



18th hole (from the tee) — Old Course.

Reflections on a Recent Journey to Scotland

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THIS PILGRIMAGE started with an opportunity to attend the Scotland International Golf Greenkeepers Association (SIGGA) Conference in St. Andrews, Scotland, in early October, 1985. I was accompanied by my colleague Wayne Otto, Superintendent of Ozaukee Country Club, Mequon, Wisconsin, as well as Stanley Zontek and Patrick O'Brien, agronomists with the USGA Green Section.

We arrived at Prestwick airport on the morning of October 6th. In the rain we drove to St. Andrews, arriving around noon, and checked into a bed and breakfast called West Park. Throughout Scotland people open their homes to visitors for a night's sleep and breakfast at a very reasonable cost. We ate lunch, got our cameras and walked to the Old Course. When we got there, no one was playing golf. Old Tom Morris, Curator of St. Andrew's Old Course from 1865 until his death in 1908, once said to a critic of the custom, "The Old Course needs a rest on the Sabbath, sir, even if you don't." It has been that way for over a century — golf is not played on the Old Course on Sunday.

What a breath-taking view! The Royal and Ancient Golf Club, the first tee and the 18th green are nestled along the narrow street and shops of St. Andrews. There is no other scene on earth quite like this.

The Links was part of the inheritance of the burgh of St. Andrews bestowed upon it in the 12th century. No one knows the exact age of the Old Course or the exact age of the game of golf, but the inhabitants of the town have been accustomed to playing golf over the links since the 15th century, and the earliest historical reference to the games is in an edict of 1457 issued by James II of Scotland. To play St. Andrews is like entering another time — a journey back in history.

That night we attended a wine tasting reception, a kick-off for the SIGGA Conference. At the reception I met Walter Woods, Links Superintendent of St. Andrews. Walter is Vice President of SIGGA and a most gracious host. James Neilson, President of SIGGA, Greenkeeper at Muirfield, also greeted us and the directors and committee people did an excellent job of putting this conference and tournament together. We were flat-

tered by being invited to Ransome's Greenkeepers/Superintendents Golf Tournament banquet. The tournament was played on the Old Course and was won by Canada. Scotland was second and the USA third.

At every course and club we visited, we found people proud of their heritage and in love with the game of golf. This was exemplified by Tom Shiel, who took us for a walk through Carnoustie Golf Course after we played there. A native of Scotland who lived some years in the United States, Shiel is the professional at Panmure Golf Club and a member of Carnoustie. He can recite what happened in every one of the five Open Championships played there.

OUR NEXT STOP was Gleneagles — a great golf course in superb condition. Gleneagles is set amid 610 acres and is surrounded by unspoiled countryside. We played the Kings Course. Its beauty is beyond description. After golf we met Jimmy Kidd, estate and golf course manager, and he took us on a tour of the hotel and exceptional grounds.



Postage Stamp at Troon.

Anyone who has been to the Midwest Regional Turf Foundation meeting at Purdue University has met John Souter. John, a landscape architect involved in sports fields and golf course remodeling, has now designed and is building a golf course in Ballindalloch, Scotland. We all share his enthusiasm, and it appears to us that this course will take its rightful place in Scottish golf.

We next visited Royal Dornoch — home of Donald Ross. A great golf course that you must see. It is entrenched in history. This was not just a round of golf — it was an adventure! We played many other great golf courses and could easily write an article on each one; Muirfield, Royal Troon, Prestwick, and Turnberry. We played 16 rounds of golf on 15 golf courses in 14 days. We played 288 holes of golf, never found a weak course or played a poorly designed golf hole.

Turf in Scotland

The turf in Scotland is bentgrass on greens; bentgrass, annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*) and fine leaf fescues on tees and fairways. Bentgrass was predominant over *Poa annua*. This should tell us something. Soil pH was 4, and this seemed to be a goal that many try to achieve. Lies on fairways were tight. Greens were not as fast as we were accustomed to, but many courses were spiking and/or top-

dressings. Much rain had fallen in the previous weeks. They were still very good, and when dealing with the severe surface contours, the greens were in keeping with the average golfer's ability.

Bunkers on the golf course were magnificent. They were mostly deep with straight faces made of stacked sod. To hit a ball in them was a lost stroke.

Gorse, contrary to my earlier thinking, is not a feathered bird. It is a bush that grows everywhere — in the roughs, on the links golf courses. Gorse has a yellow flower in spring, is about three to six feet high with very *sharp* needles and very thick growth. To hit a ball in a patch of gorse is like hitting it out of bounds. Just tee it up again because the chance of having a shot or even finding the ball is almost non-existent.

Golf in Scotland as I See It

Golf is a way of life in Scotland. Changes come only with much deliberation. Golf is accessible and affordable to everyone. Scotland has kept golf much the same since the 19th century. You see no golf carts. When you play the great courses in Scotland, take a caddie. Their local knowledge will mean a lower score and an enjoyable round of golf.

There are no yardage markers on the golf courses. I've heard golfers in the U.S. say "if we put yardages on every sprinkler

head we could speed up play." Yet, on the unmarked courses of Scotland, even with their deep roughs and Gorse, the 16 rounds of golf we played were played in four hours or less. In fact, after the visit, I'm not sure that yardage markers don't create slow play. The perception of depth or distance to the flag stick is a part of the challenge of the game — and it still is in Scotland! At St. Andrews, as well as many of the links courses, the wind blows so hard that exact knowledge of distance means very little in club selection. I can't believe some courses in the U.S. put markers on flag sticks to show hole location. I wonder what Old Tom Morris would say if he could see that?

This has been an experience of a lifetime for me as it was for Wayne, Stan, and Pat. We all agree these courses are a page back in history. Several were built as far back as the 15th century, and yet they have not been intimidated by new equipment or modern golfers. I don't think they ever will be.

The people we met and the new friendships we made are all gratifying to us. We appreciate the hospitality shown by our colleagues in Scotland and thank each and every one for sharing with us their love, knowledge, and personal commitment to the Royal and Ancient game of golf.