

MY TRIP AND EXPERIENCE IN THE FIJI ISLANDS

by Dave Feser

In late summer of 1973 I accepted a position of Golf Course Superintendent at a club in the City of Suva in the Fiji Islands. My family and I left Minneapolis in October and the flight from Minneapolis lasted 20 hours with stops in Los Angeles and Honolulu for refueling.

Fiji lies about 17° south of the equator and just across the International Date Line. This latter fact resulted in our anniversary being a very short day as you miss a day when going west across the date line. My bride, Joanie, swears she will some day get even with me for that trick. Due to my wife becoming ill we returned to Minneapolis late in May this year.

The course was designed by Robert Trent Jones, Inc. and was in various stages of construction when we arrived. There were a couple of firsts that I was proud of: (1) the fact that when we mowed the greens in Fiji they were the first greens mowed in the world every day, and also (2) our golfers were the first golfers in the world to tee off each day, on our course in Fiji. The course is part of a large planned resort community with an expected population of about 20,000 in 10 to 15 years. At present there is one hotel with three more planned, and about 150 homes near completion.

Pacific Harbour (name of the development) is about 35 miles west of Suva, the capital city of Fiji; it has a population of 60,000. Fiji's total population is about 400,000.

The 35 miles from the course to the city of Suva is a tortuous route of switchbacks with all large stones graded to the center. When we were there only a week, on our way back from Suva, we got a stone through our windshield that totally shattered the glass. We learned later that this was an extremely common occurrence. One of the men on my crew had three windshields broken in as many months. Thank goodness, only one for us.

Well, let's get back to the golf course. The land the course was built on was all tidal swamps going back into areas of high jungle cover hills. A dredge had been working for 24 hours a day for the last three years building lakes and canals and it is on this dredged material that the golf course is built. Only a couple of holes are on high ground of latsolic red clays. From a soil standpoint we had either red clay, dredged sand or dredged peat. Because of the area being a salt water marsh we had some extremely salty soil conditions. In some places this was coupled with a pH as low as 3.5 making growth of anything nearly impossible. Fortunately the rainfall in the area is about 140 inches a year and this helped in reducing the salt level. The entire course (greens, tees, fairways, and rough) was planted in Tiftgreen (Tifton 328).

There are about 10 courses in Fiji and the best was in much worse condition than the worst course in Minnesota. Our course was in the best condition of any course within a 1000 mile radius.

Supplies and equipment presented many headaches over which I had practically no control. When I arrived the first nine holes had been grassed and they were mowing everything with walk-behind 24-inch mowers. Gang mowers had been ordered from California but did not arrive for nearly two months after we got there. This was four or five months after they had been ordered. I never would have believed that I would have been so happy to see a set of 5-gang mowers. It was like a Christmas morning. After this equipment arrived and was put to work the fairways improved rapidly and by the time we left compared favorably with fairways anywhere.

Fertilizer was a real problem and will continue to be so. We ordered over 200 tons for one year and most of this was high analysis type of material such as urea and muriate of potash.



Dave Feser

With high rainfall, sandy soils, 12 month growing season, and hybrid bermuda, high fertilization was a must. Back to logistics, when everything comes by ship and takes maybe five to six months for delivery, good inventories must be kept. For example, I had to order a sod cutter blade by air freight and the shipping cost was much more than the cost of the blade.

As to the culture and job related problems, they were minimal. Fiji's population is about 60% Indian (brought from India in the late 1800s to cut sugar cane) and about 40% Fijian who are a negroid race. Our crew was about 90% Fijian. The man whom I was training to become a superintendent was about 50 years old and of European ancestry although his family had been in Fiji several generations. It was almost like being in Minnesota for his name is Ted Peterson. The second man, Brian Eastgate, was about 22 years old and also European. Both men spoke Fijian fluently and were, therefore, able to carry out most of the actual work direction. At one time we had nearly 200 men working on the construction of the golf course although only about half were under my supervision and direction.

The men were paid about 50 cents an hour but they were very happy to have a job and worked extremely hard providing they knew what was expected of them.

OSHA would have had fits in Fiji, for example, I would say that about 95% of my crew worked barefoot. Most of them had probably never had a pair of any kind of shoes in their lives. It was amazing to watch the type of terrain that they could walk over or watch a man digging a trench with a shovel and barefoot. When I left we had 50 men working on golf course maintenance and were planning to cut this to about 30, who would form the year around staff. It may be of interest that despite the high rainfall we had the capability of irrigating the entire course with a double row fairway system and all of the trenching for the system dug by hand.

