels balls off to the left. The front portion is raised, the middle portion is low, and the back portion is raised. If the flag is center left, this is definitely a pin to attack. When it's on the front, missing it short is okay. When the flag is at the back, play from the middle of the green. Missing left will pretty much always leave an uphill chip, so favor this side.

Hole #4

The first of back-to-back par 4s. It's birdie time! Be strategic with your tee shot. You can drive it over the bunkers where the fairway is narrow, or you can lay up in between the bunkers where the fairway is the widest. The most ideal shot shape off this tee box is a draw, as the hole curves slightly left. A good drive will leave a short shot.

Bunkers guard the left and right sides. The center of the green is a good play no matter what the pin location is. Avoid the front left, as the contours will catch the ball and pull it off the green. If you have a short iron in your hands, throw a dart. This is a good chance to get one back on the field.

HOLE #5

Drivable for long hitters! If you have the ability to carry the ball 280 yards, then have some fun and go for it. If you don't have the length, the safe play is a 220 shot up the left side of the fairway. The hole curves to the left around a water hazard and a waste bunker, so hit a draw to ensure a good line into the green.

One of the most severe greens on the course. There is a very large slope in the middle. Do not be too aggressive if the flag is at the back because long is dead. When the pin is at the front of the green, you can utilize the slope in the middle, taking the false front out of play.

*This hole has undergone more renovations than any hole on the course. Originally it featured two greens! In 2005 they were merged to become one large green.



Hole #6

It's difficult to gauge the wind here, so pay attention on the preceding holes. Anything short will end up in a bunker or in the water. Anything long will go into a waste area or a grassy bunker, leaving you an incredibly difficult chip. The entire green slopes toward the water, so if you are going to miss, err to the right.

Spend some time reading this shallow green. Look from both sides and play for maximum break and minimum speed. This is no time to be aggressive, as there is no easy pin position. This is a demanding hole. Don't feel like you've lost a shot on the field if you make a bogey.

*Shortest hole on the course. Very difficult, especially in the winter!



Hole #7

One of the longest par 4s on the golf course. It actually has a wide fairway, which I think is fair considering the length. Definitely hit driver. I recommend you aim to the right corner of the left bunker and gently move the ball back to the middle of the fairway.

This green is deep and narrow with a slope in the middle that funnels balls right. This is Fazio at his best! Work the ball from left to right with your approach, so if you miss, you are left with a relatively straightforward pitch back up the slope and a good chance to save par. This is usually the windiest stretch of the golf course, so plan accordingly.

*This hole was originally routed to be a par 5, but the original plan would have brought down a stand of large oak trees. Fazio made this a par 4 to save the trees!

Hole #8

Again, the direction of the wind will determine the line you take. First, get an accurate yardage of carry distance from the tee box. The further right you go, the longer the carry over Bass Pond. Don't try to bite off more than you can chew. The miss is definitely left. My recommendation for shot shape is to actually curve the ball away from the water. Although the hole curves right, do not try to fade the ball off the tee box. If you fade the ball a bit too much, you will end up in the hazard. This second shot is one of the most difficult layups on the golf course, especially when it's breezy. Again, Fazio is making you think! The ideal position is to lay up to about 110 yards. This will give a straight shot onto the green.

Very large putting surface. There are three tiers: front left, middle lower right, and a back tier. The center of the green is never a bad play. But don't be unnecessarily aggressive! This hole can be incredibly penal if you miss this green, so be patient.

Hole #9

It's time to get focused. It's not a long hole and you will usually have a prevailing wind. There is a waste area with bakeri grass and trees on the left and marsh and the Kiawah River on the right. It does not matter if you hit a driver, a hybrid, or a fairway wood - the goal is to hit the center of the fairway. The green is impossible to hold if you're coming in from the rough.

This green is severely contoured. The left quadrant is raised and surrounded by a half-moon lower tier. If the flag is in front right, take dead aim. Any other pin placement will benefit from a shot more towards the center of the green.

Hole #10

One of the longest par 4s on the back nine. Hit the ball down the right side of the fairway with a tight draw and you'll be in the perfect position to attack the pin with your second shot. A fade here will bring the trees on the right into play.

The entire green slopes left to right. It is fairly wide, not too challenging. I would favor the right side if you are going to miss, leaving yourself a relatively easy bunker shot uphill. A miss on the left side requires you to chip downhill from the rough, which is more difficult to control. Great way to start the back nine. Enjoy!

HOLE #11

This is a short par 4. Do not over club off this tee box. The fairway is too narrow, and the risk/reward is not worth it. Longer hitters must hit a fairwood, a hybrid, or an iron in order to hit the widest portion of the fairway. Now is not the time to attack.

This green is wide and shallow. A small pot bunker guards the front middle. You have no choice but to play aggressively into these pins because of the slope in the middle of the green. You must be confident and approach the shot with an aggressive mindset in order to leave your ball on the correct tier to give yourself the best chance at a birdie. Pay attention to the wind and err on the short side.

*Notice this hole is more low profile. It's called "the dry creek", its bunker modeled after an old, dried-up creek bed.

**If you hit to the left side of the fairway, there is a concave hollow called the "catcher's mitt." This is the ideal landing area to get a clear shot onto the green.

hole #12

Beautiful par 3. The further right you miss, the longer the shot needs to be to carry the water. If the flag is on the right side of the green, aim just left of it and use the slope. Don't be afraid to take a little extra club on and choke down.

