

ALBANY GOLF CLUB HISTORY



the Golf Club's future location painted in 1824 by Louis de Sainson



Albany Golf Course is an eighteen-hole links style golf course, established in 1898 with nine holes and enlarged in the 1960s.

As the chief port in Western Australia until the end of the 19th century, Albany received almost 30,000 visitors a year at the peak of the gold boom. It was also a popular holiday venue in the hot summer. As the town prospered, interest turned to sport and recreation. An English golfer visiting Albany suggested the land at Middleton Beach, beside Lake Seppings, as ideal for a nine-hole “links” course, as the best golf courses were those on traditional links on seaside land.

The Old English word “hline” has been reported as describing “connected areas of sandy ground, level or undulating, covered by scrub, turf and coarse grass, ranging along a seashore like links in a chain”. Dictionaries also credit the word “links” as deriv-

ing from “hline”, meaning “ridge” and applied to the ridged boundary where cultivated and uncultivated ground met. From this, the word “links” came to mean undulating sandy turf-covered ground usually along a shoreline (boundary), and from there, to a golf course on such land.

The idea of a golf links at Middleton Beach was made public by the Albany Advertiser, whose editor, W.F. Forster, was a proponent of the game. Other promoters of a golf links were also leading citizens, among them resident medical officer Dr Thomas Robinson and businessmen Charles Russell and F.W. Strother. They formed a Committee with the idea to have the government grant a suitable piece of land and in return the committee would develop a course that would attract visitors to the town.

At the meeting of the Albany Town Council on 8 December 1898, it was reported: Councillor James said he had seen it advocated in the Advertiser that golf links be made at Lake Seppings. He thought golf links would prove an attraction to the town. He moved that the matter be referred to the Finance Committee. Seconded by Councillor Gee. Carried.

On 15 August 1899, the Committee advised the Council it had raised £100 for construction of the golf course by sale of £10 debentures and formally requested the lease of 50 acres (20ha) of land between

Middleton Beach and Lake Seppings . Moir Road (later Golf Links Road), ran north-south between Lake Seppings and Middleton Beach . The land west of Moir Road and immediately surrounding Lake Seppings had been gazetted Botanic Gardens Reserve 1299, while the land east of Moir Road was Reserve 1303, for parklands. The Council duly requested that the Minister for Lands grant the Reserve lands to the Council with the right to lease portions for recreation purposes. The Under Secretary for Lands was against giving the land to the municipality and instead suggested it be placed under the control of a board.

While these details were being ironed out, the golfing Committee went on with its agenda. At a meeting on 2 September 1899, “The Albany Golf Club” was formed, with lawyer Samuel Johnson Haynes as president, land developer and MLA Albert Morgans as vice president, Dr Robinson as club captain, and civil servant Charles Keyser as secretary. At the time of its formal creation, the Club already had 38 members, all male, who paid one guinea a year membership. The membership fee for ladies was a half guinea, but



they were to have no voice in administration.

Surveyor William Henry Angove, who undertook government contracts in the region and also had a private practice, volunteered his services and made a rough survey of the course. He calculated 35 acres had to be cleared to provide a course 1.25 miles long with a cleared space 50 yards wide on each side of the line from tee to hole. Nine holes were planned with various distances from 80 to 240 yards.

Costs involved in the establishment of the course

included: clearing at just under £57; supply of turf for the greens at 10 shillings per 100 feet; and, making and lining the holes and erecting flags at £2. A mowing machine and iron roller was a major expense at £16.

By the end of 1899, players were practising on the course but not playing into the holes in order to give the greens turf time to establish. There was some problem with balls bouncing off tree stumps left during the clearing work, but this was considered relatively minor.

On 17 October 1899, the Lands Department announced the two Reserves were to be amalgamated as Reserve 1299 for the purpose of “park lands” for recreation, to be known as “Albany Park”, and the Council would sit as a board under the Parks and Reserves Act when dealing with the land. The Council in return proposed that the Governor appoint a board for the control of the Reserve, submitting Council’s choice of members, and this was accepted on 25 January 1900. The members of the new board of management of Albany Park were all golfers and members of the Club committee. The Parks and Reserves Act provided for a small share of funds toward the cost of improvements to parks and the new board welcomed this.

