



An Interesting Old Golf Course Book

By Monroe S. Miller

It seems I've spent an inordinate amount of my free time over a lot of years in antique stores and used book shops looking at old books. Weird as it sounds, I like buying an old, used book even more than a new one. Old books have a better feel to them and they smell really good; there is an appeal to owning a book that has a history of its own.

There may be something more to this, as a recent article in the British medical journal *The Lancet* reports. The fungi that feed on old paper may be mildly hallucinogenic and the fungal hallucinogens may cause an "enhancement of enlightenment" in readers. Wow! That news sort of makes me think twice about putting my nose in any old book again....

Except at least for one. I found a very interesting old golf course book in Tom Harrison's golf course library in his new shop. Let me tell you about it.

GOLF COURSES: Design, Construction and Upkeep is the 1950 second edition revision to the 1933 first edition. It was edited both times by Martin A.F. Sutton, and he gathered some gifted collaborators to discuss golf courses. Foremost among them were Bernard Darwin and Robert Trent Jones.

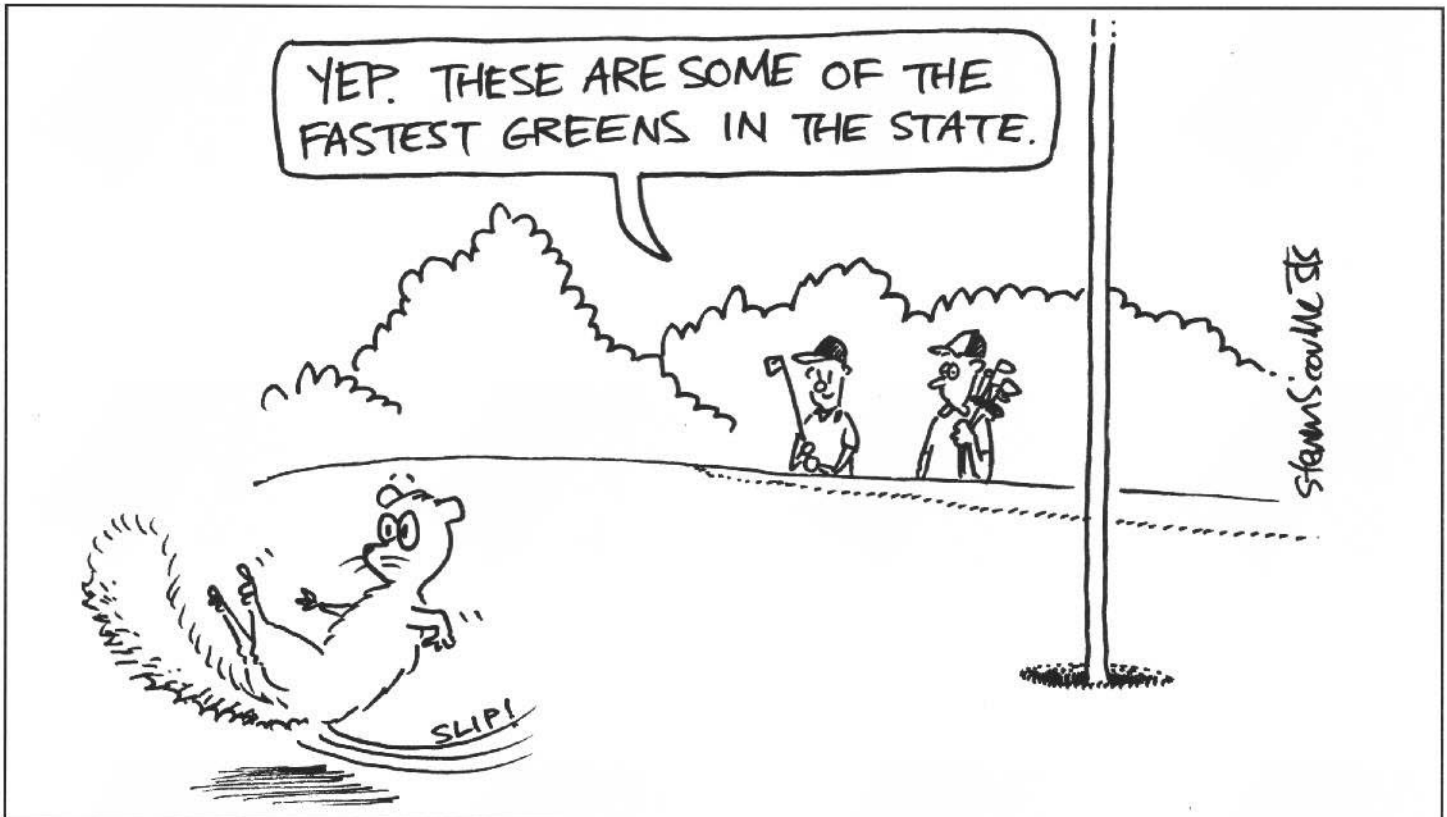
It is a British book, and all but Jones are English authors. The views brought to the subject of golf course care from the lands where golf got its start adds to the interest of this book. It is a point of view a bit different than we are used to experiencing.

