

## 2016 Odyssey

Greeting to all my golf friends,

**(Please note website now “[thegolfodyssey.net](http://thegolfodyssey.net)” and email address “[rmccoyjr62@gmail.com](mailto:rmccoyjr62@gmail.com)”).**

2016 was another exciting and rewarding year. The highlights:

### Significant Trip

November/December: Round-the-world - New Zealand/Australia/Singapore/Vietnam/Thailand/United Arab Emirates (31 days: 28,335 air miles; 1,505 driving miles; 27 rounds on 21 different courses)

### Other Courses Played

Bermuda: Mid Ocean, Port Royal (March)

Canada: Memphremagog (June)

Florida: Bear’s Club (March), Emerald Dunes (May), Naples Grande (all winter)

Louisiana: Country Club of Louisiana (May)

Maine: Belgrade Lakes (July); Boothbay Harbor (all summer)

North Carolina: Greensboro (October), Roaring Gap (May)

New York: Sunningdale (October), Tuxedo (May), Winged Foot-East (October)

(Total Courses Played 1,120 Between 1963 and 2017)

### Other Items

Moving summer residence from Boston area to Boothbay, Maine

Comparing 20-year change in GOLF Magazine World Top 100

Website/Blog “The Odyssey” ([thegolfodyssey.net](http://thegolfodyssey.net)) going strong with more content added, but a slight glitch with the domain name

Writing of book, *A Golf Odyssey with The Real McCoy*, zero progress in 2016 due to building new house along with scheduling and executing golf trips

2017 Plans - Scotland (February/March): Scottish Design Masters (Inverness); Trump Turnberry (Ailsa), Ardfin, Machrie, Glasgow Gables, Dundonald

Alaska/Canada/Minnesota/Wisconsin (September): Moose Run (Creek), Banff Springs, Jasper, Spring Valley, Erin Hills, Sand Valley; Florida (October): Streamsong (Black)

## November/December “Big Trip”

### Introduction

Newly-built, high-quality courses keep getting located in even more remote parts of the world with each passing year (using the USA as the starting point). This new segment of the golf course business was started by Dick Youngscap in the sand hills of Nebraska in the early 1990s – where there were more cattle than people. Then in the late 1990s remoteness was further defined by Mike Keiser five hours south of Portland, Oregon at Bandon on the Pacific Ocean. New Zealand came next by Julian Robertson in the mid-2000s, followed by northeast Tasmania. Then the remotest of the remote appeared on the radar screen: between the mainland of Australia and Tasmania is a body of water known as the Bass Strait. You have to look closely on a map, but there are some tiny islands in that body of water. One of them is King Island, where two world-class courses have recently opened.

At the beginning of 2016, I received an invitation to attend a week-long event in Bangkok, Thailand in early December. Thus, I began thinking about a Circle Pacific plane ticket to rate the new Tara Iti course in New Zealand as well as the King Island courses – Ocean Dunes and Cape Wickham. Then Gordon Dalgleish of

PerryGolf mentioned that Bangkok was essentially halfway around the world. Because I have had Yas Links in Abu Dhabi on my hit list for several years, I thought why not just buy a round-the-world ticket? Using the One World program through British Air, the saving was about 50% vs. the price of buying each leg separately. Yes, there was a lot of juggling around, but thanks to so many people, the wish list became a 31-day reality. So here we go.



Map from Doubek Consulting (Brian Doubek) Salt Lake City, Utah

Day	Date	Course/Transportation/Hotel	Miles
Wed	16-Nov	Taxi to airport	34
		Fly Fort Myers/Dallas 737-800	1017
		Fly Dallas/Los Angeles A320B	1235
		Dinner with Diana & Tim Clark at Valley Hunt Club	
		Fly LA/New Zealand-Auckland 787-800	6504
Thurs	17-Nov	In Air	
Fri	18-Nov	Arrive Auckland	
		Fly Auckland/Queenstown A320-200	636
		Hertz Rental Car	
		Stay Lodge at The Hills in Arrowtown	10
Sat	19-Nov	Play <b>Jack's Point Golf</b> 7:50am	15
		Stay Lodge at The Hills in Arrowtown	
Sun	20-Nov	Play <b>The Hills Golf Club</b> 8am	
		Fly Queenstown/Auckland A320-200	636
		Hertz Rental Car	
		Stay Holiday Inn Auckland Airport (Mangere)	8

Mon	21-Nov	Drive to Tara Iti in Mangawhai	74
		Play <b>Tara Iti</b> noon	
		Stay Tara Iti	
Tues	22-Nov	Play <b>Tara Iti</b> 8am	
		Drive to Wairakei near Lake Taupo	230
		Stay Wairakei Resort	
Wed	23-Nov	Play <b>The Kinloch Club</b> 8:15am	
		Drive to Auckland Airport	165
		Fly Auckland/Melbourne A380-800	1640
		Stay Park Royal Melbourne Airport	
Thurs	24-Nov	Fly Melbourne/Tasmania-King Island SAAB 340	161
		P&A Car Rental	
		Play <b>Ocean Dunes</b> 1pm	
		Stay with Denise & Graeme Grant	
Fri	25-Nov	Play <b>Cape Wickham</b> 7am	29
		Stay Cape Wickham	
Sat	26-Nov	Play <b>Cape Wickham</b> 7am	
		Play <b>King Island Golf &amp; Bowling Club</b>	
		Stay with Denise & Graeme Grant	29
Sun	27-Nov	Play <b>Ocean Dunes</b> 8am	
		Fly King Island/Melbourne SAAB 340	161
		Stay Park Royal Melbourne Airport	
Mon	28-Nov	Fly Melbourne/Singapore A330-200	3750
		Stay Sofitel Sentosa	17
Tues	29-Nov	Play <b>Sentosa GC (Serapong)</b> 7:07am	
		Stay Sofitel Sentosa	
Wed	30-Nov	Play <b>Sentosa GC (New Tanjong)</b> 7:07am	
		Taxi to airport	17
		Fly Singapore/Ho Chi Minh City A321	675
		Van to The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip	70
		Stay The Grand Ho Tram Strip	
Thurs	1-Dec	Play <b>The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip</b> 7am	
		Stay The Grand Ho Tram Strip	
Fri	2-Dec	Play <b>The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip</b> 7am	
		Stay The Grand Ho Tram Strip	
Sat	3-Dec	Van to Ho Chi Minh City Airport	70
		Fly Ho Chi Minh City/Bangkok A321-200	445
		Stay Centara Grand Hotel, Bangkok (Ladprar)	25
Sun	4-Dec	Play <b>Ayodhya Links</b> 1pm	35
		Stay Centara Grand Hotel	35
Mon	5-Dec	Play <b>Amata Spring CC</b> 11:10am	50
		Stay Centara Grand Hotel	50
Tues	6-Dec	Play <b>Ayodhya Links</b> 11am	35
		Stay Centara Grand Hotel	35
Wed	7-Dec	Play <b>Ayodhya Links</b> 11am	35
		Stay Centara Grand Hotel	35
Thurs	8-Dec	Watch semifinals World Club Championship	35
		Stay Centara Grand Hotel	35
Fri	9-Dec	Watch finals World Club Championship	35
		Stay Centara Grand Hotel	35
Sat	10-Dec	Fly Bangkok/Qatar (Doha) A380-800	3270
		Fly Doha/Abu Dhabi (United Arab Emirate) A320	202

		Taxi to hotel	7
		Stay Park Inn Radisson Yas Island	
Sun	11-Dec	Play <b>Saadiyat Beach GC</b> 7am	14
		Play <b>Abu Dhabi GC (National)</b> 12:50pm	25
		Stay Park Inn Radisson Yas Island	11
Mon	12-Dec	Play <b>Yas Links</b> 8:20am	1
		Van to Dubai	62
		Stay Pullman Jumeirah Lakes Towers	
Tues	13-Dec	Play <b>Dubai Creek</b> 7am	22
		Play <b>Emirates GC (Majilis)</b> 1:30pm	21
		Stay Pullman Jumeirah Lakes Towers	4
Wed	14-Dec	Play <b>Jumeirah Golf Estates (Fire)</b> 7:30am	11
		Play <b>Jumeirah Golf Estates (Earth)</b>	
		Stay Pullman Jumeirah Lakes Towers	11
Thurs	15-Dec	Play <b>The Els Club</b> 7am	10
		Play <b>Trump Intl GC Dubai</b> 11:45am	11
		Stay Pullman Jumeirah Lakes Towers	18
Fri	16-Dec	Taxi to airport	21
		Fly Dubai/London (Heathrow) 747-400	3410
		Fly London (Heathrow)/Charlotte A330-300	3992
		Fly Charlotte/Fort Myers A320	600
		Drive home - Naples, FL	34

## Day 1 Fly Naples (Fort Myers)/Dallas/LA/Take off for Auckland, New Zealand

I was up at 4:45 am on Wednesday November 16 for a 5:20 am cab ride (found out Uber drivers do not get up that early). Lifting off from Southwest Airport in Fort Myers at 7:30 am and arrived in LA at 2:40 pm West Coast time after a stop in Dallas. With an eight-hour layover, I had contacted Harvard Business School friend of 55 years Tim Clark. He picked me up and with wife Diana we had a lovely dinner at their Valley Hunt Club in Pasadena. Then it was back LAX for an American Air 11:10 pm flight.