On 3 February 1900, president Haynes formally declared Albany Park links open. The Park and the board were officially gazetted on 7 February 1900. The first woman joined on 13 June 1900, but there were still only 3 female members by 1903 and no record of them playing in tournaments, although the “lady friends” of members provided the requisite afternoon teas during competitions.

An early issue for golfers on the course was straying cattle. The milk cows of Albany residents were taken each day to graze on the flats below Middleton Road and often wandered onto the open fairways. This was eventually resolved when the Road Board could afford to fence the grazing area. During 1900, the club shed was erected by contractors Josiah Norman & Sons. It was located halfway along the course, near Golf Links Road (formerly Moir Road) on the west side.

In 1901, to mark Federation, a handicap tournament, known as the Albany Golf Club Cup, was established, to be played in March-April. It carried a handsome trophy donated by club president Haynes.

Other competitions included 6 medal matches, “an American tournament” for the president’s cup and two matches played against golfers from the visiting Royal Navy cruisers St George and Juno , which were escorting the Ophir , chartered for King George V and Queen Mary for the opening of the first Federal parliament.

The course was “greatly improved” by the work of the Road Board and the club in the first several years, but what this entailed is unclear. Grazing sheep were introduced on the fairways to keep down grass and undergrowth, and also contribute to Club funds with agistment fees. Weekly press reports of events in the Albany golfing round began to appear in the Albany Advertiser , with a comment in June 1903 that “The Golf Club promises to become as popular an institution as the Bowling Club is in summer”.

Golf quickly grew in popularity along the Great Southern Railway route, and the first inter-club match at Albany was played in August 1906, against Katanning. The weather played a part in the decision of the Club to change the start of its playing season from September to March. The first women’s competition was held over two days on 15-16 October 1908, and was made possible by female membership increasing to 11 in that year, from only two the previous year.

On the second Saturday in July 1910, the new Club-house was opened. Constructed by Josiah Norman & Sons beside the shed used for the previous decade, the building was timber with a red painted iron roof. It was 9.4 metres in length and comprised two rooms of almost equal size. The building cost £140 and had been financed with debentures of £10 each.

At the annual meeting of the Club on 3 April 1912, the president suggested that as Albany shops, guest houses and hotels were doing well out of the visitors the Club attracted to the town, some financial support from them might be forthcoming. Three donations of £50, £10 and an undisclosed amount were received as a result. Annual golfing tournaments were introduced, leading to the establishment of the Wittenoom Cup, Albany Open and Albany Classic.

In 1913, the Albany Week sporting program was extended to a six-week event due to its popularity in attracting visitors to the town, and in the last week it offered the Albany Golf Club Carnival, which became a fixture despite the later demise of Albany

Week. Between 1912 and 1916, improvements to the course required the purchase of turf, clover and couch seed, potato and whale manure, phosphate and bone dust, 12 hundredweight of worm killer, loam, water, and the services of a labourer to plough, roll, harrow and plant.

On 3 February 1915, a portion of Reserve 1299 that was the site of the golf course, was gazetted Reserve 15879 for recreation. In 1916, the Government abolished the Board of management and vested both Reserves Lake Seppings Reserve 1299 and the golf course site, Reserve 15879 in Albany Town Council. This made it possible for the Council to lease the land directly to the Golf Club.

In 1916, Albany Golf Club decided to promote women’s golf, with the establishment of a women’s tournament and their own day of the week “the right of the links on Thursdays”. Several of the daughters of John F.T and Albert Y. Hassell Kathleen, Ellen, Grace and Honoria, were prominent among the female golfers at the Club. A.Y. Hassell was himself president from 1912-17, and in 1919, at the first annual meeting of the Associates, his wife Ethel (Clifton) was elected their president. In 1920, of the 89 members of the Club, there were six life members, 22 country and 29 ordinary members and 32 lady Associates.



