



MOSTLY, IT'S TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE

By Monroe S. Miller

What are we going to do if we do not have the weather to gripe about? The long and late autumn, the snowy, short and almost balmy winter, and the incredibly early spring couldn't have been scripted much better. Throw in the early (record setting on my golf course) opening day and the championship conditions of putting greens, and some of us are left with nothing to complain about! Add in the budget cutting events in government at all levels and you get to thinking we are on a big time roll. Happy days are here, despite that northern European tendency to feel guilt when good luck befalls us. You know, "what did I do to deserve this?" and "this cannot last, can it?"

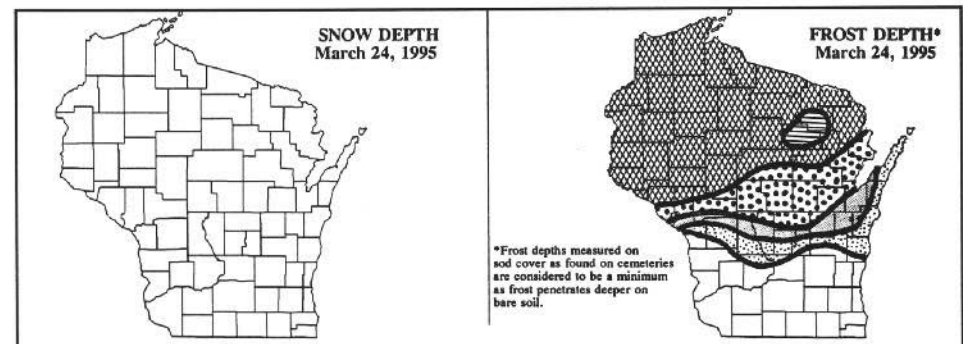
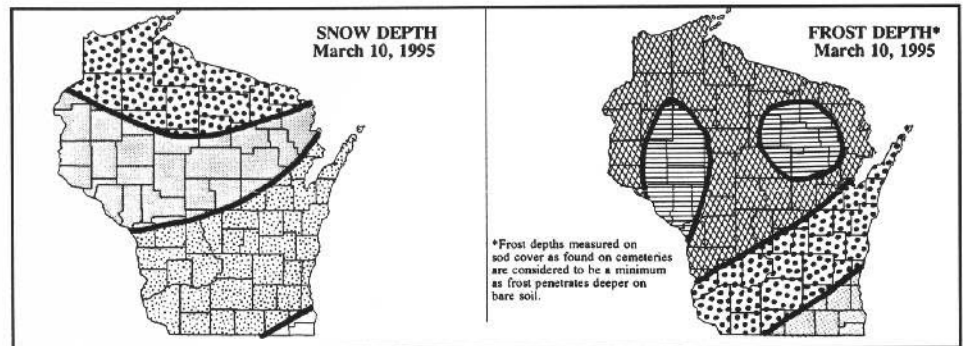
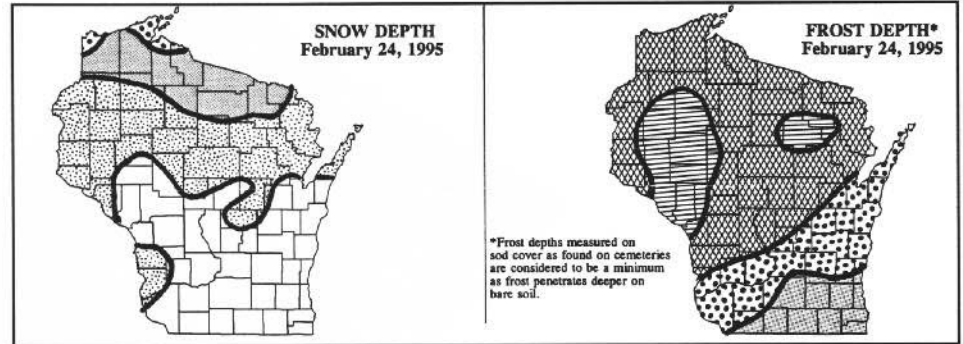
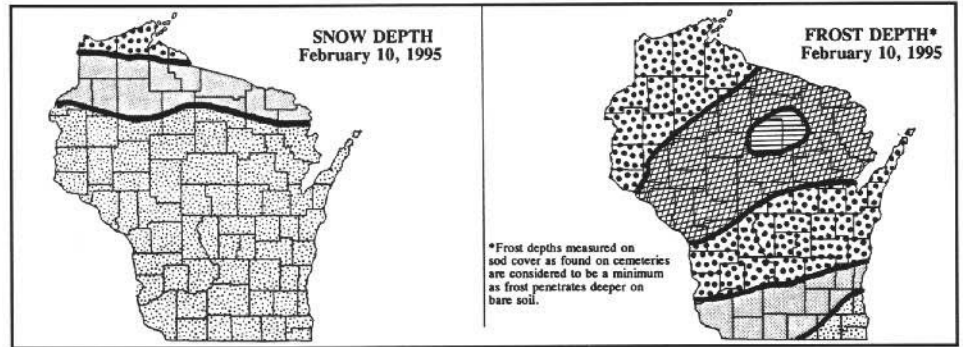
The only downside of a mild winter and early spring, in my view, will be the renewed hand wringing about global warming. I am not convinced that it is a problem.