## Day 2 In Air Crossing International Dateline

### Day 3 Arrive Auckland Fly Auckland/Queenstown Stay Arrowtown

After arriving Auckland (North Island) at 9:20 am, there was the 12:05 pm Air New Zealand flight to Queenstown (South Island), during which flight the pilot mentioned the Queenstown Marathon *next day*. When I plan these trips, I try to plan for every eventuality knowing that that is impossible. In this case, who would have thought I'd encounter an international marathon for 9,500 runners!

It would have been impossible to make a hotel reservation with this many visitors in the area. Fortunately, golf course photographer and fellow GOLF Magazine panelist Joann Dost had put me in touch with Sir Michael Hill, who had invited me to stay on his estate for two nights. From the airport I drove northeast 10 miles to Arrowtown and Sir Michael's 500-acre estate. At the golf course clubhouse, I had a sandwich and was given the key to a rustic cabin. After 9,400 miles and 21½ hours in the air (too many hours to count how long I'd been awake with the time zone changes and the international date line crossing), I hit the hay for a LONG night's sleep.

### Day 4 Play Jack's Point Meet Sir Michael Hill Stay Arrowtown

This was my fourth trip to New Zealand – 1990 to play Paraparaumu Beach when it first appeared on the World 100, 1997 to again play Paraparaumu on the-100-day-trip, and 2006 to play Julian Robertson's two additions to the World 100 (Kauri Cliffs and Cape Kidnappers). Since the 1996 trip, my great New Zealand

friend, Bob Glading, sadly passed away in 2014 at age 94. The last time we played together he was 88-years-old and carried his bag for all 18 holes. At that time, I asked for the secret of his good health. It was swimming in the ocean almost every day. Bob was a former New Zealand Open champion who'd flown propeller planes off aircraft carriers for the British Navy during WW II. He was also a long-time golf writer and golf tour guide in New Zealand and Australia. I certainly missed not being with him on this trip.

Saturday November 19 I was on the first tee at Jack's Point Club (just southeast of Queenstown) with playing companion Simon Forshaw. He had been the construction supervisor for the course and then became course superintendent. With a motorized cart in a cold 40 degrees, no wind (by 7<sup>th</sup> hole 10-15 mph), and sun blocked out by a nearby mountain range, we would finish in 60 degrees along with a hot sun.

Being "Down Under" the weather in November is the equivalent of May in the northern part of the USA. Also, here in the southern part of the South Island it's ski country. Jack's Point is closed mid-June to mid-August. Just three weeks ago there was snow on the course. Despite this being the early part of the golf season, the course was in excellent condition with fast running fescue grass fairways and smooth bent grass greens. Arrowtown resident John Darby designed and owns this public course and real estate development that opened in November 2008 (construction started in 2005).

The course starts and ends in a valley (formerly used for sheep and cattle grazing) and is surrounded on all sides by varied and beautiful scenery. On the east side is the sharp-faced Remarkables Mountain range up close and personal. The first few holes play steeply uphill to a high plateau on the west side. The view from here encompasses parts of the next several holes bordering Lake Wakatipu. This is a large body of cobalt blue water framed by snowcapped mountain ranges (see picture below). The lake itself does not affect any of the shots. The bottom line is that the setting at Jack's Point is one of the best in the world for a golf course.



*Jack's Point 7<sup>th</sup> Hole Par 3*

In addition, the golf holes at Jack's Point are very good: huge greens, deep rugged looking bunkers (blending naturally with the wind-swept landscape), and streams and lakes that challenge several shots. Jack's Point is the best course in the Queenstown area and one of the top courses in New Zealand.



*With Sir Michael Hill*

Although the main point of these trips is to play newly-built highly-regarded courses, an added benefit is to meet and learn about successful and interesting people. Sir Michael Hill is one of these people. After returning from Jack's Point I had the privilege to spend some time with Sir Michael. He built the Michael Hill Co. (mainly jewelry) starting in 1979 with one store in Whangarei (the most northern city in New Zealand and 100 miles north of Auckland) to a current 303 in New Zealand, Australia,

Canada, and the USA with 2,000 employees. Sir Michael is also a noted philanthropist.

## **Day 5 Play The Hills Fly Queenstown/Auckland Stay Holiday Inn**

At 8:15 am I'm on the steeply perched first tee at The Hills course in a motorized cart. The weather is cloudy, a cold 40 degrees with the wind blowing 20-25 mph. Into the round the sun came out and the wind partially

calmed down. I had the whole course to myself. The Hills is a private club with 300 members and a waiting list. It is on 250 acres of Sir Michael's estate (former deer farm). He built the course there over a five-year period finishing in 2007 with John Darby designer.

Part of The Hills's terrain is hilly; other areas are fairly flat. Part of the course is tree-lined and other areas are open. Much of the open areas are framed by deer grass, which forms dense clumps from the base with spike-like flower stalks growing 2-3 feet tall with striking foundation form (shown in picture below). Panoramic views of the nearby Crown Range can be seen from many parts of the course. On eight holes lakes, ponds or streams have a variety of attractive native plant life. There are also wetland hazards. Bunkers (89 in total) are sharply edged, mostly round, and vary in size from small to huge. Substantial elevation changes exist along with many elevated tees and greens (small to large in size). The course is good enough to have already hosted five New Zealand Opens with more scheduled.



*Next to 8<sup>th</sup> Tee The Hills course*

Personifying Sir Michael's artistic bent, he has placed large sculptures throughout the course such as a team of horses. A London-type red phone booth partially hidden in the trees near the 8<sup>th</sup> tee was the most unusual object I have ever seen on a golf course. This unlikely object poses the question - what is the most unusual object you have ever seen on a golf course?

The whole experience at The Hills was wonderful. Fun course, functional modern clubhouse (two-thirds underground including spa and gym), friendly and efficient staff, peaceful lodging, and most important, meeting and talking to Sir Michael.

After golf I had lunch with Australian Darius Oliver. He has studied 1,500 courses in 45 countries and written three highly-acclaimed books on golf courses, complete with handsome pictures. Darius is also Architecture Editor at "Australian Golf Digest" as well as being involved in golf course design. Sir Michael has hired Darius to design a nine-hole short course. Meeting Darius at The Hills was a surprise and I was pleased to tour the terrain for the new addition with him.

From Queenstown, I took an Air New Zealand flight back to Auckland and the Airport Holiday Inn.

## **Day 6 Drive toward Mangawhai                  Play Tara Iti                  Stay Tara Iti**

On Monday morning it was a drive north 74 miles through Auckland toward Mangawhai on the eastern side of the North Island. South of Mangawhai the route to Tara Iti is a series of turns on narrow country roads (precise directions highly recommended). The club is directly on the Pacific Ocean (Hauraki Gulf).

At lunch the foursome gathered - head professional Paul Reid, Jim Rohrstaff of Legacy Partners, and member Brian Hannan (also member and former captain at Royal Auckland). Here I learned a lot about the course. It opened October 2015. The principle owner is Los Angeles-based venture capitalist Ric Kayne. Tom Doak was assisted in the course design by John Darby (see Jack's Point and The Hills above). The investment is about \$65 million, which included the cost of removing about one million trees and their stumps to expose the sand. The land was a former commercial pine tree farm with the trees harvested every 30 years. The trees were dense and close together when Tom inspected and routed the course. Just imagine standing with your arms spread out at shoulder height and doing a 360 turn. You would have touched four trees. I am always amazed how golf course architects can visualize a course while walking through dense vegetation or a forest of trees.



*Tara Iti Before and After*

Tara Iti is a private facility for members and their guests. However, non-members have one-time privileges of a package including luxurious accommodations, excellent dining in beautiful surroundings, and playing a world-class course. It is an extremely expensive opportunity, but as I would find out, worth every penny.



*Tara Iti L/R head professional Paul Reid, member Brian Hannan, Jim Rohrstaff of Legacy Partners*

At 1 pm we were on the first tee with caddies in 75-degree sun-drenched weather with a strong 20 mph wind. Tara Iti is walking only as no motorized carts are available. However, it is an easy walking course. The front nine is south of the clubhouse on lower ground than the back nine (lowest point at 3<sup>rd</sup> green 40 feet above sea level) and less-exposed to wind. (South of the front nine is enough available land for a second course at Tara Iti.) The back nine is much higher (#13 green 110 feet above sea level). Thus the back is much more exposed to wind. By the time we reached the exposed

uphill 12th hole, the wind was roaring 40 mph against us.

The course features fast-running fescue grass on tees, fairways, and greens (closest course to equator for fescue, but there is almost no humidity). Because of the wind, there are trademark Doak-wide fairways (100 yards wide on the 6<sup>th</sup> hole). There are very few trees, but a tremendous amount of wind-blown, hard packed sand with some vegetation spread around. Even though Tara Iti might have the most exposed sand of any course in the world, every bit of sand is considered a waste area so grounding a club in the sand is not a penalty. Just like Pine Valley, there is not a rake to be seen.

Many of the greens are massive in size: #2 55 yards wide and 40 yards deep (long), #11 a boomerang shape 46 yards wide and 47 yards long, #15 55 yards long. A few are more modest in size, but all are very heavily contoured (another Doak feature). The greens are slightly-to-modestly elevated causing less than perfect approach shots to tumble off the green edges and scoot along the closely-mowed, fast-running fescue grass. With the wind blowing and your ball careening off steep contours, you have to use tremendous imagination to get the ball close to the pin. Visualizing and shaping shots aimed 10, 20, even 30 yards away from the pin, shot options are unlimited.

