



A Cold Trip Down South

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

I rubbed my hands together just before we left Wisconsin for the GCSAA conference in Atlanta, thinking about warm weather and green grass that could only be a couple of days away. Exciting thought.

But false hope, as it turned out. Actually, the farther south we drove, the more snow we saw. Ponds were frozen south of Louisville, and on the Sunday before conference, snow and winter weather in the mid-south created treacherous driving conditions. We didn't know it, but it would be worse coming home. When we arrived in Atlanta, it was raining, the wind was blowing 20 - 30 mph and the raw weather depleted the anticipation of only a few days earlier.

In recent years GCSAA has settled on certain cities for the conference, and most of them are a reasonable drive from Madison. That has become my preferred mode of travel. Air travel is a hassle, made even worse by events of 9/11/01. It can be costly; it is inflexible, boring and aggravating. So again this year, we drove.

Driving is not without its own problems. Winter weather through the south can be dicey - they don't invest heavily in snow removal equipment - but since we give up two weekends we can let the weather forecasts determine our departure day. So far it has been great traveling.

Going by car gives the chance for some substantial conversation, nearly impossible by plane. The variety is nice, and by alternating routes, it is possible to see lots of sites on the way down or while at the conference city, from golf courses to historic sites.

Car travel at times would drive a

certain kind of person crazy, though. There are the usual odd noises and aromas males are all too willing to share with one another, giving the driver a lot of power with the master window control switch. The radio causes irritations, too. The young guys want to listen to music that gives me a headache; I cannot understand why, on the other hand,



World War II writer Ernie Pyle had humble beginnings near Dana, Indiana.



There is one big bat outside the Louisville Slugger factory!

they can't enjoy a beautiful Mahler concert on NPR. We nearly had a minor row on the first Sunday going down. I was driving and therefore had radio control. I was searching the dial for *The Lutheran Hour* since I was missing church. Grimm



President Zachary Taylor is buried in Louisville.



President Andrew Johnson is buried in Greenville, Tennessee.



Abraham Lincoln's cabin birthplace is preserved inside this imposing building.



This is the home Abraham Lincoln moved into at two years of age.



Jimmy Carter's Museum is in Atlanta, a short trip from downtown.



Goninen and Grimm saw the real thing at the Patton Museum on Fort Knox.

was livid - "I draw the line at church radio," he complained.

There are similar disputes over where to eat, when to stop for a restroom visit, and how late into the day to drive. But it's all in good fun and adds flavor to the trip.

We stopped briefly in Dana, Indiana to see Ernie Pyle's boyhood home. The renewed interest in WWII has brought guys like Ernie back into the limelight a bit. He wrote great news stories about the American boys in the war, first in Europe and then in the Pacific, where he was killed himself. His dispatches were widely read and won him a Pulitzer Prize. His home in Dana speaks to his humble beginnings.

Louisville, Kentucky is the home of the Louisville Slugger bat and the factory tour is very interesting (and short). We stopped at President Zachary Taylor's gravesite in Louisville since it was so close to I-

65. He was stationed at Fort Crawford in Prairie du Chien early in his Army career, at about the time of the Blackhawk War.

WWII again inspired a stop at Fort Knox, home of the US gold bullion deposits, but more importantly, the site of the George S. Patton Museum. Security was tough, but we got on base and the Patton and US Armor Museum was worth stopping for.

Not more than a dozen miles off I-65 is Lincoln's birthplace, a NHS, and a little north of there is the farm and home the Lincoln family moved to when Abe was two years old. These were great and inspiring stops.

On to Nashville, east on I-40 to Greenville, Tennessee. President Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's VP, was the only president other than Slick Willie Clinton to be impeached. His home, tailor shop and burial site are extremely well preserved and inter-

esting. There was a fair amount of snow in this southeast Tennessee town, testimony as to how far south the cold weather pushed.

From Greenville we went to Gatlinburg, drove up through the Great Smoky Mountains - tons of snow on top - and stayed north of Atlanta. There was good reason not to go to Atlanta for the night. It was called the NBA All-Star game, which was played, literally, across the street from the Georgia World Congress Center (GWCC). Stories of the traffic jam and unbelievable behavior of the fans were spread through sports pages all across America. It sounded more like a convention for pimps and drug dealers than a professional (oxymoron) sports all-star game.

