

Why Renovate or Revise?

by DR. MARVIN H. FERGUSON

On almost every golf course some areas are inferior to the rest. They may be poorly designed or poorly located, but for some reason such areas are less easily maintained. At a time when both standards of excellence and maintenance costs are rising it is important to remove the causes of this maintenance difficulty.

Inasmuch as greens require proportionally more maintenance than the rest of the course and because they are of such great importance in the play of the game, they claim attention first. Renovation may be necessitated by the presence of an inferior grass, by the presence of thatch or by surface compaction. The trouble may be an excessive amount of weeds such as *Poa annua*, crabgrass, or chickweed. Such troubles may often be eliminated by reworking the surface.

More serious problems are associated with poor drainage and poor water infiltration. The causes of these ailments may be compact soils, layered soil profiles, or improper contours. Whatever the cause of poor drainage, the condition is seldom easy to correct.

Thus, the conditions that call for the revision and renovation of greens may also exist on other areas of the course. While poor drainage on fairways may be less critical than it is on greens, and while corrective measures will obviously not involve rebuilding, the task of effecting good drainage can become a rather large undertaking.

Revision attempts which go wrong are among the saddest experiences that one may witness. One recalls the willful green committee chairman whose business is road construction. He rebuilds greens at his club contrary to the wishes of other members of the committee. Their protests, however, are limited because the chairman uses his equipment and his workmen and does the job "at no expense to the club."

But, alas, the greens are completely unsatisfactory and the next year the club has to rebuild the greens again, this time at a substantial cost to the membership.

Another sad experience involved the use of an herbicide on dandelions in a bluegrass fairway. The sprayer was a borrowed one and the previous user had left a solution of soil sterilant in the tank. The turf was ruined and more than two years elapsed before it was possible to germinate enough grass seed to reestablish the stand.

It is important, therefore, that revisions and renovation programs be undertaken only after careful and thorough planning. On most golf courses some renovating activity is done almost every year. The object of such work is either to improve playing conditions or to ease maintenance. Careful evaluation of the problem and thorough planning can lead to the accomplishment of this aim.

Modernizing for Demands of the Game

by JOHN P. ENGLISH, Member, USGA Green Section Committee

Webster tells us that to **modernize** means to **adapt to modern needs, taste or usage**.

When we apply this title and Webster's definition to a golf course, we mean to revise or remodel that golf course to meet changing conditions. These changing conditions may affect the skill with which we play, our attitudes toward the game or the tribal customs which have grown up around the game.

I can remember a perfectly frightening number of changes in golfing conditions since we

used to scoop our tees out of a sand bucket, since cross-bunkers were an accepted part of the game—and since our ladies played in skirts.

First and foremost, of course, has been the population explosion which has lifted this country from one of 62,000,000 at the turn of this century to one of nearly 200,000,000.

This has had two obvious and direct effects on golf courses.

It has brought the cities and the suburbs to our doorsteps, making it necessary for us

to fence our courses, in many cases. It has made us squeeze the utmost value from the land in redesigning courses.

And it brought us more players and more play than many of us can handle, requiring us to make provision to expedite play, to handle heavy traffic and to promote the safety of fellow-players. It has also made it more difficult to find time to maintain the course properly without interfering with play.

The increasing affluence of our society has brought with it not only more money with which to make our courses green and beautiful, but also demands that we produce perfect tees, fairways and greens every day all season, and that we make the game as easy as we can for the members. And, of course, suitable for the electric cart.

With affluence and leisure has come a quest for beauty. The men who sank tomato cans in an open field and played a gutty ball from can to can did not write letters to the Green Committee about the ugliness or untidiness of part of the "course." Now, however, the country club has become an American institution—and the member wants to be proud of its appearance as well as its quality as a golf course. And now, also, more ladies play and express their own ideas on how to make the course more attractive.

Finally, the tools of the game—the clubs and the ball—have changed. The championship course of father's day is a pitch-and-putt for his son; the bunker that caught Dad's drive isn't taken into account as Son plans his tee shot.

Each of these changing conditions does not require separate responses. We can codify a few basic objectives which, if programmed into our construction and maintenance schedules, can keep our courses abreast of the times. We over-look them at our peril.

These basic objectives should:

1. Protect property and the safety of the players.
2. Expedite play.
3. Increase visual beauty.
4. Simplify maintenance.

Under the first objective I would list:

1. Fencing the outer limits of the property where non-member traffic indicates and planting screening trees on other property lines—to keep undesirables and casual strollers out and to keep golf balls in.

2. Planting screening trees where they will

discourage players from trying short cuts not intended in the design of the course—trees are much better than artificial boundaries, which are no protection against a wild shot anyway!

3. Check bridges and supports regularly.

4. Improve playing visibility wherever possible. Raise a tee, scalp a mound so that players ahead can be clearly seen, or install an overhead mirror or an "all clear" bell.

Under "expediting play" I would list:

1. Maintain roughs, woods, ponds and brooks so that balls will not be easily lost. One stroke is penalty enough for an errant drive; we do not have to exact the death penalty in normal, recreational play.

2. Eliminate bunkers which have outgrown their effectiveness against scratch players and which only delay the less skillful and slower players, who have trouble enough.

3. Build women's tees to fit the ability and strength of the average woman golfer. A women's tee should be placed so as to give average women players a second shot to the green of no greater difficulty for her than a man's is for him.

Under increasing visual beauty I would list:

1. Pay close attention to tidiness. Install waste containers. Instruct the crew to pick up debris and remove it. Be thoughtful of where you pile clippings and how often you dispose of them.

2. Blend the colors of plantings, flowering shrubs and trees, consider the use of rock facings on ugly unkempt banks. Use rock formations where they have natural beauty.

3. Prevent the scarring of banks and slopes by installing fences, paths and wood steps. Rustic fences have a natural beauty of their own even while they control traffic flow.

Under the fourth objective, simplifying maintenance, I would urge:

1. Building paths where people walk and where the carts roll, to avert scars and the effects of wear. This is especially necessary on slopes.

2. Re-grade and ramp slopes, if necessary, to make them safe and attractive for walking and driving. Above all, direct them away from aprons and greens.

3. Enlarge tees, especially at the short holes.

4. Drain wet areas.

5. Improve roads for moving equipment.