Throughout the round there are an abundance of striking water views, but water is never in play. Due to environmental restrictions, none of the holes is closer than 55 yards from the shoreline. With a ton of sand, mammoth fairways, and no water, it is impossible to lose a ball.

At the end of the round I was exhilarated. The course is unlike any course in the world that I have played and falls into the category of one you would like to play every day.

At dinner overlooking the beautiful Pacific Ocean, general manager Matt Guzik (formerly GM at The Stock Farm in Montana) provided interesting conversation.

### **Day 7 Play Tara Iti Drive to Wairakei Stay Wairakei Resort**

Early the next morning, Paul Reid and I are on the first tee with caddies for another shot at Tara Iti. It is 55 degrees, bright sun, and wind at 15 mph. For the first few holes the low morning shadows revealed every green undulation in detail. At the end of the quick round, there was certainly no letdown from the previous day's experience.

Having a long drive ahead of me, including busy Auckland, I was provided a box lunch and was on my way. It was a five hour 230-mile drive south to Wairakei which is just north of Lake Taupo. I spent the night at the Wairakei Resort, an area I was familiar with based on the 2006 trip when Elaine and I stopped here on the way to Cape Kidnappers.

### **Day 8 Play Kinloch/Drive to Auckland Airport/Fly Auckland/Melbourne/Stay at Airport**

The next morning I'm on the first tee at The Kinloch Club in a motorized cart. I would have the course to myself. It is 60 degrees, bright sun, and almost no wind (temperature eventually got to 75 degrees).

Kinloch is a Jack Nicklaus Signature course that opened in 2007 and was almost immediately taken over by the banks. Auckland real estate developer John Sax acquired the development in 2011 and has invested \$35 NZ million in a lodge and guest villas. Home sites are for sale, but I saw only three finished houses.

The course starts in a valley with the lodge and villas perched on top of a tall peak overlooking most of the property. There is a mountain range in the distance on the east side of the course with a dense forest in between. Famous Lake Taupo features in the club's marketing material but is nowhere to be seen on the front nine, which is on the north side of the property.

The course has the reputation of being the most difficult in New Zealand. Built on a former deer farm it immediately became apparent that Jack used every trick in his designer's repertoire to make the course interesting. It looked as if a lot of dirt was moved; almost everything appeared man-made. The fairways heave and tumble so there is barely a level stance. There are 128 rough edged bunkers with 10 or more on five of the holes. Many of the bunkers are placed in front of angled, roller coaster greens. Fortunately, water comes into play on just two holes.

The ninth hole was not good. Steeply ascending for all its 455 yards from the tips, the uphill tee shot is over a ridge hiding a plateau landing area. The second shot is almost vertically uphill over long grass to an elevated, angled green hidden by a huge hill and protected by a fronting bunker. The grade covering the second shot is so steep, carts are not permitted.

The back nine is on the south side of the property and starts with the 10<sup>th</sup> tee atop a peak where the lodge and guest villas are located. From here the first view of Lake Taupo is in the distance with a village between the course and the lake. The new feature on the 2<sup>nd</sup> nine is deep gullies with vegetation. There were forced carries over these gullies adding to the challenge. I concur that Kinloch is the most difficult course in New Zealand.

After golf and a quick sandwich, I was back on the road going north 165 miles to the Auckland Airport. The original schedule had me on a 737 Jet Star (part of Qantas) flight to Melbourne. In the early stages of planning the trip, I noticed a much more convenient Emirates flight, but Emirates was not part of the One World

program. Arriving earlier than planned at the airport, the nice Qantas lady asked me if I wanted to take their earlier flight which I gladly accepted. And bingo, it was that Emirates flight I originally wanted to take.

This was my first experience with Emirates and I was blown away both on the ground and in the air. The Business Class Lounge was the nicest lounge I've ever been in (this includes a handful of first class lounges). Among all sorts of goodies was steakhouse quality steak (the same quality steak was served on the plane compared to the mystery meat offered by British Air). And the plane was a spacious A380 (the largest plane in the world) instead of my original cramped 737.

Arriving in Melbourne at 8:50 pm, it was a short walk with luggage to the convenient ParkRoyal Melbourne Airport hotel.

### **Day 9 Fly Melbourne/King Island      Play Ocean Dunes      Stay in Currie**

Mid-morning, a small twin-engine turboprop 30-seat SAAB 340 took me for a 50-minute flight to tiny King Island. The contrast between this plane and last evenings gigantic A380 with seat capacity of 490 was notable.



*SAAB 340 Melbourne to King Island*



*A380-800 Auckland to Melbourne*



*King Island in White Box Left Picture*

South of Melbourne on the Australian mainland lies the island state of Tasmania (location of the former most-remote courses in the world at Barnboogle). The body of water between these two land masses is the Bass Strait, treacherous and noted for shipwrecks. On a standard map of Australia, a magnifying glass is needed to identify the number of *tiny* islands (50 in total) spread around the Bass Strait. King Island is located at the western entrance and is officially part of Tasmania. King Island is one of the largest islands with a population of about 2,000 people.

The only airport on the island is at Currie which is on the west side of the island. Currie has the largest population (about 750) and has the only post office on the island. The airport does not have aviation fuel so planes coming in better have enough fuel to get back to the mainland or northern Tasmania. There is a once-a-week commercial ferry service with no passengers allowed. Occasionally, the weather in the harbor at Grassy is so bad the ferry cannot dock so it can be two weeks before the island is restocked.

I am here to play two newly opened world-class golf courses. Strong winds made for a wild and wooly experience. Graeme Grant, friend of 30 years, was at the airport to meet me. We then went over to his house in Currie where I was pleased to again be with Graeme's ever-positive wife Denise (see 2006 Odyssey). I stayed with the Grants for two of the three nights on the island and we would have two lovely dinners together.

Graeme is part owner, designer, and construction supervisor of Ocean Dunes (only five minutes from the airport) which just officially opened in September. I would play three of the four rounds on King Island with him. Spending all this time with Graeme gave me a good feel for what it took to design and built a high-quality golf course in a remote location in difficult weather conditions. Certainly not for the faint of heart.

Graeme has practiced golf course architecture for 45 years as superintendent at world renown Kingston Heath (16 years), then director of Newton Grant & Spencer, and finally his own design firm "Graeme Grant Golf Design." Three years ago he bought a house in Currie and has spent the entire time since then 24/7 creating his lifelong dream that just opened in September 2016.

Stories included how Graeme found the land, designed the course, and then built the course in harsh conditions. Constant high wind when a day or more of shaping a green or bunker is totally blown away by strong overnight winds. Grassing the course was an immense challenge. Fescue grass is on the fairways and bent grass on the greens. There was a severe drought throughout year two and year three had a series of torrential rains. These unfavorable conditions delayed opening the course by 11 months.

Unfortunately, the Ocean Dunes Company is undercapitalized, so building the planned onsite accommodations has been postponed. I learned on this trip that the business plan for public access remote golf has green fees covering golf course operations and profits come from accommodations, food, and drink. To fill in the housing gap, Ocean Dunes bought Parers Hotel (including a pub) in Currie and remodeled the rooms. As yet, business volume is not covering hotel and pub operating expenses, causing an unplanned financial burden on the overall project.

At 1:30 pm Graeme and I are on the elevated 1<sup>st</sup> tee at Ocean Dunes. The wind is blasting in our faces at 35 mph along with cloudy skies and 55-degree temperature. We are both pulling trolleys on what would turn out to be a hilly course once away from the coast.

Fortunately, unlike the two courses at Barnbougle, the Tasmania government permitted holes to be built directly on the King Island shoreline. I think the government permitted this because the shore line is protected by sturdy rocks while at Barnbougle there is only windswept sand for protection. At Ocean Dunes water and craggy rocks come into play on the first four coastal holes as well as #10 and #11. There is one creekside hole and the other 11 are spread out in tall dunes. These distinctive flavors provide variety and balance.



*Ocean Dunes 1<sup>st</sup> Hole Par 5 2<sup>nd</sup> Shot*

The 1<sup>st</sup> hole is beautiful, but daunting, especially into a strong wind. It is an uphill and then downhill sharp dogleg par 5. You can see the surf, rocks and green in the distance to the right. The tee shot must be strong to get to the top of a steep hill. From there it is a spectacular downhill 2<sup>nd</sup> shot exhibiting all the magnificent aspects of Ocean Dunes. Looking through a saddle cut through a tall dune, there sits the large green in the distance back-dropped by jagged rocks and then miles of crashing surf that gets louder as you walk to the green. A dramatic opening hole to say the least.

The short par 3 fourth hole of 135 yards is another stunner. The hole spans two small rocky peninsulas, both hard by the crashing surf. It is an exciting tee shot over a cove. Into the 35 mph wind the green looks much farther away than 135 yards (see off my right shoulder in the picture below). Although the green is shallow (14 yards in the middle), it is quite wide (25 yards) and playable. This is the end of the property line, but from the back of the green you can see for miles south down the rugged coastline and also out to the vast countryside. It is an exhilarating place with a clear, clean salt air ambience.



*Ocean Dunes 4<sup>th</sup> Hole Par 3*

The course turns left and inland for the rest of the front nine. The other two coastal holes are #10 and #11, after which the course turns right for the inland stretch on the back nine. The non-ocean holes lie in a bold landscape with expansive dunes. The design features fit naturally, with fairways wide and sloping, rough three to four inches thick, and bunkers (70 in total) large, deep, and with a blowout look.

