



Maleny Golf Club

Some achievements by Maleny Golf Club Inc

(1 January 2020 - 31 June 2021)

During this period, the Maleny Golf Club achieved many milestones. Below are some highlights.

Official Opening of 18-hole Maleny Course, 14 February 2020:

Mayor Mark Jamieson officially opened the second nine holes of this magnificent 18-hole golf course on 14 February 2020 to the sounds of a lone bagpipe player, Club member Gordon Ferguson. Mark did the honours in the presence of Andrew Wallace MP (Member for Fisher), Andrew Powell MP (Member for Glass House and the Club's Patron), former Mayor Don Aldous, Deputy Mayor Tim Dwyer, Cr Jenny McKay, other councillors past and present, numerous friends and members of the Maleny Golf Club (see slides). The piper's call reflected the Club's philosophy, *Golf as it Began*, inspired by the story of *Machrihanish Dunes* in SW Scotland – a magnificent course built in harmony with the sensitive environment; and also on a ridiculously small budget (not so their clubhouse!).

A virtual tour of our quality golf course, as seen through the 'unsolicited' eyes of a visiting golfer (from SEQ Golf Course Photos) in May 2021 is attached to this nomination.

Some history leading up to the 14 February 2021 Opening:

The long 20-year journey from two dairy farms to golf course encountered numerous and persistent challenges (see slide). However, common sense and persistence prevailed. Mayor Jamieson had previously opened the first nine holes in June 2014 with \$450,000 capital works funds from Sunshine Coast Council; together with a further \$300,000 cash from club members and friends. Considerable professional volunteer effort from members and, working to a superb Master Plan from golf architect, Graham Papworth, enabled this great outcome within available budget.

The second nine holes (and a *state of the art*, ePar-compliant maintenance facility), was also constructed within a modest budget of \$750,000 (comprising \$450,000 capital works grant from Council, \$100,000 State Government and \$200,000 Sport Australia}. Again, the outcome was only possible with a huge effort by capable and dedicated volunteers – a fact reflected in industry articles such as "*A Sense of Community*" by Graham Papworth in Golf Architect Journal, and "*Humble Hero*" by Tony Webeck of Golf Digest (see slides).



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Superintendent Mick McCombe was recognised with a Queensland GCSA Excellence award, along with two national awards; while President Max Whitten received the Queensland Government Sports Volunteer of the year award.

These efforts by staff, contractors and volunteers culminated in the Official Opening of the Course on 14 February 2020.

Course Philosophy “*Golf as it Began*”: As noted earlier, Maleny Golf Club’s philosophy has emulated the inspiring story about the construction of *Machrihanish Dunes*, following an inspirational lecture by its construction manager during his visit to Australia around 2013. This philosophy, which has guided Maleny’s course design and construction, is articulated in the Club’s *Course Philosophy Manual* (see slides).

A decision was made at the 2020 AGM to include a provision in the Club’s Constitution, emulating the actions by Royal Queensland Golf Club, to protect the course design from frivolous modifications over time. This amendment to the Constitution is still a work in progress. Attempts by some members to remove areas of ‘long grass’, which are integral design feature, for providing golfers of all levels with a challenge commensurate with the short course, is an example of the merits of constitutional safeguards against incremental changes over time which destroy the original design philosophy.

Course Improvements: Upgrades to the course will always remain a ‘*work in progress*’ - as opportunity and resources permit. Access, at short notice, to over 100 truckloads of topsoil from a construction site in town (new service station) provided such an opportunity playing surfaces, especially tees. Substantial upgrades since the 18-hole course was opened in February 2020, mainly to tees, include:

- New tees, with irrigation, on hole 9 allowing this par 4 hole to become the third par 5 hole; and adding an extra stroke to the course
- 3 new tees, with irrigation, on hole 10 increased distance on this par 4 by 40m and completely changed the character of this hole
- 2 new tees, with irrigation, on the par 5 13th hole enhanced this hole
- Amended sand from the removed small practice green was used to upgrade the back tees on the par 4 11th hole
- Major upgrade and elevation to the back tees on the par 3 5th hole
- Major upgrade and elevation, with irrigation, to the back tees on the par 4 15th hole. All tees now have computer-controlled irrigation
- Two revetted bunkers on the par 4 7th hole
- Remote camera coverage in the Superintendent’s office to much of the course



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- Remote-controlled safety camera for golfers on hole 4
- Replacing small practice green with large permanent practice green, simulating real time conditions of greens on the course
- Construction of a cart shed with capacity for 30 carts and temporary office for General Manager
- Significant upgrades in golf shop

A number of these improvements feature in the attached slides.

