



Rule of the Month

Nearest Point of Complete Relief (Rule 16 and Definitions)

When taking free relief from an 'Abnormal Course Condition' such as a cart path, staked tree or casual water it is important to understand that complete relief must be taken. This is the point at which the ball, the players stance, and the players swing are all clear of interference from the condition from which the player is taking relief, and this point is no nearer the hole than where the ball currently lies.

For example, the players ball lies on a cart path and they wish to take relief. Obviously, the player will drop the ball at a point which is not on the cart path, but this may not be enough when determining complete relief. The player must also take into account their stance, which also must not be on the path after relief has been taken.

Similarly, if the players ball lies next to a staked tree, they must take relief since this is a No Play Zone in the NAGC local rules. Again, the player may drop the ball away from the tree, but they must also ensure that this is at the nearest point of complete relief where their stance and swing are also not affected by the staked tree.

Interestingly, when a player's ball lies in the very middle of a cart path which runs parallel to the fairway, (such as the path between the 1st and 18th at North Adelaide), it is very likely that the nearest point of complete relief (the reference point) will be different depending on whether the player is right or left handed. The player must ensure that they do not stand on the path after taking relief therefore for a right-handed player, the reference point will probably be on the 18th hole side of the path, and for a left-handed player it will probably be on the 1st hole side.

This would also likely be the same if the player's ball was next to the trunk of a staked tree.

Whilst it is not compulsory to mark out your reference point and one club length when taking free relief, it is recommended that you do this **before** touching your ball.

There are two reasons for this:

- Firstly, it will show to your marker and fellow players that you have found the correct reference point and dropping area, and subsequently that your drop remains in the dropping area (i.e. within one club length of the reference point), thus preventing possibly uncomfortable discussions about unfair play.
- Secondly, having found the correct reference point and dropping area, you might find that you would be worse off if you take the drop (for example, directly behind a tree or bush) and you then can choose to play the ball as it lies.

Remember – once you have touched or picked up your ball with the intention of taking relief, you must take relief; you cannot change your mind afterwards and replace your ball on the original spot.