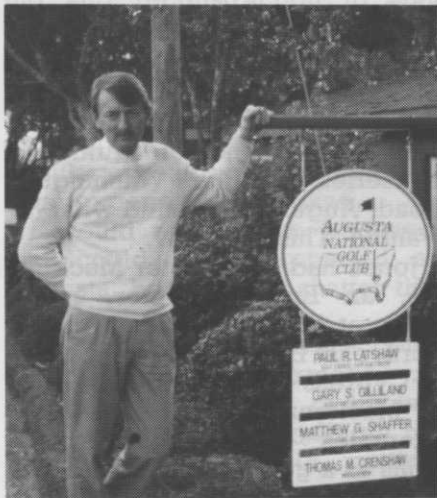


AUGUSTA!

Augusta National and the US Masters mean something special to most golfers and I'm no exception. The thought, therefore, of having the opportunity to see the course firsthand recently was exciting and eagerly anticipated. I was not to be disappointed, writes *Howard Swan (below)...*



The morning dawned bright and sunny, if a little cold for Georgia, when I was privileged to accompany Jack McMillan and Tim Bowyer, a University of Georgia Ph.D. and now president of Southern Turf Nurseries, to Augusta. The car journey of over three hours along the straight and dull freeway at the statutory, yet modest, 55 mph seemed to take an eternity.



Jack McMillan with the 4th green (background, left) and the lovely, but lethal, 16th green to the right.

But, finally, we made it and drew up to those hallowed gates through which few seem able to pass. We felt duly honoured that, via the GCSAA, the club and Tim Bowyer, we had obtained an entry badge.

Lunch in the Green Jacket Restaurant opposite the club, surrounded totally by memorabilia of the tournament, gave us the opportunity to meet Paul Latshaw, Augusta National's superintendent - a relatively recent recruit from Oakland Hills, New Jersey, itself a US Open Championship venue. He seemed a thoroughly relaxed man for one whose course would become the centre of the world's golfing eyes in early April, only some two months away.

He spoke authoritatively about his experiences in the north and his work in managing a prestige championship course and how he came to step "from the frying pan into the fire" in 1986 when he moved to Augusta.

The change, he said, was immense, not only because the whole of his management programme was geared to the Masters, but because of the vastly different climatic conditions Augusta experiences, with summers of high temperature and humidity and the attendant agronomic problems. Gone were the winter snow cover, frosts and cold winds of the north-east.

Augusta National is most famously associated with one man, Robert Tyre Jones, 'Bobby' to all, who, in the 1920s, became the world's greatest golfer.

He was, of course, an amateur - a Boy Wonder, playing in his first national championship when fourteen and, seven years later, winning the US Open (not the first time an amateur has won the tournament, however).

His years at the top were scant, covering only the time it today takes most young pros to win a single tournament, but the record he set in those eight years is colossal.

From 1923 onwards, it was Bobby Jones against anybody, everybody, all of the field, amateur or professional. He won 13 major titles, five US Amateurs, one



The par-four 14th, known as Chinese Fir.



No. 13 – the last of three holes renowned as Amen Corner.



A place for everything – everything in its place...



The short 12th, menaced by the waters of Rae's Creek.

British Amateur and, in 1926, he became the first to win both US and (British) Open Championships in the same year. He remained an amateur.

In 1930, he retired at the height of his career, after completing The Grand Slam. He was highly successful, universally liked and accoladed for his commitment, attitude and modesty.

He was a natural who had never taken a lesson. He picked up a club and just swung it, as if it was the most natural thing to do. During play, he never asked a caddie for advice in any form. It was only after he gave up the game that his immense talent was recognised and he became a true American hero.

He returned to his native Atlanta to practise law and soon began to look at building his dream course. It had to be close to home and in the land of Fruitlands Nurseries on the Washington Road, Augusta, he found what he wanted. This was 1931.

Jones had met Alister Mackenzie, an English doctor, many times at golf tournaments in the north-east but, most significantly, at Cypress Point, California, one of Mackenzie's most renowned examples of his considerable skills as a golf course architect.

Jones commissioned the doctor to design his new course at Augusta. He had chosen, in his opinion, the best site and the best man to lay out a course on it.

Work began almost immediately to a budget of \$100,000 (remember this was 1931). The specification was as never before – 80 acres of fairway, 100,000 square feet of green, sophisticated drainage and an underground watering system, one of the first in the world.

In his design, Mackenzie was uninhibited. Encouraged by Jones, he created the best simulated seaside conditions he could and as the land would allow – rolling, bumping fairways, only 29 bunkers, minimal simplicity, absolute heaven.

The day we saw Augusta National, it was just that.

A hole by hole buggy tour, guided by the superintendent, who was constantly questioned by the British, was fascinating.

I had imagined that the golf course would be the showpiece I had seen on television, so ar-

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tificial and so contrived as to be unacceptable to the traditionalist.

It was exactly the opposite.

A large expanse of open meadow to the front of the clubhouse contained the home greens, outward tees and fairways, downhill and undulating, dotted with white sand in beautifully shaped bunkers. To the left and right were the tree-lined fairways to the 10th and 1st, with no discernible rough - green and flowing, open and pleasant.