Graeme identified green locations beautifully nestled in sides and on top of dunes. The greens are large to huge with much contour. The mostly perched greens have pronounced slopes, shoulders, ridges, false fronts, swales, humps, and tiers. The par 3 angled 8<sup>th</sup> green is 60 yards in width, the 9<sup>th</sup> is 51 yards deep, the par 3 10<sup>th</sup> is 53 yards wide. There is a double green 100 yards wide containing pin positions for holes 12 and 15. #13 has an infinity green 63 yards deep.

Graeme is a serious scratch golfer and his course design here reflects his outlook. Lower handicap players will enjoy the challenging shot options, while the higher handicap players might find the course somewhat on the difficult side. However, both categories of golfers will enjoy fabulous scenery as the roaring ocean can be seen from 17 holes. Some of the best views are from the inland holes. For instance, from the elevated 8<sup>th</sup> green you can see for miles up and down the coast. Looking backward on the uphill holes is a must.

## **Day 10 Play Cape Wickham**

## **Stay Cape Wickham**

Early the next morning Graeme and I drove separate cars 29 miles north to the Cape Wickham course. This is *the remotest of the remote* (coming from the USA) in terms of high-quality golf. The course is on the northwest tip of the island and the only structure within 20 miles is the famous lighthouse on the back nine. The next land mass looking west is 9,000 miles away (South Africa).

The course is in the most exposed location on King Island and totally unprotected from the weather elements roaring westerly out of the Southern Ocean into the Bass Strait. There is a reason this area is called “the Roaring 40s” and also known as the start of “Shipwreck Trail” because of powerful storms and strong currents. After two days of golf in exposed 30 to 45 mph wind plus strong gusts, it felt more like “the Roaring 60s”! The second day was the toughest weather I had ever had while trying to rate a course -- sideways whipping rain and cold 50 degree temperatures adding to the discomfort for many of the holes played. How strong was the wind? Birds are going in reverse (being pushed backward as they are trying to fly forward).



*Cape Wickham 10<sup>th</sup> Hole Par 4 Approach Shot*

The setting at Cape Wickham is *spectacular* with dramatic ocean views and crashing surf. The salt spray and fresh air are invigorating. Eight holes play along the jagged rocky shoreline with another two having downhill approach shots with a water backdrop beyond the green. Just like Ocean Dunes, rocks and churning sea are an integral part of the design of the coastline holes. Some of the holes are on exposed clifftops with white capped surf crashing off huge rocks 25 to 100 feet below.



*Lighthouse*

Another neat feature at Cape Wickham is its 157-foot lighthouse, which has a prominent position on the course as a back drop to several holes. It is the tallest lighthouse in the Southern Hemisphere. Standing on the first tee turning sideways you can see holes 14-18 as well as the lighthouse.

A design challenge is 81 rough-edged, semi-deep, high-faced bunkers. Their size is medium to small. The fairways are extremely wide as you would expect on a windy course. The first cut of rough is only a couple of inches high. However, some of the next stage of rough is brutal – two to three feet high thick vegetation with signs saying “snakes extremely poisonous.” (I learned later the signs were referring to tiger snakes and copperheads.)

The real challenge off the tee is forced carries on 16 holes (including three of the par 3s). Some of these also have blind shots. The forced carries are over all types of trouble –short rough, rocks, tall vegetation. On calm days or downwind carrying a tee shot over the trouble is no problem, even for a high handicapper. However, into a strong wind it is a whole different ball game. Wanting to hit a low tee shot to penetrate into the wind, you might be confronted with the challenge of clearing tall vegetation just in front of the tee. The 8<sup>th</sup> hole tee shot can be really difficult. It is an upsloping blind shot over rocks and tall vegetation with a dune on the right side. Depending on which tee is used, the forced carry can be 110 to 145 yards. Then there is brutal far rough just off the right side fairway.



*Cape Wickham 8<sup>th</sup> Hole Rough with  
Poisonous Tiger Snakes*

*18<sup>th</sup> Hole Dog-Leg Right Forced Carry Over  
Vegetation and Rocks On Victoria Bay*

Moving toward the greens, there are mounds and humps around some greens, some of which are at cliff edge. The greens, medium-to-large in size with subtle to moderate contours, putted well. I believe the whole course is fescue grass which was in good condition.

The course opened in November 2015 with American Mike DeVries as designer. After golf on the first day I spent some time with Cape Wickham owner Duncan Andrews and Darius Oliver (see previous section on The Hills). Darius introduced Duncan to the land where Cape Wickham now resides and also collaborated with Mike on the course design. Duncan is a businessman who first became involved in owning golf courses in 1994 with the purchase of the semi-finished The Dunes Golf Links southeast of Melbourne. He then developed 13<sup>th</sup> Beach Golf Club southwest of Melbourne.

Over-the-years I seem to get a fair number of out-of-left-field questions. Duncan asked me if I had ever seen the regular putting green as part of the first tee? After some thought, I could not answer the question. I said the most comparable was the 9<sup>th</sup> green at Oakmont being part of the practice putting green. Duncan was proud to say that Cape Wickham had the only 1<sup>st</sup> tee in the world with the practice putting green as part of the 1<sup>st</sup> tee.

During our conversation I learned that a proper clubhouse was a few years away. Currently there is an adequate tent type temporary clubhouse with nice views and offering good food and drink. The course will be closed during the winter months of June, July, and August. Duncan was pleased that onsite lodging was about to open. He had negotiated for 16 modular lodges (two beds each) shipped in from Adelaide. Actually, I would stay in one of the almost complete units that night. The accommodations are in a strategic location on top of a high dune to the left of the 1<sup>st</sup> fairway. The rooms command great views of part of the golf course, Victoria Bay (site of 18<sup>th</sup> hole), the lighthouse, and hundreds of miles of the Southern Ocean. The sunset was spectacular as the wind had blown most of the clouds away.

## **Day 11 Play Cape Wickham Play KI Golf & Bowling Club Stay in Currie**

As stated above, I played in more challenging conditions than the first day but was able to absorb some of the finer points of the course design. The golfing experience here is totally dependent on weather. In calm conditions the course would be a joy for all level of player. However, if the wind howls bring plenty of balls because blind shots, forced carries, thick long rough with potentially poisonous snakes, water, and rocks will get you. Leaving Cape Wickham, I thanked general manager Debbie Fisher and chief Mark for their excellent hospitality.

After arriving back at Graeme's house, we went out to play the local nine-hole course (whose setup also has a composite 18 holes) called the King Island Golf & Bowling Club. Some of the holes offer a spectacular setting hugging the rugged shoreline while others climb up and down some dunes. A fun experience pulling a trolley.

Graeme, Denise and I had dinner here as the club has good food and a spectacular 180-degree view overlooking nearby Bass Strait.

## **Day 12 Play Ocean Dunes Fly King Island/Melbourne Stay Airport Hotel**

At 8 am Graeme and I are on the first tee at Ocean Dunes. The weather is 55 degrees, cloudy, the wind is only 20 mph, and a brief shower. The sun would come out on the 2<sup>nd</sup> hole and the temperature rise to a comfortable 70 degrees. Graeme is carrying his bag (the course is walkable but you had better be in shape) while I'm in a motorized cart. I'm glad I had another go at Ocean Dunes to better refine my many positive thoughts about the course.

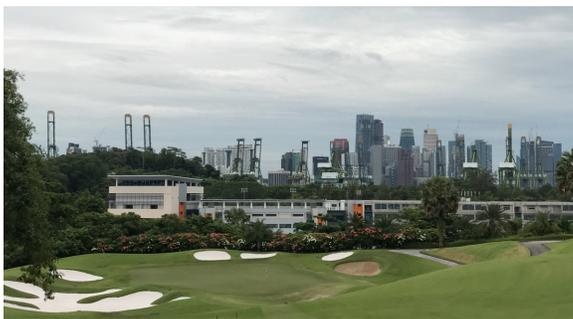
The hope for the future here is that the steady stream of golfers flying Melbourne to Barnbougle will now want more golf course variety and include the two world-class courses on King Island. Being convenient to the airport, a visit here involves just a two day, one-night visit – or flying in early in the morning, playing both courses, and then flying out the same day.

After golf at Ocean Dunes and a most sincere thank you to Denise and Graeme, I flew back to Melbourne on Regional Express with a 6:15 pm arrival. Then it was back to the ParkRoyal Melbourne Airport hotel. There I had a pleasurable dinner with John Cornish, a friend since 2002 from St. Andrews days. He is now an active member of Kingston Heath and has played about 75 of the World Top 100, so we had a lot to discuss.

## **Day 13 Fly Melbourne/Singapore Stay Sofitel Sentosa**

On Monday November 28, I had an easy five-hour flight to Singapore on Qantas. I had never been there but was told playing the two courses at Sentosa Golf Club would be worth a visit. A taxi took me south from the airport to the island of Sentosa, which has 14 hotels and a Universal Studios theme park. The small island is in the Singapore Strait, which empties out to the South China Sea. The Sofitel hotel could have not been more convenient to the golf club, just a 2-minute walk.

Singapore is a successful, bustling city-state on an island just south of Malaysia and just north of the equator with a tropical climate of heat, humidity, and rain. The semi-private club overlooks a narrow ship channel. Part of the view is container ships, terminals, and tall cranes for loading and unloading many ships. The Port of Singapore is the world's second-busiest port. This view will disappear by 2027 with the relocation of all container ship activity. Then there will be an unimpeded view from the courses to the impressive central business district skyline.



