



# THE TOUR

By Monroe S. Miller

He'd thought about this for years, going back to the point in time when he realized it was a possibility he would celebrate a silver anniversary at one club. In this day and age, long terms of service at a single golf course are less likely than they were a generation or two ago. It is rare anymore for anyone to even stay in the same profession for as long as he had. It seemed to him a notable mark in a career, and it mattered little to him that few others might view it that way. The celebration was going to be for him and no one else.

The plan wasn't going to be a jaunt down memory lane as much as it was a fulfillment of a lot of unkept promises he had made over the years. He was going to visit the golf courses in Wisconsin that were being managed by former employees. Somewhere in time he had promised everyone of them he would stop by for a visit and a tour, but unless they were close by or had hosted a WGCSA meeting, he hadn't been able to follow through. There simply had not been enough time. And although all those former staff members understood, it still bothered him that the promises were unfulfilled.

It would have taken a lot of time. There were over 30 golf courses in the state managed by kids who, while attending the UW, had worked for him. He loved every single one of them. So it occurred to him the only way to keep all those promises was to take enough vacation time to hit the road and go see those he hadn't visited. It would give him the chance to keep his word, even if it came years late for some. More importantly, it had the potential of becoming one of his great life adventures and highlights.

There was no sense in doing it when the courses were closed and snow covered. To make it meaningful, he would have to find the opportunity during the season. He got permission to take some vacation days - a week and the weekends on each side if necessary — right after Memorial Day.

Both the green committee chairman and the club president were very supportive.

Clearly he had to make the most of the time he had. He mapped out a route, approximately clockwise, around the state. There necessarily was some backtracking and zig-zagging, but not too much. He knew he would need to design a schedule, make appointments and keep on time. In a vacation heaven like Wisconsin, lodging reservations were an absolute must. All the guys knew ahead of time he could not go home with them for meals or an overnight or he would never finish the tour. No golf was allowed, either.

It took a fair amount of careful planning to schedule the visits and travel so it all came out right. A lot of miles were involved and the distance between some consecutive stops was significant. There would be discipline required so he didn't get going on one of his famous talking jags.

Simple arithmetic proved he would need to visit, alternately, three courses one day and two the next. He had thirteen golf courses to visit, ones he had heard lots about, but had never laid eyes upon.

He really wanted to see where the young men (and one gal) who were assistant course superintendents were working, too. But that was impossible to the point of being a ridiculous thought. But he held to the notion that if this tour went well, maybe next year...

He packed for comfort, taking golf clothes and boat mocs along with blue jeans and Redwings. Rain gear was a must. He was really excited, and buoyed by the confidence he was feeling in the staff at his own course, the one he was leaving for an entire week in the summertime. He chuckled when his assistant said "with you gone we will be done by noon everyday!" It was now or never, and now seemed about perfect.

It was dark when he pulled out of town. He had hardly slept all that night.

It was a curiosity that his first stop was at the course managed by the youngest and most recent graduate, Les Peterson. He had spent a year after graduation at Mt. Hope Golf and Country Club, working for Scottie Fennimore. Les interviewed successfully at a new golf course in the southwest corner of Wisconsin, near where he had grown up. Investors in the Surveyor's Point Golf Club planned on tapping the enormous tourist industry around Galena, the northwest corner of Illinois and the southwest part of Wisconsin. The club was named for the historic "point of beginning" at the very edge of the property. In 1831 Lucius Lyon, U.S. Commissioner on the survey of the Wisconsin/Illinois border, build a mound of soil 6' X 6' X 6' to make the exact spot of the intersection of the 4th principal meridian and the border between the two states. From that marker, destroyed long ago, all land surveys in Wisconsin began.

Les was in the shop when he arrived, waiting for him. Despite his  
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youth and substantial responsibilities, Les was loose this day and smiling broadly. He apologized for the rather poor shop facilities — a new building was planned — and quickly got in a golf car and drove them out to the golf course.

Surveyor's Point was scheduled for a July 1st opening and it was pretty obvious they would be in good shape for that event. Most of the time, a daily fee course like this one would have been opened already. It was a gorgeous property and the golf course had been fit to the land, minimizing massive grading and unnatural features that haunt too many new golf courses. The kid had the operation in hand, was popular with the crew and destined to have a successful career.

He was off to a good start, on time for the next stop. It was a long drive, but a beautiful one. He followed the Mississippi River along the Great River Road. The day was pleasantly warm, just about what you would expect. The corn crop and grain fields looked as prosperous as the golf courses. Riding through the countryside was constant reminder of why this was an easy state to love.

Bluff Siding CC was located on a promontory with a fabulous view of the river. The clubhouse and several of the golf holes took maximum advantage of the geography. It almost seemed the view would be a distraction to a serious round of golf.

Mike Cartwright had been at Bluff Siding for a dozen years and had grown with the club. When he took the job and for a couple of years afterward, he often had doubts about the wisdom of such a move. But as the years went by, the club grew, the course was improved and he became happier. Last year the State Open was held at Bluff Siding — an impossible thought a decade ago — and players left with great respect for this "best kept secret" as the winner noted. He was happy to get his victory with par golf.