The second World War and its economic implications restricted the playing of golf for five or so years and you could argue shortened the real time (17 years) between the first 1937 edition and the second 1950 edition. On the other hand, rapid advances in science and technology

required by the war stretched that time—phenoxy herbicides come to mind first. Also, during those 17 years the cost of the game greatly increased. One result was smaller greens; another was fewer bunkers.

The book, from Darwin's introduction, laments courses lost to airfields, "pre-fab" housing tracts and more. But those years, on the other hand, saw great advances in implements and equipment—steel shafts necessitated longer holes (and therefore more tees), the introduction of the wedge club reduced scores, and Darwin also noted the increased strength of players and their willingness to put in long hours of arduous practice.

This was a time of no golf cars, and Darwin noted how "the interest of the walk" could be enhanced by knowledge of grasses and roots and soil. Therefore, he recommended players read the book!



As older golf course books tend to do, this one also gives extensive treatment to history, quoting MacKenzie, Morris, Holt, Hunter, Low, Ross, Fowler and other authors and designers involved in the game.

The design and construction chapter is separate from a chapter by R.T. Jones about golf course architecture in America. Both chapters are good reading.

But the fun really begins with *The Formation and Upkeep of Golf Courses and Putting Greens*. Opinions are offered on grass choices, turfing vs. seeding, the importance of manure, drainage and top soil. I cannot believe, as I read a book written after I was born, how primitive our business was only 45 years ago. We have come a long, long way (and yes, I am getting into middle age).

Worm casts were a problem then (as they are becoming again) and irrigation wasn't recommended!

Great effort was obviously made in photograph selection, and Harrison's book has some outstanding pictures. They are clear, crisp black/white photos. Some of the best are equipment

machinery shots. I especially like the Lloyd's Pegasus Pennsylvania motor mowing machine with a power-driven cutting cylinder, and Ransome's Overgrass power unit with three cutters!

As recent as 1950, "artificial" (fertilizers) were deemed not as good as organic, "green resting" was encouraged, and rolling was practiced. Sheep grazing, though still practiced, was discouraged.

Chemicals, whose value to turf management was being researched, included DDT, mercurous and mercuric chloride (corrosive sublimate), arsenate of lead, 2, 4-D, methoxone and formaldehyde.

This great old book has only 200 pages, so it was an easy and quick read. And a historic one.

The Sutton family, from early in the 19th century, has led the study and development of the grass business in England, through the "House of Sutton" and "The Grass Garden at Reading, founded in 1863. At the time of this book—1950—you could take classes in "Scientific Turf Culture" in Reading, enlist in Sutton's

"Sports Grounds Construction Department" to build a cricket field or a hard tennis court. And when seeding time comes, choose one of Suttons of Reading grass mixtures!

This is a great book that has been well cared for by Tom Harrison. Maybe someday it will be in the Golf House of Wisconsin.

Postscript: A friend of mine, before leaving Madison for a trip to St. Andrews, Scotland to visit his son who is a student at the University there, asked if I wanted him to look for anything for me. I showed him Tom's book and said "if you can find this book at a reasonable (cheap) price, I'd like to own it."

When he returned he called me and opened the conversation with "Tom had better take really good care of his book." He had visited a rare book shop specializing in golf books; they hadn't seen a copy of Sutton's book in over a year. If a copy should show up, the price would be around \$300!

And there I was, thinking in terms of twenty-five bucks! 🍀



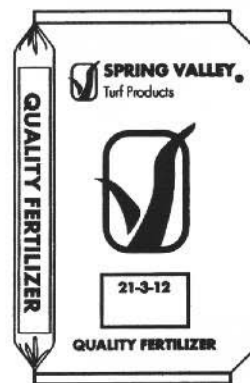
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