

A GIANT IN GOLF: Part Two

THE ROSS PHILOSOPHY

BY MIKE DANN

• As noted in the previous article, Donald Ross was trained by golf's sages in Scotland and brought his expertise in the sport to America and proved a most versatile person. Raised under the tutelage of Old Tom Morris at St. Andrews and practicing the trade of the professional at his home Royal Dornoch course, Ross found his calling in course design, and his unique style has set the standard for architecture in America.

Ross' own philosophy was to make golf a pleasure, not a penance, that a beautiful, natural course was better than an artificial, monstrous test.

Eric Nelson, his secretary from 1922 to 1948 who took over Ross' duties as Pinehurst club manager after his death, said Ross had to do much of his designing before ever viewing the land he was using.

"He was doing so many courses that often he would do the preliminary layout on topographical maps," said Nelson, still a Pinehurst resident. In such cases, Ross would pour over the blue-paged diagrams, noting sites for first the greens and then the length of the hole. "He might spend a half a day working on the map before submitting his primary proposals. When he got into the field itself he would spend much more time."

Green design was most important to his work. He would choose the sites carefully and only after he was sure of the location would he create the remainder of each hole.

Given the opportunity to scout a site first, Ross would work from sheets of 8" by 10" paper. The left side of each page had predrawn red and black grids with markings for 600 yards in length and 200 yards in width. He would pencil sketch a hole on each page, scribbling notes to the side. He was careful to not allow any fairway bunker to exceed four and a half feet in depth and took particular pains in the roll of the fairway on dogleg holes.

On the reverse side of the page was another grid, square, measuring up to 160 feet for the green. Again he made

notes. Typically, "raise green bodily four feet. Add plateau one foot above surface. Three undulations three feet above green at outer edge and blend smoothly into fairway. All form one undulating mass."

Much of his early designing was limited in that Ross had to work with less contourable sand greens, a problem typical at Pinehurst as well. "Donald said there would be no first class golf until we could build grass greens," said Richard Tufts. "It seemed Pinehurst was just a little too far north, and he was afraid grass greens would be killed by a winter frost. Finally he found a strain of rye and experimented with it. He didn't dare build it as a permanent green, so he built it off to the side of one of the regular greens. He also bought a canvas to cover it on very cold nights. Well, one night he missed covering it and found in the morning that the frost had not hurt the grass. He was one very happy man that day."

Ross had a van Gogh touch for green design and he knew sand and dirt and how to move them. In the days before the steam shovel and gas-powered equipment, earth moving was a slow and tedious proposition. But it also presented a much greater opportunity for detailing greens, and Ross would spend hours on each.

After finding the right site, he would take a man, a mule and a drag pan to contrive his artistry. With the mule pulling the drag pan around the green in circles, Ross would order a little dirt scooped here and a little dumped there. He might spend hours going over again and again one green, recalled Tufts, until it looked natural enough. His swales and ridges, ideas drafted from nature's designs in Scotland, were conducive to the man who plays a run-up shot. Many Ross greens were inverted saucer-shaped patterns, crowned in the middle and falling off around the edges, shrinking the actual landing area of the green and rewarding the player who managed a high soft shot. Ross had variety in his pattern.

"He had a flair in his layout," says architect George Fazio. "He had all the shots in designing, as a craftsman."

"His balance was good. He was particularly good with sand, but it is very difficult to find fault with anything in his design. He made very few mistakes, something few of us can claim."

"Modern thought does diverge with some of his theories. More Ross bunkers have been filled in than those of any 10 architects because he was a big bunker man. Today we feel that fairway bunkers are too penalizing, but not a man today disagrees with him around the greens."

"He put a lot of beauty into his courses, and that is important. He was gentle with his bunkers, but they did not lack shape. Artistically he was not abrupt and tried to blend everything in. When I go play one of his courses, I get a little bit of everything."

Tufts noted that Ross mentioned the one mistake he would always regret. He developed a rather extensive organization (Ross had two partners in his firm, Walter Hatch and J.B. McGovern, who worked on a supervisory basis, according to Nelson). His brother Aeneas worked for him at one time. Once in a while Ross would note that a course was not built specifically as he had laid out the plans. "He fretted that a course that carried his name was not always what he had in mind," said Tufts. While his own crews did a major share of the work on his designs, many were handled after the drafting stage by local engineers, who at times took to redesigning his work.