The installation of a water supply in the early 1920s cost £250, with most of the funds being donated by members. The water was used to irrigate the greens and the tees. A full-time green keeper, nurseryman Bob Jarvis, was employed in 1920 and the course quickly reflected his care and skill. He remained in the position for many years. By 1922, the improvements had brought praise from past and current

Australian golfing stars and increased the number of visitors to the course. With the improved course, the start date for the season was moved back two months to 1 January to attract the summer holiday players. This proved a mixed blessing as during the summer months, the local average of 50 players was outnumbered three to one by visitors and the course and facilities were congested. Golfers travelled considerable distances from throughout the southern region to play at Albany Golf Course, and regular visitors included the WA Governor, Sir William Campion, who brought a team down each year to play the Wittenoom Cup against the locals in the 1920s.

To ease the congestion, it was proposed to extend the course to 18 holes by adding three new holes at a time, beginning with the area immediately west of Golf Links Road. The Club requested a lease of more land from the Lake Seppings Reserve, but local residents lodged a petition on the grounds the land was granted for parks and gardens.

In March 1922, the purpose of the Reserve was changed from 'park lands' to 'park lands and recreation' to allow Council to lease it out, with the argument there were plenty of other public parks and recreation reserves in Albany. A 21-year lease for a section of land between Golf Links Road and Lake Seppings was entered into in August 1923.

The extension of the course onto the newly leased area did not occur immediately for reasons unknown, but in 1927 Cottesloe Golf Club professional David Anderson, a Scot who had played links courses in Britain, drafted plans for an extension of Albany Golf Course to 18 holes, with the following comment.

"I am of the opinion that the residents of Albany do not know how fortunate they are in possessing land absolutely of the finest golfing country, and it is with pleasure and without hesitation that I say I have never seen better golfing territory outside a few links in the Old Country. The contour of your land is the nearest approach to Prestwick, Scotland (recognised as one of the three best golf links in the British Isles) that it could be possible to come across. The possibilities of Albany with this excellent contour and ideal climate must be unique as far as Australia is concerned."

Lack of funds during the Depression restricted devel-

opment but some progress with planting on the new area had been made by the late 1930s. As the popularity of golf increased, the WA Golf Association was divided into regional bodies. The Lower Great Southern Golf Association was created in 1938, and on 22 February 1940, the Club became The Albany Golf Club Incorporated. During the war years, Club income was greatly reduced as members joined the services and maintenance of the course suffered. The greenkeepers position was reduced to part-time and plantings made for the course extensions were abandoned. The work of volunteers meant that the nine-hole course survived but an estimated 75% of the couch grass was lost.



On 10 September 1945, a seven-man deputation attended a meeting of the Albany Town Council to explain the need for assistance in extending the course to eighteen holes. It was argued that Albany would lag behind if it continued to offer only a 9-hole course. Professional golfers had placed Albany in the top three in Australia for locality, but not for facilities, and Bunbury was already developing an 18-hole course. The catchcry, taken up by the Albany Advertiser, was 'We must concentrate on the tourist trade'. Another reason for extending the course was the improvements in equipment, including the introduction of steel-shafted clubs and improvements to balls. These innovations had increased the distance of the best shot from 220 yards (200 m) to 300 yards (275m), and the Albany course was now too short a course to attract the best players.

The Council declined funding and the Club was forced to look for private finance. This was not as difficult as first thought owing to the booming State economy, both in mining and agriculture. Reserve

15879 was extended northwards and the landholding of Albany Golf Course was considerably increased with a lease of a portion of this land.

Opening on 24 September 1955, a new Clubhouse was built at the southern end of Albany Golf Course on four acres of freehold land acquired by the Club in the late 1930s. The extension of the course to eighteen holes took a little longer. In March 1956 a Course Planning Committee was appointed and in May 1957 it was decided to establish the 18-hole course with an immediate start on earthworks, clearing and pasturing. Funds were short, as usual, but a farmer donated the use of a bulldozer and another donated clover seed to hold the drifting sand on the seaside holes. Kikuyu grass was introduced and fertilised with residue from the Albany sewerage farm prompting the comment that 'the stench was horrific... but the grass shot up'.

On 25 May 1963, Club patron and former president C.H. Wittenoom officially opened the extended 18-hole Albany Golf Course, followed by an evening party with buffet tea and dancing. The new course included three holes on the west side of Golf Links Road as well as the northern extension. The entire site of Albany Golf Course was re-gazetted as Reserve 27629 for 'recreation golf links', vested in the Town of Albany and leased for 21 years to the Club.

