

A Visit to the South China Sea

By Tom Emmerich, TJE Irrigation Consultant

On April 23rd as with most workday mornings, I was sipping my first cup of coffee and downloading the morning's Email. The first message to appear was from Randy Witt, formally the golf course superintendent at Oneida Golf and Riding Club and most recently The Bull at Pinehurst Farm. The message read as follows:

"How's everything in WI? Hope all is well with you. I would assume that by now you have heard that I'm in Hong Kong. I'm Superintendent of the courses at Hong Kong Golf Club. We have 3 courses here. The oldest course is presently undergoing a renovation with redesign and regrassing of all fairways, some greens, some tees, and bunkers. The irrigation system is also being replaced. We are to the point where construction should be completed within the next 30 days.

Would you be interested in coming over to rebuild the hydraulic tree for the system that serves the three courses? The system is a hydraulic Toro with Site Pro/ OSMAC and supplied by a Flowtronics pump station. You would need to come over here for as long as it would take you to put it all together. If you would be interested, e-mail me back and I can give you a call to discuss it."

I thought wow! What an opportunity. I wrote back that I was very interested in doing the work, but with current business and family obligations, could not make the trip until mid-June at the earliest. Randy mailed back that my time frame was acceptable and to bring my wife Barb along. So, after writing some



HKGC Clubhouse, looking back from #1 Eden Tee.



Mechanical raking of the bunker (done once a week).

proposals and scrambling to get passports, the trip was on.

On Saturday, June 17th, we caught a 6:55AM Coach USA bus in Waukesha. After several stops along the way, we were dropped off at the United Airlines Terminal, O'Hare International Airport for a 12:23 PM direct flight to Hong Kong. The flight lasted 15 hours and we arrived at 4:50 PM Sunday afternoon Hong Kong time (3:50 AM central time). We were met at

the airport by Randy and Chip Lewison, the other golf course superintendent at Hong Kong Golf Club, and Chip's friend Debbie Sime.

From the airport, it was about a 35 minute drive to Hong Kong Golf Club. The general area of Hong Kong consists of four districts. These are the island of Hong Kong, Kowloon, the New Territories and the outlying islands. Hong Kong Golf Club is located in the village

of Sheung Shui at the north end of the New Territories. From the 5th tee on the Eden Course you can see the Village of Shenzhen which is located in Red China.

The membership at Hong Kong Golf Club numbers 2,500 people from throughout Asia and the United Kingdom. To accommodate their travel needs, the clubhouse has a hotel that is used by members and their guests. It was in one of these rooms that Barb and I stayed. We also were provided with meals in the clubhouse dining room.

According to the club's website, (hkgolfclub.org), "The Royal Hong Kong Golf Club was founded in May of 1889 by thirteen golfing enthusiasts. They played on an open area in Happy Valley that was also used for football, polo, hockey and military parades. Due to the other uses, they were not allowed to construct bunkers, greens or tees."

"As membership grew along with pressure on tee times, the Captain and club officials were forced to find another location. They found Deep Water Bay, which is located on the Island of Hong Kong. Here they constructed a nine hole course."

"Between 1906 and 1910 protracted negotiations took place between the club and local farmers to secure sufficient land in Fanling to build a full 18 holes. The Old course was laid out by the end of 1911 and additional land was acquired in the late 1920's for the New Course which opened for play in 1931."

"The end of World War II saw the club virtually bankrupt with the courses at Fanling and Deep Water Bay in very poor condition. With strong support from the members and local companies, conditions gradually improved to the extent that a third course, The Eden, was added in 1970."

Beside the golf courses, the club includes a swimming pool, tennis courts, gymnasium and the equestrian club. In fact, Hong Kong Golf



View from Victoria Peak, Hong Kong in foreground, Victoria Harbor and Kowloon in the background.



Grounds maintenance building.



Tom and Barb Emmerich on Victoria Peak.

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#6 Eden Course.

Club will host the cross country equestrian events for the 2008 Olympics. The courses for these events including the jumps are currently under construction.

In Hong Kong, the months of May through August are the rainy season. While we were there, the temperatures ranged from 90 to 104 degrees F. with 80 to 90% humidity. It rained four of the six days. Many of the members leave Hong Kong and return to the United Kingdom during these months. They return for the months of September through April. These months comprise the prime golf season in Hong Kong.

Given the tropical location of Hong Kong Golf Club, the golf courses are grassed with warm season cultivars. The greens are bermuda and the fairways are passpalum. The tees are either zoysia or passpalum and the rough is carpet grass. The tees and greens are walk mowed. The fairways and rough are mowed with riding reel mowers. The bunkers are groomed with sand pro once a week. The rest of the time they are raked by hand.