Studies of some standing show natural weather cycles occurring about every 18 years, and it sure seems to be difficult to separate out man made efforts — like global warming — from that natural cycle. The greatest increases in temperatures in this century happened between 1920 and 1940; I wonder if back then the seasons like we have had of late were considered harbingers of pending disaster?

Those details are beyond me and for now do not matter. I am too busy enjoying the good weather.

If part of our job with THE GRASS ROOTS is keeping track of significant events and features of each golf year, then data from the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service is an important part of that job. The dated maps below follow the weather of winter's end and spring's early and wonderful beginning.

(Continued on page 7)



(Continued from page 5)

The Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service offers up an excellent review of the 1994-1995 winter each year. Their own records coupled with information from State Climatologist Pamela S. Knox give a good retrospective of that season that was so kind to us this year.

As in the 1993-1994 season, the past winter began late. Besides one snowstorm in the middle of December, little snow was seen in December or January. The snow in December quickly melted from the unusually mild temperatures. Both the snow and frost depths were significantly behind normals until mid-January. The only exception to that was the snowstorm in mid-December. That storm dropped snow so that the total snowdepth for the state was 4.2 inches, only 0.1 inches below normal.

Cold temperatures then set in and the frost level increased to near normal depth but the snow cover was about 1/3 of normal. Throughout the remainder of January and into February, cold temperatures continued to send frost deeper into the ground. By late February, the frost depth was ahead of the normal. While snow levels were still well below normal, a warm week in late March melt-

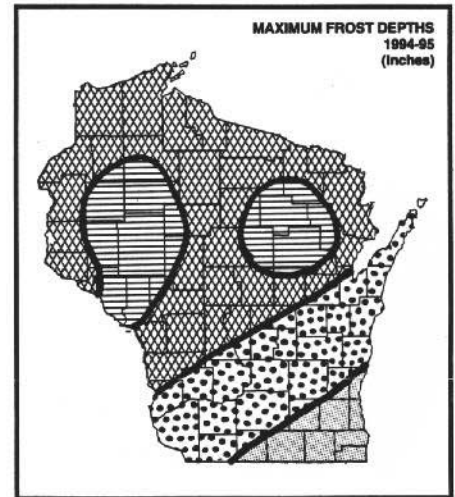
ed all the snow and brought frost levels below normal.

Snow Depths

One big snowstorm in mid-December had the snow cover on a normal pace, but warm temperatures melted the snow quickly. By late-December the snow depth was only 0.8 inches as compared to a normal of 6.0 inches. The snow depth continued to be significantly below normal until mid-March. Snow showers in mid-March brought snow depths to 7.6 inches, 0.4 inches above the 33-year normal average. Temperatures in the 70s the next week melted all the snow across the state and brought snow depths down to zero.

Frost Depths

Warm temperatures in December kept frost depths well below normal. In late December the frost depth was at 2.1 inches, 5.4 inches below the normal. Frost levels increased significantly from late December to mid-January. Frost levels increased slightly each week until mid-March when it reached a level of 22.2 inches, 6.2 inches above normal. Warm temperatures dropped the frost level 13.7 inches over the next two-week period to 8.5 inches.



