

BRIEFS

# Simmering in Death Valley's mega-heat



**ENVIRONMENTAL CARE EXPANDS**

ATLANTA, Ga. — Bruce K. Wilson, president of Environmental Care, Inc., has announced the opening of a new branch at 6990-D Peachtree Industrial Blvd. in Norcross.

Having expanded steadily since its beginning in 1968, Environmental Care's horticulturists work with fully certified and licensed staff to provide landscape maintenance, water management services, specialized arbor care, interiorscape design, installation and maintenance; and light landscape construction.

Jack E. Mattingly, who headed the Los Angeles branch of Environmental Care, is heading the Atlanta branch.

**EQUIPMENT MANAGERS' NEEDS TOPIC**

LAWRENCE, Kan. — GCSAA plans this summer a special resource committee to develop seminars addressing the mechanical, regulatory and personnel aspects of the golf course equipment manager's job.

The resulting educational program will be introduced in greater detail at the equipment manager session of the GCSAA Conference and Show Jan. 30, 1993, at Anaheim, Calif.

**GCSAA SEEKS INNOVATIVE IDEAS**

LAWRENCE, Kan. — "The Innovative Superintendent," a series of presentations by GCSAA-member superintendents, will be a feature of the Jan. 28 afternoon session of the 1993 Conference and Show at Anaheim, Calif.

David M. Bishop, GCSAA director of education, said, "We are looking for superintendents willing to share their expertise. We seek current information and new ideas."

**SAFETY HELP OFFERED SUPERS**

SafetyMaster Corp., a distributor of commercial safety products, has announced it will donate 1 percent of revenues generated from golf course sales to help fund the scientific and educational efforts of GCSAA's Scholarship & Research Fund.

Its 81-page safety equipment catalog will be distributed to GCSAA members next spring.

**ZELLERS GETS REAL DEL MAR POST**

TIJUANA — Craig Forrest Zellers has been named superintendent of golf for Real Del Mar Golf Course, an 18-hole course under construction at Real Del Mar, a destination resort on the coast 12 miles south of Tijuana.

Zellers will oversee all maintenance operations for the course, which is scheduled to open for public play in the fall.

Zellers has more than 14 years of experience in the golf industry, most recently as the golf course superintendent for the Carlton Oaks Country Club in Santee, Calif.

By DOUG SAUNDERS

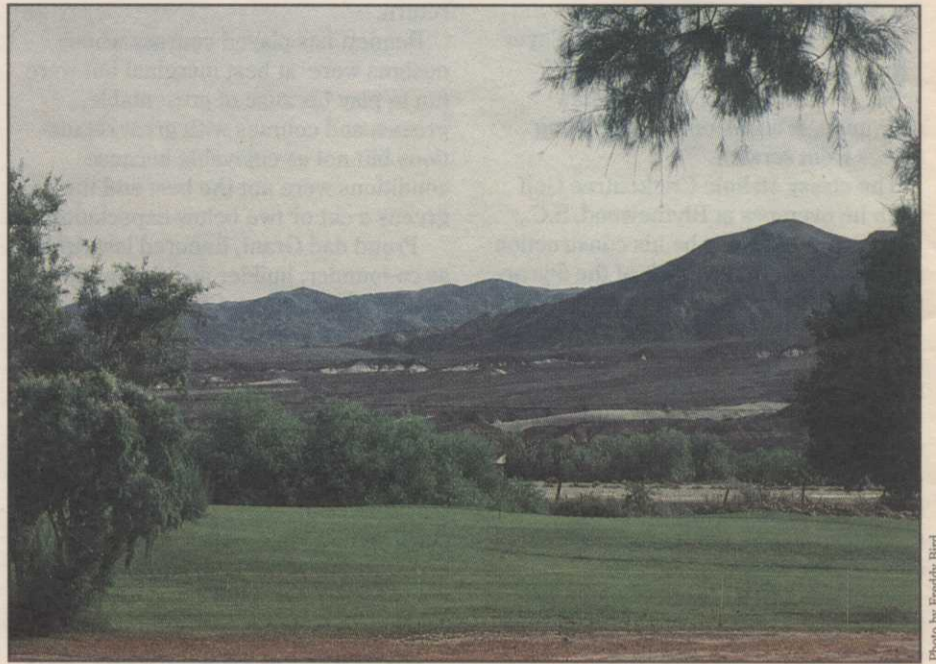
In mid-summer, course superintendents throughout the country battle their own form of severe weather. But their concept of severity can only pale to the brutality raged by Mother Nature in the treeless wasteland of Death Valley, Calif.

