

# We'll Never Be The Same

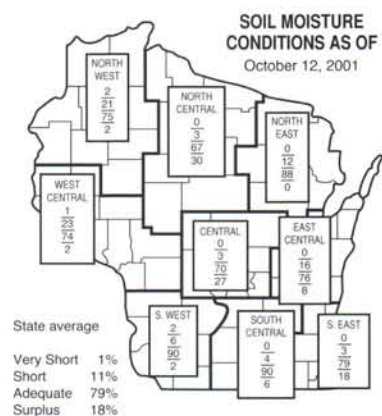
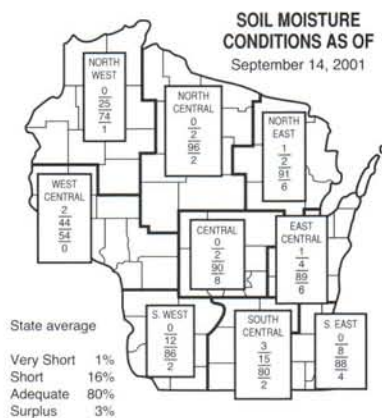
By **Monroe S. Miller**, Golf Course Superintendent, Blackhawk Country Club

The unimaginable tragedies of September 11th have changed all of us in ways we won't fully understand for a long time. The healing is just beginning for many of us, even as removed from it as we are here in the middle west. I cannot fathom the suffering of those in New York City, Washington, D.C. and Pennsylvania.

Although the world seems full of uncertainty these days, President Bush has responded with strength and leadership and common sense. His confidence has given comfort to Americans and I am among those who believe he will make the right decisions for us and for the civilized world. The guilty are going to pay and the polls indicate that Americans support the president in this to the tune of a 90% approval rating. That is just as it should be.

It has been difficult to stay focused, but the weather still

interests people like us. Dry soils from summer were replenished with substantial rain in September. Fall color was slow to come on, and leaf drop in our town didn't really get underway until mid-October. Soil moisture conditions are presented here from the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service.



The Old Farmer's Almanac weather forecasts from last year were extremely accurate – above the 80% accuracy they usually post. That success rate puts a lot of pressure on them for this winter.

The Almanac has been predicting weather for 210 years. It predicts the five-month winter season (from November through March) should be pretty mild in most places except for the Pacific Northwest, where colder temperatures above normal snowfall are forecast. More snow than normal is also possible in New England, the northern Great Lakes, the Texas Panhandle and from Denver to eastern Iowa.

We'll see.

These things only happen in America, I thought, but never in dear old Scotland.

The future of John Muir's birthplace in Dunbar, Scotland, is under threat. Muir enthusiasts (count me among them) on both sides of the Atlantic are upset.

John Muir was born in 1838 in a three-story sandstone home, built in about 1780. It came into public ownership in 1999 and the John Muir Birthplace Trust has the responsibility to renovate it and to interpret Muir's life and legacy. Many people from around the world have made the pilgrimage to Dunbar on the North Sea to visit the home and his other childhood haunts. He became the inspiration for America's national parks and saving vast lands in Scotland.

The Muir family emigrated to Wisconsin in 1849 when John had just turned 11. In "The Story of My Boyhood and Youth," he described his formative years on two Marquette County farms – his adventures, the hard work, his observations of nature, his self-education, the inspiration of the diverse landscape, and the fulfilling years at the University of

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Wisconsin – Madison. All propelled him to pursue his career in conservation. And now the Birthplace Trust is on the verge of completely gutting the home and installing a free-standing high-tech tower to create only a virtual reality interpretation of Muir's life and legacy. Many of us feel this is not the way to properly honor him.

Dunbar's Graham White, an international figure in his own right, has mounted a campaign to change course. There has already been a tremendous worldwide response.

I agree with John Muir's grandson, who wrote: "You have in your possession a resource that is truly valuable... please, let the people experience the space he was born into. What better way to experience the space he was born into? What better way to experience the essence of a person?"

We should know before long if the pressure from all over the world will force a change in the plans for John's birthplace.

Although the leaves have fallen, the beauty their color in autumn brings to Wisconsin is fresh in our memories. Every fall thousands of Americans head for the woods and back roads to see summer extinguished in a blaze of color. We celebrate Colorama all over Wisconsin. In New England, visitors like Cheryl and me are known as "leaf peepers." People travel miles and miles north for the reds and yellows and oranges of autumn.

University of Wisconsin – Madison Department of Horticulture faculty members have a new theory about why autumn leaves turn scarlet and why the hues are more vibrant some years than others. They argue that the red pigments – call anthocyanins – in plants such as maples, oaks, dogwoods and viburnums act like sunscreen.

