

Ireland

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Most golf superintendents today are being asked by greens committees, owners, and golfing public in general, to maintain the highest « quality » of turf possible. Tournaments on television have had a huge impact on this « phenomenon » we call manicuring and has changed the way many North American golf courses are managed.

I recently had the chance to visit Ireland on a golfing trip and I can tell you that they have a different definition of the word « manicuring ».

Let me start off by saying that I wasn't supposed to be a part of this golfing safari that has us playing twelve rounds in eight days with a total of 2000 kms between golf courses and hotels. My brother, who originally planned this trip, had to cancel at the last minute and asked me if I wanted to go. Of course, with the permission of my Greens Chairman and President, I said yes. There I was, in a matter of one week, on the airplane taking off to London, England and transferring into Ireland via Shannon Airport.

The following was the original itinerary for the trip :

- Sept. 6th, 1997 : Departure from Mirabel
- Sept. 7th, 1997 : Arrival Sheen Falls Lodge (Kerry Co.)
- Sept. 8th, 1997 : Waterville G.C. 18 holes

Tralee G.C. 18 holes

- Sept. 9th, 1997 : Ballybunion New course 18 holes

Ballybunion Old course 18 holes

- Sept 10th, 1997 : Connemara 18 holes
- Sept. 11th 1997 : Carne G.C. 36 holes
- Sept. 12th, 1997 : Rosse's Point (Sligo County) 36 holes
- Sept. 13th, 1997 : Enniscrone 18 holes

Westport 18 holes

- Sept. 14th, 1997 Galway Bay (Resort) 18 holes
- Sept. 15th, 1997 : Lahinch 18 holes (only round not played)
- Sept. 16th, 1997 : Return Dorval Airport.

As you can see, this was quite a hectic schedule that didn't leave us with much time to visit Ireland's most famous tourist attractions and towns, but we did manage to find the time to visit a couple of Irish Pubs, after our rounds for one or two pints of beer; we were quite thirsty after walking all these hilly golf courses (there were not many golf courses with motorised golf carts).

Being a golf course superintendent from the province of Quebec, I always thought that we were faced with some of the worst weather conditions possible. Irish superintendents also have their share of adverse conditions such as heavy rainfall and Gail force winds during the winter. Tralee Golf Club,

designed by Arnold Palmer, lost their number two green located on a cliff adjacent to the Atlantic Ocean in the winter of 1996.

The past political situation in Ireland was also evident in these golf courses that were visited. At the time Waterville G.C. was built, catholic construction workers changed the layout of the course as it was discovered that religious ceremonies were performed in a valley located where a hole was supposed to be constructed. They considered this to be sacred land and refused to continue working if the hole wasn't changed. This may seem insignificant to us but in Southern Ireland, at the time, practicing religions other than Protestant was punishable by death, Remains of churches overlooked some of the courses we played such as Ballybunion and Tralee.

I came to wonder if superintendents can play a round of golf without thinking about the profession. This led me to compare the differences in maintenance practices between Ireland and North America (I must have played an awful round that day). For example, most golf courses were aerifying greens at the time of our trip (mid-September). I asked the superintendent of Rosse's Point G. C. why he was cultivating at this time of the season. He replied that it was for the control of Dollar spot. I don't think that this practice would be popular here at home but most of the links played in Ireland do not apply fungicides to control diseases. They rely on their cultivation practices.

For me, as a golf course superintendent, this trip was a tremendous learning experience. Seeing and playing these great links courses proved to me that golf was meant to be played and maintained as much as possible in a natural setting, not in an overly "manicured" environment.