

Off The Fringe

Clemans' Travels

OREGON GCSA EXECUTIVE

DIRECTOR'S CAREER PATH HAS
TAKEN HIM ALL OVER THE GLOBE

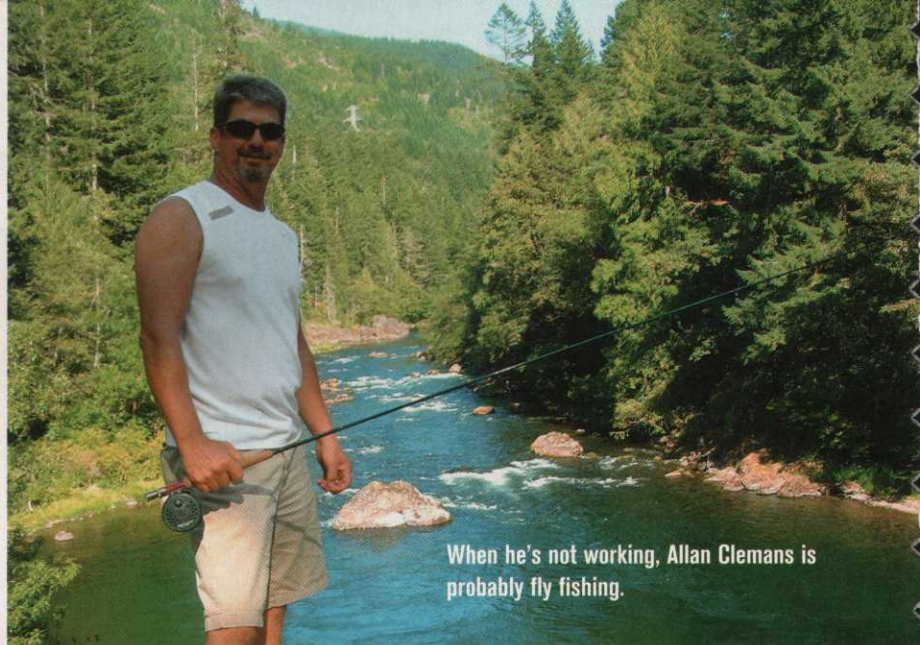
By Larry Aylward, Editor in Chief

*I've been everywhere, man
I've been everywhere, man
Crossed the deserts bare, man
I've breathed the mountain air, man
Of travel I've had my share, man
I've been everywhere*

The legendary Johnny Cash could've written this hit song about Allan Clemans, the executive director of the Oregon Golf Course Superintendents Association. The 42-year-old Clemans has been all over the world. And he's not done globe trotting yet.

For the past 12 years, Clemans has settled in Sisters, Ore., where he lives with his wife, Cheryl. Clemans, who joined the Oregon GCSA in 1996, works out of his house. He took over the job from his father, Don, in 2000 after assisting him in the role for four years. Twelve years is the longest Clemans has lived in one spot for one time.

Clemans began traveling the country as a kid. His dad was a golf course superintendent, and Clemans remembers Don moving the family several times when he went from job to job. Clemans was born in St. Louis. He lived in Columbus, Detroit and Indianapolis when his dad held superintendents' jobs in those cities. Because of Allan's asthma, Don moved the family to a less-humid climate, specifically Cody, Wyo., here he took the job as superintendent of Olive Glenn Country Club. Clemans



When he's not working, Allan Clemans is probably fly fishing.

joined his dad's maintenance crew soon after the move. He became the night waterman when he was 15.

"I worked on the golf course every summer until I graduated from high school," Clemans says. "But my dad told me that if I really wanted to get into this business, I'd need more work experience than just working for him."

So Clemans hit the road the day after graduating from high school to work at the Country Club of Colorado Springs. It was difficult to leave his family and friends in Cody, but Clemans learned how to live on his own, which would come in handy later on.

"Moving around as a kid made me less fearful to move around as an adult," he says.

That fall, Clemans returned to Cody to attend the University of Wyoming, where he was a soil science major. It was 1985, and Clemans' dad left Olive Glenn to become the superintendent at Black Wolf Run, Pete Dye's new design in Kohler, Wis. When the school year ended, Clemans went to Kohler to work with his dad again. But company rules — Wisconsin's wealthy and successful Kohler family owns Black Wolf Run — prohibited family members working directly for family members. So Clemans took a job on Dye's construction crew.

"I learned how to dig ditches and handle a lot of railroad ties," he says. "It was hard work and long hours."

Clemans didn't know it at the time, but his career in golf course construction was about to kick into high gear. Clemans found himself in the driver's seat of a tractor and was trained how to finish grades on tees and subgrades.