*Serapong 2<sup>nd</sup> Hole Par 3*



*5<sup>th</sup> Green Par 4*

## **Day 14 Play Sentosa (Serapong) Stay Sofitel Sentosa**

At 7 am I'm playing Serapong by myself in cloudy 70-degree humid weather with a 5-10 mph breeze. During the round there was some light rain, the temperature would get to 90 degrees, and the breeze pick up to 15 mph. The roofs on the rain shelters were the longest I have ever seen on a golf course. Obviously they get some serious downpours there.

The Serapong course is the second course built at Sentosa Golf Club. The design was created in 1982 by Ron Fream, with half the holes built on reclaimed land with dredged material (three million cubic yards) from the adjacent container ship channel. Five of the holes border the channel, which and definitely influences many shots.

In 2000, the Golfplan Company, including Dave Davis, did a major rebuild here. Later, the Gene Bates group, including now general manager Andy Johnson, did more work including extensive tree removal which brought back the original special water views. Under Andy's guidance, Serapong has the reputation of being the best maintained course in all of Southeast Asia. Several European Tour Singapore Opens have been held here.

Serapong is a tight course with many trees still remaining, deep bunkers (108 in total, several huge), and water (on 10 holes). All the greens are large. Many are also deep with wings to tuck pins in tight spots while water lurks close by.

### **Day 15 Play Sentosa (New Tanjong) Fly Singapore/Saigon Stay The Grand**

Tanjong was the first course at the club built in 1974 with Frank Pennink as designer. In November 2015 it closed for a one-year \$US21 million total rebuild supervised by club general manager Andy Johnson (formerly with Arnold Palmer design and Gene Bates design). Fortunately for me, play on the New Tanjong course just commenced three days previously after nine months of construction and three months of grow in.

This is a completely new course with all old holes turned up, down, sideways, and relocated. Many trees were eliminated and 300 were moved. There are new ponds and lakes (water in play on 11 holes including the island 17<sup>th</sup> green). Bunkers are large and deep with sparkling white sand. The greens, with a SubAir moisture handling system, are big-to-huge-to-massive with subtle slopes and ridges. Fairways are Zorro Zoysia and greens TifEagle Bermuda. New Tanjong will be a challenge for 2017 HSBS Women's Championship and prestigious 2018 Asia-Pacific Amateur, whose winner goes to The Masters.

After golf I enjoyed a relaxing lunch with Sentosa's course superintendent Rodney McKeown. Before leaving I thanked the ever organized Nicole Thew, Senior Assistant Director, Golf Operations. Then it was back to the airport.

A one hour Vietnam Air flight arrived Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon) at 7:30 pm. There I was met by Patrick Kelly, Golf Club Manager of The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip. The 70-mile drive southeast took more than two hours to where The Grand resort hotel and casino awaited. The property is almost at the southern tip of Vietnam on the South China Sea. Vietnamese do not like China so they refer to this body of water as the "East Sea." Drilling activity has picked up in this area with the hope of finding large quantities of offshore oil.

### **Days 16 and 17 Play The Bluffs Stay The Grand**

At 7am on Thursday and Friday I'm on the first tee at The Bluffs in a motorized cart with Patrick. It is a pleasant 70 degrees, cloudy, with a 5 to 10 mph breeze. During the rounds, the temperature rose to a humid 90 degrees, the sun came out, and the breeze picked up to 10-15 mph. This can be a windy part of the country with at least a two club wind a normal occurrence.

The hotel/casino, white sandy beach, and the South China Sea are on the south side of the main road. Crossing the road, a wide expanse of huge sand dunes occupies one's immediate attention. Just to the north of the dunes is a dense National Rain Forest. Thus, the property has ample width, but not unlimited depth to route a course. The land runs parallel to the shore line which is 200 to 400 feet away from the dunes.



*The Bluffs with Sea Left and Golf Course Right 14<sup>th</sup> Hole Par 4*

In 2014 Greg Norman and design team did a brilliant job of routing the course back and forth amongst the dunes. They maximized the advantage offered by the impressive terrain. Only 350,000 cubic meters of material was moved, but some of this was cut through a large dune to create a funnel-type appearance. There are three double fairways - 1 and 9, 5 and 6, 13 and 16.

Water comes into play on only two holes, and there are only 33 formal bunkers, many of them large. Actually, it is difficult to count the total number of formal bunkers because sand is visible surrounding every fairway and every green. The severe sloping fairways (Tifway 419 Bermuda) are generous in width. However, once off the fairways there is sand and more sand, native grasses, thick underbrush, and tall trees. The wavy fairways are uphill or downhill with humps and hollows, so there are almost no level lies.

Most of the tees are perched on top of dunes and offer excellent views. Visible from almost every hole is the broad expanse of water, with modestly crashing waves. On some of the holes on the back nine you can hear pounding surf. There is 170 feet of elevation change with the highest point being the 15<sup>th</sup> tee.

The greens are TifEagle Bermuda and many are placed near or on top of dunes and some lower and surrounded by dunes on three sides. The option of run-up shots to greens is available because the formal bunkers are mostly on the sides or backs of the greens. However, away from the formal bunkers are tons more waste area sand.



*The Bluffs 16<sup>th</sup> Hole Par 5 2<sup>nd</sup> Shot*

There is a good variety of green shapes and sizes. Green contours varied from modest to wild. It seemed that the greens got much larger as the round progressed with a corresponding increase in contour intensity.

The course is walkable, but you had better be in good shape. The one draw-back in the routing is the 240 degree long uphill U-turn from the 3<sup>rd</sup> green to the par-3 4<sup>th</sup> tee. At first this seemed to be an awkward aspect to the flow of the course. But when you arrive at the tee, you realize why Norman did what he did. From an elevated tee, the shot is only 170 yards to 100 yards. However, the wide green is small on the back right side and is perched on top of a dune. There is a deep ravine with thick vegetation in front but then the green falls off on three sides to sand and trees. It is an “all or nothing hole” where birdie or triple are possibilities.



The Bluffs 3<sup>rd</sup> Hole Par 3

The other reason for the placement of this hole is the 360-degree miles-long view of the whole countryside including many of the holes, sea, rain forest, and mountain range in the distance. This combination of a nice-looking, challenging hole with wonderful views makes for a great setting.

I read that Norman complained he was not given the best part of the property to build his course. If I were the owner, I would not be at all happy with this type of public comment, especially after paying Norman \$US1.5 million for three one-day site visits plus helicopter transportation from the airport and back. Norman wanted to build a tunnel under the main road leading to one or two holes directly on the water similar to what he did at Danang Golf Club. This feature at Danang did not impress me when I was there in 2011, and I think it would have been a big mistake here in terms of playing flow. In addition, the government does not allow any holes to be built within 55 yards of the shoreline. The dead flat land is better used for more hotel and resort construction plus real estate development.

The Ho Tram Strip project is now owned by American financier Philip Falcone. With the course and one hotel tower complete (540 rooms), a second hotel tower (560 rooms) is slated for completion in 2017. On the golf course I saw a few villas under construction with a list price of \$US1.2 million. The project has 400 acres in total with a 1½ miles of ocean frontage. There are plans to develop the entire property with resort type amenities and possibly timeshares. A second course might be built in the rain forest just north of The Bluffs course. At the moment, Vietnamese cannot gamble in Vietnam so the strategy is calling for a beach resort business plan with casino gambling as the second attraction.

## **Day 18 Fly Ho Chi Minh City/Bangkok**

## **Stay Centara Grand Hotel**

Saturday morning, I said a very thankful goodbye to my great hosts at The Bluffs.



Ms. Sonia Mia (Golf General Manager), Domenic Ricciardelli (operations manager of the whole facility including the casino) on her left, Patrick Kelly on my left, and Ali Macfadyen (course superintendent). Domenic is from Philadelphia, Patrick from Australia with college golf in the USA, and Ali is from Scotland and worked with Howie Roberts (see Yas Links below) at Danang Golf Club.

The hotel van then took me for a 2½ hour ride through the countryside and ultimately the wild scooter traffic in Ho Chi Minh City. A 1½ hour flight on Vietnam Air landed me in Bangkok, Thailand and the welcome greeting

of the World Club Championship (WCC) committee. I am here along with 15 of my fellow GOLF Magazine panelists as spectators for an amateur golf tournament.

## World Club Championship

The annual weeklong golf competition and festivities originated with the imaginative and energetic David Smith in 2002. Basically, each year he takes the *GOLF Magazine* World Top 100 ranking and invites about 20 of the clubs on the list to a two-man competition. The teams consist of the current club champion and a partner of the champion's choosing from the same club. In some cases, the partner is a determined in a special club competition. The 2016 event comprised 24 teams representing 15 countries. The WCC website is "www.worldclubchampionship.golf."

The competition is filmed for TV (the Golf Channel and Sky in the UK show it) with Terry Jastrow as producer/director. Terry was the producer/director at ABC Sports for many years and then did the resurrection of "Shell's Wonderful World of Golf" series for Jack Nicklaus Productions. The quality of play is really good along with a warm feeling of sportsmanship and fellowship among the contestants. This year Portmarnock Golf Club (Ireland) squeaked out a dramatic one-up win over Royal Melbourne (Australia) after the lead had gone back and forth.

GOLF Magazine is one of the sponsors of the WCC and sixteen of the course rating panel have been invited to attend as spectators. During the week we had a lively panelist meeting with our leader, Joe Passov (Senior Editor Travel/Course Rankings and famous "Travelin' Joe's" monthly contributor).