The Club employs about 100 people for maintenance of the golf course and the club grounds.

The ground maintenance department is organized with two golf course superintendents. Chip Lewison handles all administration and interfaces with the Club Manager, the Captain and club officials. Chip has three administrative assistants to handle paperwork and materials disbursement.

Randy reports directly to Chip and handles the day to day operations of the grounds maintenance department. Each golf course has a 1st and 2nd assistant superintendent and thirteen laborers. Besides the three golf course crews, there is a shop crew consisting of the chief mechanic, an assistant and ten laborers; a fourteen person projects crew; a landscape crew to maintain all of the gardens and run the nursery operation and a six arborist crew. There are



Golf hole on the new course.



Carpet grass sod.

also two technicians to handle day to day maintenance and repairs on the irrigation system.

About 40% of the grounds maintenance employees are women and all of the caddies are women. They used pull carts to transport the golfer's bag rather than carrying it over the shoulder as we do here. Despite the high temperature and humidity, all of the caddies and the women on golf maintenance crew wore clothing to avoid exposure to the sun. This included long pants, long sleeve tops, wide brim hats and gloves.

Randy explained that in the Chinese culture a tan on a woman is considered unattractive. All of the golfers carried umbrellas to shield themselves from the sun. The umbrella was handed to the caddy at each shot and then returned for the walk down the fairway.

The programming of the new fairway irrigation and rework of the hydraulic tree for all three courses took about four and one half days to complete. During that time, my wife Barb and Deb had a wonderful time exploring the shopping offered in the New Territories.



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Eligible organizations include:

- Wee One Foundation
- Wisconsin Golf Course Superintendents Association
- Wisconsin Landscape Federation
- Wisconsin Nursery Association
- Wisconsin Turfgrass Association



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Ladies laying carpet grass sod. I was reminded of a quilting bee.



The Red China / Hong Kong Border.

On Thursday afternoon we took the commuter train into Kowloon and boarded the Star Ferry for a seven minute trip to Hong Kong Island. Once on the island, we went to Victoria Peak to see the wonderful view of Victoria Harbor and Kowloon. We then returned to Kowloon to meet Randy, Chip and Deb in a Packer bar and restaurant that Randy found in the Miramar Hotel. We were greatly disappointed to find it closed for renovation. We made other arrangements for dinner but not until we caught happy hour in the hotel bar.

The highlight of our trip was a one day excursion into Red China to visit the city of Guangzhou. Through a local travel agent, Chip was able to secure single day visas

for himself, Deb, Barb and me to enter Red China. Escorted by Li Tao, the 1st assistant for the Old Course and a Guangzhou native, we went through immigration and customs at Kowloon Tong and boarded a train for a 90 minute ride to the northeast. Guangzhou has a total population of 7.5 million. That is two million more people than live in the entire state of Wisconsin. Arriving in Guangzhou, we left the train, cleared immigration and boarded the subway to a shopping district where we met up with Li's wife Yang Li. We spent the day browsing the many shops and experienced a traditional Chinese meal for lunch.

On the return trip we got off the train at Shenzhen, a Chinese city on

the border with the New Territories. Here we did more shopping and walked across the border back into the New Territories. We went through Chinese immigration and customs, walked over the border and then had to clear Hong Kong immigration and customs. This was all done in the confines of one building.

For me the most sobering part of that experience was the walk across the boarder. The border consists of a concrete moat about 50 yards wide. On each side of the moat was a 10-

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Happy Hour at the Miramar Hotel in Kowloon. From left, Chip Lewison, Deb Sime, Barb Emmerich, Tom Emmerich, Randy Witt.



Brat fry at Chip's house. From Left Yang Li, Deb Sime, Barb Emmerich.



Our Guides in Guangzhou, from left, Yang Li and Li Tao.

foot high chain link fence topped with razor wire and security cameras. That sight really made me appreciate the freedoms we enjoy in this country.

Saturday was our last full day in Hong Kong. I worked on some drawings of the new irrigation system for Lie Tao while the ladies completed a final day of shopping. Chip found Johnsonville bratwurst at a local market, and that evening we had a traditional Wisconsin brat fry at Chip's residence.

The next morning we left Hong Kong Golf Club at 9:00 AM for the trip home. Between vans, airports, planes and buses, it took 22 hours to reach our front door. We were exhausted but happy to be home.

This trip was a great experience. I am grateful to Randy and Chip for giving me this opportunity and would definitely go back should opportunity arise. ♡



Brat fry at Chip's house. From Chip Lewison, Randy Witt, Li Tao.

Constructing an Olympic equestrian jump on the old course.



#18 Old Course, club house and Sheung Shui in the background.