

Golf Keeps America Beautiful

by SHERIDAN MUCH
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ON FEBRUARY 22, 1888, John Reid walked onto his front lawn, in Yonkers, New York, and with some friends, using equipment imported from the shop of old Tom Morris, in Scotland, began playing golf.

They were playing on a rude, makeshift, three-hole layout. In the 97 years since then, we have covered our share of this planet with uncounted acres of concrete and asphalt. We have scarred our landscape with strip-mining and clear-cutting. We have created dust-bowls, polluted rivers and lakes, and set off forest fires, mud slides, oil spills, explosions, and other catastrophes.

We've also been intelligent enough to sprinkle our landscape with some 13,200 golf courses, which today provide us with about 1½ million acres of some of the most beautiful man-made or man-enhanced vistas in the world.

Without a shadow of doubt, Golf Makes America Beautiful.

Herb Graffis, a great friend of mine, created that slogan two years ago. Because he cherishes the game and the contributions to golf made by the United States Golf Association, he suggested it to the Green Section.

Since then, the phrase has been amended slightly to Golf *Keeps* America Beautiful.

Every winter thousands of Americans flock to warm-weather areas, attracted, of course, by sun and sand and sea breezes, but increasingly they are attracted by golf courses.

Nor is the appeal of golf restricted to these havens from winter. Just a few weeks later our burgeoning army of nomadic golfers, now numbering nearly 20 million in America, return with spring to their homes, from Atlanta to Anchorage and from Boise to Bangor.

We are blessed with an abundance and diversity of golf courses. They line



Oakland Hills Country Club, Michigan, where CGCS Ted Woehrle is preparing the course for the 1985 U.S. Open Championship.



our seacoasts and they nestle comfortably in the Rocky Mountains. They interrupt, however incongruously, our spreading cities, and they rest gently upon the sometimes eerie emptiness of the western plains.

Sure, someone might say, you Americans and your architects can create outlandishly beautiful golf courses all over your country because so much land is available and all your people are receptive to this kind of frivolous usage. Wouldn't the landscape you are using nearly always be just as inspiring without your tampering with nature?

PERHAPS. It is true that our ancestors sealed off as golfing preserves for their pleasure such awesomely endowed sites as Pebble Beach, the sand hills of North Carolina, and the highlands of Michigan. One of the most beautiful golf courses I know of rests curiously on the floor of the Snake River Canyon, near Twin Falls, Idaho, 500 feet below the rim. It wanders through rocks probably rarely trod by white men before they came bearing five-irons. This crevice of the American West was beautiful before golf and would be beautiful without golf. And the same is true of many of our golf courses.

But those who glorify our scenery with the green, green grass of golf do not always enjoy the luxury of a pristine property upon which to work their artistry. More and more today our architects and builders and agronomists and turf managers are being asked to make grandeur out of garbage, literally. We are building golf courses on landfills, on flood plains, in swamps, and on rock-piles. Where real estate sales are involved, as they usually are today, we are building them on land where residences would be impractical or impossible. Bill Bengueyfield, the Green Section Director, was for some years the resident gardener of the garbage dump in City of Industry, California, and anyone who has seen that fabulous multi-purpose recreational resort, featuring two splendid golf courses, all built on a huge landfill, has seen the magic of modern golf course design, construction and maintenance.

And they know that Golf Makes (and Keeps) America Beautiful.

As a representative of the National Golf Foundation, I have visited nearly



The venerable Herb Graffis, originator of "Golf Keeps America Beautiful" with the author.

every part of the country. I have seen, for example, how a new municipal golf facility in New England might bring diverse factions of a community together and provide a common recreational interest for citizens of all walks of life. I have seen a nine-hole golf course carved into the fringe of an isolated village in Montana turn a place with one blinking caution light into a mecca for golfers.

In what appears to be a period of affluence for many Americans, when travel is a passion and travel abroad more affordable, I see friends wing off to Europe or the Far East or some islands in between. Many of them may never have seen a sunrise over Savannah or moonlight on the Mississippi. But these promising domestic experiences lose out to the exotic appeal of the other side of the world. Knowing what I know of this land and what they may not, I am sorry for them. If they are golfers, I am particularly sorry. However awesome the Eiffel Tower or captivating a shrine

in Kyoto, I am convinced a concentrated tour of golf courses of any region of our country would be equally rewarding for anyone.