Temperatures range from as high as 134 degrees in the summer to a low of 19 in winter. Daytime temperatures average 120 in summer while nighttime temperatures might drop to 100 degrees, offering little reprieve from the onslaught. The oppressive sun relentlessly bakes the ground until soil temperatures can reach 200 degrees. With an average of 1.91 inches of rain a year, it seems impossible for anything to thrive here at the lowest spot in the Western Hemisphere.

Yet in the midst of nature's oven exists Furnace Creek Golf Course at the Furnace Creek Ranch. Here lies a desert oasis surrounded by the salty remnant of a dead lake, miles of sand dunes, and the wrinkled, rocky precipices of 11,000-foot mountains that hold in the stifling heat.

Here lies an 18-hole golf course that for more than 65 years has offered a form of escape from the monotony of this arid world. Here is the chance to play golf in the most uninhabitable place on Earth.

Furnace Creek Ranch was settled in the



At the lowest point on earth, Furnace Creek grounds crews defy all odds in keeping grass alive.

late 1880s during the frantic quest for minerals throughout this stretch of California. Large deposits of borax — an essential mineral in the production of items from tires and cosmetics, to insulation and glass — were discovered.

The Harmony Borax Works, just a mile

from the ranch, quickly grew and the ranch provided alfalfa for the livestock that hauled the ore across the chalky floor on the famous 20-mule team wagons.

In the 1920s, Furnace Creek Ranch had become grazing land for cattle and the area

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A kayaker herds a flock of geese out of a pond at Indian Tree Golf Course in Lakewood, Colo., for transportation out of state.

Photo by Pat O'Connor, Colorado DOW

## With a giddy-yup, mush...

By MARK LESLIE

Cowboys, roundups and Colorado. A natural combination. But a new ingredient has entered the equation: Geese.

Geese are indeed fouling up golf courses across Colorado, and superintendents in that state — along with cooperative government employees — are doing something about it. They are rounding them up and driving them out, literally. The destination is new residences — the big lakes of Oklahoma and Kansas.

The trail boss is Dick Kingman, a.k.a. Richard Kingman, a 25-year lobbyist at the state capital and long-time associate member of the Rocky Mountain Golf Course Superintendents Association.

"Some golf courses are absolutely inundated with geese," said Kingman, who led the roundup with a team from the Colorado Division of Wildlife and Oklahoma Department of Game, Fish and Wildlife.

Kingman reported 1,157 geese were corralled June 29 to July 1 during their moulting period when they were losing their flight feathers.

At each golf course a corral is built and placed in the water or by the lake bank and the geese are herded. But the cowboys are in kayaks, not riding horseback.

The 1,157 geese are 300 more than corralled in 1991, an increase Kingman attributed to a mild winter this year.

Lakewood and Rolling Hills country clubs and Englewood, Centennial, Windsor Gardens and Lowry Air Force Base golf courses, along with parks and cemeteries, participated in the roundup. Each year different courses participate because at least 25 are required for a pickup and it usually takes a couple of years or more for that high a population to build up.

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## Turf pioneer Beard retires

COLLEGE STATION, Texas — Dr. James B. Beard has retired from Texas A&M University after 35 years in turfgrass research and teaching, but plans to continue full-time involvement with the turfgrass industry.

The professor of turfgrass physiology and ecology in the university's department of soil and crop sciences has with wife Harriet authored five books and a laboratory manual. He authored 228 scientific papers and 316 technical articles.

He has given numerous invitational papers and been an adviser at international conferences and symposia in the United States, Canada, England, Europe, Far East, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Korea and Southeast Asia.

