



In Bounds

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Over the last MEA weekend my family and I ventured north on a much-deserved vacation to Madeline Island. This, the fifth in a series of annual autumn cross-county trips, was full of family embracement, adventure and some education. Mid October affords me a lull in the golf course action when I can create some guilt free time to spend with my family away from the office.

Previous trips have included Chicago, Washington D.C., The Ozarks and Mount Rushmore. At this time of year, post summer vacation, and with the exception of Washington D.C., the crowds are non-existent. In fact, we saw more wildlife in the Badlands than tourists. And many of the sites and accommodations have been available at a great discount, as in up to 60 percent off peak pricing. To me a vacation is always better when you return home with some change in your pocket!

On our quests we have been surrounded by bovines in a cattle drive, shopped at the original Bass Proshop, stalled with commuters riding the rails home from Chicago (I was surprised at the legality of drinking in public upon the train) and explored the largest network of caves in North America.

Johnny Law caught up with us in the windy city and Madeline Island. The first incident involved speeding, crossing a solid white line and not yielding to pedestrian traffic. Fortunately I was not driving, however, it was the third offense in as many weeks for the Middle Eastern cabbie. After flipping the driver a twenty, we walked the rest of the way to the Navy Museum, our ears ringing with the colorful singsong rhythm of what we suspect were naughty Arabic words.

On the island after which my daughter was named, Madeline, I was documented exceeding the 40-mile per hour speed limit by a solid fifteen. My son Tyler said, "Oh cool!" when the red lights filled our interior from behind, I just whispered "Oh sh!#." Thankfully, the officer understood our hurry to catch the 9:00 a.m. ferry, or perhaps and more likely he wanted some repeat business during another slow season, and didn't issue me a citation.

On two of my family travels I brought my sticks and experienced three different courses. The first was The Merit Club where my gracious host was none other than turf guru Oscar Miles. Just the visit with him alone made the long night of sleeping under the watchful eyes of my sister's pit bull bearable. Mr. Miles shared his many philosophies on golf course design, irrigation systems, staff management and agronomics. Of particular interest was his reliance upon turf tissue analysis for the management of his greens.

Although I am a skeptic of tissue analysis due to the turn around time with laboratories, Mr. Miles had that problem solved for he owned his own dry analysis machine. His years of in house procedures had also developed a nutrient requirement baseline specific for The Merit Club and I was very impressed.

Another course visited was Heather Ridge, or as my brother-in-law and I fondly referred to it in almost every sentence, "The Ridge", a lower end municipal course. We engaged the track purely for giggles and camaraderie. I do however lament the fact that they had recently aerified the greens, didn't allow spikes (five years ago) and even delayed us due to frost. Imagine that! We were even given ball repair tools to fix our ball marks!

The last club I toured was the Robert Trent Sr. designed course at Madeline Island. Although the day was fair and the pins were out, my son and I found the clubhouse and proshop locked up tight. Go figure! In fact the only other witnesses to our errant shots were the many deer who graced the fairways. So tame were they that none excused themselves as we played through. Instead the ruminating creatures that milled about in foursomes of their own critiqued our game.

It was on the eighth hole I heard a cart in the distance, "No doubt the Superintendent." I told my son Tyler. Sure enough Jim Erickson, Superintendent of Madeline Island Golf Club was out and about checking his course.

Resplendent in his Carharts and leather boots, Jim greeted us with a well-callused hand and sun baked smile. He had recently blown his irrigation system and was waiting for the last of the leaves to drop before one more vacuum. We touched upon the weather, budgets, his membership and the availability of equipment and turf management tools at his disposal upon his island retreat. With a nod Jim left us to finish our round, again much to the annoyance of the deer.

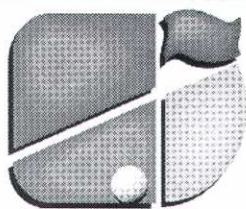
Three very different courses, and yet so incredibly similar. Regardless as to the maintenance dollars, management technique or membership, each provided exactly what they were designed for, an opportunity for an enjoyable outdoor athletic experience. Each was a treat to be on. I didn't care about the rain washed out bunkers at The Merit Club. The frost delay at "The Ridge" didn't put me over the top. And so what if there was a bit of deer manure spread willy nilly upon the Madeline Island Golf Club? I had fun. Period. End of statement. And isn't that why they call it a game?

But my real focus on these adventures wasn't to spend time on the turf. Rather I was getting away to be with my family. Together we have created memories to enjoy for the rest of our lives. I would encourage everyone to take, or should I say make the opportunities to bond. It doesn't have to be on a long journey either.

In fact, two very memorable family mini-tours have included the Hormel Museum in Austin and the Aquarium in Duluth. The quality of information available and hands on fun provided by the meat museum in southern Minnesota makes this destination a family favorite. And the wealth of inland sea knowledge and opportunities for exploring a local port city makes the Duluth tour a daylong experience.

My family quests have touched upon and drawn out a variety of emotions and worldly experiences. From the Crazy Horse Monument to the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., we have explored the past, present and future history of our great country. And as we begin to plan our next journey we will reflect upon our last. Family bonding, education and just plain fun will be our guide on the next road trip to adventure.

-JM



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