**Days 19 through 24**

**Play Ayodhya Links**

**Stay Centara Grand Hotel**



*With Ayodhya Chairman Pitak*

The host of the 2016 WCC event was Pitak Intrawitayanunt and his world-class **Ayodhya Links**, 40 miles north of Bangkok. Pitak is founder, course creator, and chairman (no committees, just Pitak calling all the shots). The course was routed by Peter Thomson and Ross Perrett of Australia, but after completing the routing Pitak created and supervised everything. He worked 24/7 from 2003 to 2007 to create the best course in Thailand, which is now on the Top 100 World list (#76).

In May 2011, I was the first GOLF Magazine panelist to play the course and did not know what to expect. Ayodhya is an exclusive, prestigious private club with member play only. Guests must play with a member and there is absolutely no tourist play. After finishing the 18 holes in the morning, I had the feeling that this was a "hidden gem" and worthy to be put on our ballot for World 100 consideration. I could see from the surrounding dead-flat, almost treeless marshy terrain that much time, effort, imagination, and money had been put into this project. Through meticulous planning, Pitak produced a course of variety, good rhythm, and solitude (very important after the hustle and bustle of teeming Bangkok).

During construction, about 2.5 million cubic yards of dirt were moved, creating elevation changes of 30 feet. Also, tens of thousands of trees were planted.



*Ayodhya Site of 18<sup>th</sup> Green Before Construction*



*18<sup>th</sup> Green After Construction    9<sup>th</sup> Hole Fairway with 9<sup>th</sup> Green Right and 18<sup>th</sup> Green Left*

Just three months after my visit a record Monsoon flooding devastated most of Thailand in the summer and fall of 2011. It was categorized as the **world's fourth costliest disaster** at the time. Ayodhya Links was almost totally underwater for 66 days. Obviously, it took much time, effort, and money to bring the course back to its former pristine condition. It took 30 days to pump out the water, but fortunately the grass did survive.



*18<sup>th</sup> Green Left and 9<sup>th</sup> Green Right Under Water After Flood*

*View of Flood from Clubhouse*



*Pumps Worked 30 Days to Drain Water from Flood*

The current course has a massive lake in the center of the property with a series of connecting streams and ponds running away in all directions. Thus, water comes into play on every hole with multiple water hazards on a few of the holes. In the attention-to-detail category, every hazard has a lot of attractive vegetation in and surrounding the water, so golfers are not just looking at a big, bland body of water. There are tall reeds in some ponds along with low lying lily pads. Modest waterfalls with clear running water add to the beauty.

The fairways are generous in width and are superbly shaped. If tee shots do not carry the ridges, the approach shot can be partially or fully blind. Humps and hollows in the fairways produce challenging uneven lies. The fairways are pinched in the landing area by strategically-placed and -sculptured bunkers (78). There are many elevated greens with semi-severe to severe contours. Missing a green usually presents challenging chip or pitch shots off tightly mowed grass.

Throughout the whole week **Mr. and Mrs. Pitak were perfect hosts**. On Thursday night they created a magnificent dinner in their lovely home that looks out to the huge central lake with the island 12<sup>th</sup> green a predominant feature.



*Ayodhya 12<sup>th</sup> Green Par 3*

## **Amata Spring Country Club**



*Amata Spring L/R Julian Fryett, Andrew Pitts, Mike Yamaki*

During the week I had the opportunity to play **Amata Spring Country Club**, 55 miles southeast of Bangkok in Amata Nakorn Industrial Estate. The traffic in and around Bangkok is notorious (rated the worst in the world the past two years), but luckily the day for going to Amata was a national holiday. The club is private with limited guest play tee times available for people with the proper introduction. Playing partners were club General Manager Andrew Pitts, club and R&A member Julian Fryett, and

Riviera Country Club General Manager Mike Yamaki (fellow GOLF Magazine panelist). Andrew is from North Carolina and played on the Asian Tour. The Amata gentlemen can really play (both under par for the day). The course is a Lee Schmidt 2005 design.

Water and bunkers are the notable challenges, with water coming into play on 13 holes via two huge lakes and a meandering river. The par 3 17<sup>th</sup> hole has a floating island green accessed by a small ferry boat. The length is not daunting (145 to 114 yards), but the green is angled and semi-thin. A fun setting and challenging tee shot. There are about 100 bunkers including a sea of them on hole #16 (14 in total). There is at least one huge bunker on 10 holes, many steeply sand-faced.

After playing Amata Spring, I agree with its rating as #2 in Thailand. In 2011, I played eight of the leading courses in Thailand using Mark Siegel's GolfAsia ([www.golfasia.com](http://www.golfasia.com)). His company can arrange any type of golf tour in Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Cambodia. He also has a monthly newsletter with the latest golf developments in each of these countries, including when courses are closed for heavy maintenance.

## **Day 25 Fly Bangkok/Qatar (Doha)/Abu Dhabi Stay Park Inn Radisson**

With the One World program, the only way to get to the Middle East from Bangkok is on Qatar Air with Doha as the entry point. After the 3,270 mile, seven-hour and 25-minute flight it was just a quick 200-mile flight east to Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Before planning this part of the trip I knew almost nothing about the region except for some of the names. The UAE consist of seven states (emirates) bordering the Persian Gulf. Iran is just a short distance on the other side of the gulf. Oil was discovered here in the 1950s under British rule, with oil exports commencing in 1962 and independence arriving in 1971. Locals (Emirates) only make up 11% of the 9.3 million population with expatriates comprising the rest. India provides the largest segment at 27% followed by Pakistan at 13%. Dubai has the most people (2.7 million) and is flamboyant. The capital of the UAE and authoritarian rule is located in conservative Abu Dhabi (613,000 people). More important, 94% of UAE oil reserves are in Abu Dhabi and just 4% in Dubai.

Through shrewd worldwide investing of petro dollars starting in 1962, the Abu Dhabi and Dubai government investment companies are now enormous and influential. Trading and finance are huge growth vehicles which cause the population to grow. Dubai has become one of the most important ports (sea and air) in the world. Almost everything that crosses from the West to Asia, and vice versa, goes via a Dubai port.

The governments continue to make huge infrastructure investments on roads, bridges, fresh water, and airports. The investment funds and partners are spending vast amounts of money on office buildings, five-star hotels, and residential housing. High-quality golf courses are part of the housing developments. There are no private, golf-only courses in Abu Dhabi or Dubai. Rather all courses are surrounded by five star hotels and residential real estate developments. Tee times are open to members, guests of the hotels on property, and the general public. Troon golf course management company takes care of seven different clubs in the UAE.

Everything in the UAE was once barren desert, including the land for golf courses. An example is below. This is the Emirates Golf Club Majilis course built in 1988 as the first course in the Middle East.



*Emirates Golf Club Majilis Course in 1988*



*Emirates Golf Club Majilis Course in 2016*

Being early December, it is the height of the golf season in this part of the world. Tee times are at a premium, especially on weekends (Friday and Saturday). There are 24 courses in the UAE, and I hoped to play the best nine over a five-day period, which meant four double-headers. The routine was 5:15 am room service breakfast, taxi to course at 6 am, play two different courses until sunset at 5:30 pm, taxi back to hotel, early dinner, bed. I was one tired puppy at the end of each day.

The weather each day was consistent: about 60 degrees in the early morning, so a sweater was needed. Then partly cloudy skies produced 80 degrees and a little humidity. There was mostly just a light breeze.

Having absolutely no contacts in the UAE, how did I arrange to play these courses on my desired schedule? Late in 2015, I had lunch with golf course architect Dana Fry in Naples. At that time, he mentioned receiving a new assignment in Abu Dhabi at Yas Links. That course has always been on my radar because it was rated the best in the Middle East and a serious candidate for our world 100 list. A couple of months after that lunch I got

the idea for the round-the-world trip so I could visit the UAE. I immediately had another lunch with Dana and he introduced me to Howie Roberts, general manager at Yas Links. And bingo, Howie orchestrated the whole UAE part of the trip. It turns out all the general managers and directors of golf in the UAE are good buddies and do favors for each other.

## **Day 26 Play Saadiyat Beach Play Abu Dhabi Stay Park Inn Radisson Yas Island**

The first course played in the UAE was my introduction to the frantic construction taking place in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. As one of the taxi drivers said: “The skyline changes every year.” Saadiyat Island is just off the Abu Dhabi mainland and is a new artificial island on what was originally an uninhabited stretch of coastal desert. Currently a \$27 billion program involves the construction of a cultural metropolis to include a New York University campus, the Abu Dhabi Louvre (exact replica), the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, and the Zayed National Museum. Already, the growing hub is surrounded by five-star hotels (two now and seven more to come) and hundreds of luxury villa and apartments.

On the shoreline within the hotels and villas area sits **Saadiyat Beach Golf Club**, a 2010 Gary Player-designed course. My playing companion, in a cart, is young Englishman Clinton Norris, assistant professional and graduate of the University of Birmingham (England) golf program. Clinton picked me up at the hotel, drove to the course, took me after golf on a short tour of downtown Abu Dhabi City, and then to the Abu Dhabi Golf Club.



*Saadiyat Beach 6<sup>th</sup> Hole Par 3 on Arabia Sea*

The Saadiyat Beach course features 76 bunkers, many huge and cutting into parts or all of some fairways. Some stretch the entire length of a hole. There are huge-to-massive greens with noteworthy steep ridges and shoulders. The greens are Paspalum grass, which ran surprisingly true. Saadiyat Beach is the third best Player design I have played (10 in total) after Fancourt and Sun City in South Africa. (Later, I heard from Adam Lawrence, editor of “Golf Course Architecture,” who said Mazagan Golf Resort in Morocco should be included in the Player top-design list).