Course Innovations: The Club is proud of a number of design/construction innovations since January 2020 which add to the unique charm of its golf course (see attached slides). These include:

- **Revetted bunkers.** Maleny is the first Club in Queensland to construct revetted bunkers. After confirming that no patents were relevant in Australia at the time, and after a courtesy consultation with, and encouragement from, Richard Allen the principal patent holder in the UK, the Club proceeded to source suitable recycled synthetic turf; and proceed to construct highly professional revetted bunkers. All bunkers on the second nine holes constructed enjoy revetted bunkers; and work is in progress to convert the remaining conventional bunkers in the first nine holes to this design. These bunkers are very aesthetic and easily maintained. They are greatly appreciated by members and visitors.
- **Gender neutral tees.** While the concept is not new, Maleny has abandoned the more traditional blue, white and red tees, replacing these with new colours and labels "Mountain, Obi and Farm" (see Course Philosophy). This change, implemented early in 2021 has been well received by members and visitors; and noted with approval in May 2021 Issue of *Inside Golf*.
- **Coronacarts.** Again, the concept is not new, with various commercial clear partitions to separate golfers sharing a cart available in the USA, one of our upholsterer members designed and constructed cheap and practical dividers (see slide) which allowed safe cart sharing. These PVC dividers are now on standby for re-installation, if appropriate restrictions are put back in place,
- **Windmill with safety lights.** An ancient windmill was installed between holes 4 and 6 to add to the rustic charm of the golf course. However,
- combining the 'old with the new', the windmill and tank now house camera gear and traffic lights to warn golfers on the 4th tees if golfers 'over the ridge' are still within range. This modern safety measure works well and is much appreciated (see slide).
- **Infinity green.** A new practice green, emulating conditions on the course, has been constructed and is now in play. It is nestled into a gentle slope and creates the impression of an 'infinity green'. This green was designed



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by Graham Papworth, and constructed all within a two week period by Greens staff and volunteers. (see slides)

- **Dark Sky, Observatory.** For several years now, the Sunshine Coast Stargazers (a branch of the Brisbane Astronomical Society (BAS)) have taken advantage of the dark sky above the golf course for both member astronomers and public viewing nights. Telescopes are stored on site and an outdoor turf area provides suitable ground for the telescopes during night use. The Club's marquee is used for public lectures arranged by BAS. Recently, the BAS has been granted formal *Observatory* Status in recognition of the facilities provided by the Maleny Golf Club. The local BAS team are providing technical advice to Precinct users and the Sunshine Coast Council about ways to reduce light pollution with significant economic, social and environmental benefits. (see slides)
- **Geohex/stabilised Granite paths.** All the steeper areas of the golf course now have concrete paths; but elsewhere the Club is experimenting with Geohex combined with kikuyu for providing safe and aesthetic paths for golfers. Experimental work has been done with the owner of COOEE who had IP on a stabiliser for crushed or decomposed granite to provide serviceable and durable alternative to concrete for paths in the flatter area of the course. Construction of Deco paths has been delayed due to concerns about further pandemic lockdowns. However, once the pandemic has run its course, we will complete the path network with stabilised decomposed granite
- **Butterfly habitats.** Over the period of course construction, particular attention has been given to protecting or planting native plants which are the host plants for rare or endangered butterflies. (see slides)
- **Rehabilitation of farm dam and southern wetland.** The Maleny Golf Club has members with substantial environmental expertise. This has been well used by staff and volunteers to control weeds and to restore two wetlands. One, a former farm dam, is now functioning as a robust fresh water wetland (slide) while the other, called the Southern Wetland (see slides), is now the subject of a joint investigation by *Water and Carbon* and the Golf Club, with financial support from Council, to upgrade into a vibrant palustrine wetland which will also double as storage for some of the town's recycled water to be used by the Golf Club for Fairway irrigation. A preliminary design for the Southern Wetland is available (see slides)