"It is a particular art to build a bunker or a green like it had been there all along, so that nothing looks constructed, and that was part of the beauty of his work. I went with him on occasion when he would chart a course. He could see the design of a hole through the thickest of woods, through places where I could not even visualize a hole. Then he would cut a center line to get the character of the hole, and through that narrow path, I



Dear Poppa

As a player, Ross counted three North and South Open titles.

could see the outline of the roll he intended.

"He talked about the different approaches to bunkering a green. The easy way is to place a bunker on each side of the green, tight to it. But that would look artificial. So he would put a bunker on one side of the green and build a mound on the other, and it would look very natural.

"He enjoyed pointing out the architectural features of his courses when we played them. When I asked him how he started a course, how he proceeded, he said he more or less accepted what he found and worked with it. The green location is the key. He said the feature of any hole is the shot to the green, and it is important to have good green sites."

"His strategy is something you don't see in many courses today," said

designer Pete Dye. "He might bait you to what appears the easy side of the fairway, and then you find a very tight approach shot.

"Whereas today you find a lot of course designing in a pattern, Ross tried to use as much variation as possible. He had a hell of a lot of contours around the greens. Some bunkers around the greens would be deep and others would be shallow. But he had a definite scheme for every hole. That's a marked difference with a lot of architects.

"It's that sense of strategy that a few of the great designers had, Charles Blair Macdonald, Albert Tillinghast and Ross.

"Donald Ross made Pinehurst No. 2 great in that a player has to use the club in every manner you can think of."

Ross commented similarly once. "I have been playing golf since the 1880s, and I don't believe there ever was a round in which I needed more than six clubs. But today (1941) there is a stick in the sack for every shot. Rather the stick than the player should have to make the shots.

"The No. 2 course is a chess player's course, where the placement of every shot opens or closes the way for the following shot, and determines the varying ways a shot must be hit."

Robert Trent Jones has called No. 2 "a chipping course that has no equal."

"When he first came to Pinehurst," said Tufts, "Ross took out many of the bunkers, the cross bunkers, that he said looked mechanical. He tried to stress beauty, balance and naturalness. He preferred every hole to swing a little. 'You don't see a straight line in nature,' he said. And he tried to avoid them in design."

Ross' penchant for dogleg holes is another example of his constant work for strategy. His dogleg holes would turn so that a player could determine just how much of the hole he could cut off and yet leave himself in position for the next shot.

"His plan was to leave a choice for every caliber of player," said Peter V. Tufts, son of Richard, Ross' godson and an admitted Ross-styled architect. "He avoided artificial or oversized hazards. But he figured the more choice a player has, the better.

"Much of his style was dictated by the times, of course. He did not have the landmoving equipment we have now, so his greens tended to be smaller and tougher targets than what we face on modern courses. And today it is too expensive to develop the details of his mounds and swells. His courses have better depth, definition and character than today's because he could afford the time to devote to detail."

Ross again thought of shotmaking. "This mounding makes possible an infinite variety of nasty short shots that no other type of hazard can call for," he said. "Competitors whose second shots have wandered a bit will be disturbed by these innocent appearing slopes and shots from which they need to recover."

Yet, recalled Richard Tufts, Ross did not forget the varying quality of players on his courses. Whereas many courses have been and are designed with the intention of presenting a fiery, difficult championship masterpiece for tour players to relish and ordinary golfers to anguish over, Ross said he always wanted to make "a way

all good

Did he really say this

new ideas in golf course design & construction

Innovation in design and a systems concept approach to course construction makes **golforce** a source you should consider.

Some good reasons: Muirfield Village Golf Club (Columbus, Ohio); Frenchman's Creek, 36 holes (Palm Beach); Jack Nicklaus Golf Center, 36 holes (Cincinnati); Glen Abbey (Toronto); plus courses in Spain, Japan and England.

another reason:
ask jack nicklaus.
he uses

golforce
INCORPORATED

CALL: 305/626-3900
1208 U.S. HIGHWAY 1
NORTH PALM BEACH, FLA. 33408



**FAMOUS
GOLF
PACKAGES
\$ 87.00**

**PER PERSON
DOUBLE OCCUPANCY**
EFFECTIVE NOV. 24—FEB. 19

4 days / 3 nights

Includes: Room, three outstanding meals per day, greens fees and tennis.