*Abu Dhabi GC 9th Green with Unique Falcon Crested Clubhouse*

The second round of the day was with **Abu Dhabi Golf Club** general manager Jon Brook and two members. We are in carts, but cart paths only as the course is being prepared for the January Abu Dhabi HSBC European Tour event (Dustin Johnson and defending champ Rickie Fowler will be here). The course is a Pete Harradine 1998 design on flat terrain with 84 bunkers and seven lakes that affect nine holes. The greens are normal size and moderately sloping with Tifdwarf Bermudagrass. The entrance to most greens is very pinched by bunkers so it is an aerial game here compounded by sticky, slow-running Paspalum grass fairways. With the pro tour coming soon, the narrowed fairways and high rough were a challenge.

## Day 27 Play Yas Links Drive to Dubai Stay Pullman Jumeirah Lakes Towers

Yas Island, started in 2006, is man-made with an eventual development cost of \$40 billion. The island features a Formula One track with a yearly Grand Prix event. Other attractions are Ferrari World (red roof building in second picture), Warner Bros. World, and Sea World. The Yas Links course was created with 2.4 million cubic yards of dredged material that provided the course designer an opportunity to create something special.

I played with Yas Links General Manager Howie Roberts (from Wales) in a cart, although the course is compact and easily walkable (during the winter months' mild weather). It is a Kyle Phillips 2010 design. Eight holes (2 miles) are directly on a wide estuary of the Persian (Arabian) Gulf. On the opposite side of the estuary is another island which is and will always be uninhabited. This nice buffer is important as the other side of the course has significant condominium and hotel development.



*Yas Links 13<sup>th</sup> Hole Par 3 with Howie Roberts*



*17<sup>th</sup> Hole Par 3*

The course is 100% Paspalum Platinum grass in good shape. The design features are excellently balanced so there is much variety in looks and shots. The well contoured fairways produced many challenging lies. Although there are 111 bunkers, many of the greens are open in front allowing for links-type low running approach shots when the wind is blowing – par for the course on this exposed land. However, the greenside humps and ridges can deflect less-than-accurate approach shots. The large-to-a-few-huge greens have distinctive contours. Yas Links deserves its #1 rating in the Middle East and is a strong world 100 candidate.

After lunch with Howie, the club van took me one-hour north to Dubai.

## Day 28 Play Dubai Creek Play Emirates (Majilis) Stay Pullman Jumeirah Lakes Towers



*Clubhouse Dubai Creek Golf Club*

The final leg of the trip started at **Dubai Creek Golf & Yacht Club**. I am in a cart with assistant professional Joe Way who also graduated from the UB golf program in England. It is cart paths only as the fairways have just been overseeded. The course was designed in 1993 by the European Golf Design group and Thomas Björn. The excellently conditioned course is within a fully built-out real estate development. There is member and public play from Korea, Japan, China, and Scandinavia.



*The "creek" at Dubai Creek Golf Club*

There are only 65 bunkers, but a few are mammoth – hole #1 220 yards long, hole #7 249 yards long, hole #10 290 yards long, and hole #12 has two long bunkers with only a patch of grass in between so it is essentially 385 yards long. Water comes into play on nine holes, including an island green on a short par 5. but I do not see a "creek". It turns out in this part of the world a "creek" is the large body of water shown in the first picture with a sea plane landing. This "creek" is 10 miles long and 1,700 feet wide starting in the Persian Gulf.



*Emirates Golf Club Majilis Hole #9 Par 4 with Dubai Skyline Backdrop and Long Way from Cape Wickham Lighthouse*

After an early lunch with Director of Golf Operations Stephen Hubner, there was a drive across town to the **Emirates Golf Club Majilis** course. This is a Karl Litten 1988 design and was the first 18-hole grass golf course in Middle East. On the 8<sup>th</sup> green, the towering Dubai skyline hovers over the course and made me reflect on being a long way from King Island and the lonely lighthouse at Cape Wickham just 18 days ago.



*Emirates Golf Club Majilis 8<sup>th</sup> Hole Par 4*

The 2017 European Tour Omega Dubai Desert Classic will be played here in early February. As a result, no carts are allowed so I am walking with a caddie. The course is surprisingly hilly. There are numerous huge sand waste areas with vegetation similar to Pine Valley (picture left is the sharply dogleg right tough #8, an uphill 459-yard beast). Water is in play on 10 holes including the double green for the 9<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> holes.

## Day 29 Play Jumeirah Earth and Fire Stay Pullman Jumeirah Lakes Towers

**Jumeirah Golf Estates** has two Greg Norman designed courses – **Earth** opened in 2009 and is the championship course and **Fire** opened 2010. Both are definitely worth playing. The Earth has a proliferation of steep-faced bunkers (97 total) and some are in the middle of fairways and/or in front of greens. Water appears on only four holes, but grouped together on 14 and 16 through 18 which make for a tough finish. Hole #16 has water on three sides and a three tier green 41-yards wide and shallow. #17 features an island green.



*Earth Course Hole #15 Par 4 Nest of Bunkers*



*Hole #16 Par 4 Three Tier Peninsula Green*

After golf I met Neal Graham, General Manager Club Operations at Jumeirah and Chris May, Chief Executive Officer Dubai Golf. Chris had an invitation for me to attend the Middle East Golf Association annual awards dinner to be held that night. Sadly, I had to decline due to fatigue after so much golf. I was afraid my head would collapse in the soup bowl during dinner. Chris was kind enough to take me back to the hotel so we had a chance for some interesting conversation about golf in the UAE.

## Day 30 Play The Els Club Play Trump Dubai Stay Pullman Jumeirah Lakes Towers



*The Els Club Hole #8 Par 5 Approach Shot with Green Far Right*

**The Els Club** opened in 2008 and is part of the multi-billion dollar Dubai Sports City (even has an ice hockey rink). Water only comes into play on two holes so sand is one of two features with 85 bunkers and tons of wasteland desert areas. The interesting challenge is the many medium-sized greens with false fronts, sides and backs. These are Donald Ross-type domed shaped upturned saucer green. Bring your up-and-down game to contend with many roll-offs. This was a fun course.

After golf, Andrew Whitelaw General Manager of Trump Dubai was there to take me over to his new course. The final course on the trip was a bonus - **Trump Dubai** (officially called Trump International Golf Club-Dubai). It was not yet officially opened (soft opening early January 2017 and official opening early February 2017). Actually the course was ready to play several months ago but management waited for the grass to get really healthy. The course is part of a massive real estate development by Dubai company DAMAC and called Akoya Image. DAMAC was also owner of the original Tiger Woods 2008 design course that was started but never finished and plowed under. Now DAMAC has brought that project back to life with the Tiger design to open in 2018 and called Akoya Oxygen. The Trump organization is managing both courses (no real estate

involvement). For the first course, Trump picked Gil Hanse for the design and helped supervise construction. Eric Trump is calling the shots from NYC.

The golf course sits inside a large villa and apartment building project called DAMAC Hills on the outskirts of Dubai. Some 100 Trump-branded villas also are on the property, selling from 5 million dirhams (\$1.3 million) to over 15 million dirhams (\$4 million). The course is the first opened in Dubai in seven years. It is semi private with memberships available. Public green fees are \$US245 during the week and \$US270 on weekends. These are not the most expensive green fees in the UAE.

In planning the trip, I was hopeful just to be able to tour Trump Dubai without being able to actually play the holes. Instead, I had Craig Waddell, Director of Golf, driving a cart and offering interesting comments about many aspects of the whole project. At first I had trouble figuring out what Hanse was trying to do here because there did not seem to be much definition. The first and ninth fairway parallel each other with only one smallish bunker separating the two. With a Trump course you expect a lot of bells, whistles, and even a waterfall or two. There is none of that here. I was told there was a waterfall, but I did not see it.

Actually, I think the course falls into the “minimalist” architecture category with wide fairways, almost no rough, some bunkers, abundant waste areas that the club calls barrancas, some water, and greens varying in size from small to large with some contouring. The key here is the grass around the greens. The fairways are Bermuda and the greens are TifEagle Bermuda. The new element here is tightly mowed TifGrand Bermuda around all sides of the greens. Most of the greens are raised with runoffs on all sides so miss-hit approach shots will scamper 10 to 25 yards away from the green because of the slick grass.

Thus, I think this course is designed for every level of player with the mid-handicapper able to make an easy bogey, but the scratch player has to hit the correct side of the fairway to hit and hold the correct part of the green to make a par or birdie. I love this feature.



*Trump Dubai 12<sup>th</sup> Green Par 4*

The 12<sup>th</sup> hole is a GREAT short par 4. It measures just 287 yards from the tips with a blind, straight, uphill tee shot. There are no bunkers, but the putting surface is partially hidden by a low ridge in front of the green. The green is 47 yards wide, but very shallow (how about just seven yards deep in the middle). This hole design is a takeoff of #10 at Riviera and seen on Gil's #5 at The Boston Golf Club. I rate Trump Dubai the second-best course in the UAE.



*17<sup>th</sup> Green Par 3*

So the UAE part of the trip ended on a high note. I was able to play the top nine courses in the country in ideal weather. Thanks to trip organizer Howie Roberts and all the cooperating staffs at each club, the program went off without a hitch and I was still standing at the end.

