

GOLF TRIP BECOMES EDUCATION

By DAVID BAILEY
Atlantis Country Club

Have you ever wanted to play seven famous golf courses in as many days? If so, this story will equal your fantasy.

Two neighboring golf course superintendents from Palm Beach Chapter were involved, Kevin Downing, C.G.C.S., and this writer. The *Golf Digest* top 100 list was the main criteria of club selections. The objective was to play and drive to the next site daily. Thus the selections had to be the proper mileage apart. Seven clubs were picked. Letters were written to the host superintendent and phone calls confirmed all courses before the departure.

The first course selected was Moss Creek Plantation at Hilton Head, South Carolina, site of an LPGA Tour event. The host was Gerald Beaman, C.G.C.S. The huge live oak trees and savanna lowlands made a beautiful setting. This was the only all bermuda turfgrass course played on the trip. The Tifway 419 bermuda turfgrass fairways were the finest of the entire outing.

The second day we were the guests of Bernard Greene at the Country Club of North Carolina at Pinehurst. The exclusive private 36-hole club was the site of the 1980 U.S. Amateur Championship. The tournament course was opened in 1962 and is rated in the top 40. The tall Carolina pines and rolling hills were a pleasant change for the Palm Beachers. The back nine was exceptionally splendid as it played around a forty acre lake. The turfgrass types were the best of both worlds. The greens were Penncross Bent, with the remainder of the course grassed in Tifway 419 bermuda. Because of the heat and humidity of this southern location the green height was 1/4 inch. This superior turf type putts at that height as well as bermuda greens maintained at 3/16 inch.

A trip to the Pinehurst area would not be complete without a visit to the World Golf Hall of Fame. The complete history of the game is well documented. All forms of golfing equipment are on display and the great players are honored. One sad note that must be mentioned is the 100% complete lack of recognition of our profession. It is impossible to play golf without the work we do. Our national professional organization is to blame for this oversight. Effective that day plans were made to change the situation.

Monday we went to the Congressional Country Club in the suburbs of Washinton D.C. We were the guests of Bill Black, C.G.C.S. Rated in the top 50, this club is where the nation's political leaders meet, golf, and decide our national interest. This was the site of the 1964 U.S. Open and 1976 PGA Championship. Remember the heat when Ken Venturi won the Open? This course is located in the very

difficult to manage turfgrass transition zone. All types of turfgrass persist: bluegrass, rye, zoysia, bermuda, fescue, and bent. The bent greens had just been extremely lightly topdressed and putted excellently. Fairways were being aerified, seeded in a rye blend and fertilized. The clubhouse at this course must be noted. It is huge, has an indoor pool, and a massive formal dinning room. The last two holes are designed around the best vista of the clubhouse. In fact the 18th hole is a par 3, high on a hill looking down over water to the green with the clubhouse as backdrop.

Tuesday gave us the opportunity to play the 1981 U.S. Open site, Merion Golf Club just west of Philadelphia. The 36 hole club has hosted five U.S. Open titles. The tournament-famous east course is rated in the top 10. Our host was Richard Valentine, C.G.C.S. The Valentine history is legendary at Merion. His father, Joseph, helped to build the club in 1912, discovered Merion Bluegrass, and was one of the true giants of our industry. The greens and fairways are bent grass with bluegrass rough. The rough was tournament height and was an extreme challenge. The Colonial Bent greens were the finest of our trip. Our 80-year-old caddy had some real stories and I am sure some were true, but my memory of the depression era is rather vague. Merion is a short course by today's standards but a classic in its own way, especially the final three holes. We had the pleasure of talking with Richard Valentine for over three hours and had dinner with the assistant superintendent, Armond Sequi. The inside stories they told us of a major tournament was the highlight.

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Seldom does a club have a par 3 18th hole. Congressional C.C. gets maximum use of its clubhouse view.

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Wednesday was the only day we were not able to play because of rain. What makes this a true disaster is that we were at my alltime favorite golf course, Pine Valley. Always rated in the top 10, Pine Valley is located in the Philadelphia suburbs of New Jersey. Craig Reinhardt was our host and gave us an all day tour in the rain. Eb Steiniger, C.G.C.S., is now retired and was not there the day of our visit. Having been to Pine Valley before, I knew what to expect. Pine Valley stories are many and can only be told and appreciated when you have been there. I always ask people what is the greatest golf course and when they do not mention Pine Valley I immediately know one thing: they never been there! There is no club that is as pure golf as Pine Valley.