We stopped at the Atlanta Athletic Club on the way into town - Bobby Jones was club president once - and also at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Museum and Library. I



Bobby Jones was once president of the Atlanta Athletic Club.

am glad I saw the Carter Center, but left a bit underwhelmed.

The GCSAA conference was held at the confluence of many well known venues. The Phillips Arena is right there, where Dany Heatly plays hockey for the Atlanta Thrashers instead of the Wisconsin Badgers. He is a real hero in Atlanta. The Georgia Dome is connected to the GWCC and is the field where the Packers will administer a severe revenge beating to the Falcons in the 2003 NFL preseason. The CNN Center is there and we were able to watch Arthel Neville host her daily one-hour show, Talk Back Live. In fact, a program staffer tried to get us to join the audience. We passed; I didn't want to argue with some nitwit over the pending conflict with Iraq.

This was the 31st conference I have attended (consecutively) and, honestly, the thrill is still there. I registered for Frank Rossi's seminar - excellent, as usual - and an HR course taught by Frank's colleague at Cornell, Dr. Bob Milligan. Great stuff to consider and contemplate as the new golf season bears down.

The conference really got rolling Wednesday late afternoon when the



The Georgia Dome is adjacent to the convention center.



A bird's eye view of a small portion of the show floor.

opening session was held. For the first time in a long while all three recipients of the DSA got my applause. No political payoffs here; these men were selected on the basis of their qualifications and contributions. Joel Jackson is the long time editor of *The Florida Green*, a regular feature contributor to other journals, and an effective advocate of golf before regulatory agencies. He even served as a Symposium speaker. Dudley Smith spoke simply but eloquently about his 40-plus years at Silver Lake CC in Illinois. And Bob Emmons, professor of turf at Cobleskill, New York, a Vietnam War veteran with abundant humility and humor, has taught at a lower profile institution that has turned out quality students for years.

John Kasich was as outstanding as Jimmy Johnson was outrageous last year. Speaking without notes and always from the heart, John was



Wayne Horman was an anchor at the Scott Seed booth.

truly inspiring. He even spoke to the importance of religion in life.

This edition of the opening session left me feeling really good. It gets my best grade of A+.

The general golf session on Thursday morning had me skeptical that there could be much to learn from a commercial airline pilot. I was wrong. Al Haynes told a story of courage and cool and professional



The Badger Turf and Grounds Club represented their institution very well.



Dudley Smith, Joel Jackson and Bob Emmons were deserving DSA recipients.



A couple of former Wisconsin guys - Frank Rossi and Darrin Litchfeldt.



Sheri Swonger with Lyle and Darlene Christopherson.



Dr. Chris Williamson lectured on his earthworm research.

competence that could do nothing but inspire. Adding to my good grade is the fact that 20 people were not paraded up to get their environmental award. Mass recognition was fine. Give 'em an A.

The innovative superintendent lectures were mostly good, better than in recent previous years. Some grouse about the early hour, but the seats were all taken, as well as the "standing room only" spots along the back wall. Collectively, give this portion of the program an A.

The most consistent feature of the GCSAA meeting is the equipment show. Always, it is a powerful event and that was true again this year. I could get along without the irrelevant product displays that always seem to appear. But, hey, the bills have to be paid. Mostly, this is the greatest collection of golf course equipment assembled in one place each year in the world. If it's made for a golf course, it usually is at the GCSAA show. My complaints are the usual ones, especially the lack of seating at lunch time. Give the show an A.

There are so many educational sessions available at conference that it is physically impossible to attend

them all. Some are eliminated automatically - I do not care about southern grasses, for example. But everyone finds value in the USGA Green Section Program. They have moved away from the turf tips and gone to longer presentations. It turned out really well this year; the secret is carefully selected topics. The 50-year history of the Green Section, Dr. Couch's Green Section Award, and Stan Zontek's fungal resistance lecture all hit me between the eyes. Grade this program with an A+.