Leasing of the site was an ongoing issue, as the Club wanted a fifty-year lease for security instead of the 21 years, which was the longest period the Council was authorised to provide. The shorter lease presented problems when development funds were required as banks and other lenders wanted a more secure asset for their loan. This problem was obvious in the latter half of the 1960s when extensions to the Clubhouse were planned. At that time, various proposals were put forward to raise the necessary money when the Club's own bank refused to assist. Careful management eventually resulted in a successful outcome with the Clubhouse being considerably enlarged and facilities improved, but the issue of long-term security of tenure remained.

Having a road through the course presented real problems with stray balls hitting cars. When a ball bounced off a police car it was time to find a solution. This came in the form of realigning the road to run on the west boundary of the course, closer to Lake Seppings.

The social aspects of golf were as important as the game and the enlarged course and Clubhouse provided the best of both for members. As well as the pleasure of playing with other golfers and spending time in the Clubhouse, there were golfing competitions, visitors from other clubs and visits to other clubs, the Annual Club Ball and fundraising events. The female Club members, known as Associates, were responsible for much fundraising for the Club and for charity, with jumble sales, raffles and stalls, among other activities. They raised funds for furniture for the 1960s Clubhouse extensions and set up a furnishing committee. In 1971, a sub-committee of Associates launched a scheme of planting of trees and shrubs for protecting the Clubhouse and the course from the ever-present winds.

Lake Seppings was a significant coastal wetland and together with Albany Golf Course with its largely indigenous flora and lack of development, provided a popular habitat for coastal bird life. Albany Golf Course acted as a corridor between the Lake and the sea and was attractive to walkers and birdwatchers as well as golfers. This bird life habitat and greened space became more important as Albany continued to grow and residential development extended along the coast.

In 1971, the Royal Perth Golf Club succeeded in getting a 99-year lease on its site, and Albany continued to campaign quietly for its own longer lease, despite some opposition from those who considered the Club should not have such recourse to public lands. During the 1970s it became apparent that income from fees and charges was only sufficient to maintain current amenities and not to develop into the future. A country club resort was proposed but the issue of land was always a stalling point. It was another ten years before a land exchange deal was brokered which involved the Club agreeing to exchange its four acre freehold Clubhouse site for crown land at the northern end of Albany Golf Course, and another decade before planning on the new resort Clubhouse was completed.

The Minister for Lands gave the Club a 50-year lease commencing in 1990, which made the development proposals attractive to investment. In 1996, a new water supply was sourced from Yakamia Creek, three kilometers away. This water was piped to the course and an off-peak electric pumping system installed to water the grounds during the night.³³ In 1998, the

Albany Golf Club celebrated its centenary. The Club is the oldest in WA still on its original site.

The development of the resort Clubhouse went ahead in the late 1990s, and the new building was opened in 2000. As well as providing top-class facilities for members, the new Clubhouse is a venue for dinners, conferences, meetings and private functions and is fully booked for much of the year. The driving range, situated northeast of the car park, between Barry Court and Griffiths Street, was developed at the same time as the new Clubhouse.

The resiting of the Clubhouse to the opposite end of Albany Golf Course necessitated a change in the order of the holes to accommodate starting and finishing at the northern end. Another result of that change has been that instead of starting each nine-hole end with the southwest wind behind, the golfers now start their game playing into the wind, which has had some initial adverse effects on handicaps.

Regardless of changes in the course and the advances in the technology associated with the game, professional golfers continue to have a high regard for the course owing to the undulating landscape and the coastal winds.

Proof of this can be seen in the club record which was set in 1967 by West Australian champion golfer Graham Marsh with a round of 65 – 7 under par – and which has not been bettered since. Another professional golfer, Craig Parry, has been often quoted as saying ...

“Albany is my favourite Australian golf course. It’s a great course by the ocean, which plays hard and is never the same”.

A tradition with true links courses is the naming of the holes and Albany has kept up with the tradition. To this day, Albany Golf Course is a functioning and popular golfing and social venue.