We were there in their summer, December-March, and it was hot and humid, although the body seems to adapt quite well. The average temperature is around 87° with the relative humidity about the same. Winter might find it cooling off only five or six degrees with slightly less rainfall. Despite this, disease was a problem for only about three or four weeks which I guessed to be mostly a pythium species. Various species of cutworms were the worst problem. They could quickly defoliate an entire fairway although recovery would be quick.

All in all it was an experience that we thoroughly enjoyed and would like and hope to do again. Fiji is about everything that you have heard of a South Sea Island and the Fijians are undoubtedly the most likeable people anywhere.

Of course, on my return it was necessary for me to find employment and I have taken the position of Golf Course Superintendent at the Chattanooga Golf and Country Club, Chattanooga, Tennessee and we will be leaving for there in July. The Chattanooga Golf & Country Club is a very old club, having been built in the 1890s. It has bent grass and bermuda fairways and golf is played the year around. Chattanooga is on the Georgia-Tennessee border and is on most routes to Florida, so we hope that those of you who head for Florida for a winter vacation will give us a call when you come through.

VANDALISM AT THE WHITE BEAR YACHT CLUB, AUGUST 3, 1974

A cart was stolen and driven over greens 8-10-17, spinning the wheels and tearing up the greens, driving over the pins and poking holes in the greens with the poles. They then totaled out the golf cart by rolling it down the #8 golf path. Superintendent Tom Frost and his staff used nursery sod and repaired the greens and fortunately, by Sunday, the 4th, you could hardly tell there was any damage. we are certainly glad to learn of the quick repair. However, it is too bad these vandals cannot be apprehended and punished.

GREENS' CLIPPINGS

Tom Frost, Superintendent at the White Bear Yacht Club, has some talented people on his staff. He has sent along a couple of poems that one of his men, Dan McCarthy, wrote while doing some night watering. We will pass them on to you.

I was mowing tees and approaches one bright early morn, and wishing to God that I'd never been born.

I was trying to hurry, I don't like to wait, but then I saw something I knew I would hate.

For what to my despairing eyes did appear, but a threesome of ladies who golf once a year.

So what did I do for the next half hour or so, but sat there and watched as their golf scores did grow.

Their scores grew so fast I could hardly keep track, for even their best shots weren't much more than a hack.

So if anyone tries to tell you women golfers aren't slow, then tell them they're crazy, I think I should know.

When I was night watering, one bright moonlit night, my eyes did behold such a terrible sight.

I sped over on the Cushman as fast as I could, but kept it in second like the boss said I should.

Out on the horizon, a geyser I did spy, coming from the pump house, I soon found out why.

A main pipeline had burst, the water was over my knees, for the pump's pressure had risen, past two hundred and three.

Now if the pump ever gets fixed before the snow flies, the night waterman won't have to watch the morning sun rise.

(Continued on Page 8)

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AUGUST OUTING
OWATONNA MUNICIPAL
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MEETINGS

There was a Board Meeting Monday, August 5, at the Red Coach.

Business - Treasurer's Report, Communications, Distinguished Service Award. Moved and seconded that the name of Harold Stodola be submitted for this award. Annual Tournament - Necessary to change the date to September 23; all concerned to be notified by postcard, various special events to be determined by committee. It was determined that Seniors are to be over 50 years old and are eligible for only one prize. Conference, Annual Meeting and Seminar - Registration will be Wednesday night and the Annual Meeting will also be on Wednesday night. The Pesticide Seminar will be held prior to the Conference (see meeting schedule for further details regarding the Seminar). Membership - Application for membership received from John Hopko, Elk River Country Club was presented. The application will be voted on at the next regular meeting. The Board approved life memberships for George Leppanen, Virginia and John Thompson, Cook, Minnesota. New Business - The Board theoretically supports the tentative draft of Anoka Tech. and its philosophy. Larry Vetter will head the Long Range Planning Committee.

