

# REFLECTIONS ON A JOURNEY TO SCOTLAND

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This pilgrimage started with an opportunity to attend the Scotland International Golf Greenkeepers Association (SIGGA) Conference that was held in conjunction with Ransome's 5th International Greenkeepers and Superintendents Golf Tournament in St. Andrews, Scotland at the Rusack's Marine Hotel. I was accompanied by my colleague Wayne Otto, Superintendent of Ozaukee Country Club, Mequon, Wisconsin.

We flew from Chicago to Toronto where we met Stanley Zontek and Patrick O'Brien, consulting agronomists with the USGA Green Section. We left Toronto at 8:30 p.m. October 5, and arrived 8:00 a.m. October 6th. We were greeted at Prestwick airport with rain and an opportunity to take our lives in our hands by driving to St. Andrews. None of us had had much sleep and to drive a strange car with the steering wheel on the "wrong" side sure seemed like risky business to me. It worked out better than I thought because everyone drove on the "wrong" side.

We arrived at St. Andrews around noon and checked into a Bed and Breakfast called "West Park." Throughout Scotland people open their homes to visitors for a night's sleep and breakfast at a very reasonable cost. We ate lunch, got out cameras and walked to the "Old Course." When we got there, no one was playing golf. Old Tom Morris, Curator of St. Andrew's Old Course from 1865 until his death in 1908, once said to a critic of the custom "The Old Course needs a rest on the Sabbath sir, even if you don't." It has been that way for over a century — golf is not played on St. Andrew's golf courses on Sunday.

The four of us walked down the first hole of the "Old Course" appropriately named the Burn. In front of the green is Swilcan Burn — to our left a landmark, the Swilcan bridge, directly behind the bridge the 18th tee and the famous "Road" hole. The score card says



An old WGCSA friend, Stan Zontek.



The "Old Tom Morris Golf Shop."



A St. Andrews street and shops.



Rugged terrain of Scottish golf courses.

that this 461 yard par-4 is the most difficult hole on the course. The card states that you have to drive over the edge of the out of bounds wall to the center of the narrow fairway. Second shot must be to right hand half of the green to avoid the deep road bunker at the left of the green. To use too much club means playing from the road. Playing this hole is the only way one can appreciate it. Don't let your mind go on vacation, or you will soon have big numbers on your score card. Now, having walked only 400 yards onto the golf course and standing on the 18th tee — we turn around and look back, what a breathtaking view. In our view is the Royal and Ancient Golf Club, behind the first tee and the 18th green nestled along the narrow street and shops of St. Andrews one realizes that there is no other scene on earth like this. The following day we played this great golf course and as we walked down the fairway across "Swilcan Bridge," crossed the road that leads to the North Sea, to the "valley of sin" (the name given to the deep contour of the putting surface, front left of green) — we realized it doesn't matter whether you are a great Golf Professional or sport a 20 handicap — you will never forget such moments in your life.

"The Link was part of the patrimony of the Burgh of St. Andrews bestowed upon it at erection in the 12th century. No one knows the exact age of the Old Course or the exact age of the game of golf, but the inhabitants of the town have been accustomed to playing golf over the Links since the 15th century and the earliest historical reference to the games is in an edict of 1457 issued by James II of Scotland." To play St. Andrews is like entering another time — a journey back in history.

That night we attended a wine tasting reception, a kick-off for the SIGGA Conference. At the reception I met Walter Woods, Links Superintendent of St. Andrews. Walter is Vice President of SIGGA and a most gracious host. Not only was Walter hosting the Greenkeeper Conference and Tournament — he made each individual feel welcome. In addition to all this, he was preparing the course for the Dunhill Classic to be played

the following week. Just to say Walter is a remarkable person is an understatement. When meeting Walter one soon realizes that these great golf courses are in caring hands. Just like Walter's hospitality, the playing surfaces at St. Andrews were of "top quality."

James Neilson, President of SIGGA, Greenkeeper at Murryfield; the Directors and Committee people did an excellent job of putting this conference and tournament together. We were flattered by being invited to Ransome's Greenkeepers/Superintendents Golf Tournament banquet. The Tournament was played on the "Old Course" and was won by Canada. Scotland was second and the USA third.

Prizes were presented by Sir John Carmichael, KBE Chairman at St. Andrew Links Trust. A toast was proposed by Mr. F. Guy Catchpole, Sales and Marketing Director of Ransome's. Reply on behalf of the guests was made by Mr. Keith MacKenzie, OBE, MC., past secretary of the Royal and Ancient Golf Club. In his reply he stressed the importance of young people being involved in the game of golf — a cause that all of us connected with the game should easily relate to. Mr. MacKenzie pointed out we all share a responsibility in this ongoing goal.

Every course and club we visited we found people were proud of its heritage and in love with the game of golf. This was exemplified by Mr. Tom Shiel who took us for a walk through the history of Carnoustie Golf Course after we played there. Mr. Shiel, a native of Scotland who lived some years in the United States, is the Professional at Panmure Golf Club and teaches and is a member of Carnoustie. He remembers and can relive each tournament, every great shot. Carnoustie is the site of five Open Championships.

Our next stop was Glen Eagles — a great golf course in superb condition. Glen Eagles is set amid 610 acres and is surrounded by unspoiled countryside. We played the Championship Kings Course. The beauty of the course is beyond description — something you must experience for yourself. After golf we met Jimmy Kidd, estate and golf course manager. After a tour of the hotel and grounds it is

readily evident the large responsibilities he has, and the fine job he is doing.