Dr. Beard pioneered investigations in turfgrass evapotranspiration, drought stress, metabolic basis of indirect heat stress, shade adaptation, wear tolerance, nitrogen and potassium stress and thatch biodegradation. Particularly hailed was his discovery of the spring root decline phenomenon in C-4 grasses.

## Jensen promotes Kirchhoff

David Jensen Associates, Inc. has named Wayne Kirchhoff as project manager for the land planning and landscape architecture firm.

Kirchhoff earned a bachelor's degree in landscape architecture from Kansas State University in 1973 and has worked for design firms in Colorado, Kansas and Arizona.

# Furnace Creek a toasty test for Hindman's grounds crew

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became a unique destination for tourists. Scotsman Murray Millar carved out three crude golf holes so he and the tourists could play.

Nine formal holes were designed in 1939 by William P. Bell, the prolific California architect who also designed Bel Air Country Club in Los Angeles and Stanford Golf Course in Palo Alto. The course was then extended to a full 18 holes in 1967, with William Bell Jr. doing the redesign.

It is a stunning contrast to the surrounding desert scene. The golf course is a lush expanse of common Bermudagrass bordered by date palms and Mediterranean tamarisk, or salt pines. The tamarisk were first planted for shade and a source of firewood. They are a fast-growing tree that can withstand the high salinity of the soil. The date palms provide shade and a cash crop to the ranch.

The course is notable in that it has all-grass bunkers, even though

*The sand around Furnace Creek is so high in mineral content that, if it gets wet, it compacts much like concrete.*

this seems odd in a desert. Fact is, the sand around Furnace Creek is so high in mineral content that, if it gets wet, it compacts much like

concrete.

Quality sand for the traps has been tried, but the sand was no match for the fierce winds that howl through the valley.

Throughout the golf course's existence, the job of maintaining it has bordered on the archaic.

The water source for irrigation is a natural spring which pours from the nearby mountains. Water comes out of the mountain at a temperature of 87 degrees. It supplies abundant water through the winter

months but dwindles in the heat of summer.

In the early years, the course was irrigated by the use of flood gates that filled the alfalfa fields with standing water. This flood irrigating continued until the early 1940s when galvanized irrigation pipes were finally laid into the course.

Cattle and sheep would graze across the fairways during the hot summer months as late as the 1950s as the idea of golfing in the heat of July didn't strike the fancy of many.

With the installation of irrigation lines, the course stepped into the realm of modern technology, for that time.

Time has stood still at Furnace Creek since then. Old Rainbird heads still have to be installed by hand on one of the 250 hookups that run through the course. PVC pipe was laid in parts of the course in 1967 when the second nine holes were constructed. But even today seven greens and most of the fairways must be irrigated by manual hookups.

Dennis Maskell, Class A member of the GCSA, served as the head superintendent at Furnace Creek for 12 years and has seen all the elements can offer.

"Furnace Creek is a golf course that won't ever be the site of a PGA Tournament, but it is an enjoyable course that offers a unique golfing experience because of where it is," Maskell said.

The biggest challenge is dealing with the high salinity of the soil. Ph levels average 8.5 and, at times, climbed as high 9.0 during his tenure. Leaching lots of fertilizers high in nitrogen helped to combat the situation, he said.

The other difficulty was having a stable water source. The sprinkler system is actually gravity-fed by the spring and pumped through the course with two 75-horsepower pumps. As the water source dwindles in summer, so does the water pressure on the system, pulling the sprinkler radius down to less than 20 feet at a head.

"The heat is something that you sort of get used to," Maskell said. "I remember one summer when we had three straight months where the temperature never dropped below 100 degrees, day or night. I got to the point that it didn't seem hot until the mercury got up over 115."

On top of the intense heat, cold nights are not uncommon in Death Valley during the winter months. Frosts are common and the lowest temperature in Maskell's memory was 19 degrees.

