

# SUPERINTENDENT STRIVES FOR CONSTANT, MODERATE TURF GROWTH

By Ed Ginn

As the casual visitor approaches Hilton Head Island and its plethora of golf courses, it takes a sharp eye to spot the miniature waterfall in the pecan grove that marks the unobtrusive entrance to Moss Creek Plantation — still clinging to the mainland.

In an official brochure, the line reads "Moss Creek . . . it's not for everyone." This is a reminder that, unlike its island neighbors competing for tourist attention, Moss Creek is a private residential community open only to property owners and their guests. There are a few exceptions, as when its distinctive Devil's Elbow South course is opened to host such events as the CPC Women's International tournament early each May.

The Devil's Elbow name comes from early Carolina history. It was the title of a Barony granted in 1663 to Sir John Colleton by England's King Charles II. Later the Barony was divided into six plantations that became important producers of rice, indigo, and the famous Sea Island cotton. One of those plantations was Bog

Bluff which evolved into a cattle ranch and was renamed Moss Creek when it entered a new life in 1973. The concept then was that Moss Creek would be carefully designed for low density housing of a very fine order. Facilities were to be top drawer with a rigid rule of privacy.

During Hilton Head's "difficult times" in 1975, ownership passed from the original Moss Creek developers to Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company, but the new owners hewed to the original concept.

The first 18 holes, Devil's Elbow South, was started in January, 1974, and opened in March of 1975. It was designed by George and Tom Fazio, and is considered one of their finest accomplishments. Of moderate length, about 7,000 yards, it is a relatively tight course with a number of holes bordering the treacherous salt marsh. Number 15, with a green virtually surrounded by water at high tide, is probably the most scenic. Rated the toughest par 3 from the men's tee, a player must carefully assess the wind. Residents say that a short iron might carry more than the 190 yards from the championship tee on some days. On the next day (or the same afternoon) a driver might find you falling short.

A new 18, Devil's Elbow North, was started in September, 1978 and was opened in March, 1980. It is shorter (6,650 to 6,700 yards) than the South course, somewhat tighter, and with smaller greens. Turf was doing nicely until a seven week drought in late spring coupled with a depleted water supply caused some anxious moments. This occurred during the critical transition period as ryegrass was fading out and the permanent grasses were just reviving. There was some evidence of this in mid-July when I visited, but turf appeared to be healing quickly.

Gerry Beaman, golf course superintendent, has things well in hand at these splendid courses. Gerry came to Moss Creek early in 1974 and has lived with the layouts almost from the day the first fairway was carved out of the old plantation. A graduate of Clemson University (tiger paws greet you as you step into his office), Gerry was determined that the quality of the turf would match the high standards of the Moss Creek community.

Fairways were shaped with the naturally existing soil, but greens were constructed from imported materials. The soil mix is 80 per cent concrete sand and 20 per cent pine bark, blended to a depth of 18 inches. French tile provides sub-surface drainage. Greens were sprigged with Tifdwarf Bermudagrass, fairways with 419 Tifway Bermudagrass. Roughs and tees consist of 419 Bermudagrass, with a considerable amount of lovegrass in the roughs.

Overseeding in this part of the South is done in October to supply color throughout the cooler months. A 50-50 mixture of Derby perennial ryegrass and Jamestown chewings fescue is used on the greens. Fairways are overseeded with a 60-40 blend of annual and perennial ryegrass.

Lush, dark green grass may look great, but does not always signify the best playing surface. While Gerry



**Salt marshes** and water at high tide make this par-3 hole at Devil's Elbow a challenge to the finest golfer. The green is nearly surrounded by water at high tide and winds can require any club in the bag to negotiate the 190 yards.



does attempt to keep a pleasant color year-round, he is more concerned with texture, turf vigor, and playability. To accomplish this he strives for a constant, but moderate growth curve. "We're not in the business of growing grass," Gerry says. "We're maintaining grass, and we want to keep it healthy while keeping growth as slow as possible."

In his plans for a turf fertilization program, Gerry chose ureaformaldehyde (Nitroform) as his source for the slow, controlled release of nitrogen that he needed. After the first 18 holes were completed, he made applications of granular UF exclusively from late spring through the summer, and followed up in mid-September with an application of sulfate of potash.

Recently, however, Gerry installed a "fertigation" system so he could inject liquid fertilizer into his sprinkler system. His feeding program now goes something like this:

December 1st until April 1st.....20-0-0  
 April 1st until July 15th .....14-1-7  
 July 15th until overseeding (about  
 Oct. 1st) .....11-1-11

He makes supplemental applications of ureaform when needed. October and November are the months when no fertilizer, or "not much" is used.

Suppliers are important people in Gerry's profession since the superintendent is responsible for maintaining all property, except that belonging to private homes. Dependability and promptness of delivery are essential to keep an operation like Moss Creek moving on schedule. Fertilizer products are supplied by reliable sources, such as Bingham Seed Company of Jacksonville and Regal Chemical Company of Atlanta.

There is no golf course, public or private, that doesn't present problems for the superintendent. We asked Gerry about his.

Live oaks are a trademark of the Low Country, and Moss Creek has preserved theirs beautifully. But when a green is almost surrounded by trees it creates an awful lot of shade for sun-loving Bermuda. Gerry calls this his number one problem. In addition to the oaks, Moss Creek has a good population of palms, pines, and cedar. The ubiquitous palmetto grows close to the ground and usually does not produce problem shade.

Drought is not an annual problem, but is always a threat. Moss Creek has a sewage treatment plant and recycles effluent water for irrigation use. It can cope pretty well with the average dry spell, and if drought doesn't come again during the turf transition period, all should be well.

Cart traffic and unrepaired ball marks are probably Gerry's second biggest problem. He is certainly not alone when he mentions these. Working around play, perhaps, may be more tedious on a course like Moss Creek. Here, it may require a bit more tack, and cannot be hurried.

Turnover in help is another problem Gerry mentioned that is common everywhere. Twice during our tour of the course Gerry stopped to correct workers on some aspect of their routine. The care taken at Moss Creek is evident everywhere. Only walking mowers are used on the greens, since Gerry feels they give a better quality cut and leave a finer appearance.

One nice touch is the placement of granite markers on the men's tees, giving exact yardage to the center of

the green. These are a real help on the par 3 holes, although wind velocity indicators might be more appropriate.

While Moss Creek residents may cherish their privacy, they are still generous hosts to many golf events. In addition to the annual Women's International, Devil's Elbow South has been host to the USGA Boys Junior Championship, the Moss Creek Seniors Invitational (a men's amateur test), and the Carolinas-Virginias Cup matches. It has scheduled the Women's Western Amateur (in 1981), the Southern Amateur in 1982, and the USGA Seniors Amateur in 1983.

So, if you're eligible for any of these, don't hesitate. You'll never forget your experience at Devil's Elbow!

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