AUGUST MEETING AND OUTING

The August meeting was held in Owatonna, Minnesota, Monday, August 12th. The meeting was preceded by an outing of golf and visiting at the Owatonna Municipal Golf Course. Mike Klatte was the host and did an outstanding job. The Owatonna Municipal Golf Course is an unusual course; it is a comparatively narrow course as golf courses go but with the creek running through the course it is not only a beautiful course but also a very interesting one. It is a course that knowledge of the layout is very beneficial as the creek, doglegs, etc. present a golf course that requires not only excellent golf shots but some very good thinking before making the shot. In addition to this Mike had the course in outstanding condition. In riding around the course taking pictures we had an opportunity to take and visit with all of those playing and we heard nothing but compliments about what the players were finding to play on. Very special compliments were given to the large and excellent conditioned greens. This was also designated Kromer day and the Kromer Company had their equipment on display and it created a lot of interest. They gave away some mementos, beverages and three door prizes. A drawing of the names of those that had registered was made and the following lucky people were the winners: Jim Lindblad, Rolling Green Country Club, Graphite Shaft Putter; Jim Bartels, Eastwood Golf Club, Rochester, AM-FM Portable Radio and Gerald Pirk1, Brauer Associates, Carbon Shaft Driver.

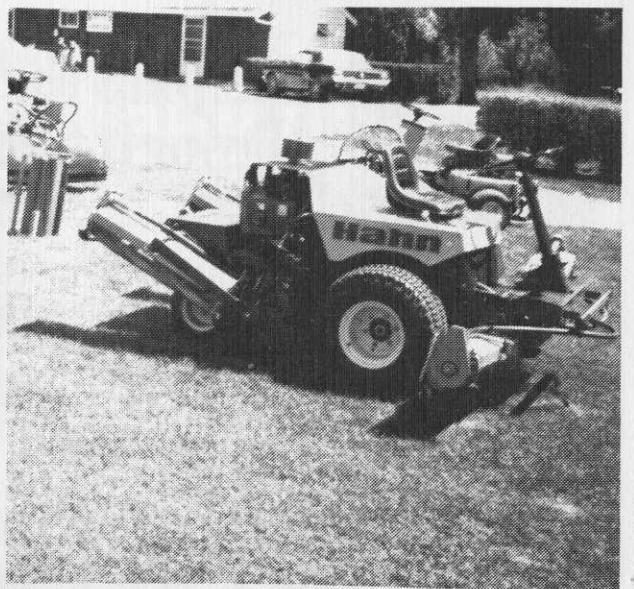


Host
Mike Klatte

After the fun and enjoyment at the course, all attending were invited to the Eagles Club for a cocktail and more door prizes and then to the Owatonna Inn for an excellent Steak Dinner and meeting. It was a great day and our thanks and gratitude to Mike and all others concerned.

SEPTEMBER MEETING

There will be no September meeting as that is the day devoted to the Annual Tournament. See the enclosed entry form for details regarding this event. We cannot stress too much the importance of getting your reservation in before September 16th. This applies to those that intend to attend the dinner only as well as those that will be playing in the Tournament. The entries and reservations must be sent to Jim Wodash, 816 William Street, Albert Lea, Minn. 56007. Entries and reservations received after that date cannot be accepted.



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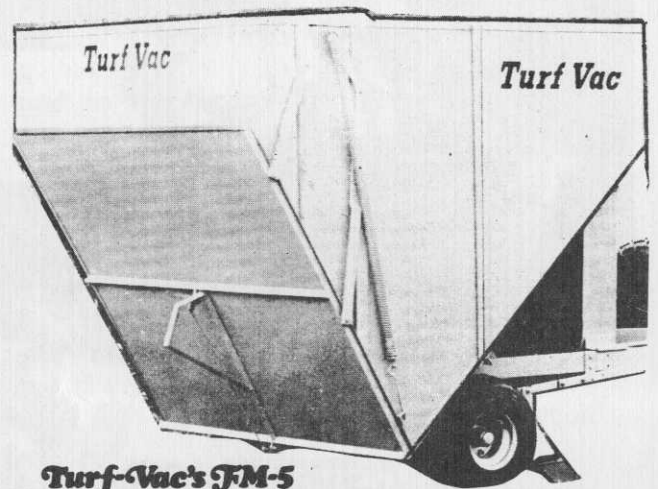
GREENS' CLIPPINGS (cont'd from Page 4)

- A day or two after returning from Owatonna I received a letter from Mike Klatte in which he enclosed a very generous contribution from the City of Owatonna to the MGCSA Research Program. It was very kind of the City of Owatonna to do this and we appreciate their support and are very grateful to them.
- There was a good turnout for the golf at Owatonna and also for the dinner and meeting. From the pictures taken I would estimate in excess of 40 played golf and there were 57 at dinner. It was well worth the trip and again congratulations to Mike and also to Manager Vern Moat.
- The prizes won by the golfers were donated by the Club at the Owatonna Municipal Course.