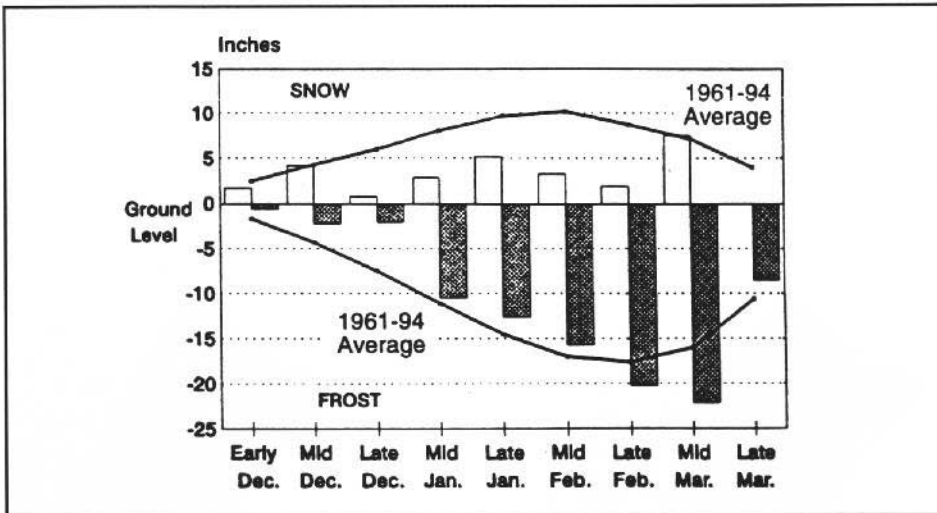
Frost depths measured on sod cover as found on cemeteries are considered to be a minimum as frost penetrates deeper on bare soil.

Temperature and Precipitation

The October – March average temperatures were above average as reported by the five major reporting stations in Wisconsin (Madison, Milwaukee, Green Bay, LaCrosse and Duluth). Temperatures were well above normal for each month and in each reporting station. The only time the temperature was below normal was in February at the Duluth, Minnesota station.

Total precipitation for the five major reporting stations was below normal for the months of October – March except for Duluth. This station was above normal in precipitation by 0.06 inches, mainly due to the 3.4 inches of above normal snowfall. The Madison station was 11.8 inches above normal in snowfall, but 1.57 inches below normal for precipitation. This is a result of the more precipitation being in the form of snow instead of rain. The snow received had a low moisture content.

1994-95 Snow & Frost Depths Compared to Average & Previous Historical Records



Total Precipitation and Departure from Normal, Water Equipment Inches, Winter 1994-95

Location	October		November		December		January		February		March		Six months	
	Total	Dep.	Total	Dep.	Total	Dep.	Total	Dep.	Total	Dep.	Total	Dep.	Total	Dep.
Madison	0.65	-1.52	2.77	0.68	1.08	-0.76	2.12	1.05	0.06	-1.02	2.17	0.00	8.85	-1.57
Milwaukee	0.78	-1.63	3.31	0.80	1.14	-1.19	2.14	0.54	0.25	-1.20	1.76	-0.91	9.38	-3.59
Green Bay	0.98	-1.25	1.43	-0.73	0.34	-1.19	0.65	-0.50	0.39	-0.64	1.92	-0.13	5.71	-4.44
La Crosse	1.99	-0.21	2.05	0.32	0.71	-0.56	0.73	-0.20	0.38	-0.52	2.78	0.80	8.64	-0.37
Duluth	2.27	-0.22	2.53	0.73	0.33	-0.91	1.38	0.16	1.04	0.24	1.97	0.06	9.52	0.06

Source: Pamela S. Knox, State Climatologist.

Wisconsin Average Precipitation October 1, 1994 - March 31, 1995 1/			
District	Total	Departure from normal	Percent of normal
Northwest	7.06	-2.19	76
North Central	6.92	-3.00	70
Northeast	7.24	-3.22	69
West Central	7.57	-1.65	82
Central	7.14	-3.01	70
East Central	7.65	-3.25	70
Southwest	7.56	-2.34	76
South Central	7.86	-2.89	73
Southeast	9.27	-2.22	81
State	7.41	-2.62	74

1/Preliminary. Source: Pamela S. Knox, State Climatologist.

The weeks of March 6 and March 13 were tremendous for turfgrass education in Wisconsin.

It started out with the WGCSA spring business meeting. I echo Rod Johnson's compliment to the officers and directors on a job well done. The only disappointment was the modest turnout.

I think I know why more didn't attend — lawyers were the featured speakers. You know full well if a program features three attorneys, the subject is not going to be putting green management or sand bunker reconstruction. More than likely the discussion will be about a topic considerably less interesting, at least to golf course superintendents.

But not less important. Personnel policies, especially hiring and firing procedures, are touchy issues these days. The speakers did a superb job of updating and informing those smart enough to attend.