Two-tiered green here; small back tier and then a much larger front tier. Be aggressive if the flag is at the front. Err to the left side to avoid the water and the bunker at the front of the green. A miss short left is an impossible up and down. A short miss right is fine because you have a lengthy two-putt. And if your shot is long, behind the green is a fairly straightforward up and down. (Although, when standing on the tee box, you may think I'm crazy for saying so!)

hole #13

Signature hole on the course! This is your chance to play aggressively and possibly walk off with an eagle. Don't play it too safe! Off the tee box, aim at the bunker in the center of the fairway and hit a slight draw. Good players will be left with a long iron into the green. If you hit the ball more than 250 yards, the bunker on the left will not come into play. Shorter hitters have the option to lay up across the lake or just short of the lake. In this case, favor the right side of the fairway as opposed to the bunker and draw the ball.

Play aggressively in your approach shot and draw the ball away from the hazard. If you miss the green, you're left with either a bunker shot or a chip with plenty of green to work with. So you don't need to fear the third shot. If you are laying up, make sure it's at a comfortable distance. Do not try to get close to the green if you're not comfortable with three-quarter shots or shots that aren't full swings.

Everything short on this green funnels to the water on the right side. If the pin is on the right side, play left of the flag and the ball will funnel down. If the flag is in the back of the green, watch your distance control. Attack the pin at the front of the green.

*Before you get to the 14th tee, stop at the comfort station for a snack and a drink. Two good par 4s await you!



*Fazio wanted to connect holes 14, 15, and 16 so he would have more sand to work with. The sand here is all completely natural to the island.

hole #14

Blind tee shot here. It's a dogleg left, and the further you hit, the narrower the fairway gets. Consider the wind here and choose between a fairway wood or a hybrid. Draw the ball off the tee if you want to play aggressively. If you prefer to fade the ball, aim just right of the waste area on the left side and work the ball to the largest part of the fairway.

This green has two tiers: upper left and lower right. Bunkers guard the front. If you're more comfortable in the bunkers, then the miss is short. If you're not comfortable in the bunkers, take an extra club and don't be afraid to chip back to the flag. If the flag is on the left, play aggressively to the left. Anything that hits in the center of the green will funnel to the right.

hole #15

You must hit the ball straight here. Waste bunkers guard both sides of the fairway. If you can carry the ball a decent distance, then a driver will hit the downslope and hopefully run a considerable distance. If you're not comfortable with a driver, then a fairway wood is fine. Just take the straightest club you have in the bag. The approach shot plays ever so slightly downhill, so make sure you deduct a few yards off the actual to get your number.

This green is narrow and long. Do not miss the ball in the bunker to the left. It has an awkward shape and will pose a very difficult stance and lie. If the flag is in the center of the green, don't be afraid to take a little bit less or a little bit more club just to avoid that bunker. Relatively flat green, so no real challenges posed with the putter.

*Historically there was a series of shallow wells in this area that supplied fresh water to the early residents and guests of the old Kiawah Inn.



HOLE #16

This is your last good opportunity to make an easy birdie. It's a long par 5 but very gettable. If you're a longer hitter, shape it right to left off the tee box and favor the left side of the fairway. If you miss right here, you will not be able to hit the green in two. If everything goes well, keep your foot on the gas and fade your approach shot.

Play aggressively on this green. Ideally you'll want to use the contours to work the ball close to the hole. The green slopes severely from left to right at the front with a relatively flat back tier. If the flag is on the front, play your approach shot just left of the pin. Utilize the slope to feed the ball to the hole. When the flag is at the back you have a little bit of room long left, so don't be afraid of a fraction too much club to ensure you carry the slope.



hole #17

Do not be distracted by the beautiful views! This hole requires some thought. It's one of the most exposed holes on the course, so the wind is going to affect your tee shot more than the previous three. The waste area left of the green is close to the penalty area, so miss right if you must. I like to start the ball in the right portion of the green and work it back towards the flag. But some players hit a fade and work the ball off the waste area because the error is to the right side. Stick to your game and play your natural shape.

Relatively flat green. A small spine rolls through the middle. The front portion slopes right. Make sure you walk 360 degrees around your putt, because a putt from the front to the back will break multiple different ways.

*You'll notice the back of the 15th tee here. This can also be played as the back tee for the 17th hole. And it's arguably a more direct shot!

hole #18

Home stretch! The average hitter should play a draw on this hole, starting the ball to the right center of the fairway and working it to the left. The longer hitters should favor a left to right - over the tree on the left side and work it to the right. Because the miss is definitely right. You don't want to hit driver on this hole and work it too hard to the left. This could potentially leave you in the waste area, or even the penalty area. Whatever you do, avoid the tree short left.

Fazio challenges you right to the very last moment. This is an incredibly narrow green guarded by a large bunker on the right and a waste area on the left. The green is contoured like a potato chip, with various slopes and contours. If the flag is on the front and your approach is above the hole, be very careful of the speed coming down this hill. If the flag is at the back, do not go long. Play to the center of the green and putt straight up the slope. The miss is short right!

*Fazio modeled this green after the iconic Tillinghast design - concave with sides that sweep up. The shape is a lot like a potato chip!

GOOD LUCK!!