Mike took him home for a quick lunch — over his objections. He wanted him to see Becky and their three kids. They had purchased an old farmstead and twenty acres of rolling, almost rough ground. All of their spare time was spent repairing and renovating the house, the barn, the other buildings and the line fences. It was a cozy place, much like a picture you would see on the June calendar from the Farmer's Co-op.

The real treat came when Mike pushed open the door of the machine shed, revealing a like-new Oliver Super 88 and a freshly painted Ford Golden Jubilee! The boss was speechless.

He waved farewell to this great young family, thinking of the times he and Mike had spent together on the golf course, focused on problems, working late and keeping one another's spirits up at tough times. They had always been close, probably because of their common farm upbringing in

small Wisconsin communities. Mike was a happy and fully satisfied man, and that made him more than happy.

"Why haven't I made it up here before?" he thought to himself. "Always too busy" seemed like such a weak answer. He promised it wouldn't be another dozen years before he returned to Bluff Siding.

Tuesday would be a big day, one spent in northern Wisconsin. He pushed hard, leaving the Great River Road for Eau Claire on the way to the

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lake country between Chetek and Hayward. He had called Cale Spencer weeks ago when he was laying out his plans and told him he wouldn't be stopping at Stockholm CC despite the fact he would be driving almost by the golf course. Cale had been active in the WGCSA and insisted, over the years, that a couple of board meetings convene at his place. SCC was another absolutely breathtaking golf course, situated in the driftless part of Wisconsin that had been missed by the glacier. Good thing.

He was glad to reach the motel — two visits and over 400 miles for this day. He was ready for serious sleep.

Northern Wisconsin had never done much for him. He always preferred the beauty of the rolling farmland in the south to the sandy soils and desolate look up north. As soon as he pulled into the magnificent Piney Woods Resort, he started to reconsider. This was going to be an interesting day.

Piney Woods covered nearly two thousand acres and featured four superb golf courses — The Pine Needles Course, Pine Cones Golf Course, Cathedral Pines Golf and The Big Pines Club. Roy Winston was the golf course and property manager. The two of them went back to the time when he was new in the profession. Roy had been one of his first students and over the years one of the most loyal to the Wisconsin program. Each of the four golf course superintendents had worked for him, too, just like Roy had. Bill Reeves was at Pine Needles, Jack Brainerd was managing Pine Cones, Tom Spencer was at Cathedral Pines and Jim Bower ran Big Pines.

The resort had been carefully thought out. There was a large central shop that housed the mechanics, Roy's office and the equipment that the four golf courses shared - aerifiers, fertilizer spreaders, dump trucks, frontend loaders and backhoes, sprayers, and the like. Each course had a smaller satellite shop where the staff for each course worked and each course superintendent had his office. The machinery used most often was kept in each satellite shop. The four buildings were identical, yet each one of the guys gave him a shop tour!

They had lunch at the resort lodge, an enormous, rambling building with hundreds of rooms, tennis and swimming and dining. It was a very busy place, as it had to be. Piney Woods had about six months in a good year to

make its money, leaving little room for slow times during the summer. Everything he had heard about it was true. It was a first class facility, running smoothly due in no small part to successful golf courses.

Wednesday was mainly a driving day. He charted a route across the state he had never travelled, hoping to gain more appreciation for country lots of people really like. It wasn't interstate driving, but traffic was light and the miles passed quickly. He pulled into Fiddlesticks Country Club right after lunch. He was in the heart of north central Wisconsin.

This was going to be a fun stop. Vic Jorstad was a second generation for him. His dad Vince spent three summers at his golf course, graduated and moved to The Four Seasons Club in northeast Wisconsin. When it was time for Vic to go to college, he went to Madison and spent for seasons with his dad's old boss. Two years as an assistant at Emerald View led to his job at Fiddlesticks.

This stop needed more time than the others. He and his wife had sort of been parents away from home for Vic and had known him all his life. Despite the generational differences, he and Vic were really close.

They drove the course, hole by hole, greeting players and looking at greens and visiting the whole time. He hated to leave; it was time to go to Door county.

The Links at Moonlight Bay. The name sounded so good and so inviting he was sure the course couldn't live up to anybody's expectations. He was wrong. Located on the Lake Michigan side of Door county, the golf course hugged the soft and gentle coastline. You could almost convince yourself that you were on the coast at Cape Cod. Pete Collins was having a love affair with this golf course, and he could see why.


He couldn't see why, however, he hadn't visited before this time. The site was created for the golf course that had so carefully been crafted here. Pete was the only superintendent Moonlight Bay ever had. He was there for the long stay and it was no wonder. The course was more beautiful than his words could describe. It was fit into the natural landscape much like its neighbor across the lake, Crystal Downs. He and Pete had a great time touring the place. He wished he could take some of Pete's enthusiasm home with him.

