

A Dream Comes True For Golfers

Fun-loving residents built their course around a coal mine in 1929

It's not an easy journey from dream to reality. But in 1929 the vision of a golf club became just that, a nine hole course.

It wasn't easy. Edmonton was a young city with only 75,000 residents. True, the Highlands was upscale. But everyone had bills to pay just like today.

In the 1920s, the Highlands area was still semi-rural with plenty of open land. There were several market gardens between 60th and 53rd Streets from 112th Avenue north to 118th Avenue.

Jean Robbie's dad raised chickens behind the house on 71st Street. Myrt Drury's grandfather had a team of horses on 69th Street for his own use.

There was a teamster business on 66th Street and 113th Avenue, right behind Enid Hart's family home.

And there were a few dairy cows around - a local alderman even owned one.

However, the trappings of the city were gradually moving into the area. A streetcar line ran along 112th Avenue, ending at the 60th Street turnaround.

And Edmonton's zoo - which featured a bison paddock - was in Borden Park, together with a permanent wooden roller-coaster and carousel.

Farmland and brush areas along the river valley looked like the perfect place for a golf course. But when a group of fun-loving Highlands residents pondered the idea, they soon realized that raising \$2,000 to buy enough land for a



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Golfers and politicians meet to open Highlands course in 1930

course was out of their league.

So they convinced the city to lease them the land.

Construction of the west nine began in the spring of 1929 and was completed by the fall at a cost of \$6,700.

Horses were used during construction and later to pull mowers and plows on the course. Early golf club records show bills for hay and feed.

The links surrounded the Pre-

mier Coal Mine (owned by Jean Ruiters' father) and four homes.

The mine buildings sat on land between the present 15th tee and the three large spruce trees on the right side of the fairway.

The working shafts extended to the river and east to below the first tee.

Mine operations came to an end in 1932 after a fire and subsequent flooding.

But the legacy of the pits lives on. There's always the chance of a shaft cave-in, and the surface is continually shifting.

The undulating fairways and greens mean the course is actually changing a bit year to year.

The Highlands course was officially opened in May, 1930, before an enthusiastic crowd and a host of dignitaries, including Lieutenant Governor William Egbert and Mayor Ambrose Upton Gladstones Bury.

According to all accounts, it was a grand day.

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A biplane piloted by Vic Horner tried to drop golf balls onto the first green before well known local amateurs took up their clubs for the first round.

Harvey Day Jr. posted the low score of the day with a 88, while Jack Starkey fired a 90.

There was no clubhouse yet, just a small pro shop. So tea was served in a large tent.

In his opening remarks, the mayor said he could foresee that Edmontonians would soon have more leisure time, increasing the importance of recreation in their lives.

Made in the year when the world began to feel the effects of what was to become the Great Depression, we can only wonder if the mayor realized the true foreboding nature of his speech.

The private Highlands club hoped to appeal to as many people as possible, even those of moderate means. And so, the board authorized the sale of 100 shares at \$100 each, and set green fees for the first year at \$35 per couple. Harry Shaw was appointed as the first pro.

The word is that if you were a junior player back then, Harry would see that you spent an hour digging dandelions before you were allowed to play golf.

That was for the boys, though. There is no word as to what tasks girls were assigned.

In 1931, a single storey clubhouse was in place, housing locker rooms and a small kitchen and eating area. It was not heated. A second floor was added in 1938.

The ladies section of the club held many bridge parties and teas during those early years to raise money for curtains, china and kitchen equipment.

The local newspapers even published lists of who were making up tables for bridge.

The first club dance was held in November, 1930, at the Hotel Macdonald. The press reported the event as one of the "gayest" affairs of the season.

The first winners of club competitions were awarded their trophies at that dance. Sandy Niven won the Parlee Trophy for the men and Greta Muir took the Van Allen Trophy for the women.

The club was barely underway when the Depression began to create hardship, even for the relatively well-heeled Highlands golfers. Many members were allowed to pay the annual fees in instalments of \$10.

(To be continued in the next newsletter)

Krysia Jarmicka



Photo courtesy the Provincial Archives of Alberta

Highlands course in 1938

(Note: Background for this article came from research done for the Highlands Golf Club's 60th anniversary. My thanks to Kay Anderson, Enid Hart and Jean Robbie. We are still looking for either a sketch or photographs of the original course.)

A Walk Around The Original Nine Holes

The first hole is now the 10th hole. In 1930, you played 18 and 17 as numbers two and three.

A walk through the bush (now under the Capilano Freeway) took you to the fourth tee (today's number 11) and west for 450 yards. Then, as now, a

hook would land you in the river.

Five was called the "Plateau" and was 258 yards to an "upity-up" green, still visible behind the 15th tee.

Six was a severe dog leg back towards the river and than sharp east to the general area of today's 13th green.

From the six green you walked back to what is now the centre of the freeway, and hit to a green beside the 14th fairway trap.

The eighth hole was the practice hole, 15A, and played at 150 yards. The green was well trapped in front, and a clump of trees on the left made it a tricky par three.

The ninth tee was located in front of the three spruce trees on 15, and you played to the present 16th green - about 300 yards. A walk up the hill behind the 17th green brought you back to the small pro shop.

Then came Baker's folly.

You see, Alderman Baker had visions of making the drive from downtown Edmonton to the Highlands a quick as possible.

Why use 112th Avenue when all that was needed was to extend Jasper Avenue?