Anyone who has been to the Midwest Regional Turf Foundation meeting at Purdue University has met John Souter. John, a Landscape Architect involved in sports fields and golf course remodeling, has now designed and is building a golf course in Ballindalloch, Scotland. John showed the design to us over refreshments at Glen Eagles. We all share his enthusiasm and it appears to us that this course will take its rightful place in Scottish golf.

The next course we visited was Royal Dornoch — home of Donald Ross. A great golf course you must see — great designs, entrenched in history. This was not just a round of golf — it was an adventure.

We played many great golf courses and could easily write an article on each one — such tradition we found at Muirfield, Royal Troon, Prestwick and Turnberry. We played 16 rounds of golf on 15 golf courses in 14 days. We played 288 holes of golf, never found a weak course or played a poorly designed golf hole.

#### **Turf in Scotland**

The turf in Scotland is bentgrass on greens; bentgrass, annual meadow grass (**Poa annua**) and fine leaf fescues on tees and fairways. Bentgrass was predominant over **Poa annua**, this should tell us something about our fertilizer program as very little is used in Scotland. Soil pH was 4 and this seemed to be a goal that many try to achieve. We understood this was a level they wish to maintain. Lies on fairways were tight. Greens were not as fast as we were accustomed to but many courses were spiking and/or top-dressing. Much rain had fallen in the previous weeks. They were still very good and when dealing with the severe contours of the surfaces and the approach shot required to the greens — the greens were in keeping with the average golfer's ability.

#### **Golf Course — Predominant Features**

Bunkers on the golf course were magnificent. They were mostly deep bunkers with straight faces made with stacked sod. To hit a ball in them was a lost stroke.



Before going to Scotland I thought Gorse was a close relative to a goose because of its spelling. Gorse, contrary to my thinking, is not a feathered bird. It is a bush that grows everywhere — in the roughs, on the links golf courses. Gorse has a yellow flower in spring, is about three to six feet high with very **sharp** needles and very thick growth. To hit a ball in a patch of gorse is like hitting it out of bounds. Just tee it up again because the chance of having a shot or even finding the ball is almost non-existent. If your bad shot is lucky enough to miss the gorse, the ball will end up in the deep rough and if you find the ball you should consider getting it back on the short grass as quickly as possible.

**Golf in Scotland as I See It**

Golf is a way of life in Scotland. Changes come only with much deliberation. Golf is accessible and affordable to everyone. Scotland has kept golf much the same since the 19th century. You see no golf carts. When you play the great courses in Scotland, take a caddy. Their local knowledge will mean a lower score and an enjoyable round of golf. The caddies we took were great.

There are no yardage markers on the golf courses. I've heard golfers in the U.S. say "if we put yardages on every sprinkler head we could speed up play." Yet, on the unmarked courses of Scotland, even with their deep roughs and Gorse — the 16 rounds of golf we played were played in four hours or less. In fact, after the visit, I'm not sure that yardage markers don't create slow play. The perception of depth or distance to the flag stick is a part of the challenge of the game — and it still is in Scotland! At St. Andrews, as well as many of the links courses, the wind blows so hard that exact knowledge of distance means very little in club selection. I can't believe some courses in the U.S. put markers on flag sticks to show hole location. I wonder what Old Tom Morris would say if he could see that?

This has been an experience of a lifetime for me as it was for Wayne, Stan and Pat. After each round we would review our score, losers would wipe their tears, and then we would discuss what we had experienced that day in respect to

our profession. We all agree these courses are a page back in history. The courses in Scotland have stood the test of time and will continue to do so. The golf equipment and skill of the game has advanced much over the past century. These golf courses built as far back as the 15th century have not been intimidated to date and I don't think they ever will be.

The people we met, new friendships made were all gratifying to us. We appreciate the hospitality shown us by our colleagues in Scotland and thank each and every person for sharing with us their love, knowledge and personal

commitment to the Royal and Ancient game of golf.

**Our best to the  
"GREENEST  
THUMBS"  
in the State...  
enjoy a  
bountiful 1986!**



**WISCONSIN SECTION  
PGA OF AMERICA**

**Wisconsin Golf Course  
Superintendents Association  
1986 Meeting Schedule  
and Educational Program**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Topic/Speaker</b>
March 17 (Monday)	Traveler's Inn Fond du Lac, WI	Business Meeting
April 28 (Monday)	Tumblebrook, C.C.	<i>"Winter Recovery"</i> James Latham, USGA Director
May 20 (Tuesday)	Villa du Parc C.C. Mequon, WI	<i>"Fairway Insect Control and Earth Worm Suppression"</i> Dr. Roscoe Randell, University of Illinois
June 23 (Monday)	North Shore G.C. Menasha, WI	<i>"Irrigation Techniques"</i> Mr. Peter Beaves, Engineer, East Dubuque, IL
July 14 (Monday)	Waupaca C.C. Waupaca, WI	<i>"Poa anna Breeding"</i> Dr. Donald White, University of Minnesota
August 11 (Monday)	Watertown C.C. Watertown, WI	<i>"Employees Equal Rights and Supt's. Responsibility"</i> Mr. Robert Huppertz, Equal Rights Officer, Milwaukee
Sept. 22 (Monday)	SentryWorld Stevens Point, WI	<i>"Fall Fertilization"</i> Dr. Wayne Kussow, University of Wisconsin- Madison
October 20 (Monday)	Cherokee C.C. Madison, WI	<i>"Bunker Design and Construction"</i> Mr. Bob LohMann, Architect
Nov. 3 (Monday)	Traveler's Inn Fond du Lac, WI	Business Meeting