

# BUILDING THE LINKS AT SPANISH BAY

An all fine fescue course is a bold stroke at Pebble Beach. Yet The Links at Spanish Bay is giving it a shot.



Despite the drought tolerance of fine fescue, Spanish Bay is irrigated. The system is checked by assistant superintendent Carl Rygg.

Imagine for a moment that you're about to tee off at a links-type course in Scotland. You toss a blade of fescue grass in the air to test the wind; you're exhilarated by the coastal view, the wind-swept dunes with bunkers formed over the years by sheep seeking shelter from the elements. You remember the history of those who have passed this way before. You tug at your tam, take a practice swing and address the ball...

The bunkers, dunes and absence of trees on the course are similar, and fine fescues covering the course from tee to green are the same. But you're playing The Links at Spanish Bay, Pebble Beach, Calif. What nature needed years to develop in Scotland was very intentionally integrated into this 6,870-yard, par-72 course along the 17 Mile Drive.

The design team of Robert Trent Jones Jr., Tom Watson and Frank D. "Sandy" Tatum transformed the 195 acres into a world-class course with large dunes, rolling fairways clipped short from tee to green, a continuous concrete cartpath, state-of-the-art amenities and equipment. A superb blending of the old and new.

Superintendent Mike Phillips started with the Pebble Beach Co. in 1978. He has been superintendent at Spyglass Hill and Pebble Beach Golf Links where he supervised preparations for the 1982 U.S. Open. After coming to Spanish Bay, Phillips was responsible for supervision and construction of The Links, and now, its overall maintenance. Assistant Carl Rygg had 14 years experience at the Steamboat Springs course in Colorado. Rygg helps supervise the staff of 28.

## Plans and permits

Greenscape Ltd. built the course, but years of planning and permits preceded the first scoop. The Links at Spanish Bay falls into the authority of the California Coastal Commission. With committee meetings, review boards and public hearings behind, the Coastal Commission approved the plans and granted a permit for the construction of a golf course on July





The Links at Spanish Bay has 95 acres of fine fescue. It's the only fine-fescue course in the United States.

11, 1985.

This permit was contingent on the reconstruction of 100 acres of silicon sand dunes that had been mined from the 1930s through 1973. All that was left was coastal bedrock, so a conveyor belt system was implemented to transport sand two miles from Sand City. In May, 1986 the conveyor belt began hauling the 530,000 cubic yards of sand required to construct and contour the dunes...some up to 24 feet high.

As part of the land reclamation agreement in the Monterey County Land Use Plan, Pebble Beach Co. is replanting the dunes with native plant species and enhancing two wetland areas. Ryegrass and native plants were hydroseeded onto the dunes in June 1986. The ryegrass is to stabilize the sand until the native plant seedlings could establish.

Some of the flowering plants included in the seeding program are California beach poppies, pink sand verbena, lizard tail and yellow bush lupine. The dunes themselves are planted in dune sedge, a gray-green low growing plant that becomes a buffer between the native plants and the maintained areas of the course. Dune sedge covers the gallery areas. Ice plant, used for dune stabilization at one time, is not native to the area, so the spreading vegetation must be removed by hand...a painfully slow and labor-demanding process.

#### 'Fine' turf

The Links at Spanish Bay is the first all

fine fescue golf course in the United States; 95 acres are seeded with the fine-leaved cool-season grass.

"Fine fescues are commonly found in fairways and tees as part of a mixture," explains Phillips, "but mowing them at  $\frac{5}{32}$  of an inch for daily play is an innovative concept. The more the course matures, the more impressed we are."

The course was said to be outstanding for its "soft" opening on Nov. 4, 1987.

The turf seeding, fertilization and maintenance recommendations were prescribed by Rich Hurley, Ph.D., of Lofts Seed.

The tee and fairway blend is  $\frac{1}{3}$

Jamestown,  $\frac{1}{3}$  Barthala and  $\frac{1}{3}$  Koket; all chewings type fescue. Tees and fairways were seeded at a rate of 250 lbs./acre. This amount was felt to be adequate even though 300 lbs. was recommended. Roughs and steep grades were also seeded at 250 lbs./acre with a blend of 40 percent Reliant hard fescue, 30 percent Ensylva creeping red fescue and 30 percent fairway/tee blend.

The greens were all seeded with a 50/50 mix of Jamestown chewings fescue and Exeter colonial bentgrass. This is actually 20 percent fine fescue and 80 percent bent by weight. The base for the greens is a 14 inch sand/peat cap with 10 percent peat. Of the 90 percent sand, 90 percent of that is in the medium grade range.

Fertilizer applied at the first seeding was 16-16-16 with one lb. N/1000 sq.ft. Establishment rates for the first 14 months was 21-7-4 after eight weeks, with four lbs. N/1000 sq.ft. "Fertilization rate now that the course has matured is determined by soil testing," Phillips says. "We then order our fertilizer with minor nutrients mixed according to the resulting analysis."

Tees and fairways are mowed at  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch with triplex mowers with catchers. Greens are hand mowed at  $\frac{5}{32}$  inch. In addition to golf, the 24,000-sq.ft. clubhouse will accommodate a pro shop, locker rooms, starter area, retail shops, health club and 50-patron restaurant/bar. Across from the clubhouse are eight outdoor tennis courts with pro shop and lockers.

As with the other Pebble Beach Company courses, The Links at Spanish Bay will be open to the public. Carts are required and winds with gusts to could be a factor, but playing this unique course will offer its own rewards. **LM**



A crew member rakes one of Spanish Bay's large sand traps.