

River Rock Relief?

Arizona terrain can cause some confusion

By James Waitt



MANY GOLF COURSES in Arizona utilize a common design feature – river rock areas or other collections of decorative stone. They usually begin adjacent to a cart path and extend into the desert areas. When your golf ball comes to rest in one of these areas, do you and, more importantly, should you get relief without penalty?

The answer is more difficult than one might think, unless of course it's your ball in the condition. Obviously, you are going to want to get out for free.

Rocks and stones are natural objects that fall under the definition of loose impediments. It can be argued that these rocks and stones, when arranged in an

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area for drainage/erosion purposes, take on the status of an obstruction.

Since the rocks and stones are movable, should they be treated as movable obstructions? Most courses don't like that idea because the rocks and stones get tossed all over the place and are not put back after the shot is completed. As a result, there tends to be a general opinion that all of these areas should be treated as immovable obstructions. The problem

with that policy is that many of these rock areas are so far away from the fairway and the intended landing area that someone who has hit their shot 50 yards or more offline (obviously a really bad shot) would be rewarded with a free drop.

In 2004, the Arizona Golf Association's Rules Committee adopted the following Local Rule to handle these areas:

“Areas of river rock or decorative stone within two-club lengths of and abutting an immovable obstruction (usually a cart path) shall be treated as part of that obstruction. All other areas of such rock shall be treated as loose impediments unless solidly embedded.”

Local rules are intended to address specific problem areas on golf courses. As we travel throughout the state, we often see clubs that employ local rules that are not

consistent with the Rules of Golf. Keep in mind that a local rule must not waive a Rule of Golf. The most common example of a local rule waiving a rule of golf is one that allows spike marks to be tamped down prior to a stroke on the putting green.

The AGA offers assistance to member clubs in defining the local rules at their golf course. Contact Ginger Monroy at the AGA office at (602) 944-3035 to set up a club visit. ■