

A Mystical Golf Adventure in Myrtle Beach

Three Dan Maple courses with strikingly different personalities

Have you ever had a witch determine the outcome of your golf score? Have you ever eaten lunch in a wizard's castle after a day on a Scottish-type links course? Or, have you ever played an island par-four, yes the hole is an island on a lake disguised as a golf course? If the answer to any of the above questions is "no", the Carolina Golf Journal has found just the spot to enjoy each of the fun possibilities just a short drive from Charlotte.



The Witch, one of the three Dan Maples courses used in the Mystical Golf adventure.

Featuring three distinctively different golf challenges, the Mystical Golf courses: The Witch, The Wizard and Man-O-War are located along the US 501 corridor just minutes west of Myrtle Beach. Reaching 4-1/2 stars from *Golf Digest* and named both "Best Bargain" and "The Best Value in America" by *GOLF Magazine*, each course in the Mystical trio is designed by celebrated architect Dan Maples.

Excellent golf packages exist up and down the Grand Strand, but Claude Pardue's Mystical Golf offers one of the best plans for two reasons. One, the three well-conditioned golf courses, all designed by renowned architect Dan Maples, are

totally different layouts spread around eye-catching scenery, and, two, the whole experience, from the golf, to the pro shops, to the food and beverage services, to the lodging is extremely affordable.

"My product is not golf. I sell fun," said Pardue. "I cater to the golfer who wants a vacation to get away from it all for a week—his home, his work, his other responsibilities—and play golf during the day with his friends, then have a dinner at a sports bar, and play poker at night. I know these golfers seek value, and we strive to provide our guests the best 'bang for the buck' in Myrtle Beach."

Awarded 4-1/2 stars by *Golf Digest*; The Witch is a Myrtle Beach favorite. The challenging layout sits regally on 500 acres of tranquil cypress groves and wetlands teeming with flora and fauna. Well-placed tee shots to manicured fairways and razor-sharp iron approaches are awarded. With 4,000 feet of bridges snaking through a magnificent swamp and rolling hills, golfers may spy cranes, bald eagles, alligators and black bears. Holes are separated by deep swaths of forest promoting a glorious pure-golf vibe. The Witch is golf and Mother Nature in perfect harmony.



A Myrtle Beach favorite - The Witch- awarded 4 1/2 stars by Golf Digest.

The front side plays much longer than the backside. The first couple holes required similar tee-shots, yet the approach shots were much different. The first par-3 was a mid ranged par three over a bunch of junk. The angles were very different on each tee, but all appropriate for the skill level.

The next stretch of 3 holes was somewhat difficult. The shorter par-4 4th hole has water down the left side of this hole almost the entire length with some very strategic bunkers on the right. The par-5 5th hole is an S-shaped hole that is going to be a 3 shot hole for 99% of golfers, and the par-4 6th hole was one of the longest and most difficult par 4s on the course; requiring a long drive and then accuracy on the second shot.

The final 3 holes on the front side were more strategic than difficult. The par-3 7th hole is fronted by water, but there is more than enough green and rough to work with on this longer hole. The big bending right par-5 8th hole was not over difficult, just long, and the shorter par 4 9th hole was visually tricky, but played fairly tame. The first 3 holes of the back nine wrap around the driving range.

The par-4 10th hole is nothing too tough to start out the backside, while the par-5 11th hole runs along the road busy with traffic. While the road is not right next to the hole, the road sounds are very different than the tranquil sounds on the rest of the course. The par-3 12th hole is very simple, although fairly long. The par-5 13th hole tees off right next to the clubhouse and for the next 6 holes you are back into the swampland again. The par-3 14th is the shortest hole on the course, but for some reason played fairly difficult for our group. The longer par-4 15th offered a generous landing area, which leads to a lower green fronted, by swamp and creek.

The final three holes are a great closing stretch of holes that aren't too tough, but yet maintaining focus to the end is important. The dogleg right par-4 16th hole needs a well placed tee-shot in order to make par here. The par-3 17th needs the ball to stay away from the left drop-off and woods. The finishing hole is a very picturesque par-4 down hill right in front of the clubhouse.

The Man-O-War Jelly fish is best known for how dangerous and deadly they can be in the ocean or on the beach. Well, the Man-O-War golf course might better be named Man-O-Water for its ample amount of deadly and dangerous water.



The Man-O-War Golf Course will test your over-water skills.

