



A Report on my Visit to Wisconsin's Last Golf Club

By Monroe S. Miller

Keith Wallace had made the invitation any number of times, but I just hadn't found the time to drive down to visit him and see his course. Or, maybe it would be better to say I simply hadn't *taken* the time. Too bad, too. It was a great visit in more ways than I'll be able to detail in this report.

Keith was the first generation born in America of a Scottish immigrant couple. His parents, Bill and Lorraine Wallace, spent the last 25 years of their lives in Wisconsin; Bill was the greenkeeper at the Bonnyrigg Golf Club in the south/southeast part of Wisconsin. Keith succeeded his father and has been the golf course superintendent at Bonnyrigg for a number of years now.

Bonnyrigg Golf Club is an independent, quiet, out-of-the-way and unpretentious organization. Neither Bill nor Keith was very active in the WGCSA, adding somewhat to the mystique. Never had one of our meetings been held there, maintaining an aura of curiosity about the place. Their predecessors were similar in demeanor, and both of them had retired after a career at Bonnyrigg.

BGC wasn't a member of the WSGA, or any other organization, for that matter. The golf pros over the years were not PGA members, happy instead with their circumstances and position among the players at Bonnyrigg.

Keith Wallace dropped me a line confirming my visit, and sent me directions to the course. "I'm directing you to the clubhouse," he wrote, "because you'd never find the shop."

I almost didn't find the clubhouse. Like most cautious Midwesterners, I left plenty early — you know, in case of a flat tire or a road detour or some other potential delay. There is nothing worse or more rude than showing up late for an appointment. Good thing — I got close in plenty of time but had a devil of a time finding the clubhouse, Keith's directions notwithstanding. Finally, I followed a car that didn't look like a farm vehicle, thinking it might be someone going to play golf. My hunch was right.

The drive into the club was a good quarter mile, narrow and old and very unimpressive. The land on either side was pasture land, fenced with rusty steel fence posts and barbed wire. This was as far from Magnolia Lane as you'll get.

The drive opened into a modest parking lot; it was clean and well striped. I pulled into an open spot in the shade, and started to look for Keith.

The clubhouses at country clubs around the country are fairly easy to spot. There are those, seen mainly in the Midwest in my experience, that are immense, rambling bright white clapboard structures. Usually they have either green shutters or black shutters with shingles to match, big brass doorknobs, massive red brick chimneys, and grass

lawns dappled with the feathery shade of elms or oaks. They are easy to decorate for the holidays and different seasons — big red bows and huge dark green wreaths at Christmas, and tall corn shocks and pumpkins in the autumn. The golf shop mostly is on one end of the building, and the kitchen and delivery areas are on the other.

Then there are the big brick monoliths, Tudor in style, complete with so many rooms that they actually accommodate overnight guests of members and members themselves.

Another standard clubhouse is the style that looks like it belongs in Spain — they have the appearance of a hacienda, all white-washed with a red clay tile roof. They seem out of place in the north.

So do those clubhouses that seem to have been built for a southern plantation, complete with oversized white columns at the entrance.

The clubhouse at Bonnyrigg is, well, a house. It is small and looks like a typical Midwestern bungalow. In other

THE NEXT BEST THING TO RAIN!

- Complete Course Design and Installation
 - turnkey or in-house installation
- Conversion of manual/hydraulic to electric
- Repair, Routine Maintenance & On-site Training
- In-house CAD Design & CIT Data on Sprinkler Performance
- Installation & Upgrade of Pump Stations
- Answers to your "how-to ..." questions

If you have a goal, we have the leadership ...
... personalized service you can depend on


Economowoc
Irrigation



800-554-TORO
(8676)

words, it is a house, unlike those just described, which might be houses for Rockefellers or Vanderbilts or Kohlers.

Keith drove up in a Cushman and reached out to shake my hand. We exchanged pleasantries — he didn't have the heavy Scottish accent of his parents — and he said, "let's start our tour in the clubhouse."

Up the steps we went and through the door. It opened into a large hallway. There was no receptionist or receptionist's desk. A coatroom was on the right, a small office was to the immediate left.

The dining room was open to the hall; there weren't more than a dozen tables in it. A small bar was to the immediate corner so as not to interrupt the view of the golf course. Two sides of the dining area were glass, offering great sight lines to the finishing hole and the back nine. "There's no menu," Keith said. "You can get a hamburger, a steak, fried chicken, and spaghetti (that's what they call pasta at Bonnyrigg). If you are here early, you might be able to talk the cook into scrambling you a couple of eggs and serving them up with a glass of milk."

Opposite the dining room, on the other side of the hall, were the doorways to the locker rooms, both the men's and the women's. "I don't know why they keep the women's locker room," Keith mused. Rarely do women play golf here, although they certainly can." The men's locker room consisted of pale green half lockers in rows divided by narrow wooden benches. The shower had three shower heads, a clue to how busy Bonnyrigg usually was. There were a couple of card tables, but no television, no locker room attendant and no one available to shine shoes or switch out steel spikes for soft spikes! Pretty much, you are on your own. It was becoming obvious this small private club existed for golf, exclusively and solely for golf.

"I'm anxious for you to meet our golf pro," Keith enthused as we walked through the locker room to the golf shop. "You'll like him. He was trained in Scotland, just like my father was."

"Meet Hamish McFarlane," Keith said. I smiled, exchanged a firm handshake and thought to myself, "this is how it was 50 years ago."

