

Great Golf Courses of America

— Their Paths and Roads

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Moderator: Wm. G. Buchanan, USGA Green Section, Mid-Atlantic Region

Buchanan: With the introduction of the electric golf car in the 1940s, it was soon evident that some kind of surface path would have to be provided if turf was to survive on heavily trafficked areas. What about the evolution of cart paths and roads on America's golf courses?

Moncrief: Over these 30 years, we have seen everything from shale, sea shells, sand, wood chips, pine needles, rubber composition materials, asphalt and even green concrete used in cart path construction. Paved service roads for heavy maintenance equipment have also become a necessity.

Bengueyfield: Yes, and we have seen the width of the paths increase from 3½ feet to 10 feet or more. I suppose most golf carts are now five feet wide and therefore most paths are six feet wide today. This allows six inches on either side of the cart for error and most drivers seem to need more.

Snow: It has been my experience that when blacktop is being installed, an eight-foot width is often nearly as economical as a six-foot path. It seems blacktop equipment is set up for eight-foot

wide installations. But of course, there are many golfers in clubs where an eight-foot wide path is not a welcomed sight.

Schwartzkopf: The acceptance of cart paths is a serious and growing problem. Cart paths are sorely needed to save the turf, and they also help many members extend their playing days. Nevertheless, more and more concerned golfers object to the proliferation of cart paths. They feel it is harmful to the game, the Rules of Golf and the beauty of their course.

Snow: It is a growing problem! From a survey we recently conducted, some clubs have made the commitment not to rely exclusively on carts, but to encourage a return to caddies and walking rounds of golf.

Brewer: It is interesting to note that at three of *Golf Digest's* 10 Great Golf Courses in our survey, we found a total of 79,000 rounds of golf played last year. Of these, 74,000 of them (or 94%) were walking rounds on the three courses. Some golfers, it seems, still like to walk!

Keep to the right!





Surfaced paths are turf savers.

Zontek: There is no doubt that some people, and perhaps their numbers are growing, like to walk the golf course. They feel more comfortable. They play better and they enjoy the game more. But we can't deny that a majority of golfers apparently prefer to ride.

Buchanan: What about speed of play? Do golf carts really speed the game?

Brewer: There have been reports about informal clockings of some players over the same course with and without golf carts. Even where carts were not restricted to paths, there was little appreciable increase in the speed of play by those golfers using carts.

Bengeyfield: Yes, I've heard of similar surveys and I'm sure the cases cited are accurate. Thankfully, there are still those who can walk 18 holes in three hours or less. But in the broad view I'm convinced more rounds can be played over 18 holes in a day's time if everyone uses a cart. Whether this is good or bad depends upon one's point of view. But at a resort course, or one heavily played, the maximum number of rounds per day is an essential ingredient in the economic health of the operation.

Schwartzkopf: Just in the past year, one of the great golf courses of America—which is also a popular resort course—installed cart paths to minimize turfgrass wear. Let me read two newspaper headlines which appeared soon after; "From Tee To Asphalt Jungle," reads one. The other, "Cart Paths Desecrate The Golf Shrine."

Zontek: Perhaps objections to cart paths can at least partially be overcome through careful planning and location. There is no consideration given to the game when a path runs down the middle of a fairway or continually comes into play around a green. And we have all seen examples of this.

Buchanan: In other words, the first consideration is due the game, not the convenience of a cart path or a player.

Zontek: Exactly!

Buchanan: Let's touch for a moment on the installation of cart paths. What are some of the considerations they deserve?

Moncreif: At least in bermudagrass country, some type of chemical sterilant should be used under the roadway to retard root growth. Otherwise, it isn't long before the roadway is invaded and deteriorates.

Snow: A well-drained sub-base is also important. Regardless of the type of material being used for the surface, a 4-inch layer of crushed stone or gravel sub-base will add years to the life of the path—especially asphalt. Asphalt should also be sealed periodically to protect its surface.

Audience Comment: In Michigan, we have found we can put four inches of asphalt down on a good solid base and get anywhere from eight to 10 years of good serviceability before the path begins to deteriorate.

Zontek: A gravel base is expensive but we have found far greater longevity of the path where the four-inch gravel base is used. It seems especially helpful in areas where there is a great deal of freezing and thawing through the winter.