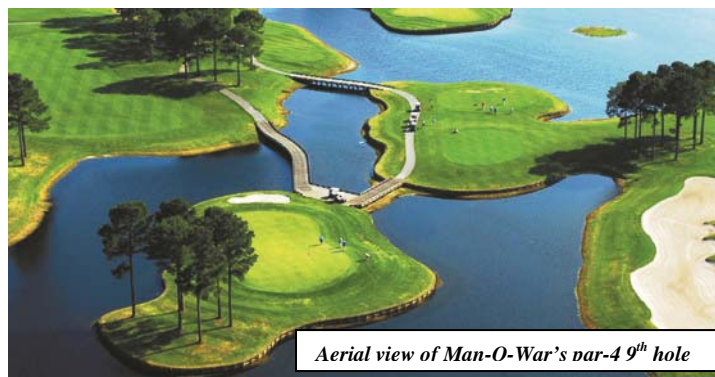
Starting with a shorter par-5 wasn't too bad, and really was one of the tamer holes of the day. The par-3 2nd hole just offered a hint of what was to come with water long of this green. The par-4 3rd and 4th holes were pretty much straightaway with a similar length. While they played opposite directions and on each side of the driving range they weren't nearly as frightening as the holes to come.

From the 5th hole until the finish of the front nine there seemed to be ample danger from water hazards. The long par-4 5th hole had water all down the left side. The decent

length par-3 6th had water in front. The par-4 7th had water all down the left side and the long par-5 8th had water on the left, tree on the right. The par-4 9th is a long island hole. There is water on both sides of the fairway and all behind the green. While there is water on so many holes, at times it can feel intimidating, but actually there was more than ample room for tee shots and approach shots even for even high handicapper. From the women's tee there were very few forced carries over water.

Over all, the front side plays long enough and tough enough, but not abusive or unplayable. The back nine has a little more war (water) in it. While it doesn't play as long, there are a few more water hazards and island holes on this 9. Hole 10 is an average par-4 that has water fronting the green. The par-4 11th comes back with water fronting this green too.

The par-4 12th has water in play on the left side, and the long par-5 13th doesn't have much water, but plays long with OB all down the left side with houses. The par-4 14th hole is the first island green. But this green and surrounding area is huge and doesn't feel like a little island. The par-3 15th is also an island green, but this one too is very large with more than ample bail out area.



Aerial view of Man-O-War's par-4 9th hole

The building was built on pillars in the middle of the lake. It is really a cool setting for a clubhouse. Man-O-War's commanding 141 slope rating is offset by massive, bent-grass greens – making putting a joy – and

tantalizing par 5's begging golfers to go for glory. With no holes playing or even looking the same, the grand illusions and magic of Man-O-War make it a Myrtle Beach must play.

What Dan has done is transport the golfer into thinking he is in the Scottish Highlands or on the Irish coast, playing a classic, wind-swept, wide-open links course. Stone bridges like Swilcan Bridge at St. Andrews are also part of The Wizard's trademark. The par-72, 6,721-yards appear to be easy to tame as the golfer stands on each tee, but, once again, that is the illusion.



The Wizard Golf Course comes with its very own old Mystical Castle clubhouse, stone bridges, pro shop and restaurant.

Deep bunkers (many of them hidden from view); dry gullies and hidden burns, subtle elevation changes, mound-framed fairways, and fast bent-grass greens are the sorcery at work. Nothing that straight drives, crisp irons, and that wand on the green can't ward off, of course. The Wizard is a golf treat. You'll think you've been transported to the Scottish Highlands with ever present deep bunkers, mound-framed fairways, dramatic elevation changes and dry gullies throughout. Golfers' journeys crescendo with a one-two punch. No. 17 – a classic par-3 – requires a well-struck iron onto a Royal Dornoch-style green perilously flanked by water on all sides.

The robust par-4 18th is a land unto itself with an island tee; island fairway and peninsula green testing your nerve and skill. Par these two stalwarts and you'll moonwalk to the 19th hole in the old-world, castle-style clubhouse. The *Golf Digest* 4-star course is enchanting!

With 4000 feet of bridges through swamps and pristine habitat, almost every hole is secluded and is surrounded by forest and native flora. The golfer, who quickly realizes the beauty and challenge of the course, is also privy to the native fauna such as cranes and herons, bald eagles and other raptors, alligators and deer, and the occasional black bear.

As Pardue stated, "I wanted The Witch to be golf and Mother Nature in perfect harmony." Pardue also wanted to expand upon The Witch theme in its "haunting" surroundings by building a Gothic gabled mansion for the clubhouse and devising a "spooky" logo for the flags and pro shop merchandise. The tee markers are small cypress stumps from the swamp that resemble a witch's hat. The Affordable Appeal of Mystical Golf Pardue, who is active in the day-to-day management of his properties and often speaks with his guests after the round, was much more effusive when asked why Mystical Golf has been so successful in an area that is teeming with competition.

He said, "My product is not golf. I sell fun. I cater to the golfer who wants a vacation to get away from it all for a week—his home, his work, his other responsibilities—and play golf during the day with his friends, then have a dinner at a sports bar, and play poker at night. I know these golfers seek value, and we strive to provide our guests the best 'bang for the buck' in Myrtle Beach."

For more information visit the website www.mysticalgolf.com.