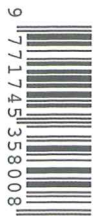




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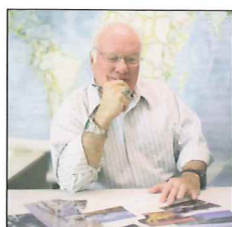


Golf's first globetrotter

How Ron Fream and his Golfplan colleagues helped the game grow into a worldwide phenomenon



The Pioneer
Robert Trent Jones: golf's
greatest moderniser
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Ron Fream
Taking golf to the farthest
corners of the world
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Wolf Point Club
The Old Course
remade in Texas?
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Lone and level sands

With the *Committed to Green* initiatives in the 90s and, more recently via the R&A and Golf Environment Organisation, the golf industry has tried to introduce sensible debate on environmental issues. Through education, research, case studies, certification programmes, publications and Web sites many golf organisations, greenkeepers, agronomists, golf architects and a few environmental NGOs have sought to help developers, designers, golfers and most importantly the general public, to understand the pros and cons of environmental arguments.

While those efforts have been largely successful in countering the anti-golf fundamentalists of a decade or two ago, the goalposts have shifted. Environmental issues used to be confined to birds and bees stuff. Nowadays global warming, water wars and carbon emissions have replaced DDT, pesticides and biodiversity. Golf is not fleet of foot in the face of change, nor enthusiastic to embrace new ideas, which perhaps accounts for its unawareness of current attitudes towards new golf developments with their often huge earthworks, water requirements, mighty carbon footprints and often dubious economic, social and environmental sustainability.

Golf architects are sometimes caught between their desire to exercise their profession, creating exciting designs and earning a living; and actually putting into practise what their own publicity material often preaches — respect for the environment. Of course most architects would think twice about wilfully stirring up a hornet's nest of opposition by ignoring common sense in favour of ego-building design choices that end up in the planners bin, and this is seldom a major issue on smaller low profile projects,

But when developer and architect are sufficiently powerful (often the case on the prestigious projects through which public opinion is formed), this is not always so. Things are done that should not be done.

The Jack Nicklaus designed Samanah golf course was opened last year near Marrakech, Morocco. The course is built within a large residential development with over 400 villas for sale at prices from €450,000-€2m. The French development company is proud of the fact that the course meets the severest technical specifications, the greens meet USGA norms and the course will satisfy the rigorous standards imposed by the PGA of America. There are

now over twenty golf courses in Morocco, many world class, the earliest dating back as far as 1917, and, Morocco being a sandy sort of place, all have used local materials in construction. All, except Samanah. Apparently no Moroccan sand could satisfy the specifications and the contractor was obliged to import from France.

In Tunisia last year, The Residence, a Robert Trent Jones II designed course, also opened for play. Located on the outskirts of Tunis, by Samanah standards it is a rather modest development, with about 150 villas, all sold off plan. According to the golf club's Web site, it is situated "in the heart of a natural reserve where migrating birds and wildlife abound." The course was built on a salt marsh and to ensure grass growth, ground level was raised a metre or two. Material was imported from 25-35km away to fill in the marsh. The houses are built, the clubhouse is up but its luxuries are still for the few.

And then there is Donald Trump. He has plans to build a £1 billion resort with 1,500 houses and two courses at £90 million north of Aberdeen. (£90 million? In Scotland?) But there is a problem with sensitive sand dunes. A quote from the *Guardian* sums it up: "Trump refused to move that section of the course, again overruling his own environmental experts, telling the planning inquiry that he didn't do 'half assed.'" Trump's lead golf architect is Dr Martin Hawtree, with Tom Fazio II as consultant. While Dr Hawtree's name may not sell houses as well as a name like Nicklaus or Trent Jones II, Trump no doubt chose him because of it. Dr Hawtree surely raises fewer hackles in Scottish environmental circles.

Importing sand for Samanah from France to Morocco looks daft. The carbon footprint of the course could surely have been reduced using local materials without any appreciable reduction in quality? And Robert Trent Jones II (motto: "Of the earth.... For the spirit") was apparently unfazed in Tunisia by filling in a salt marsh with muck from 30km away. The project would surely not have been approved his home state of California, though it might have been in Scotland where Trump and Hawtree have yet to build their monument.

It may never happen, but if it does go ahead as currently planned shouldn't we, as golf course architects, be asking ourselves about what effect this project may have on our collective reputation and how such a sorry tale will appear to the outside world? Does Scotland really need another world class links course at the price of irreplaceable sand dunes? And our reputation as qualified professionals whose judgements are sought and respected?

I believe it is time for golf architects to accept responsibility for what they are paid to do. If we are to continue to design courses that meet common approval rather than universal condemnation our profession requires a moral compass. And where the planet is concerned, we should start to use it.

I quote from a prescient lecture given 17 years ago by Dr Hawtree: "Recession may inevitably bring about a deflation of our architectural egos, but its positive virtue may be to return to the idea of playing golf over a rural or parkland landscape without unduly changing it."

Jeremy Pern is a golf architect in France