Inland and southwest of The Links at Moonlight Bay was Emerald View Country Club, another Door county premier resort golf course. Chip Chandler had been Pete's assistant after graduation and was a natural to fill the Emerald View job when it opened. Some thought he and Pete would be in competition, but they were closer than brothers. Visitors to the Door rarely chose between these two golf courses; rather, they would play them both. The three of them had a nice lunch at Ducky's Cafe in Bailey's Harbor and afterwards he was down the road for one more stop.

Scheduling was going well. After today only four courses would remain. The distances between were diminishing, saving considerable time.

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The next stop was at a new, snazzy golf course called Shadow Glen. It was in a remote area between the interstate and Lake Michigan. It was a private course with only 100 members, mainly from the Fox Valley and Milwaukee, but a few from Madison and a few more from Chicago. He couldn't figure out how, in this day and age and in this state a "Men Only" club could exist. But it was there.

He thought he had followed Frank Van Gilder's directions to the shop, but somehow he had lost his way. He couldn't even see any evidence of a golf course. He wasted little time before stopping to ask a farmer how to get there.

"It's not easy to find," the farmer said from the seat of his AC 200. "They've got it hidden real well, which suits us from around here just fine. They're a bunch of uppity out-of-towners." Ten minutes later he was in Frank's parking lot. Frank drove up as he got out of the car. It was a generational thing, but he got a little nervous when a man gives him a hug, even a little one. Frankie squeezed the pudding out of him! "I'm glad to see you, too," he said to Frank while extending his right hand.

In Wisconsin, Thursday is "Men's Day", at least after the lunch hour. But at Shadow Glen, everyday was "Men's Day". And this day there were very few players. It was a surprise.

"We get 7,000 or 8,000 rounds a year." Frank said with a smile on his face. "But when they tee it up, it better be good. Really good."

"You don't deserve this, Frank," he teased.

"I know I don't." Frank replied with a sheepish look. "It's like a fantasy — a golf course but no golfers."

The architect had done a masterful job of tucking the course away to provide maximum privacy to the players. In terms of condition, it was close to perfect. Frank loved the occasional easterly cool breeze from Lake Michigan, giving the property a moderate climate.

He left Frank, had some supper at a fast food restaurant and went to bed early. The trip was starting to wear on him and he needed plenty of sleep to finish up with the same enthusiasm he had started with.

It was before daybreak when he left to motel and started out. The birds were singing, the stars were still out and the air was calm. Even away from the golf course, the thought "great

night for irrigation" went through his mind.

At sunrise he was rounding the southern tip of Lake Winnebago, going west toward a stop in Waupaca county at the Tip Top CC. He was going to visit Gene Hudson.

Tip Top CC was a well established older club, one that would be fun for anyone to get established on. That had been Gene's plan. But he has stayed for longer than he or anyone else had thought. He liked it too much to leave. Moments after arriving, it was easy to see why.

The course was nicer than he had expected and conditions were really great. Gene and his wife and kids lived in a large old Victorian house in town that they had fixed themselves. Its expansive lawn was fenced with a white picket fence. Gene had hosted a monthly meeting a while back, but he'd missed it for some reason. He was really glad to have finally visited.

After Gene's stop he drove south and west, gradually working his way closer and closer to home. Next on the schedule was the heart of the triangle from Prairie du Chien to LaCrosse to Madison. Two courses, fairly close together, would round out Friday.

It was embarrassing to him that he hadn't driven to here before. It was a little more than an hour from home to either golf course. Butter Valley CC and The Barn Golf Club weren't more than ten miles apart. Curiously, Steve Kowalski and Phil Brock had worked together two summers at his place. They were both fun-loving guys, crazy enough to have driven their old boss wild more than a few times in a day.

He stopped at The Barn CC first and they were both there. The course was named for the set of farm buildings, minus the house, that had been nicely preserved as a backdrop to the fifth hole. The corn crib, silo, hoghouse and chicken coop were pretty much

decorative, Phil told him. But the barn was secured and used for cold storage of equipment and fertilizer. The buildings had been freshly painted a deep red and trimmed out in white. The dark green shingles on the roofs were the perfect accent.

Butter Valley had the same kind of rural site The Barn GC had. And both courses were supported by modest sized towns, dictating a modest budget for each course. That didn't bother those two. They made the most of what they had, making up for some resources by simple hard work and creativeness. The great attitude that each had would ensure a long and happy life. He doubted they gave a hoot or a holler about moving to "a bigger course"; that kind of presumed status was of no consequence — none — to either of them. They were, to their old boss, the very models of success.

The evening was mild, and couples' golf had filled the BVCC course. These happy, middle class, so typically mid-western men and women demonstrated yet another reason why so many, like the thirteen kids he had driven hither and yonder to see, loved managing a golf course.

It had been a grand week and the good feelings that he had made him forget, for the moment anyway, his weariness. If there is anything in life better than what he'd experienced this past week, he was anxious to learn about it. The sunshine, the scenic Wisconsin landscape and friendly towns, and the thirteen members of his extended family made a dream come true. He was happy just to be alive.

The drive home went quickly. He thought about the notes he was going to write each of his hosts, thank you notes about how they had made his life so rich. And the thought occurred to him that he was going to do this again, soon. Real soon. 🍷

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