

Grass From the Past

Bandon Dunes borrowed a bit of history
with its focus on fescues

BY LARRY KASSELL

As golfers step onto Bandon Dunes in Bandon, Ore., history overwhelms them. The course's design calls to mind the links courses along the Scotland shore.

If Bandon Dunes seems as if it has always existed, then Scotsman David McLay Kidd, the course's architect, achieved his goal. The fine fescue grass Kidd chose for the course add to that sense. But he didn't choose the grass alone.

Superintendent Troy Russell worked for a seed company prior to becoming the superintendent at Bandon Dunes. The experience allowed him to specify fine fescue mixtures planted in turf trials at the course with the help of Jimmy Kidd, director of turfgrass maintenance for Gleneagles' three courses in Scotland; Eric Nelson, formerly with Jacklin Seed Co. and now with Scotts Co.; and Tom Cook, an associate professor in the turfgrass program at Oregon State University. Between them, they arrived at a mixture of

slender creeper, Chewings type and hard fescue selected for use on the course's seeded areas.

"This is a magnificent piece of ground," Russell says. "The fact that I grew up a few miles away makes coming to Bandon and its sandy dunes extra special for me. Since I'm a native Oregonian, it was important to me that the seed was also grown in Oregon."

The same fine fescue mixture is cut at varied heights around the course. Deep roughs grow long, seed and turn golden. Intermediate roughs are cut at 1 1/2 inches. Long roughs were seeded at 100 pounds per acre, while short roughs were seeded at 6 pounds per 1,000 square feet.

Tees, fairways and greens are 80 percent fine fescues mixed with 20 percent colonial bentgrass for a tight-knit, sand-stabilizing surface. The fine fescue/colonial bent mix was seeded at 8 pounds per 1,000 square feet on greens, and 6 pounds per 1,000 square feet on fairways and tees.

Tees are cut at three-eighths of an inch, fairways are nine-sixteenths, and greens are cut at three-sixteenths.

"The fine fescues add more than the Scottish links look and feel to Bandon Dunes," Russell says. "When certain diseases occur, as often happen with young bentgrass, fine fescues survive to fill in the trouble spots."

Russell says his crew takes particular care when mowing the fescue grasses. The crew walk-mows the greens, tees,

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and greenside bunkers. Lightweight triplexes are used as fairway and trim mowers because of their quality of cut and minimal impact on turf. Closely cropped approaches are important to the game plan here.

"Our greens are firm and resist spin, so it's advisable to bump-and-run when the pin's placed forward," Russell says.

The low maintenance fine fescues require no special treatment.

"It's a dream to work with — less water, less fertilizer and less headache than other cool-season grasses," Russell adds. "It established quickly in our native sand course. No amendments were added to the sand — not even on the greens."

The course, which opened last May, needed little shaping because Kidd utilized the areas' dunes and extreme rough. The 40 acres of fairways are wide and the greens are large (averaging 8,300 square feet), but miss one of the ample targets and recovery could be from unmown mature fine fescue and extreme rough consisting of European beach grass, salal, common bermudagrass, native strawberries, huckleberry and gorse imported years ago from Bandon, Ireland.



Superintendent Troy Russell says fine fescues require no special attention.

There are no water hazards, but a right hander's duck hook on No. 6 could fly a 90-foot cliff and tumble to the sandy beach below. Shore pine is sparse, and doesn't impose on play, but 63 strategically placed pot bunkers — some of the sod wall type — can penalize errant shots.

Bandon Dunes has received accolades from golf publications as well as satisfied golfers.

"We've nearly doubled our projected rounds this year," Russell says. "The course draws people to the quaint town of Bandon. The positive response has encouraged the design and forthwith groundbreaking of a second course adjacent to this."

The second course will be designed by Tom Doak, also a proponent of fine fescue. Doak's first design was High Pointe, near Traverse City, Mich., and was one of the first all fine fescue courses in the United States.

"Bandon Dunes has everything Scottish links courses have — everything but the history," Russell says. "But we're earning that every day." ■

Kassell is a freelance writer from Silverton, Ore., in the heart of grass-seed growing country.

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