Despite being very sick, Frank Rossi drove to Fond du Lac to report progress on the WGCSA-sponsored research of putting green management underway at the Noer Research Facility. Frank was probably told two times by every person at the meeting how happy we are that he is staying in Wisconsin.

A good business meeting is a short business meeting, and President Semler kept this one organized, on track and on time. There was no rea-

son anyone should have been late for supper!

The USGA held a regional meeting at Maple Bluff CC on Thursday, March 9th. Jim Sweeney put the program together with golf course superintendents, clubhouse managers, golf pros and club officials in mind. Strong emphasis was put on the environmental issues and environmental research the USGA is sponsoring. Green Section staff on the program included Jim Snow, Bob Vavrek and Bob Brame. Heidi Olson, USGA Women's Regional Affairs manager for the norther region, spoke about the ways and importance of making women feel welcome on our golf courses.

Jim Sweeney talked about the regulatory role of the USGA, critical to golf's integrity. And Dr. Frank Rossi wrapped up the day with a lecture on grass selection. Gene Haas and I had the easiest jobs — moderating the two excellent sessions. If attendance is an indicator, Jim selected some great topics of discussion. About 100 were at Maple Bluff for the day.

All reports that came back to me were highly favorable. Thanks to all the USGA people for a job well done.

The next week, on March 15th and March 16th, Reinders hosted their 12th Turf and Irrigation Conference and Equipment Show. One had to wonder which was the toughest for Ed Devinger to handle — the lousy winter weather

which makes travel nearly impossible, like two years ago, or the gorgeous days like this year when the temptation for WGCSA members was to stay home and get ready to open. Ed said 'give me the good weather every time!'

Fact is we were having days with high temperatures 30 degrees above the normal. It was so warm that on the 14th Mike Handrich opened Racine CC for walkers! That's early!

The Reinders show was great. Dr. Joe Vargas has been on every program — 12 in all over the past 24 years. I was glad for the chance to visit with him, ask my list of specific questions (rates, timing, materials, etc) and listen to him and Wayne Otto chew on matters around the midwest. He autographed the books of his I have and gave two really good lectures.

Bill Ratajczyk presented a good refresher and update on aquatic weed control. Phil Pellitteri's lectures are a "can't miss" prospect and Wayne Kussow's ever-growing expertise on USGA spec greens was offered and useful. From 9:15 a.m. until 3:30 p.m. in three different rooms, there was more to learn than one person had time for. The new information given by Joe Becker (D & B Sales, a GRASS ROOTS advertiser) was worth the price of admission.

All in all, the 1995 Reinders Conference was a winner for the Wisconsin golf turf industry.



One of the most popular UW-Madison staff members — Phil Pellitteri.



Professor Joe Vargas, in Milwaukee from MSU for every one of the 12 Reinders conferences.



The boss himself — Ed Devinger.



On the day of the USGA Regional meeting, Gene Haas wore a blue jacket in lieu of the red coat we are used to seeing.



USGA Regional Director Jim Sweeney.



Showtime!

The USGA meeting at Maple Bluff CC was the second of 17 similar meetings Jim Snow will present. Who better to discuss environmental matters than the Green Section's director?



The true Extension Scientist — Dr. Frank Rossi in front of an audience talking about turfgrass issues.

I'm not certain if this is a confession or a clarification. Either way, here it goes.

Stories you read in *Tales From The Back Nine* are just that — stories. For years I have wondered why all golf fiction is about the game when there is so much happening on a golf course and in the golf course shop. Our places of work reflect life itself — I wish John Steinbeck had grown up around a golf course and worked on a course staff somewhere rather than the farm fields of the Salinas Valley in California. There might have been books about us instead of the farm workers he knew and remembered.

I have seen only a few really good pieces of golf course fiction in our popular literature. Twenty or so years ago there was a great story in THE NEW YORKER. Of course, the author had worked on a golf course and knew of what he was writing. Maybe that, in fact, is the reason for the dearth of that kind of writing — golf course summer employees go on to become golf course superintendents, lawyers, architects, doctors and engineers. Very, very few become writers.

So I decided a couple of years ago to try myself to write some golf course fiction stories. And all I do with my pencil is try. I have no — none, zero, zip — training, only the interest to make an attempt. Most attempts are amateur and pretty feeble. That's why I was so surprised and pleased that lots of people thought I actually had made the trip to Scotland as a result of reading the ANCESTORS story in the March/April 1995 *Tales From The Back Nine*. Especially gratifying was a note from Geoffrey Cornish, a phone call from Stan Zontek and a scolding from Len Sosnowski, my boss for six years ("why didn't you tell me you were going to Scotland?").

