Hot ... Hot ... Hot!

TPC network takes off with new construction

BY PETER B LAIS

The network of PGA Tour Tournament Player Club facilities will reach the quarter-century mark by the year 2000 with seven courses currently under construction or in planning and others being discussed, according to Chris Smith, director of special projects for the PGA Tour.

The latest course to come aboard is the TPC at Wakefield Plantation in Raleigh, N.C. The Hale Irwin design broke ground Sept. 16 and is the first TPC course to be announced as the future home of a Nike Tour event, Smith said.

"It [the number of TPC facilities] is expanding because of the overall success of the TPC network," said Smith, adding that TPC clubs have garnered a number of operational and design awards.

The TPC network runs the gamut from private to public to resort facilities. With the exception of the TPC at Eagle Trace, which yielded the Honda Classic to the recently opened (1996) TPC at Heron Bay, all the PGA Tour Golf Course Properties owned and/or operated by the PGA Tour host Tour events.

The design arm of the PGA Tour — PGA Tour Design Services — works with the architect that the developer hires at each facility to make sure the Tour’s needs are addressed. A PGA Tour player is usually also involved as a consultant or designer on the project. "Player involvement is important in the design of all TPC courses," Smith said. "All..."
Ireland welcomes Kirby design on Old Head

Kirby, who is semi-retired and lived at Old Head the last two summers to design the course "totally hands-on," said he had faced challenges similar to those of handling lava at Mauna Kea Beach Hotel Golf Course in Hawaii but "not with this beauty.

"Bobby [Robert Trent Jones Jr.] had a property like this one at Clearwater Bay in Hong Kong, but it was not wide enough. This was difficult to route, but there's plenty of room — 210 acres."

There is a minimum of five tees on every hole and the par-72 layout plays from 5,844 to 6,756 yards. But the routing had to work around an archeological site, which is a hazard on the 10th hole; an old tower house which was restored just inside the main gate to allow the public to watch a seabird colony in the cliffs and caves; the Old Head of Kinsale Lighthouse built in 1853 at the southern extremity of the peninsula.

History and modern-day golf meet here.

Old Head is a national monument and ancient Royal site, fortified by a castle at the narrowest part of the promontory. Its history traces back to between 200 BC and 400 AD, and it is the only definitely known place directly connected by historians and academics with the Eirean Celtic tribe, who gave its name to Ireland as a whole.

The Stone of Accord once stood here. A free-standing piece of limestone with a single hole at the top, it was used by ancient tribesmen who sealed a deal by placing their fingers in the hole at either side.

Kirby kept this history, as well as the natural beauty of the peninsula, in mind in his design.

"I tried to keep it natural," he said. "We moved very little dirt, less than 200,000 cubic yards."

Many of the contours for a golf course already existed, including the 2nd hole which Kirby called "the most natural hole God ever built."

"You do nothing to that hole," he said. "The dogleg was exactly 265 yards to the corner. No designer should ever miss that hole."

Old Head, said the man who has designed scores of courses from America to Britain, Europe, Africa, Asia and Central America, is "the best I've ever done."

The wind will be a major factor. So will the 90 bunkers, most of them cut deep to prevent that wind from blowing out the sand. And the panorama will be a distraction from every hole on the course, Kirby said.

Working with Carr, a three-time British Amateur champion who has played international golf for Ireland 110 times including 10 Walker Cup matches, was wonderful, he said. "He is a fun, delightful guy. He is a friend of the O'Connor brothers and this was his first design project. We thoroughly enjoyed it."

There is no fairway irrigation, encouraging traditional "bump-and-run" play, and builders planted colonial bentgrass on the greens and an 80-20 mix of fescue and bentgrass on the fairways.

Kirby said a limit of 20,000 rounds a year will be played on Old Head Golf Links. Once that limit is met, it will be shut down to preserve its conditioning.

Carts? They will be available as a concession to group play by overseas corporations who normally demand the option, Kirby said.

Area businessmen expect Old Head to draw visitors, and more hotel rooms are being built in Kinsale.

"This course could host the Irish Open some day," Kirby said.

Meanwhile, Kirby is the lead architect on Hook Head Golf Links in Hook Head, Wexford County, Ireland.

Grading has begun on the property and it should open in another year or two, he said. It is a tight site for a 18-hole track — allowing 5,600 yards on less than 100 acres — but seven or eight holes along ocean cliffs.

Michael Cullen, a local developer, has built low-budget holiday cottages in Hook Head and intends golf to be an amenity.

Is it just us, or does a course without dollar spot seem like a much happier place?