



SEA PINES' Changing Formula

Outdoor Photographs League photos by Eugene B. Sloan

Every year Don O'Quinn has to vary the feeding rate on this bountiful Island course so the turf won't get out of hand

By KATHLEEN L. SLOAN

The 18-hole Sea Pines course, Hilton Head Island, S.C., one of the loveliest in the United States, cost \$1 million dollars to build. It was carved from marshes bordering the Atlantic ocean and a terrain covered with palms, palmettoes, red-berried hollies, giant oaks and Southern magnolias. The course, designed by George Cobb, winds through this native flora past lagoons and creeks, right up to the Atlantic. Its borders are a natural tree line, many of whose specimens are more than 100 years old. Focal point of the course is the magnificent 15th hole, built at a cost of \$175,000, from the marshes by the sea. The blue waters of the Atlantic whirl at the base of the green set high above them, and acres of sea oats at the edge wave in the breezes.

The success story of the Hilton Head Island course is due largely to the wise



Don O'Quinn, Sea Pines maintenance vp, helped in planning of the Hilton Head course.



Wallace Palmer is Sea Pines pro. Shop is located in four small buildings that resemble native huts. (R) Alligators, protected by law, eat lost golf balls as their dessert course.



use of money and expert management, with great emphasis on the latter, and to the efforts of one man who has nurtured it from the beginning.

Donald H. O'Quinn, formerly the supt., and just recently promoted to vice-president for maintenance and construction of Sea Pines Plantation (operators) joined the firm in 1959. This was before the Sea Pines course was designed, when Hilton Head was still a jungle-like island hardly touched by the hand of man since before the Civil War.

Understands the Climate

Among O'Quinn's attributes is the fact that he understands the Sea Islands' subtropical climate where the growth of foliage and grass overnight may be literally measured by the yardstick. Nature here has been magnanimous. The beautiful, boot-shaped island, surrounded by sounds, creeks, inlets and the sea, gets the benefit of the warm air currents from the Caribbean and the Gulf Stream, thus providing 300 growing days a year and four seasons of golfing weather. Players come from all over the U. S., and some foreign countries.

Originally the entire 18-hole course — tees, fairways and greens — was planted

in Tifton 328 in three two-acre plots in the Sea Pines' nursery. When the course was planted in 1960, the sod was stripped, run through a compost grinder and 25,000 bushels of sprigs were sown by hand over the 105 acres of the course. These were then cut in lightly with a disc harrow, rolled with a culti-packer and watered abundantly. Use of such a great amount of stolons paid off with a verdant course ready for play by September.

"We have no set formula for the fertilization of the course," says O'Quinn. "We vary the feeding program from year to year, and what we do is unique in that, it would probably not apply to any other course. Each year a soil analysis is made, then a formula for fertilization is devised for the current season. In this sandy loam, one year we might come up with 16-4-8, or the next it could be 5-10-15."

Fertilization Program

In mid-March or the first of April an adequate supply of fertilizer is applied. This is followed with a medium application in midsummer and another full application in the fall. During the 1964 season, a supplemental program of ammonium nitrate was used. This was dis-

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Sea Pines' Formula

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tributed heavy or light as needed. Because of the danger of burning, the nitrate was spread at intervals, with great care being taken afterwards to soak the turf thoroughly. "Sprinkling is not enough," O'Quinn explains.

With good weather conditions, Tifton greens up at Hilton Head about mid-February or early March. Play on the course becomes heavy from then until sometime in May when winter tourists depart. There is a brief lull before summer vacationists arrive, and another following Labor Day. After Labor Day the course is seeded with rye.

Mow Every Day

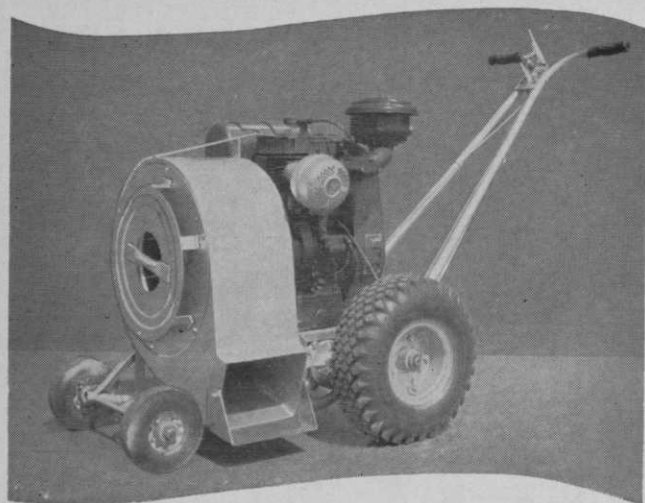
Greens and tees are mowed everyday. When the weather is "right," fairways also must be mowed every day, a job that has to be worked in between waves of golfers. At other times they are cut on alternate days. One man, who is the caretaker of the sandtraps, spends his entire time raking, trimming edges, and replacing sand washed out by rains, or packed or blasted by players. Strangely enough, sand for the traps must be imported even though the Sea Pines plantation has 13 miles of white-ribboned beaches. This sand is too fine and packs too firmly.

The sandy soil is helpful, however, in repairing damaged areas. Wounds in the fast-growing Tifton 328 heal quickly when sand is applied around divot edges and watered thoroughly.

O'Quinn emphasizes the necessity for keeping the turf thinned and aerified. Control of weeds, pests and diseases calls for a continuing battle. "We have to be alert for foreign grasses, such as dallis and crab, and keep a watchful eye on sod webworm, army worm, mole cricket, fairy ring, dollarspot and brownpatch and fungi," says the Sea Pines turfman. "Nematodes cause us trouble. But again, we use a varying program against these things, changing from year to year as immunity to pesticides and fungicides is built up."

Scum Control, Too

Unique at Sea Pines is its method of weed or scum control in water hazards. A page was taken from the history of this



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part of the country where huge rice fields built a dynasty in days gone by in the use of the same kind of flood control. The ten lagoons and eight other water hazards in the playing area, all inter-connected, are part of a master water control system, where on either end a large dam has been constructed. Each dam contains two 48-inch tidal gates which permit fresh water to flow out — and when desired, salt water to flow in.

This method was used to smother grass in the rice fields. The inflowing salt water inhibits scum and the growth of weeds. Control of this kind is ingenious, and according to O'Quinn, was devised after all others failed. "Sometimes we leave the sluice gates open for as long as two weeks at a time, or for as long as we need the incoming salt water to serve our purpose," he explains.

The watering and drainage systems were completed before the course was built, to control the water table in the area, and to permit lagoons and canals to have constant levels in wet or dry weather. The extensive irrigation system includes a 5-mile transite water main

which runs the length of the course, together with more than five miles of galvanized lateral pipe lines. Each of the more than 500 sprinkler heads has a watering diameter of 180 feet. Even fairways and roughs are covered. Water is supplied by six 220-foot-deep fresh water wells.

Though the lagoons were a natural consequence when the more than 80,000 truckloads of dirt were moved in the construction of the course, they are strategically located and have proved to be a tremendous tourist attraction. They are a natural attraction, too, for alligators which immediately took up their abode in the pleasant waters and soon learned they could get three square meals a day from the hand of man. Another fringe benefit is the golf balls lost by unsuspecting players — the saurians eat 'em for dessert!

The Sea Pines course operates on an annual budget of about \$65,000. The pro shop is leased and is under the management of Wallace Palmer of Baden, N.C., a PGA professional and a brother of Johnny, well known as a circuit player about a decade ago.