

Recently, the United States sent the rover Curiosity to Mars to see if there is life on this distant planet and determine if the Martian environment could be suitable for microbial life. The Curiosity joins the long-running rover Opportunity, which has been on the Red Planet since 2004. Yet another rover, Spirit, fell silent on Mars after getting stuck in one of all things what NASA calls a sand trap. I personally didn't even know there was a golf course on Mars.

If you read articles about the Curiosity and its mission, there is frequently a reference to the phrase "a look at what's ahead." That phrase leads me to the topic of this article. I'm not referring to Mars, but rather to Asia in general and China specifically.

In some readers' minds, the analogy between Mars and China is appropriate. Because, like Mars, China may as well be millions of miles away from here. In the minds of people in the golf industry, however, China creates immense curiosity, like the Mars rover.

We often hear conflicting stories about golf in China and whether or not there has been a moratorium placed on golf development. I'm not certain, and I don't think anyone else is, what the definition of a moratorium on China golf means.

But I can tell you in my many visits to China I have seen a large number of golf courses under construction or renovation. I was there for a month this past spring, and my Chinese golf industry friends mentioned to me there are nearly 100 golf courses under construction there, not to mention the courses under construction in the rest of Asia. This is why many golf course architects, management companies and golf course construction companies are devoting many of their resources to this part of the world.

By comparison, there may not even be a handful of new golf courses being built in the United States. So one would think there is, like that other rover, a great deal of opportunity in China. And if you're willing to make

China: Curiosity and Opportunity

BY MARK WOODWARD



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some sacrifices, there is opportunity.

First of all, like Mars, China is a long way from home. Secondly, even though China is a modern country in many respects, it still has its challenges. But if you have an open mind, enjoy Chinese food (there's a lot of it over there) and want to learn about a unique culture, you may want to consider looking into the many golf industry opportunities there.

For me, it's a balancing act. I'm intrigued by golf in China. I want to help the Chinese and contribute to the growth of golf there. But I don't want to live there full time. I am currently the consulting CEO of the golf course management company MasterStep Golf Group. I also teach classes at Jiao Tong University in Shanghai. Both of those positions provide me with a balance between the consulting and golf course renovation businesses I own here in the States.

Many people don't know this, but golf is a relatively new sport in China. The oldest golf course there is less than 30 years old. It's not as far away as Mars, but if you're curious and at a turning point in your life, I would encourage you to look at the opportunity in China and the rest of Asia.

One thing that I am sure of is, the Chinese people have a wonderful spirit and are truly excited about golf. They're interested in learning from Americans and others in the international golf community how to make golf a sustainable industry there.

Now, who is raking that sand trap on Mars? I guess that's a topic for another column.

Mark Woodward is president of Mark Woodward and Associates, principal of DaMarCo Golf, CEO of MasterStep Golf Group and a contributing editor for Golfdom.