

south africa

# Duffer's guide to the 19th

The law of the jungle applies when faced with the world's quirkiest tee-off, writes **Kate Armstrong**.

TWENTY seconds is a long time to wait and see if you've won \$US1 million. That's the time a golf ball takes to sail through the air after impact and land on the ground.

Welcome to the world's longest, and quirkiest, par three – the Extreme 19th hole at Legend Golf & Safari Resort in Limpopo Province, South Africa – where \$US1 million is up for grabs for the player who gets a hole in one.

I'm standing nervously, golf club in hand and waiting my turn, to hit off from the Extreme 19th's tee box. It teeters over a cliff on top of the 430-metre Hanglip Mountain. My adrenaline is already through the roof; we've just had the most exhilarating trip here – by helicopter.

To calm myself I concentrate on the extraordinary view: Africa's bushveldt spreads for miles. A large swathe of velvety green indicates Legend's championship 18-hole golf course. It's superlative in every sense.

The course is the longest par-72 in the world and is within a wildlife reserve, the 22,000-hectare Entabeni private game reserve. Each hole has been designed by one of 18 of the world's golfing legends, including Australia's Robert Allenby, Germany's Bernhard Langer and Spain's Sergio Garcia.

Course hazards include massive



Reach me ... (from above) the Hanglip Mountain tee-off; the course from ground level; impala at the seventh hole.

Photos: Getty Images

bunkers, lakes and baobab trees.

Other hazards are more idiosyncratic. Warthogs, wildebeests and zebras wander freely across fairways. The Big Five – lion, leopard, rhinoceros, buffalo and elephant – are safely behind fences; you can see these on a safari drive offered by the resort.

Legend's club professional, Wilhelm Groenewald, says no matter what the course hazards, rules are rules: "If a monkey takes off with your ball and drops it, you must play it from where the ball has been dropped." That's

not the only unconventional aspect to Legend. As well as the championship course, the resort boasts the recently opened Tribute Course, replicas of the world's 10 most captivating par threes. You can try your luck on Royal Melbourne's tricky bunker-strewn 6th hole, Troon's Postage Stamp (8th hole), and Augusta's Golden Bell (12th hole).

Back on the tee box of the Extreme 19th I'm now concentrating on the green below. It screams "reach me". The green itself is designed in the shape of Africa, with a tiny extra

“

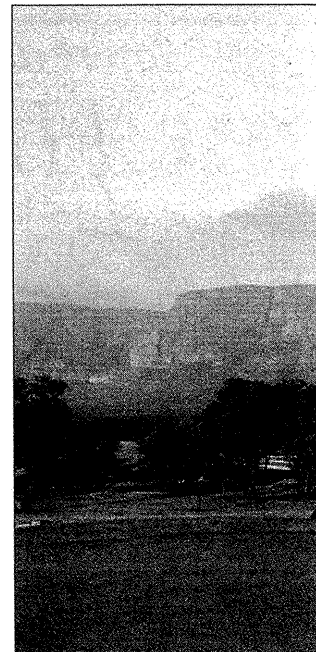
My ball was impeded by a passing wildebeest.

green (that's Madagascar) to its east. It helps to know your geography; even the green's contours have been built to reflect that of the continent.

I'm hedging my bets. I figure if I'm lucky (really lucky) my ball might clear the scrub, bounce off an eland, roll on to the green and – plop! – into the hole.

It's time for my two minutes of possible glory; I address the ball. I am sporting a newly bought pink shirt and matching glove; I'm keen to look the part, if nothing else. I've borrowed Wilhelm's club (a King Cobra S-9 Tour Driver, for those interested); its head is as big as a tennis racquet compared with my own small woods, my mother's 1960s cast-offs.

I keep my head down, draw the club back and swing. At that moment I have a golfer's epiphany: if I am to duff the ball and it merely dribbles over the cliff edge to drop 430 metres, it will be nevertheless the longest drive I'll ever do. It's a



clean hit, although my follow-through is lame; no sooner have I whacked the ball than I rush to the edge of the tee to peer over the mountain's lip. The group collectively hold their breath.

The 20-second ball drop gives me time to compute: the actual trajectory – from the top of the cliff directly to the green – is 627 metres, – the equivalent in golfing terms, Wilhelm tells us, of a 280-metre drive. This promotional talk makes it sound, well, almost achievable.

After all, strange things can happen in golf. A former boyfriend