

Growing grass on coral rock

It isn't easy to establish turf in the Bahamas without dirt, but a warm climate and the absence of weed grasses help.

By VERNE FLOYD

Growing grass in the Bahamas may sound like an easy role for the golf course superintendent but the warm climate of these islands is only one requisite for establishing Bermuda grass.

With the rapid increase in golf course construction everywhere, the Grand Bahama and Abaco islands have come in for fine courses, some completed and some underway. Sites for 13 courses have been set aside in the Freeport area which covers some 112,000 acres.

Number one problem on the islands is lack of soil. To grow grass on Coral rock something just has to be added. Since the hardness of the coral varies from island to island, several measures are used preparatory to planting. At Freeport on the Lucayan country club course and the King's Inn Course, material was added from the beaches near-

by. This material, resembling sand less silica (probably mostly ground marine life), was placed to a depth of four inches on fairways, twelve inches on greens and six inches on tees.

At Treasure Cay on Great Abaco Island the coral is comparatively soft and another method of seed bed preparation was used for the golf course. Crawler tractors and grid rollers crushed the top two to four inches of rock, leaving a fair seed bed for fairways.

As one may gather from the accompanying photographs the task of creating a growing medium for golf grasses is not an easy one. However, such a medium has been accomplished, and some of the finest grasses anywhere may be seen at this area.

According to W. A. Roquemore, whose firm planted and maintains the courses

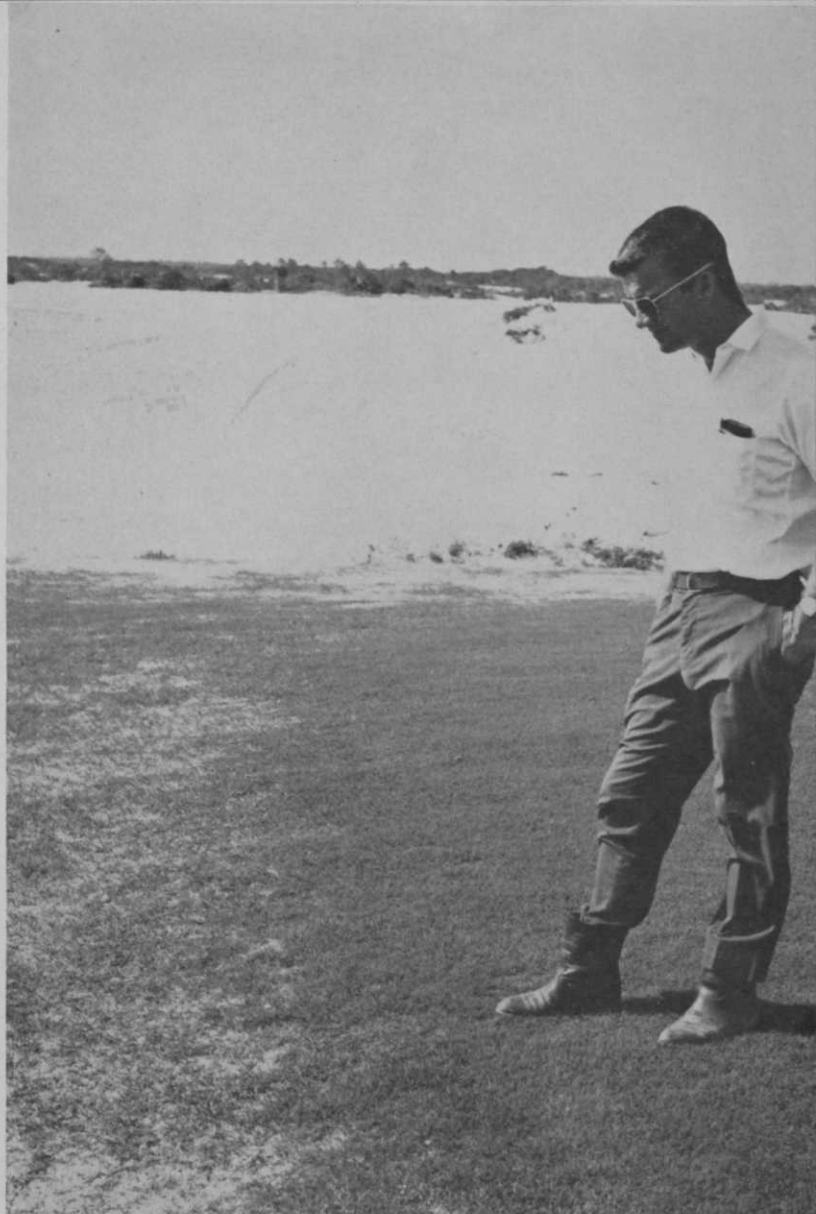
Continued on page 28



This is the coral rock found on Great Abaco Island. After being crushed by crawler tractors and grid rollers, it leaves a fair seed bed.

Tee planted to Ormond Bermuda stolons, lower right. Seeded area next to tee, lower left. Both plantings made in September, 1965. Background, typical coral after crushing.

Photos by
the author



Irrigation water comes from ponds dug out of coral, left, and from numerous shallow wells. Maximum safe depth of wells before water turns too salty runs about 20 ft. Rainfall can be 50 inches per year or as low as eight.



From common Arizona bermuda seed planted in September, 1965, runners spread over fairway of crushed coral, above. This is average stand in early March.

CORAL ROCK

Continued from page 26

at Freeport, the greens are fertilized every 10 days, and fairways every 3 weeks. Greens are never overseeded. Top dressing? Yes, the same material brought from the beaches plus organic fertilizer and possibly a small amount of peat. The addition of lime would, of course, be unnecessary, since the pH runs from 8.2-8.4. Bermuda growing the year round creates a thatch problem on greens to an extent not found on most courses here in the states. Therefore maintenance to control thatch re-

quires considerable effort.

Although Bill Roquemore claims he prefers planting on the worst soils on the mainland to coral on the islands, there are some compensating factors for island maintenance. The islands, without frost, allow Bermuda to keep green and growing. The absence of crab grass and other weed grasses on these areas lessens the job of weed control. Also the rock gives good drainage. So all in all, even though the job approaches hydroponic growing of grasses, the islands have their rewards. •



At right, T-328
Bermuda green at the
Lucayan Course.
W. A. Roquemore,
left, with Golf Course
Superintendent
Tommy Burton, son of
eminent geneticist,
Dr. Glenn Burton of
Georgia.



Spots in fairway being reseeded and top dressed at Treasure Cay, Bahamas, above. Plenty of native labor available—plenty of problems in training them for course work.

Fall planted tee at
Treasure Cay, right,
shows worm damage.
Sod-web worm leads
assault on grass.
Parathion often is
necessary.



18th hole at Lucayan,
left. Ormond Bermuda
tee and fairway. This
course opened two
years ago. Result of
traffic from 100 elec-
tric cars at right.