The entire golf course, both greens and fairways, is planted in common Bermudagrass. The greens, obviously, aren't the quickest as a bit more length is needed to withstand the heat, and common Bermuda is rarely, if ever, used on greens. In the winter months, the greens are overseeded with ryegrass while the Bermuda goes

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GOLF COURSE NEWS

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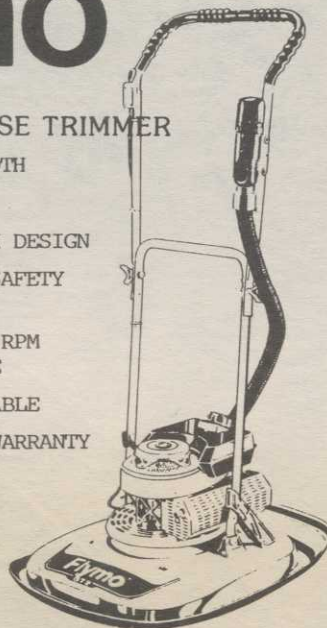
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# 100 degrees considered a pleasant day at Death Valley golf course

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dormant.

Maskell has left Furnace Creek and is now working at Shadow Creek Golf Course in Las Vegas, the multimillion-dollar private course of casino tycoon Steve Wynn. In one step Maskell has gone from one of the most outdated courses to one of the ultimate state of the art.

Continuing at Furnace Creek is Bill Hindman, a jack-of-all-trades who now has the duties of superintendent at Furnace Creek. With a force that includes one tractor, two mowing machines, three antiquated E-Z-GO carts, and a crew of four men, he works to make the course more playable.



Superintendent Bill Hindman welcomes visitors at 214 feet below sea level. Photo by Freddy Bird

The golf boom is obvious even here in Death Valley. The winter months are the strong business time for the course, but golfers now come even in the heat of summer just for the experience of playing in the hottest spot in the world. The owners of the course are beginning a major clubhouse renovation, and looking at the possibility of installing a new irrigation system.

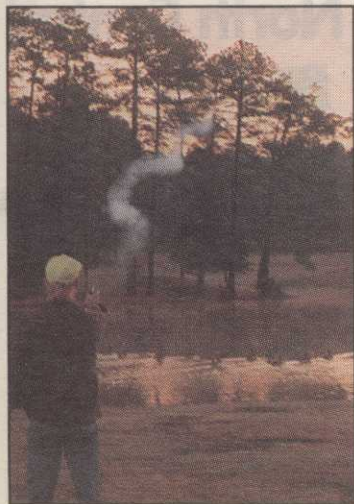
"I'm just learning as I go. I've been getting help from people in the turfgrass industry," Hindman said. "In the last few months I have been getting soil samples done in Las Vegas, had high-pressure aeration done to the greens, and been playing with the mowing

heights on the greens and fairways."

Although he has only been working on the course for nine months, Hindman has learned what superintendents the world over know: Everyone is an expert when it comes to turf.

"I have explained to the golfers that here in Death Valley things are a little bit different than in other places. The players have a choice. They can either play on grass, or they can play on dirt, depending on how short I cut the greens. I have to do what makes the grass happy, not what makes the golfers happy sometimes."

So during the summer months, if you think Mother Nature is dealing you a bad hand, just remember the crew at Furnace Creek.



Starter or firecracker guns scare ducks and geese away, but only for a short while, says goose roundup veteran Dick Kingman. A roundup is permanent for nearly 100 percent of the geese moved out of state.

## Roundup nets 1,157 geese

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"We have a lot of little lakes but it's basically dry. We only get about nine inches of precipitation a year," Kingman said of the Denver area. "Oklahoma has a lot of big lakes that aren't very populated by year-round geese. They want to build up their lakes for hunting purposes, and these geese basically don't leave during the winter."

In the three days of roundup Kingman and colleagues found only six tagged geese — ones that had been taken to Oklahoma previously and had flown back to Colorado.

DOW biologist Kathi Green said: "Over the years, the goose roundup has helped stabilize the summer population and it helps Kansas and Oklahoma with their goose restoration projects. This is a really good cooperative venture that benefits everybody and helps keep goose problems at a reasonable level."

Kingman said the roundup program has been done annually for the last 15 years and he has been involved the last six years.

It's something that has to be done. Superintendents have tried many ways to keep the messy geese off their courses. Starter guns work, but only for a couple of days, Kingman said.

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