"The pigments shade sensitive photosynthetic tissue in fall while trees reabsorb nutrients from their leaves," says horticulturist Bill Hoch. "Trees need to store as many of those nutrients as they can before the leaves drop."

Co-authors Hoch, Eric Zeldin and Brent McCown laid out their ideas in an article featured on the cover of the journal *Tree Physiology*. "The scientific literature contains many different explanations for why trees make anthocyanins in fall," Hoch says. "Some theories account for the color change in one tree, but not in other species. Other ideas are clearly wrong. For example, the red does not come about because sugars are trapped in leaves and converted to anthocyanins."

"Light that is too bright can inhibit photosynthesis any time of the year," Hoch says. But in fall when trees are breaking down and reabsorbing important nutrients from their leaves, their photosynthetic tissues are especially unstable and vulnerable to too much light and other stresses. Yet trees need the energy from photosynthesis to drive the processes that allow them to recapture as many of those nutrients as possible. Just as this process begins, leaves start producing large amounts of anthocyanins near the leaf surface. The UW – Madison scientists argue that the pigments protect the leaves' dwindling ability to gener-

ate energy during this period.

In addition to high light levels, other plant stressors such as near-freezing temperatures, drought, and low nutrient levels trigger increased levels of the pigments. The researchers' theory agrees with the observation that autumn colors are best when the fall features dry weather with bright, sunny days, and cold nights. It also makes sense of observations that the outer leaves of maple trees, for example, are more colorful than shaded leaves inside the canopy and leaves on the north side.

Hoch believes their ideas also explain why most of our native maples and oaks in the Midwest and New England turn red, while European species such as the Norway maple do not. "None of the European counterparts of these North American trees produce high levels of anthocyanins. We think it is because the weather in that part of the world is cloudier and warmer during fall. European species don't need the protection of these pigments."

There isn't a *Poa trivia* column in this issue. Cubby O'Brien has some family issues he is dealing with and won't be able to continue his popular column. We are going to miss his writing.

Cub is a keen observer of what is going on around us. He has that excellent undergrad education in

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turfgrass science from the UW – Madison, has experience on Wisconsin golf courses, and is very knowledgeable as a sales rep. I have found his advice was always straight up and honest.

The columns he wrote were from a solid midwestern guy's point of view – a good family man who works hard and loves his work. We are lucky he wrote his column as long as he did.

But life changes and priorities shift and Cubby has to commit his time elsewhere now. He suggested two successors for him. I approached them and they agreed to give journalism a try. Rob and Steve Wasser travel most of Wisconsin's highways, know most of our WGCSA members, and command a lot of respect. They will do a fine job of reporting on the lives and activities of our WGCSA family.

I drove to West Bend for the October meeting and the opportunity to hear Bob Vavrek speak. His topic was rich – everyday tournament conditions and the risks they bring. It was a great lecture.

That got me to thinking about the upcoming Symposium and what an opportunity it is going to be to travel to Kohler and the American Club and soak up what there is to know about the new pest forces that face golf turf in Wisconsin. It will be a meeting not to miss.

Highlights and lowlights of my 2001:

**Highlight:** A visit from Joe O'Brien to our golf course and a long talk with him and Steve Quale in our Mendota Lounge. During my years in golf, few stand taller than Joe – he's in the company of Jim Love, Bill Bengueyfield, Gayle Worf, Stan Zontek, Chuck Koval, Gene Haas and Bob Newman. So it was an honor to have him in Madison.

Joe is excited about the turn in

his career. Have no doubt about this – he will excel at The First Tee, just like he did at GCSAA.

**Lowlight:** Events of 9/11. They will shape our lives for a long time.

**Highlight:** WSGA Centennial celebration in August. It was a singular event in my life in golf; I was fortunate to have been there for the experience it presented.

**Lowlight:** An up close and personal experience with Japanese beetles – adults and grubs. Not fun and not pretty.

**Highlight:** Completion of the Wisconsin Turfgrass Industry Survey. Thanks to the Wisconsin Agricultural Statistics Service and to John Stier.

**Lowlight:** Atrocious summer weather in our town – hot, humid, no rain. Made keeping golf turf healthy a real battle.

**Highlight:** Initiation of the

Kussow Wisconsin Distinguished Graduate Fellowship, and the first recipient – Wisconsin grad Doug Soldat.

**Lowlight:** Committing to attendance at the GCSAA 75th Anniversary celebration, only to have it cancelled by events of 9/11.

**Highlight:** Addition of another ten or so acres to the Noer Facility.

**Lowlight:** An up close and personal experience with GCSAA politics; it was petty and aggravating. It won't happen to me again.

**Highlight:** The knowledge that in America there has always been the possibility that next year will be better than this one. That STILL is true in America.

How do you assess your 2001?

Merry Christmas, Everybody. ♣



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