Bill Black, CGCS, at Congressional C.C. wears a tie at all times.

Thursday our host was Sherwood Moore, C.G.C.S., at Winged Foot Golf Club. This top 10 course will host the 1984 U.S. Open for the fourth time. This is the club of the Wall Street tycoons, located 30 miles north of Manhattan. The 36-hole club is also highlighted by its splendid formal clubhouse, definitely a blue blood club. Our host took great pride in both courses, its quality turfgrass, and especially its specimen trees. He also arranged a visit for us to the nearby Westchester Country Club, site of a PGA Tour event. Our host was Ted Horton, C.G.C.S. This was the hilly terrain we had yet to see. Ted Horton told of his water shortage problems this past year. The course was shut off from its city water supply for four days. Why four days? It took that long to get through successfully to city hall. The day we were there pumps were being installed for future use from existing lakes on the course.

Friday we went out to the tip of Long Island to Shinnecock Hills Golf Club. This top 20 club hosted the 1896 U.S. Open. That date is not a misprint. The club claims to be the oldest in the nation, 1891, but the course was changed 50 years ago so that leaves the issue open for discussion. The 1986 U.S. Open will be held there. Seldom is this great course in the limelight but the Open exposure will change that. This is the summer home of many Palm Beach club members from Seminole and the Everglades Golf Clubs. Our host was Pete Smith, the only superintendent that played golf with us. He is a great story in his own right. Some history is in order. The Shinnecock Indians once

controlled the land and still have a large population in the area. Smith is a Shinnecock Indian. The maintenance staff are all Shinnecock Indians. Pete is an Ivy League graduate of Dartmouth. He was not in the turf business. His grandfather had worked the course, his father was the superintendent for 35 years. When Pete's father became ill the club asked if he would like to continue the family tradition and work with his father. Pete accepted the offer, leaving a government position in Indian affairs. Several months later his father died of a heart attack. The club sends Pete to Rutgers University in the winter to advance his turfgrass education.

Now back to the course. Ten years from now this is the one course I will remember most from the trip. This is more like a true Scottish links golf course than any in the nation. The fairway rough color contrast is the most distinct I have ever seen. The two foot fescue rough placed a premium on a good tee shot. When the wind blows off the bay and ocean, scores will skyrocket. This very private club is a real hidden jewel. Several years from now when this course becomes rated in the top 10 remember where you first heard about its greatness.

There are many reflections on such a trip. Number one, without question, is the warm reception we received from each host. To say they rolled out the red carpet is not enough. I knew we were in for a good week when the entrance guard at the Country Club of North Carolina said, "Mr. Bailey we are expecting you." At each club we were treated like royalty and that was because we were the guests of the most respected person at the club, their golf course superintendent. Members of their crew knew we were fellow superintendents and always spoke to us. It was the most educational golf week of my life. I learned more about different turfgrass, management, chemicals, crew conditions, etc. than in 10 years of seminars. I realize how we over manicure courses in our state, especially the big



Richard Valentine, CGCS, (center) discusses the 1981 U.S. Open with his assistant and guest.

money clubs along the southeast coast. Our roughs are cleaner of weeds than northern courses fairways. We edge cart paths and they do not even have them. One famous course had not edged traps in 10 years, two others never, but bermuda is entirely different. Equipment conditions are very different. I saw tees being mowed by machines we would have worn out seven years ago. The long winters give

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get out of the water

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them an opportunity to rebuild everything. Only one superintendent even thought a hydraulic fairway unit was worth looking at. Two clubs aerify fairways with Ryan greensaires. No northern course ever verticuts a fairway. Almost everywhere the main fertilizer was Milorganite. Rates of two or three pounds of N per year were common, less than we apply in January alone. Budgets vary from 40-75% of what we spend. There are more contour breaks in putts than we are accustomed to playing.

The texture of bent grass and its density makes bermuda greens putt like wire brushes.



At Merion G.C. no flags are used. Wicker baskets are placed atop the pole. They are handmade by the staff.

Golf courses are such a common item in Florida we forget to put things in a proper perspective. We build communities around our courses. In the metropolitan areas of the industrial east, courses are a real oasis from everyday reality. A drive through the concrete jungle of downtown New York City will make you appreciate your job and where you live.

Never mentioned in this article are any golf scores and, after all, this was a golfing trip. Well one thing was learned for sure. The great golf courses are truly great and we did nothing to lower their rating.

P.S. I must thank my wife for giving me a week to myself to complete my golfing trip. But do not tell her we are making plans for our next trip to the midwest. ■

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