Course Promotion: With limited funds for conventional advertising, the Club has resorted to 'good news stories' where possible to promote the virtues of this new facility; and to bring the merits of this 'hidden gem', to quote Adam Scott, to the wider golfing fraternity. For example, virtually every issue of *Inside Golf* during this reporting period would contain one or more stories emanating from the Maleny Golf Club. Amongst our members are experienced journalists



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who have put their vast experience, *pro bono*, into preparing ready copy for industry journals and local media outlets. Three classic

examples are-

- the many articles on the Club's 'coronacart fleet available to members during a COVID lockdown period;
- revetted bunkers and
- gender neutral tees.

Switching from men's and ladies' tees to *Mountain, Obi and Farm*, respectively, created unintended excellent media material. This is well illustrated by the comment from Richard Fellner, Editor of *Inside Golf*, in the May 2021 issue: "*While Maleny is far from the first club to adopt this type of mentality (I have been reporting on clubs that have done that since I began as Editor in 2009), for some unknown reason, the news of Maleny's changes struck a nerve online, with conversations/comments flooding social media – both in favour and against*".

A pocket-size spiral-bound Course Guide is available for members and visitors which describes each hole and notes features like the Mountain, Obi and Farm courses (see slides).

Like many other Golf Club's, the COVID-19 pandemic has created challenges, but it also presented opportunities. A mere month after the 18-hole course opened, the pandemic hit Australia. Early in the partial lockdown, Adam Scott initiated his "*Playing with a Mate*" idea. The first of Scott's events was at Maleny with his good friend, Wayne Perske, our then Pro. Adam live-streamed on Instagram the event at a time when literally there was no other live sport around the globe. The benefits for golf generally, and Maleny in particular, from this unique and unrepeatable situation, were immense.

Sharing the Facility: The Maleny Golf Club shares the 150ha Maleny Community Precinct with a number of other Council leaseholders. These include: *Friends of Pattemore House* (the former historic Armstrong dairy farm homestead); *Maleny District Sport and Recreation Club* (boasts over 60 member organisations of which the Golf Club is a driving member); *Barung Landcare*; and *Unitywater*, the utility which supplies the golf club with A grade recycled water for irrigation. More than half the 150ha Precinct is devoted to rainforest, wetland and riparian vegetation, and walking trails along the Obi Creek. The Drone photos of the course, surrounding rainforest, wetlands etc, with the Glasshouse Mountains backdrop, are stunning illustrations of this strategically located course. [As one well-travelled international visitor commented "*This is the first time I have encountered a links golf course on top of a mountain*".]

In recent years, the Club has shared the course for the Sunshine Coast, Queensland and National Cross-Country Championships with great success. The



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Brisbane Astronomical Society uses the club facilities for its dark sky activities involving both its members and an appreciative

public. In recent months the Maleny Golf Course has been officially recognised as an Observatory (see slides). Three Springs Golf Club, a council owned facility in WA, is one of the very few golf courses anywhere that include the night sky firmaments in its inventory.

This sharing of our facilities, especially where the external use is a logical and common sense 'co-habiting' arrangement, makes good sense economically, philosophically and socially. With a permanent club house still over the horizon, chasing grant funds is greatly facilitated if the benefits are shared.

The club has already created a robust wetland in the former dairy farm; and is currently leading a collaboration between Council, Barung, Unitywater, MDSRC and Pattermore House, to rehabilitate a larger poorly managed wetland (see slides) into an ecologically sound fresh-water wetland. Council has provided \$10,000 to engage *Water and Carbon* to conduct a feasibility study on reconstructing this wetland with two outcomes in mind – a vibrant wetland and a source of recycled water to irrigate the golf course fairways (see slide). Once upgraded, the southern wetland will be shared and enjoyed by the wider community – just like the former Armstrong Dam, now called the eastern wetland (see slide).