**SOUTHERN PINES
NORTH CAROLINA 28387
(919) 692-2114**

DONALD ROSS Continued

for everyone to play the course—all the handicap players. The course must be such that it is easier for the less skilled player and more difficult for the skilled."

Once he had been established in the architectural business, Ross worked the summer months out of his office in Little Compton, R.I. "We would drive up there each year and travel out of that office," said Nelson.

It was one afternoon in the late 1920s that Ross learned of a course that was in the planning stages in Palm Beach, Fla. It was the only course that Ross designed where he entered a bid and signed on a contract basis, and Seminole turned out to be one of his best.

"Donald noted that Florida was a difficult place to build courses," recalled Tufts. "He said there was little land and less character to work with. But he learned a great deal from his dealings there. Once we were putting in rye greens in Pinehurst and Donald did not know how to handle it properly. So he said, 'Let's go to Florida and see how.' We did a study of the methods used there and found that we were not seeding heavily enough.

"He was particularly proud of some of his work in Florida. He said Dunedin was one of his best, but Seminole was an even better accomplishment."

He built the course in 1929, a rolling layout, unusual for usually flat Florida terrain. He made as much use of the breezy Atlantic winds as the rolls but was especially resourceful with his bunker construction. Measuring 6,890 yards, the very elite who's whoish membership has a course that Ben Hogan preferred to use in his Masters tune-ups each year. He would arrive four to six weeks prior to the august Augusta tournament. "This is the only course I could be perfectly happy playing every single day," remarked Hogan once of Seminole. "If you can play well here, you can play well anywhere." The devious sixth hole, perhaps the best strategically bunkered hole in the world, was called the best par four in the world by Hogan and the finest single golf hole in the U.S. by Tommy Armour. And that's before you get to the strong finishing holes. The strategy of the seaside Seminole course is strongly established in Ross' added rolls and 187 bunkers.

As well defined and rounded as his courses, Ross had a thought-out opinion on about every matter, although brother Alec was always more outspoken. But Donald knew the place of golf in his life, and family came

first. "Now golf is a fine game," he wrote once. "It has been my relaxation and livelihood since I was a little shaver in Scotland. But when the game of golf becomes so all-important and feverish and holier than anything else in life, then parents might do worse than turn their young careerists over their knees and administer an old-fashioned spanking."

And on another occasion, he wrote about the "young fellows who are so completely wrapped up in getting a little golf ball into a little hole in less strokes than anyone else that their attitudes and sense of intelligence about the more important things in life become not only distorted but practically nonexistent. These boys acquire the idea that golf is terribly, terribly important. They read about themselves in sporting pages and become complacent but eager for more and greater laurels. They cannot carry on an intelligent conversation without sooner or later having their talk backfire to golf."

Ross could at times be impatient and bossy and was usually very demanding. But then he was a perfectionist and an honest one. Simple honesty is a necessary way of life among the Scots, and that was one attribute that Donald was careful not to lose across the Atlantic. His physical appearance grew through the years and despite his rotund mid-section in his later years, Ross always managed a dignified appearance. He was rarely seen sans a business suit and the young Rosses from Scotland were direct from the Victorian age, always proper but hardly unsociable.

Donald always kept his soft, watery eyes and a fine, white mustache that nestled in his smile. He enjoyed people from all walks of life and made a point of bringing home guests for Scottish tea, remembered his daughter, Lillian. "Dad loved to laugh. It was a high point of his day when he could bring someone from the club home, sometimes someone important, and we would all sit down for tea and good talk. He was always a delightful person and took an abiding interest in young people."

He would approach each addition to his clubhouse or pro shop staff openly. "I am not hard to get along with," he would say, "but I want you to work as hard and as honestly as you can, and you will find your work most enjoyable."

"He was honest and expected honesty from everyone else," said his daughter. "He had a great sense of right and wrong, but I do not recall him being overly strict. (with me!)"

"He did so much for himself, taught himself how to read blueprints and

how to make them, how to study graphs. And he was able to communicate them. My stepmother wanted him to write the story of his life, but he would never do it. He said no one would be interested in such things."

