

By the time I got to Phoenix

I HAD willingly accepted an invitation from the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America to chair the international golf course management session at the 58th International Golf Course Conference and Show in Phoenix, Arizona at the end of January, writes Michael Coffey.

A trip to the United States is always a delight. I find it stimulating. I learn something new every time I go, the weather is invariably better than at home and, above all else, America is where anything is possible. Whether I could live there permanently or cope with all that food is a different matter, but hospitality and friendliness abound.

Long-haul flights are not to be enjoyed, especially if, for reasons of simple economy, you travel TWA (The world's Worst Airline?). Seven hours to New York with a third degree grilling by a 'welcoming committee' from the immigration service, followed by another five hours down to Phoenix, takes a bit of getting over.

Phoenix, a city of nearly a million, about the size of Birmingham, but a lot better organised, is essentially a one-storey sprawl, expanding daily into the desert. However, there appears to be plenty of room left. Phoenix was a staging post, renowned for its clear air and favoured by those suffering from allergies, although since the introduction of resort hotels, cultivated and irrigated gardens and verges, sufferers have had to move steadily further and further out.

An indication of how times have changed rapidly can be gained by noting that, in 1946, the suburb of Scottsdale had no made-up roads. Currently, there are 20 golf course and real estate developments under construction!

At this point, it might be wise to point out that, although I enjoy America and many of its attractions, I am well aware it is neither practical nor economically feasible to import American ways wholesale to the UK. For instance, could anyone see £65 becoming commonplace as a green fee here?

The hotel that housed the British party was very pleasant, set in 26 acres with oranges and grapefruit growing everywhere. It also featured a large pool and, with temperatures touching 75 degrees, jetlag soon disappeared.

My first venture out was for "enforced culture," a trip to the Grand Canyon courtesy of Jack and Rita McMillan's hire car. Two hundred and twenty miles of

desert, with no petrol stations en route from Phoenix, through the Red Rock cowboy country, where ranches are measured in tens of thousands of acres, eventually brought us to the canyon rim.

Spectacular it most certainly is, over a mile deep and several miles long with the Colorado River running through the bottom. A proposed helicopter trip was quickly cancelled or, should I say, chickened out of! It's well worth a visit if you ever get the chance.

It was time to check into the conference and show. The GCSAA's hospitality to international visitors is limitless. From executive director John Schilling down, the entire staff could not have been more helpful. I would especially like to thank Jim Prusa, who has now left the association and will be greatly missed by all, Colleen Pedersen who has taken over as the GCSAA's director of education, Judy Jones, who handled all our problems so swiftly, and Bob Still and Chris Caldwell.

The trade show itself is almost as big as the IOG show at Windsor, but indoors. There is much to see and many people to bump into, although the British contingent was smaller than in recent years. It included David Palmer of Supaturf on a first visit to see his son, Richard Fry, Mr and Mrs Jonathan Franks of British Seed Houses, Dr Peter Hayes, director of the STRI, Bill and Eileen Hawthorn of Watermation, Christine Smith, who was not always in charge of the IOG's young and 'old' groundsmen of the year, Chris Smith of Jacobsen, Duncan Stewart of Maxwell Hart, Bob Dodsworth and John Wilson on a very busy Ransomes stand, as well as Jim and Audrey Arthur, Jack and Rita McMillan and Howard Swan, chairman of the NTC, who were speakers in the

international golf course management session programme.

Maybe it was because the show was shorter this year, but I didn't see that many new things, much attention being given to the Jacobsen turf groomer and its copies. Ransomes, I gather, had a novel way of entertaining guests, taking them to a rodeo, complete with covered wagons, and barbecue.

During Friday, Jack McMillan, course manager at Sunningdale and vice-chairman of BIGGA, gave a paper on deep aeration, i.e. the use of deep slitters and the verti-drain. Jack was concerned that the audience might not understand his Scottish brogue. Suffice it to say that the verti-drain stand manned by Ruudi Francissen of Redexim of Holland, which sells the machine in America, had 50 enquiries that day alone.

Saturday was taken up entirely by the international session. With the assistance of Colleen Pedersen and Judy Jones, the entire team of speakers, from such diverse places as the Philippines, China, Japan, Mexico, Sweden, Scotland and England, were brought together for a photocall and to 'break the ice.'

Chairing the session was a little harrowing, but we got under way with a quick fire, but excellent, presentation on golf in Japan, then similar topics covering China, central America and the Philippines. By this time, the audience was dwindling due to a rival session on The Black Layer, something Arthur Harrison of SISIS could have sorted out had they asked him to speak.

Matters were revived by Rolf Loewgren of the Swedish Golf Federation who spoke on Golf In Northern Europe. His tongue-in-cheek performance had the audience highly amused. Jack McMillan gave a good account of how poorly greenkeepers in the UK had organised themselves until recently and how he felt optimistic about the future of the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association.

Howard Swan gave a paper on The British Isles - The Traditional Home Of The Golf Course, which was very patriotic and extremely well-researched and illustrated.



GCSAA trade show in full swing.

Jim Arthur brought matters to a close, by which time only 45 remained in a room capable of holding over 300. No doubt Jim would have had some very interesting words for the 400 who attended the 'black layer' gathering next door.

Everyone gave their best and I understand that sales of the session tapes are going well, although I doubt whether the top ten will be threatened. After nearly four hours of listening and handing out plaques, Toro's reception was much appreciated.

I had been looking forward to Sunday. The United States Golf Association green section held its annual seminar, which was, as usual, well-attended, although guest speaker Howard Keel of Dallas fame and a former greens chairman at the Bel Air Country Club seemed a little lost without a script.