A roadway starting at Jasper and 82nd Street was built in 1931. It ran down along the river valley and started back up behind what is today's 12th green and 15th fairway, surfacing from the valley at 68th Street and Ada Boulevard.

The road seriously disrupted the original layout of the golf course. It cut right through the fifth hole - "The Plateau".

There was an outcry from the golfers.

But now, just a year after their glorious opening day, the Depression was in full swing. Building a new road and adjusting the layout of a golf course served as a useful "make work" project.

"Baker's Folly," otherwise known as Highlands Drive, was in use until 1945 when unstable banks made it too costly to maintain

A Dream Comes True — Golfing In The Highlands

(Part 2)

Fun-loving Highlands residents had build their course around a coal mine in 1929. And the club survived the Depression.

The 1940s started with soldiers being sent off to war, and national golf events curtailed.

Ration coupons were needed for everyday things like butter, sugar, meat and coffee. McGregor golf clubs sold for between \$4 and \$12, and golf bags fetched up to \$29. Balls were three for \$1.

Across the country, member clubs of the Canadian Ladies Golf Union were raising funds through teas, bingos and bridge parties to buy a Spitfire fighter. They raised \$25,000 - and "their" plane was dispatched to the North African campaign in early 1942.

In 1942, the U.S. Army arrived in Edmonton to begin construction of the Alaska Highway. The city was the main staging area, and in one day a record 860 aircraft left with supplies for the rush road-building project.

American officers enjoyed many rounds of golf at the Highlands club. Rumor had it that army engineers offered to build an escalator from the clubhouse to the parking lot.

At the end of an invigorating 18 holes of golf, as you climb those "blink, blink" stairs, I'm sure you wonder why the offer was refused!

With the end of the Second World War in 1945, families were reunited and rationing ended.

At the Highlands Golf Club, Henry Martell, the golfing policeman, continued to win major amateur championships. He was named pro in 1948, succeeding Alex Olynk.

John Glasgow, who would later become club president, was playing the piano for singsongs accompanied by next-door neighbor Nina Kesner.

The social activities included rushing down to the clubhouse on Friday nights to save a table for the weekly cash draw. You had to be there to win.

The club was the site of a major exhibition match in 1948 between Martell, Stan Leonard, Dave Dixon and the world renowned South African Bobby Locke - well known for his plus-fours attire, and putting skills.

During the match Locke set an unofficial course record of 65.

(Sadly, many of the club's records were lost in a fire at the home of secretary-manager Pem Wood.)

Players could be stymied on the course in those days.

During matches, golfers weren't allowed to mark their balls on the green. Opponents had to chip over or putt around on the way to the hole. Styning became an art. Now the rules have changed and it's a lost art.

The grass was greener by 1948. That was the year Ed New installed the first pipes to bring river water to the course.

In 1951, the City of Edmonton advertised for "golf pro-managers" offering \$1,200 per season, plus all profits from the pro-shop and lessons. Living quarters would be provided for \$200.

One wonders what kind of living quarters were available for that very modest sum. Surely not the top of the clubhouse!

The post-war boom and a desire for all things "modern"



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meant traditions had to change on the course. Pull carts were making their debut.

And at the 1953 City Ladies Championship, competitors were allowed, for the first time, to wear slacks on the course. It seems the rules were relaxed because of a heavy infestation of mosquitoes that year!

Spring teas were a popular start to the new golfing season, and were duly noted in the Edmonton Journal. Some of the club's promising juniors were: Betty Stanhope

Cole, Enid Hannah Hart, Clyde Martell, Rick Collier, Ray Rhodes, Jimmy Harper, Buddy Loftus, Frank Fowler and Neil Green.

Edmonton was in the midst of a boom of sorts in the 1950s. Between 1946 and 1956 it's population doubled to 226,000.

At the course, the city was installing sewer lines along the number two hole. This provided an ideal opportunity to eliminate the severe cross-slope, making the hole less difficult. It had been a par 6 for ladies.

The change meant the great toboggan run from Ada Boulevard to the river would never be the same again!

Hole number three was also redesigned.

It used to have a deep ravine, with a small, rickety bridge. When fill dirt became available from city projects, it was decided to fill in the ravine and replace the bridge with a path. Ed New suggested planting the caragana hedge, which to this day keeps your ball in play - if you're lucky.

Construction around the golf course wasn't without its hazards.

The city lost a bulldozer in quicksand east of the clubhouse, and the club lost one when excavating into the hillside for the lower tee at the present 10th hole.

By 1967 the club had a fleet of six power carts available for rent. However, Glen Wilson decided to build his own using a gas washing machine motor. It was a little top heavy, sometimes tipping over. It had to be rebuilt several times, but always got Glen back and forth to his Ada Boulevard home.

Bob Stanhope was busy acting as a liaison between the city and the club on the reconstruction of the course to make way for the Capilano Freeway bridge.

It was Bob who insisted that the large spruce trees on number 15 hole be saved. This caused a controversy, but what would that hole be like today without them?

(Did someone say easier?)

The city constructed new greens on number 14 and 15, and on Bob's suggestion incorporated the tunnel to number 16.

Again, it was Bob who suggested the fence on number 17 be built halfway up the embankment and not at the bottom as the city had planned.

Bob would show up everyday with his hard hat and clipboard, and that made some city workers think he was the club's resident engineer. His job ended when the bridge was officially opened on Nov. 3, 1969.

(Research done for the Highlands Golf Club's 60th anniversary was used in this article. If readers have sketches, photographs or other information on the club, please contract Krysia at 474-2412)

Krysia Jarmicka