I do not mean to presume that a wandering American golfer will realize the same cultural advantage of a world traveler. I mean merely to suggest that this America, this land kept beautiful in many ways by its golf courses, can delight us all with a remarkable panorama no farther away than the next golf course. We need only to look around us.

SOME YEARS AGO I set out to play all of the golf courses in Oregon, where I lived at the time. My travels with the Foundation made this a possible goal, but I fell short by some 30 of the 140 or so courses in the state. Even so, this dogged pursuit of one 'more and then another golf course took me into strange and wonderful places.

I saw the rainswept, sometimes flooded links of the Oregon coast, and some deep green oases among lava rock

and sagebrush under clear central Oregon skies. I saw many things in between, too, because this state has a diversity of climate and terrain. I saw golf courses designed by celebrated architects and others done by imaginative farmers using farm equipment. If, now and then, what I saw might have annoyed a purist, almost everything enchanted me.

I think we all know in our hearts that they design best who design least . . . and those who would create a monument to themselves in the name of golf are friends neither of nature nor the golfer, and certainly not of those who must maintain those courses.

It is one of the more compelling aspects of golf that each time one sets out to play a different course he is treated to an entirely new experience. By its nature, the arena for this sport,

unlike almost any other, save for such outdoor pursuits as hunting, fishing, and hiking, provides a totally different set of challenges, circumstances, situations and surroundings each time. From every tee, across every water hazard and around every dogleg there is a new sight to behold and almost invariably it is a thing of beauty. It is a place into which we take another dimension of our consciousness and which rarely fails to please the senses.

Peter Dobereiner, an author of golf books, observed, "Golf, after all, is a form of escapism, and it helps if we really can escape from the sight and sound and consciousness of our everyday world."

Those who eagerly escape at every opportunity into the satisfying serenity of one of our 13,000 golf courses will agree that Golf Keeps America Beautiful.

One early spring morning several years ago I was looking across the frosty fairways of a northern course when I spotted a lone figure coming toward me. As he putted out and left the final green, I walked up to him. He turned out to be a spry little man in his 80s who had been out for his morning exercise despite the chill.

"This golf course," he said, "is keeping me alive. I play every day I possibly can."

Today, as I visit golf courses in all parts of the country, I am increasingly aware that more and more older Americans are enjoying the game. I am thankful older Americans enjoy our game with all the gusto of the young.

Even more, I am thankful for those who work on our courses to make certain that Golf Keeps America Beautiful and that Golf Keeps Americans Alive.

Agri-Systems Soil Testing Laboratory Will Continue

MANY INQUIRIES have been made to Green Section regional offices concerning the status of the soil testing laboratory facilities of Agri-Systems of Texas, Inc. Dr. Marvin H. Ferguson developed the soil laboratory and many of its techniques 20 years ago, and with his death, on January 10, 1985, the future of the laboratory has been of great concern to many in the field.

Agri-Systems will continue to be active in testing of soils for USGA Putting Green Construction Specifications. Judith Ferguson Gockel, Dr. Ferguson's daughter, was the manager and chief technician for Agri-Systems for eight years; she will continue the laboratory operations.

In addition to the training received from her father and some formal course work at Texas A&M, Mrs. Gockel has studied soil physics and soil mechanics. She developed and now holds two patents, based on fluid movement and soil structure, widely used in the oil drilling industry today. She and her

husband, a petroleum engineer, operate an engineering and laboratory service for the oil industry.

Plans have been made to upgrade and improve the present soil testing laboratory equipment and to expand the services now offered. Assurances have been made that the same high standards for testing and the same frame of reference will be maintained. The new mailing address is:

Agri-Systems of Texas, Inc.
15511 Baldswelle
Tomball, TX 77375
Attn: Judith Ferguson Gockel
(713) 376-4412

For efficient delivery in the Houston area, use U.S. Mail or United Parcel Service. Rates for the various testing procedures remain unchanged.

Agri-Systems is *NOT* the "USGA Soils Laboratory." Rather, it is a private contractor. It has agreed to conduct the physical soil analysis requirements for USGA Green Section Specification greens.