Nelson recalled that Ross took particular joy in playing with the famous guests who frequented Pinehurst. Poet Edgar Guest and Henry Hornblower were two whose company he often sought out. He became such fast friends with Hornblower that the banker went to Ross during the depression when the question arose of the solvency of the Pinehurst Co. "Donald backed us to the hilt," recalled Tufts. "And that was good enough for Hornblower. We were lucky to have Donald take such an active part in the management. He was a very logical businessman. He had many friends among people in responsibility and he was as proud of them as his accomplishments. But he never boasted." Ross had part ownership in the successful and highly regarded Pinecrest Inn in Pinehurst among other interests.

Tufts told a story that gave Ross a chuckle but pointed out his own modesty. "Donald was sitting in a smoking room on a train one day in his travels from Pinehurst. A couple of golfers who had just left Pinehurst walked in and started a conversation about the courses. Most of their words were complimentary, but they did agree that 'that man Ross must have a mean disposition.' He did not tell the gentlemen who he was but found the incident very funny when he told me upon his return."

He was equally as proud of his calling. When, in his later years after retiring from competition, Tufts asked him if he would like to try to regain his amateur status, Ross replied quickly and sharply, "No. I'm proud to be a pro."

Though he shied away from politics, he grew quickly loyal to his American home. "Dad was a very religious man," said Lillian. He was instructed in the Free Church as a boy in Dornoch, and took an active interest in the building of the nondenominational Village Chapel in Pinehurst.

"He loved growing things," remembered Lillian. "He enjoyed being able to include a certain tree in one of his designs rather than tear it out. He said you learn to appreciate the land when you have to walk over it all day."

"He was proud enough of his golf game to never allow himself to hack around a course," said Tufts. "It meant a lot to him."

One particular story involved Jack Jolly, a Scot from St. Andrews who moved into the golf ball production

and sales businesses in the U.S. Jolly was runner-up to Ross in the 1903 North and South Open but gained more fame for their one round by moonlight at Pinehurst. The announced exhibition drew a rather large gallery, and the twosome played the round in three hours, losing not a single golf ball.

Ross was particularly helpful in placing other Scots who emigrated to America. He hired a Dornoch man, Alexander Innes, to work in the club, and his son Rod later worked in Ross' pro shop. Young Rod was trained in club repair. "Mr. Ross had a very even disposition. He did not lose his temper," Innes said, recalling one story.

"He walked into the shop one day, looking for a tool, and he picked up a

some 65 years ago at Pinehurst and caddied for Ross for two years before being promoted to locker room attendant. Today he likes to sit under the lone holly tree by the bag rests outside the Pinehurst clubhouse, decked in sportscoat, tie and hat. At age 79, Gaines is retired.

"I would stay until 11 o'clock cleaning the locker room some nights," he said. "Sometimes Mr. Ross would check. He didn't like to fire anyone, but he could get very upset when you didn't do your job. We all liked him so much, we tried very hard to please him. He was a good man."

"Donald was particularly proud—it might have been the only time he boasted—that he could take care of his mother," said Tufts.

Ross was very much the Scot



Before the famed moonlight match at Pinehurst in 1903; that's Ross looking away from the camera and Jack Jolly on his right.

wood chisel. He noticed the cutting edge was chipped and saw that we were using the chisel to remove the tacks on wooden shafts we were fixing. He was upset at the misuse of the tools, but instead of getting mad, he took us to the old stone grinding wheel and showed us how to sharpen the chisel. He was very firm in telling us not to use it again in that manner."

Ross would not interfere with anyone's work in the shop, "although he could still do anything in the shop better than anyone else," said Innes. "Whenever he got a new set of woods, he would come into the shop, put the heads into the vise and begin to file away on the face. He liked his woods with a slightly open face. It was easy to see that he could still work very adeptly in the shop, and he was a perfectionist."

Old Bill Gaines worked as a caddie

through his life. He did not like to bet at golf, something he learned early in life from Old Tom Morris. "Golf is not a horse race," Donald would like to say.

"When I was a young man in Scotland, I read about America and that the American businessman was absorbed in making money. I knew that the day would come when the American businessman would relax and want some game to play, and I knew that game would be golf. I read about the start of golf in the United States and knew there would be a great future in it. I learned all I could about the game, teaching, playing, clubmaking, green-keeping, golf course construction—and came to America to grow up with a game in which I have complete confidence. Golf has never failed me," he wrote.

And he did not fail golf in return.

John Peacock
Jack Jolly
Donald Ross
Jimmy Macpherson

All good friends
in early
Pinehurst

where he & they
found this quote