I enjoyed the best of the season's tips, which are the ideas USGA agronomists pick up as they visit clubs around the country and pass on each year to



Grand Canyon, Arizona.



Speakers at the international golf show management session: Vicente Buencamino, Jim Arthur, Rolf Loewgren, Michael Coffey of Greenkeeper, Howard Swan, Alwyn Tai, Toru Inoue and Jack McMillan.

GCSAA members. Star of the show was Stanley Zontek, who patrols the mid-atlantic section. He is a polished and amusing performer and I am pleased that he will be giving a UK audience the benefit of his knowledge and wit

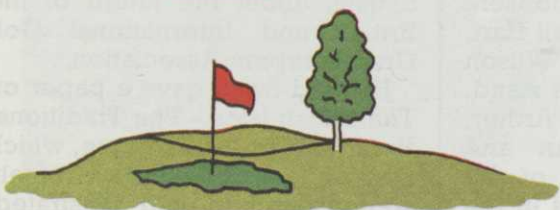
sometime in 1988. I was less impressed with The Magic of Lime from the green section head Bill Bengeyfield. But, as I said earlier, all that glitters and is American does not necessarily apply to Great Britain - far from it!

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I had been invited by a good friend, Dan Pierson, who is superintendent at the Cherry Hills Country Club in Denver, where Andy North won the US Open in 1978, to play the Desert Highlands Golf Club, outside Scottsdale (see the comments of Dr Peter Hayes on the facing page and the feature on page 19).

Accompanied by Howard Swan and Dr Peter Hayes as 'official photographer,' a great time was had by all. The whole set up is unbelievable and I am sure I will never see anything quite like it again. Together with other golfing extravaganza's such as Troon Village and Desert Mountain, it is a testament to unlimited imagination and the fact that, if you have enough money, anything can be turned into a golf course.

On our return, sunburnt and excited by what we had seen, we attended the GCSAA president's reception - the culmination of a year that Riley Stottern will always remember and a most enjoyable party. This was followed by the Jacobsen international dinner, the highlight of which was an amazing feat by Curt Kimpfbeck, who introduced all 70 or so diners from all over the world by name, recognising each of them with a little anecdote.

Monday saw the wind up of events and saying goodbyes, with the grand finale being the banquet. The top table was three tiers deep and some 1,700 sat down to dinner - an awesome sight. The focal point was the presentation of the Old Tom Morris Award to Robert Trent Jones, now an energetic 80 and a man who has put his name to some 500 golf course designs right across the world.

Born in Lancashire, his family moved to New York State when he was six and he soon became a useful golfer - finishing top amateur in the 1927 Canadian Open.

The new GCSAA president Donald Hearn took office, retiring president Riley Stottern received many compliments and appreciation was shown to associate director Jim Prusa, who was making his final official appearance for the GCSAA.

Marie Osmond and her brothers brought the whole show to a rousing end. A fitting piece of razzmatazz for an event that is almost larger than life, but an extremely enjoyable experience.

My impressions of golf in Arizona - by Dr Peter Hayes

THE annual rainfall of Scottsdale is about six inches per year, hence the climate is arid. The native vegetation is mainly of a desert type, dominated by cacti plants - for example, the saguaro and cholla cacti - and small yucca shrubs.

In the development of any golf course in this sort of hostile, arid climate, water is an absolute necessity and by the addition of water to these areas, the desert can turn green. One of the biggest problems in Arizona, and also Southern California and Florida, is the shortage of good water. Therefore, irrigation schemes on golf courses and landscaping areas are carried out by using secondary water - that is, effluent from sewage works, etc. This secondary water is piped separately to golf courses and used for overhead irrigation.

Naturally, warm season grasses are used - these use water more efficiently and, therefore, the predominant grass is Bermudagrass (*Cynodon dactylon*). This grass and its modern cultivars, such as Tifway and Tifgreen, grow well during the hot summer months, i.e. from May through to October when they are at their peak.

However, during the cooler winter months, Bermudagrass goes into a dormant phase and turns light brown and no matter how much water is added to this grass in its dormant state, it will not green-up.

Consequently, these areas have to be oversown with ryegrass during winter to give green conditions and it is normal practice in these hot, low rainfall areas to overseed greens, fairways and tees with perennial ryegrass. This seeding is carried out in October and the best cultivars of perennial ryegrass are used for this purpose (the cultivars we would normally use on playing fields).

When temperatures rise in late spring/early summer (late April), perennial ryegrass is unable to survive under high temperatures and dies out. Then the Bermudagrass starts to grow and takes over and grows during the hot summer months.

Fairways and tees at Troon and Desert Highlands were of Bermudagrass and, during my visit to these courses, they were green as a result of over-seeding with perennial ryegrass. The greens, on the other hand, had been sown out to bentgrass (either Penncross or Penneagle) and these produced a good putting surface.

With Penncross or Penneagle, the biggest problem will arise under Arizona climatic conditions during the predominant high temperature period of late August when it can reach 110° to 120° in the shade and it is under these stressful conditions that the bentgrasses will probably be at their weakest. But during the major playing season, which is winter-time, these grasses produce superb putting surfaces.

There is no doubt that both courses were very beautiful and maintained to a very high standard. However, the Nicklaus course at Desert Highlands was extremely strenuous. It consisted of five par-five holes and, from the middle tees, was 5,861 yards in length. The carry consisted of many native plants including cacti and other spiny desert species and, even for reasonable golfers, it was difficult to clear the carry and reach the fairway.