Staff and Volunteers: The Club's members ran the Maleny Golf Club on a volunteer basis from 2000 until 2014, at which time we recruited our first staff member, Superintendent Mick McCombe, previously Headlands Golf Club. The Greens staff have slowly increased to the current complement of four, with Nick Smith, previously at Pelican Waters, as Deputy Superintendent.

The mentoring and nurturing environment fostered by Superintendent Mick can be illustrated by 4 examples:

- Mick has secured a dedicated and competent group of volunteers to drive mowers, construct bunkers, erect signage, fit out the maintenance shed; all tasks which has saved the club huge sums of money
- After recruiting Nick Smith from Pelican Waters as his 2-I-C, Mick has passed responsibility for turf management and irrigation to Nick. It works really well
- Mick has nurtured one greens' staff from Work Cover, following an industrial accident during his prior employment. After the Work Cover agreement expired, this person is now full time on staff;
- having mentored a school student suffering severe social anxiety for a year on a '*loco parentis*' basis, Mick, at the request of Child and Youth Mental Health Service (CYHMS), has now taken the lad on as a Club apprentice. Here is what the lad's mother, Leah Treloar, said recently in the *Sunshine Coast Daily*: "*Samuel, now 19-years-old, is studying at tafe*



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*in Brisbane and works at the **Maleny Golf Club**. It's been a long journey. Where he is and what he's doing now are things I would've never thought could*

happen and that's a massive thank you to the people that have supported him in this journey."

On the all-important golf shop front, after several experiments with 'shop staff' managed by Committee members, the Club recruited its first General Manager, Stephen Porter, in May 2021. Stephen's first responsibility was to recruit new shop staff. He secured the services of two outstanding PGA members, Rob McConnell and Nicola Moulton (see slides). Both are former tour Pros; and each comes with substantial Club experience; and are assisted by Jack Day. Our Club House 'team' of Stephen, Rob, Nicola and Jack is proving to be an outstanding powerhouse. This group, along with our brilliant Greens Crew, are positioning the Club for a bright future to complement the many excellent golf courses on the Sunshine Coast.

The 'Evolving' Business Model – the 400 Club: When the course was first mooted, it was intended to be a modest typical country town golf course. However, during the relevant nomination period, with the course growing from 9 to 18 holes, we are now discovering that the short, but challenging, quality 18-hole course is increasingly patronised by members, but is especially enjoyed by visitors - with Saturday competitions now upwards of 90, comprising both members and visitors. Furthermore, social group bookings are growing rapidly.

On reflection, the strategic location and rustic nature of the course is shaping the facility into a 'destination' golf course – and this 'unplanned feature' is emerging as a critical component of our Business Model.

Public courses tend to rely on a large locally based membership to provide the bulk of operating funds. This strategy has some downsides:

- Members can experience difficulty in accessing the course, especially for competitions
- Subscriptions, the main income source, need to be high to finance club operations; and
- It proves challenging to chase grant funds if the benefits are largely being captured by a closed membership base, and not beyond. Whereas, if the club is meeting the needs of local tourism with the flow-on economic and social benefits enjoyed by the wider community, then public funds become more accessible.

In line with this general thinking, and our experience since opening the 18-holes in February 2020, the Club is exploring the notion of capping membership around the 400 mark, or perhaps a tad higher. **Currently, Club membership is around 350.** A membership of around 400, along with a healthy stream of



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visitors, could well prove to be the ‘Goldilocks’ sweet number to ensure member satisfaction while being financially viable.

The Future. There remains much to be done to develop the full potential of the Maleny Golf Course to complement the many outstanding golf courses on the Sunshine Coastal plain; and to provide an alternative experience, particularly during hotter weather, or following heavy rain when coastal courses can be waterlogged. Temperature is some 4 Celsius degrees cooler on average in the Sunshine Coast hinterland; and the excellent draining volcanic soils on the Maleny Precinct allow play very shortly after heavy rain periods. Construction of a suitable Clubhouse is another project over the horizon. However, it runs a distinct second to constructing and maintaining a high-quality community golf course. Finally, like other golf courses, Maleny needs to be mindful of the challenges that COVID-19 will present to us; and have contingency plans in place.