### **Day 31 Fly Dubai/London/Charlotte/Fort Myers**

Getting home from Dubai involved some unusual aspects. The best connections meant a 2:25 am British Air flight. So I stayed an extra night at the hotel with a midnight checkout. The early Saturday morning traffic nearing the airport was chaotic with my taxi charging down back streets. The airport was also mobbed and hectic with people jumping the long security line to get to the head of the line. After that it was smooth sailing through Heathrow to Charlotte and on to Fort Myers where ever-smiling Elaine was waiting for one weary traveler. I had just covered 8,000 miles over 19 hours and 20 minutes of flying time, arriving home in Naples in the early evening of the same day I took off in the early morning. Tired but exhilarated after another great trip. How lucky can one be? Continuing to live the dream and thanking everyone involved in making this a truly memorable trip.

### **Moving Northern Home From The Boston Area To Boothbay, Maine**

The 2015 Odyssey outlined our plans to move in 2016 from Manchester, Mass. to Boothbay, Maine. After some construction delays we did move into the new house on July 1. When you do a program like this there are hopeful expectations, but some uncertainty. I am pleased to say the whole project was an absolute home run. Every expectation was met. We thank the Knickerbocker Group of Boothbay for the expert work – Randy Smith (architect), Steve Berger (project manager), Jason Davis (construction supervisor) and the rest of the team.



*Northern View of Tidal Back River from Side Porch*

The house and surroundings are so quiet we call it “Tranquility Point.” We have friendly neighbors. A small used motor boat was purchased to see if a golfer might take to water. The answer is a resounding “Yes,” so it is now Captain Bob. Thanks to my new friend in the boating business, Bruce Burnham, a bigger boat with a much more powerful engine has been purchased for the 2017 season. Our tidal Back River runs north to south out to the Atlantic Ocean.



*Captain Bob*



*Two Feet of Snow with House and Guest Cottage*

The Boothbay Harbor Country Club is only five minutes away. The brand new clubhouse and refurbished golf course work just fine thanks to Director of Golf, Chad Penman. (More complete story of Boothbay revitalization is in 2015 Odyssey featuring the tens of millions of dollars investment in Boothbay and Boothbay Harbor by Paul Coulombe.) Friend Warren Appell organizes a Monday/Wednesday/Friday nine am game with a bunch of congenial guys. Elaine will be getting into the ladies' golf program in 2017 after spending the 2016 summer doing her favorite thing – decorating a new home. We have 1.7 acres of land and I thought I would purchase a riding mower to cut the grass. However, I started out with a motorized hand mower and love the exercise along with the smell of fresh-cut grass.

### **Comparing 20 year change in GOLF Magazine World Top 100**

When I did the 100-day-trip in 1997 I used the GOLF Magazine 1995 World 100. It was the most current list at the time because the 1997 ranking had yet to be published.

Below are the eliminations and additions.

#### **World Top 100 Course Deletions 1995 Compared to 2015**

<b>Courses Deleted</b>	<b>Rank 1995</b>	<b>Country</b>	<b>Total Deleted by Country</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>1995 Total By Country</b>	<b>#</b>
Loch Lomond	44	Scotland	USA	21	USA	57
Medinah (#3)	46	USA	Australia	3	United Kingdom	20
Scioto	48	USA	Canada	2	England	10
Shadow Creek	49	USA	Japan	2	Scotland	8
Colonial	56	USA	New Zealand	1	Northern Ireland	2
The Honors Course	57	USA	England	1	Australia	6
El Saler	60	Spain	Portugal	1	Japan	4
Cherry Hills	62	USA	Scotland	1	Ireland	3
Royal Adelaide	63	Australia	Spain	1	Canada	2
Wentworth (West)	65	England	<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	Spain	2
World Woods (Pine Barrens)	66	USA			Dominican Republic	1
Shoal Creek	69	USA			France	1
Kasumigaseki (East)	70	Japan			Mexico	1
Paraparaumu Beach	71	New Zealand			New Zealand	1
Double Eagle	74	USA			Portugal	1

Peachtree	75	USA		South Africa	1
Cascades	76	USA			
Wade Hampton	77	USA			
Black Diamond	78	USA			
Long Cove	80	USA			
Canterbury	84	USA			
Naruo	87	Japan			
Yale	88	USA			
National GC of Canada	89	Canada			
Oak Tree	90	USA			
Victoria	91	Australia			
Royal Montreal (Blue)	92	Canada			
Spyglass Hill	93	USA			
Lake Nona	95	USA			
Firestone (South)	96	USA			
Commonwealth	97	Australia			
Interlachen	98	USA			
San Lorenzo	100	Portugal			

#### Top World 100 2015 Additions Past 20 Year

Course	Rank 2015	Country	Year Open	Total Added	#	Total By Country 2015	
Sand Hills	13	USA	1994	USA	9	USA	45
Pacific Dunes	21	USA	2001	Scotland	5	United Kingdom	26
Friar's Head	31	USA	2003	Australia	3	England	11
Barnbougle (Dunes)	36	Australia	2004	Canada	2	Scotland	12
Diamante (Dunes)	38	Mexico	2010	England	2	Northern Ireland	2
Cape Kidnappers	40	Zealand	2004	Ireland New	2	Wales	1
Nine Bridges	43	South Korea	2001	Zealand	2	Australia	6
Shanqin Bay	47	China	2012	China	1	Ireland	5
Trump Aberdeen	48	Scotland	2012	Japan	1	Japan	3
Kiawah Island (Ocean)	50	USA	1991	Mexico	1	Canada	2
Whistling Straits (Straits)	52	USA	1998	Netherlands	1	Mexico	2
Shoreacres	56	USA	1921	Portugal	1	New Zealand	2
Oitavos Dunes	58	Portugal	2001	South Korea	1	China Dominican	1
North Berwick (West)	63	Scotland	1878	Thailand	1	Republic	1
Bandon Dunes	64	USA	1999	Wales	1	France	1
Kingsbarns	65	Scotland	2000	<b>Total</b>	<b>33</b>	Holland	1
Castle Stuart	69	Scotland	2009	<b>Newly Built</b>	<b>22</b>	Portugal	1
Ellerston	73	Australia	2001	<b>Seaside</b>	<b>17</b>	South Africa	1
Cabot Links	75	Canada	2012			South Korea	1

Ayodhya	76	Thailand	2007	Spain	1
Ballyneal	78	USA	2006	Thailand	1
California Golf Club	81	USA	1926		
Waterville	83	Ireland	1973		
Barnbougle (Lost Farms)	85	Australia	2010		
St. George's	87	Canada	1929		
Royal Porthcawl	88	Wales	1913		
Swinley Forest	89	England	1910		
European Club	90	Ireland	1992		
Kaninklijke Haagsche	92	Netherlands	1938		
Machrihanish	93	Scotland	1879		
		New			
Kauri Cliffs	94	Zealand	2000		
Sunningdale (New)	95	England	1922		
Tokyo	96	Japan	1940		

Here are some observations about the changes:

33 deletions and additions.

22 of the 33 additions are newly built courses from 1991 through 2012. It could be argued there are two more that could be added to the 22 newly built because of extensive redesigns (California Golf Club 2007 Kyle Phillips design and Waterville 2006 Tom Fazio design).

17 of the 22 newly built are adjacent to the sea.

The USA non-USA mix has dramatically changed by 12 from the 1995 list of 57-43 to 45-55 in 2015.

Depending on how England, etc. is counted, in 1995 there were 13 countries on the list and in 2015 the list expanded to 17.

## Website/Blog

I am pleased to say the website/blog “The Odyssey” continued to make progress in 2016, although a glitch developed late in the year. Somehow, someone hijacked the original domain name “[thegolfodyssey.com](http://thegolfodyssey.com)”. The company I originally purchased it from was absolutely no help in the retrieval process. After much frustrating to and fro, I got the idea to purchase the domain name “[thegolfodyssey.net](http://thegolfodyssey.net)” and that worked. Thanks to Kevin Larrabee, my IT guru, all the website code and content were successfully transferred to the new domain name. Another technology crisis resolved. As of January, 2017 “[thegolfodyssey.net](http://thegolfodyssey.net)” became operational.

“The O” on a website gives everyone various options to read the material – computer, tablet, smart phone. My preference is tablet. In “the nothing is easy category” I found that my website provider WordPress has a glitch in their system. If you use an Apple product, minor amounts of the text and some pictures do not appear. Thus we have posted the following: Safari Users (iOS/OSX): *The Odyssey's content is best viewed by using the "Download" option at the bottom of each page.* Actually, no matter what browser used, the “Download” routine is the best way to view any of the documents. I welcome your visit and would appreciate any comments and/or suggestions you may have about the format and/or content.

## The Book

Yet again and not surprising, nothing was accomplished on *A Golf Odyssey with The Real McCoy*. The 2016 excuse was all the decisions involved in designing and building a house along with furnishing the place (like purchasing an outdoor grill, which was a first). Also, much time was spent in organizing and executing golf trips. So I repeat the refrain from the 2015 Odyssey. The intention this summer is to sit in my new study, with the peaceful view of the gorgeous river, and pound away on the computer. I will be whipping all previous

“Odysseys” into a continuous flow and then add material from pre-1985. Completed sections will be posted on the website.

## **Conclusion**

There are so many people to thank for making 2016 another successful golf travel year. Special thanks go to Howie Roberts for making the UAE go smoothly. I would also like to single out “O” proof readers Tony Maramarco and Tom Bindley for help in polishing the draft version into the finished product.

Wishing all the readers of the “O” good health and enjoyable golf in 2017.

Bob McCoy