Jim McFarlane was wearing a white shirt and a necktie, like some golf professionals did even when I first started a career in golf. It was refreshing to see a pro dressed that way, rather than in a \$100 shirt, \$200 slacks and God only knows the cost of Italian shoes one might be wearing.

The golf shop mirrored the clubhouse facilities. It was the size of a big closet. There were a few golf shirts with the Bonnyrigg crest embroidered on the front, some windbreakers and umbrellas, a few hats, a good selection of golf balls and a couple sets of handmade clubs. McFarlane had an excellent reputation as a clubmaker. That was the pro shop, probably because that was what the members felt was adequate. A small caddie shack was away from the golf shop, and a couple of golf cars were parked against the back wall of the first tee.

"Bonnyrigg isn't a big place," Keith told me as we headed out for a tour of the course. "It's typical of those courses built between 75 and 100 years ago in Wisconsin. There are about 110 acres here, but the excellent design of the course gives it a feel of covering more acres than that. And it has stood the test of time — very, very few changes have been made."

I was impressed by the condition Keith had the course in. It didn't have that "overgroomed" look to it. The fairways

were cut at a modest height; there was no collar or intermediate rough. The greens were small, somewhat undulated and grassed with what appeared from a distance to be very healthy turf. Close inspection confirmed that.

"I don't know what our greens stimp at," Keith said as we stood on the fourth. "It doesn't matter. The green convenor (green committee chair at most clubs) and his committee, the club captain (president) and I communicate regularly about this issue. Mostly, it is not an issue. They are not trying to keep up with anyone else, so a speed number is meaningless to them."

The sticks were plain, the flags were shaped like penants ("Tradition," Keith said.) and there was one set of blocks on the one set of tees.

Keith's shop was neat as a pin, the equipment inventory fully adequate and current, and the crew was done by noon most days.

"When you get down to it, this is a golf club," Keith offered as we made the final turn back to the clubhouse. There aren't many like us left. We don't have a single golf outing or tournament a year. Not one. There are no weddings or birthday parties or theme parties or any other social event. You can get a bite to eat and something to wash it down with, but not much more than that. And there is no Muzak in the building; it is really quiet!

"Players are loathe, almost forbidden to talk about business deals or the stock market. They play golf and talk about the game. It is a golf club. Period."

(Continued on page 15)



Golf Course Construction, Renovation and Restoration

Dan Murray, CGCS

**18250 Beck Road Marengo, IL 60152
Phone (815) 923-1868 Fax (815) 923-3662**

(Continued from page 13)

"There is no swimming pool, no tennis courts, no halfway house, no paddle tennis. What there is, is decent and undistracted golf.

"Hamish doesn't take tee times. If you want to play, you just show up. And mostly, all the guys walk when they play. Or, if you want some solitude and would like to play alone, you can. All you have to do is say so.

"And although I tell everybody Bonnyrigg is a golf club, it is in one way a country club because we truly are in the rolling hills of rural Wisconsin. We are in the country, but close enough to metropolitan areas that we have members from all them. But if you want to play Bonnyrigg, you have to make some effort to get here because it is some distance from everywhere."

I thanked Keith for his hospitality as we shook hands again. I started my truck, backed up and headed out the driveway on my way home.

On the trip back I thought about what made Bonnyrigg different from most other private clubs — and "different" is the correct word. Not better, not worse. Just different.

And the biggest difference was one of conspicuousness. Bonnyrigg has golf and pretty much only golf. Little else matters. Conspicuous consumption doesn't exist, by the choice of the members. They are independent, comfortable with what they are doing and belong to Bonnyrigg just to play golf, kind of the old fashioned way. It is located in a difficult to find place, it chooses members carefully and is debt free. In the world of golf today, it is an unusual organization.

In Wisconsin, it is our last real golf club. 🏌️

Polytech Industries

A Distributor of Prefabricated Specialty Liners

Applications

- golf course pond liners
- pool & landscape pond liners
- stockpile covers
- storm retention pond liners
- waste lagoon liners
- equipment covers

Cost efficiency is more than just a "cheap" material price

**installation instruction and support
long-lasting product life
high strength
easy handling**

sizes available up to 1 acre +

**For purchasing or further information, please contact
(414) 569-8678 or
visit our website at www.pondliners.com**

OTTERBINE®....

Your Water Quality Management Specialists



Surface Aerators

- Reduce the problem of algae, aquatic weeds and odor.

- Introduce O₂ into the pond.
- Available in a variety of spray patterns and sizes.



Sub-Surface Aerators

- Introduce O₂ into the pond bottom via Sub-Surface or Diffused Air.

- Perfect for shallow ponds.
- No visible spray pattern.



Bunker Pumper

- Removing water from bunkers, excavation sites or swimming pools.

- 280 GPM pumping rate.
- Floating, self priming portable - only 85 lbs!



Ottershield Lake Dye

- Transforms muddy water into **healthy blue water**.

- No stained clothes or hands - you never touch Ottershield.
- Neat, clean, packets.

Reinders

- "Ask For A Free Demonstration"

ELM GROVE
13400 Watertown Plank Rd.
414-786-3306
1-800-785-3306

MADISON
4618 A Tompkins Dr.
608-223-0200

APPLETON
900 Randolph Dr.
414-788-0200

STEVENS POINT
3501 Dixon St.
715-342-3600