The fact is I have never been to Scotland. The story I wrote was fiction.

You could call it historical fiction, I guess. I read extensively for two months about Scotland, everything from Tulloch's book *Old Tom Morris and Darwin's Golf Courses Of The British Isles* to John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Scotch* and Michelin's *Guide To Scotland*. In between were a couple dozen others. I think I visited every Madison bookstore and looked at the photos in every coffee table book in this town about Scotland so I had a visual image before I started to write my story.

The parts about my ancient relatives are all true and I simply wove them into this travel story.

Two other things were extremely helpful. Gavin Inglis, the bar manager at Blackhawk, is Scottish, born and raised in Glasgow and educated (B.A. and M.A.) at the University of Edinburgh. I spent time — hours, actually — asking him questions, getting help with dialect, and soaking up the essence of his wonderful, witty and bright Scottish personality. He also proofread the copy for me. He is a great guy who was a big help in making my story more authentic and credible.

The other helpful item was a huge topography map of Scotland I had at hand when reading. Really, I feel as though I have been to that country. Roads, mountains, lakes, villages, shorelines and golf courses took on a reality when I read a paragraph and then looked at this huge map.

And let's give credit to Jen Eberhardt; her splendid and realistic cover added to the sense of reality.

It was fun to do, although it took a lot of time.

So I beg of you this: remember "tales" equals fiction. Any resemblance between characters I write about and people you know is purely coincidental. The places around Wisconsin may be real but the golf courses are from my mind and are not intended to represent a real course. If one does, it is unintended and accidental. I am not smart enough to figure all that out and keep it straight.

I do, however, have a master list of recurring characters, their courses and towns, family details, and the like. This record-keeping is for consistency sake from issue to issue, but that is as deep as it goes.

Summer is almost here, and the hot weather is not only sometimes hazardous to the health of grasses but to us and our staff as well. That is particularly true on those hot AND humid Wisconsin summer days.

When the humidity is high we don't cool off as quickly as we would at a lower humidity. Sweat doesn't evaporate so your heart beats faster in an attempt to increase circulation and get more blood to the skin surface. Oftentimes people faint because the body is saying to you, essentially, "I want you horizontal so it will be easier to pump blood than it is while you are standing and vertical." Down you go.

In anticipation of those inevitable hot and humid days, below is the Heat Stress Index chart from the National Weather Service. You might want to keep it handy as a reminder not to send a crew out to shovel sand when the temperature is nearing 90 degrees and the humidity is moving over 80%. It could be disastrous.

		Actual temperature										
		70	75	80	85	90	95	100	105	110	115	120
Relative humidity	0%	64	69	73	75	83	87	91	95	99	103	107
	10%	65	70	75	80	85	90	95	100	105	111	116
	20%	68	72	77	82	87	93	99	105	112	120	130
	30%	67	73	78	84	90	96	104	113	123	135	148
	40%	68	74	79	86	93	101	110	123	137	151	
	50%	69	75	81	88	96	107	120	135	150		
	60%	70	76	82	90	100	114	132	149			
	70%	70	77	85	93	106	124	144				
	80%	71	78	86	97	113	136					
	90%	71	79	88	102	122						
	100%	72	80	91	108							

* All temperatures in degrees Fahrenheit

Danger zone: highlight area between 90-130 degrees apparent temperature. Sunstroke, heat cramps and heat exhaustion may occur with prolonged exposure and physical activity.

If you haven't gotten your new directory yet, here is Jim and Lois Latham's new address:

Jim & Lois Latham
P.O. Box 587
Whitney, TX 76692

There was a nice article about Jim in the March/April 1995 issue of GOLF JOURNAL. Look it up.

The news about Bill Sell's massive heart attack on March 2 travelled around Wisconsin very quickly. He was in the hospital for 15 days, ten of them in intensive care. He called me on March 20 from home and didn't sound like the guy we know. His voice was weak and he said he was only able to walk a short distance down the hallway.

But I told Bill that if anyone could make the most of a tough situation, he was the one. Let's help him out — drop him a line with some news and a word or two of encouragement. He will appreciate it.

Raise your glass in a toast to the good winter and spring season and lower your head in a moment of prayer for a good summer season. Best of luck to everybody. 🍷