Clemans was also about to become a traveling man. He went to Florida to build a course and then to North Carolina to build another one. And then he went back to Michigan State University to get his degree. When Clemans had the chance to intern with Robert Trent Jones Sr. while a student at MSU, he jumped at it. Upon his graduation in 1987, Jones' construction company offered him a full-time job for \$22,500 and benefits, including insurance, travel and housing expenses.

Clemans' boss was Roger Rulewich, a golf course architect under Jones. "I really enjoyed working for Roger because he was a true teacher," Clemans says.

Clemans worked as a shaper. Within six months of joining Robert Trent Jones, he was traveling overseas. Clemans was only 23, but he was making a name for himself. Within 18 months, he grew experienced enough to handle a remodeling job on his own.

Clemans worked for Jones for 10 years. In that time he saw the country and the world. Clemans went to Ireland, Wales, Scotland, France, New Zealand, Egypt, Kenya, Japan and the Dominican Republic, among other

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places. He once watched the British Open from the Old Course Hotel’s balcony overlooking The Road Hole at St. Andrews. He rode a train along the Nile River.

But as a road warrior, Clemans didn’t have a home. He stored his possessions in Montgomery, Ala., for years. He was once told he’d be going abroad for four to six months and he came back 28 months later.

“I had girlfriends here and there,” he says, “but they all understood these were short-lived relationships.”

When he was back in the states working, Clemans drove throughout the country from job site to job site and lived in those cities for short periods. When people asked him where he lived, he didn’t know what to tell them. “I was never in a place long enough to establish a residency,” he says.

But the travel began to wear on him. Clemans grew tired of the long workweeks, sometimes 80 to 90 hours. Sometimes he didn’t even cash his paychecks because there was no time to spend any money. He lost track of time.

“One day someone said Happy Easter to me in the grocery store,” Clemans recalls. “I didn’t even know it was Easter.”

Clemans, who was pushing 30, began to wonder if his life was passing him by. He was also losing his zest for the job.

“I started wondering if I was going to be a really neat old fart with lots of stories — but nobody to tell them to,” he says.

He decided to quit. He moved to Bend, Ore., where his parents were now living. Clemans also liked the outdoors, and Oregon offers everything from mountains to forests to high lakes to the ocean. Clemans bought few possessions with him when he moved, but he did bring a canoe, a tent and a fly rod.

“I didn’t know what I wanted to do, but I decided to stay,” he says. “I also wanted to find someone to share my life with.”

One thing he knew for sure is he didn’t want to work for a while. “After working 80 to 90 hour weeks for 10 years ... I wanted to take some time off,” he says. “I had money in the bank to do so.”

At that time, Clemans’ dad, who had retired from being a superintendent after nearly 30 years, was managing a few local superintendent associations. He had just taken on another association job shortly after Clemans returned. “He had bitten off more than he could chew,” Clemans says.

Clemans began helping his dad and ended up succeeding him as executive director of the Oregon GCSA. While in Bend, he met his wife, Cheryl. They moved to Sisters, a town of about 700, and live in a log cabin by the mountains with their three dogs. One of the first things Clemans did after moving in the cabin was shape a small golf hole in his yard.

“I love my job,” Clemans says. “It’s wonderful to hang out with golf course superintendents and listen to their problems, and see if I can help them. I feel like they’re all part of my family.”

Quotable

“I don’t want some mom whose son may have recently died to see the commander in chief playing golf. I feel I owe it to the families to be in solidarity as best as I can with them. And I think playing golf during a war just sends the wrong signal.”

— *President George W. Bush, who has given up the game the past several years to acknowledge the sacrifice of soldiers and their families. (CBS News)*

“In order for golf to grow, we need to embrace the public player.”

— *Golf course architect Rees Jones on the importance of holding the U.S. Open at a municipal venue such as Torrey Pines.*

Clemans, an avid fisherman, keeps his fly rod in the back of his car. When he’s driving through the mountains, sometimes he’ll pull over and cast his line in a trout stream and fish for a few hours

It’s a slower pace, but Clemans doesn’t regret the time he spent working himself to the bone. He was able to see the world and have a big hand in building some great golf courses.

And Clemans is not done. In April he announced he’s leaving the Oregon GCSA to take a job in Portugal. Clemans is getting back in the bulldozer seat and will build a few golf courses for Rulewich in Evora, Portugal. Clemans leaves July 1, and he and Cheryl and their dogs will live in Portugal for three to five years.

“I’ve been dreaming about the dirt rolling off the corner of a bulldozer blade for 10 years,” says Clemans, who realized he misses the construction part of the business. “I love building golf courses and putting my personal mark on something that could possibly be here for 200 to 300 years.”

Clemans’ advice to up-and-comers thinking of following a similar career path is to follow their heart’s desire.

“Be careful, but have fun and definitely go for it,” he says. “It’s such a great experience, and you’ll never forget it. You’ll realize what a great world we live in.”

Clemans should know. He’s been everywhere, man. ■