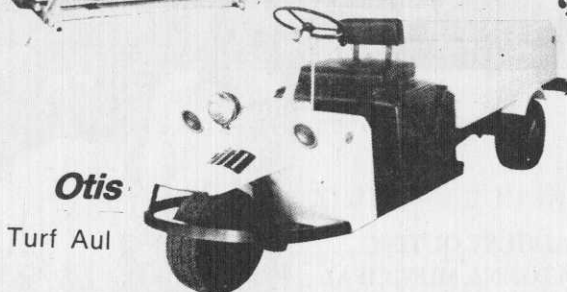
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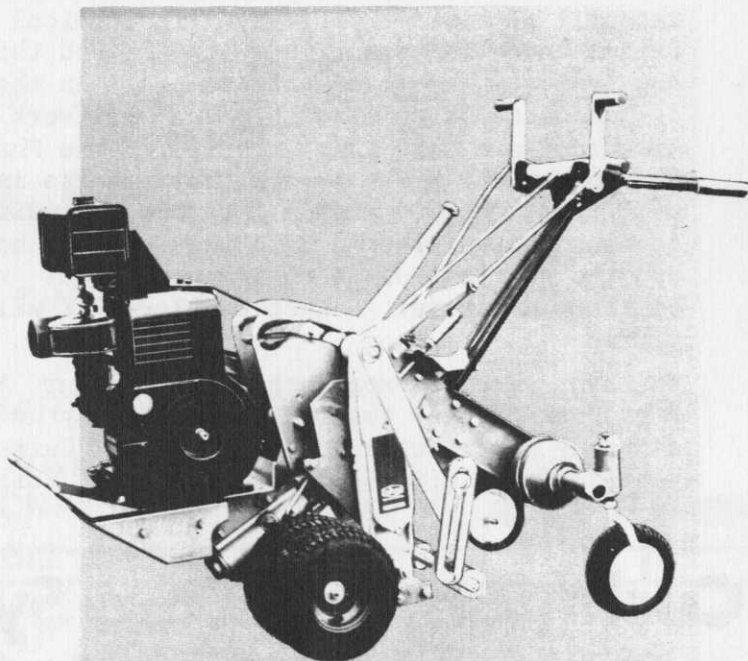
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GREENS' CLIPPINGS (cont'd from Page 8)
Vern Hansen has taken a position with the Anoka Tech. He will teach young men who aspire to work on the staff of a golf course superintendent. With Vern's background the students in his classes will receive the benefit of his vast knowledge and experience.

While riding around the Wayzata course during the MGCSA outing and meeting there in July, I had a very nice and educational visit with Associate Member, Don Herfort. Don was out playing and had as his guest his son Tom who had just recently received his degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Princeton. Tom is working with his Dad this summer in the Golf Course Architect Business. When school starts again in the Fall, Tom will attend the University of Minnesota on a fellowship and will work for his Master's Degree. In the meantime they are both busy rebuilding the Phalen Course for the City of St. Paul. The course which was a very short course is being lengthened and will play at a par 70 and can be played from 6000 to 6250 yards. The course will have four lagoons that will come into play on six holes. There will be a driving range and the shortest par 4 on the new layout will be longer than the longest par 4 on the old course. When completed it will give St. Paul another championship course.

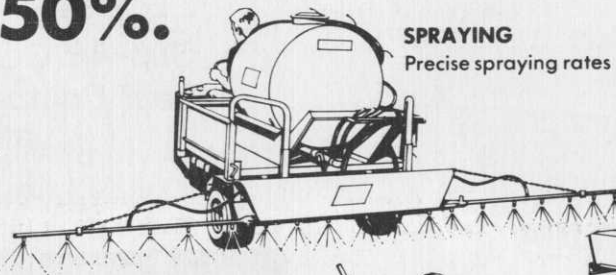
We have received word that one of our Associate Members, Gerald J. Commers, President of the Cushman Motor Company of Minneapolis, was named a 1974 Outstanding Distributor for Cushman Golf Carts. Jerry was presented a plaque on behalf of his firm by James Leventhal, Cushman Product Manager, during the annu-
(Continued on Page 11)

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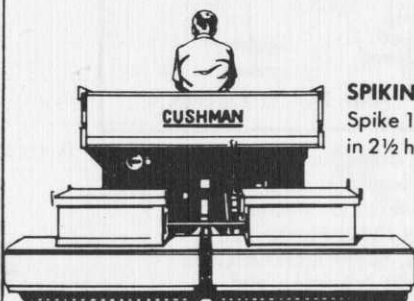
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