I attended the chapter publications seminar; it's always useful and besides that, I enjoy visiting with my editor colleagues from around the country. Another A.

The research session on Saturday morning should have been a must for almost everyone. I was especially anxious to hear Dr. Gwen Stahnke give a northwest US perspective on basal rot anthracnose and compare that with what we know about it in our state. The other lectures were as good as hers; therefore, an easy A.

I went to both golf course management sessions - Saturday morning and Saturday afternoon. Again, excellent. The afternoon program included our own Dr. Chris Williamson; he gave a lecture that has created some demand for him around the country - earthworms. Nick Christians gave some good info on research that is being initiated at Iowa State to study winter injury on golf course turf. Rack up these two



GCSAA members will miss the great work of Suzanne Clement. This was her last conference as a staff person.

sessions with A grades, too.

For the first time in 31 years, I passed on the banquet and show. The past two years were awful, and for the money charged, it isn't worth the risk of lousy entertainment and poor food. I would have liked to have seen Pete Dye get the Old Tom Morris Award, but not enough to chance enormous aggravation again. I didn't miss it. Also, it was the absolute last event. I wonder if attendance was affected by that?

Gosh, there are so many other things I love about conference. The book store is one of them; great selection and some great prices again this year.

I also enjoy seeing GCSAA staff people I have gotten to know over the years. Margo Campbell Szabo's daughter, for example, is attending Lawrence University in Appleton. Small world. I am always glad to see Suzanne Clement; she's the librarian for GCSAA and has been in charge of the formidable historical preservation effort for us. She is trained in the science and brought GCSAA from the dark ages in these areas. I knew she was a pro when she made me don a pair of white gloves to handle an old Tonka Golf Course Tractor collectible. Heck, I was going to run it around on the floor! Suzanne is a great one, the right person at the right time for us, and we will miss



Jim Latham was presented the USGA Green Section's Piper and Oakley Award by Jim Moore at the Wisconsin Hospitality Room.

her a lot. She's taken a tenure track position with Kansas University in Lawrence where her husband is a professor. I wish her the best.

And I had a chance to sit next to past GCSAA president Jim Timmerman during Frank Rossi's seminar. Jim was Dr. Paul Reike's first graduate student and the first turf student at Michigan State University. He is 64 now, still a golf course superintendent and still taking notes on the latest research and science; he wants to get better! What an inspiration. Michigan has been fortunate to have Ted Woehrlle and Jim Timmerman in the profession, and we have been lucky to be able to learn from them.

The UW-Madison had a great booth on the show floor, a good effort by the Turf Club. And they did well in the Turf Bowl Competition. Congratulations to all who participate.

I was happy to see the GCSAA directors no longer wear the same plaid coat; it may have been a nice touch at one time, but it grew old. Business suits are better.

The highlight of the whole trip for me had to be the USGA presentation of the Piper/Oakley Award to Jim Latham at our Wisconsin/Milorganite Hospitality Room. To see all of the Green Section staff and hear them chanting "Latham, Latham" was rarified stuff. The presentation by Jim Moore, the comments by Bob

Vavrek and Wayne Otto and Danny Quast were precious, and Jim's acceptance speech became a piece of our history. Gosh, it was a great evening.

Maybe, looking strictly at association activity, the best to come out of the conference is the fact that they wisely tabled the move to move. I have never once heard a member say, "we should move out of Lawrence." I know a lot of GCSAA members, yet nary a one ever suggested the need to move. Maybe that message came through.

It is always hard to pick up on a theme, but if there was one, it was water (or the lack of it). From the use of reclaimed water for irrigation to low water use varieties, there were lots of avenues to investigate. The economic downturn in golf nation wide was discussed extensively too.

The GWCC isn't the best we've visited, but it wasn't the worst. The city offers little to my tastes, but the area seemed safer than in past years. It was interesting to walk through the Centennial Olympic Park; we certainly read a lot about it and the explosion there in the months after the Olympics.

All things considered, the GCSAA conference in the judgment of a 31-year attendee ranks in the top half. For a tough judge with high expectations, that is pretty good. ♣