Brewer: There is a new development in cart path materials this year and it seems especially promising for the worn areas at the end of cart paths. The new plastic or masonry honeycomb cells seem to reduce turf wear and soil compaction. I don't know how this material will "play," but it does deserve investigation and further testing. It is far more pleasing to view than asphalt or concrete.

Moncreif: Of course asphalt and concrete paths are often used for surface drainageways as

well. They do an excellent job. Either concave or convex construction will carry water away from critical playing areas.

Snow: Curbing also helps in this regard. In fact, four- to six-inch curbs help keep carts on the path near tees and greens. If the back side of the curb is leveled off with soil and grass is encouraged to grow here, it is easy to maintain with a regular mower. Hand clipping will not be necessary. Carts remain on the path, and worn areas along its side are greatly reduced if not eliminated.

Brewer: As grass growers, perhaps we can do more to encourage grass to grow on heavy traffic areas. For example, choosing the right grass, adequate aeration, fertilization, irrigation, etc. Once the turf shows signs of wear, you must raise the maintenance level in that area or divert the traffic or put in a cart path or road.

Moncrief: According to Dr. Glenn Burton, of Tifton, Ga., some of the hybrid bermudagrasses are withstanding traffic better than common bermuda or other types. I believe plant breeders are developing more wear-resistant grass varieties. The improved perennial ryegrasses also illustrate the point.

Buchanan: Gentlemen, it seems we all agree that, as cart usage increases or is concentrated in particular areas near greens and tees, the need for some kind of path or roadway also increases. The degree of wear depends also on what type of soil you have, the type of grass, the management of it and the climate of the area. Carts are especially necessary if the course is frequently played under adverse weather conditions.

Up to a point, the "scatter" principle, or "room at will," seems to work fairly well on fairways. But with increased cart traffic and increased maintenance costs for repairs, certainly there should be income enough from cart usage to pay for turf repairs and cart path installations and upkeep.

As to the control of carts and their ownership, control seems best achieved if it is in the hands of the club or professional. By control I mean the granting of permission to use the cart on the course on any given day and in maintaining proper tire size, tire inflation and etiquette in cart use.

The golf cart problem may always be with us, but I thank you gentlemen for contributing to a better understanding of it and the use of cart paths and roads.

The Invisible Men

by FURMAN BISHOP, Sports Editor, *Atlanta Journal*

The biggest subject of gossip around any golf course is not the pro, not the nifty feminine member behind whom all the panting male members want to play. Nor the sandbagger with the 18 handicap.

It's an invisible man. You know he's there, but you never see him. He might have lunch at the next table in the men's grill, but you wouldn't recognize him.

He's a kind of Santa Claus with a green thumb. He works while you sleep. You go to bed at night and wake up the next morning to find that he has achieved wonders.

He probably couldn't break 100. It's possible the only club he ever swung was a pick. (That's a No. 2 club in your gardening bag.)

The spring breaks, the greens are like parlor rugs, the fairways look like long verdant hallways through the forest and the rough is but yet only tender sprouts, all the members go about cooing, "The course is in the greatest condition I've ever seen." They're talking about the Unseen Man with the Unidentifiable face.

The winter has been rotten. The course a bog from rains that turn the fairways to ponds and the color to brown. Greens are patchy. Bunkers have

washed. April comes and the course looks like Sulphur Pits 9-Hole Municipal Links—though it's 1,000 miles from any ocean—\$1.50 a round. You curse him. You're not sure who, but you curse him.

You've never met him socially, but you invite the Lord to join you in bringing down an avalanche of wrath upon him. Your putt hits a patch of poa annua, you assail his parentage. Your drive hits a sign that says, "No Carts Today," you demand an immediate face-to-face with him.

You discover that he is real. Flesh and blood. A very tranquil man with cool, clear eyes, and in condition to swim the rapids—upstream. Chances are, he wouldn't know a Calcutta from a church bazaar. But he knows grass, and how to grow it. Basically, that's his business—grass-growing, and barbering it.

Mostly, he's referred to as "the greenkeeper," a rather pleasantly bucolic term. As a group, they refer to themselves as "golf course superintendents." They have a national organization called "Golf Course Superintendents Association of America." They didn't get off some hay mow and come to town. They study for it, and they're as devout toward their duty as monks.

They don't wear bib overalls and dip snuff.