The greens borrow heavily, true to Mackenzie tradition. Originally Bermudagrass, they were more recently converted to bent, with considerable reshaping and reconstruction to suit grass and architectural whim. The greens had been returfed in that process and, interestingly, were exhibiting problems of poor rooting, soil incompatibilities and capillary breaks similar to those I have experienced at home.

I would never have believed that could have happened at Augusta, but it didn't shatter the dream!

Fairways and tees were common Bermuda, dormant, of course, on our visit, oversown with ryegrass, providing, by Masters time, perfect golfing surfaces.

Reaching the holes on Amen Corner (11, 12 and 13) was the climax of our tour. The architecture was stimulating and all without the vast array of flowering shrubs in bloom. It must really be a picture at tournament time in April.

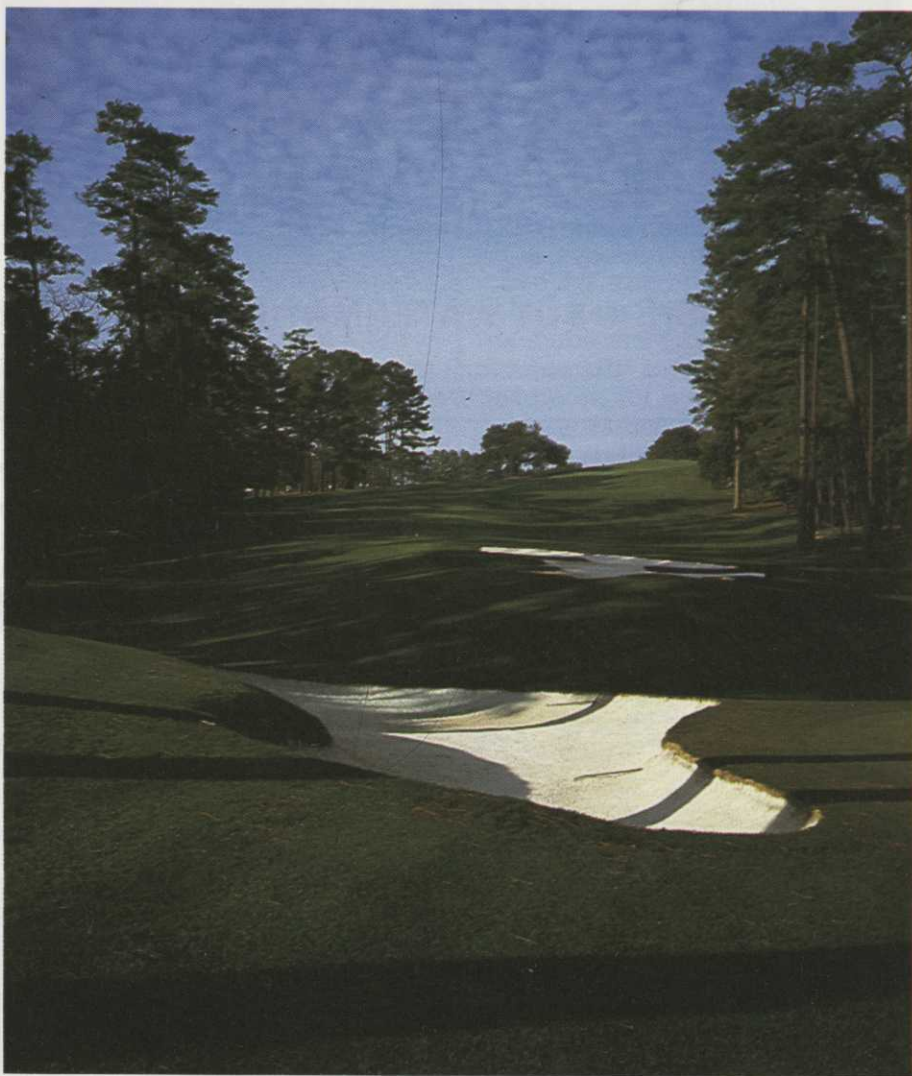
I have to say that it should be in good condition. After all, no one plays it. The membership is exclusive, to understate the point. In the five hours of our visit, we saw only five golfers - one four and a single! And the course is closed through the hot and humid summer prior to overseeding and preparation.

I was surprised to find a par-three course also on the club's land, to the back of the elegant colonial houses that flank the clubhouse. The short course plays a significant part in Masters week when the pros have a lighthearted day on it. From what we saw, it looked as attractive, challenging and superbly kept as the main course.

We returned to the clubhouse - which, sadly, we were not permitted to enter - in the late afternoon



The British contingent - Howard Swan, Rita and Jack McMillan - revelled in the delights of Augusta, guided by Paul Latshaw.



and to the maintenance complex. It may be modestly provided with buildings but, by many British standards, it was palatial.

There was an office with a secretary, a laboratory, staff facilities, mower stores, material stores, large machinery stores, all excellently laid out and maintained, and as many Cushman's as I have seen on one golf course.

Needless to say, Jack McMillan

melted at the sight!

I came away with the lasting impression that it was all being professionally managed and presented, much to the credit of the superintendent and his staff, some 50 years after the inspiration of Jones and Mackenzie began it all.

Augusta National is a marvellous golfing place and it was a magical day.