



RCGC RECOLLECTIONS



PROVIDED BY:

C.R. [Bob] Langford.

Hello there!

I joined the Red Cliffs Golf Club in 1949 on my return to the district after a couple of years away following my discharge from the RAAF. The club has been a major part of my life for well over 50 years and I can honestly say that I've enjoyed every moment of it. As a Life Member I retain an interest in the club, although my active participation in club matters has ceased. The following is some of my recollections of the major events during my active club years.

Almost from the time I joined I was heavily involved in the management of the club through membership of the General Committee, as it was known in those days. I served six terms as President, six as club Captain as well as numerous terms as an ordinary committee member. I would recommend that every member of any organization get involved at the management level because it gives you a real understanding of how the organization works as well as the feeling of having achieved something for the time and effort you put in.

When I was asked to make a contribution to this history of the Red Cliffs Golf Club, my first reaction was – what would I have to say that others would be interested in reading! But now that I've given my time at the club more thought, it's clear that I had been an active and involved member during a period of unprecedented development at the club. I'm not saying that this development happened as a result of my involvement, it's simply a fact that it did occur during my time as a member.

Before going on to tell my story, allow me to make a couple of general observations about the club that I think are relevant.

- The Red Cliffs Golf Club was established by people who had been through the hard times of the First World War. They knew that if they wanted to improve their circumstances, they had to do it for themselves; nobody was going to do it for them. They were a determined, hard-working group of people who had a clear idea of what they wanted and they set about achieving it.
- Another point that shouldn't be overlooked is the fact that, for many years, a large proportion of club members were practical people who could turn their hand to most things. Many were dried fruit growers and dryland farmers who were used to hard work, with an almost innate ability to get the job done regardless of the problems they faced. They had access to block and farm equipment, which on many occasions was

brought long distances to work on the course. They knew what the land could and couldn't do and they knew how to look after it.

- The final observation that I would like to make is that the club has had a history of volunteerism that exists to this day. During my time as an active member, there were countless working bees, attended by both men and women to do something on the course or around the clubhouse. There is no doubt in my mind that this willingness by the members to get involved and 'do their bit' is one of the major reasons why the club is where it is today.

Where to begin!

Although I joined the club in 1949, the first real highlight occurred in 1957 when the club finally took ownership of the land. There had been several attempts over many years to achieve this goal, but on each occasion the Lands Department had refused to sell the land to the club. At a public auction in October 1957 the land was knocked down to the club's 'trustees' for 850 pounds [\$1700.00].

In my early years as a member one of the standout events at the club was the AIF Cup. Although this was not an official Red Cliffs Golf Club event, it was held every year at our course until it was disbanded in 1958. Whilst I can only speak personally about the latter years of this event, it was clear that it had a big impact on the club, not always a pleasurable one. The AIF Cup was started by the First World War returned servicemen and often attracted up to 150 players on the day. Following the Second World War a howitzer was brought out to the course and fired as the signal that the day had commenced. A tradition of the event was to invite one or two returned service women to hit the first ball off the tee and after that was done they were then kindly asked to leave.

One of the 'highlights' of each year's event was the 'stunt' put on by the participants, reliving past wartime experiences. It was during the 'stunt' of 1956 that unfortunately a club member was killed. Apparently the story goes that one of the participants bought along several sticks of gelignite in an attempt to 'liven up' proceedings. Some of the gelignite was let off at various points around the course, to the obvious amusement of everybody. However, things went a bit far when a stick of gelignite was thrown into a brazier of burning Mallee stumps. A club member, who was attempting to set fire to a piece of paper, took the full brunt of the subsequent explosion and unfortunately died two days later in hospital as a result of extensive internal bleeding. As you can imagine, the whole club was shocked and rallied around his wife and family in an attempt to support them through a very tough time. Several days later, I was in my fruit block pruning vines when a local, well-known member of the police force presented me with a subpoena to attend a Coroner's inquest along with the comment that if I didn't attend he would come and get me and charge me with manslaughter. You can imagine my shock! Here I was, a relatively young man with a young family, trying to

establish myself on the land, faced with the prospect of going to gaol. Obviously, I attended the Coroner's inquest and related my story about what had happened and was most relieved when the Coroner handed down a verdict of 'death by misadventure'. His comments about the club were a little more disconcerting when he said that he found the actions of the Red Cliffs Golf Club 'infantile'. And so concluded one of my least enjoyable experiences as a club member.

During these times, golf was not played all year round, mainly due to massive amounts of Barley grass right across the course. Anyone who has any knowledge of this vigorous grass variety would understand the problems we faced. The club had no mower to control the grass and we relied on an annual visit from the Mildura Shire Council to mow the course in an attempt to keep it under control. Over the years a number of discussions had taken place within the club about grassing the fairways to enable golf to be played for a greater part of the year. Although many working bees were held to prepare the fairways for grassing, the financial cost involved was always too great for the club to meet.

In the early 1950's we were spurred on by some derogatory comments by a visitor from another club who said that we could never grow grass on this 'god forsaken piece of land'. Across the road from the front gate into the golf course a fellow by the name of 'Titch' Ware had a fruit block with quite a bit of kikuya growing on it. Several of us approached Titch about accessing some of the kikuya for a plan we had to grass the 2nd fairway. Why the 2nd fairway you ask! Well to grow grass we needed water and in those days an irrigation channel crossed the 2nd fairway near where that patch of Mallee scrub juts out onto the fairway today. We reckoned that with the water near by the 2nd fairway was the best place to prove our point.

Several members brought their tractors and 3-point linkage scarifiers along to a working bee and we scratched up the 2nd fairway and planted the kikuya runners. Now we needed the water so we 'helped ourselves' from the channel and flooded the fairway in both directions and the grass grew extremely well. This success gave us the incentive to go on and in my 1952 President's report it was pleasing to announce that the first stages of grassing the course had been successful and that the money spent had covered the cost of a pump, piping and a mower. The club had made a huge leap forward!

As the grassing project continued we had to come up with a way to get water onto the fairways and this is where 'Old Stinky' came to the fore. For those not familiar with the term 'Old Stinky', let me explain. This is what the dam behind the 10th green has been referred to for as long as I can remember. It was put in by the irrigation authority at the time to handle the drainage water from several surrounding fruit blocks and it was the drainage water the dam held that would be used to water the fairways. It's somewhat ironic, isn't it, to think that all those years ago irrigation drainage water would

allow us to have grassed fairways and in 2009 the club entered into a new arrangement to use drainage water for the same purpose. As the old saying goes – what goes around, comes around!

With the water available it was full steam ahead to pipeline the course to get the water onto the fairways. We didn't have pumps and sprinklers in those days, so the plan was to flood the fairways. In order to achieve this we needed to be able to contain the water where it was needed, so once again our 'blockie' members came to the party. With their tractors and furrowing-out shovels they built check banks along the sides of the fairways to hold the water in.

Whilst it was great to see the grass growing, there were a few problems we had to deal with. Although the Barley grass problem had diminished there were those who felt that the Paspalum that flourished as a result of the water was not a lot better. Many members found that the Paspalum created tough conditions on the fairways, but in true Red Cliffs spirit they adjusted and just got on with it. The biggest problems with the flooded fairways were the unevenness of the water due mainly to the fact that the levels on the fairways weren't totally accurate. This led to patches receiving very little water whilst other patches received too much, creating boggy areas on some fairways. It was also very difficult to time the flood irrigation to ensure that both the men and women golfers weren't disadvantaged by the fairways being too wet for play. In the early years of flood irrigation, we didn't always get this right, but we got better at it as time went on.

Grass greens were the next big thing on the club's agenda, but once again lack of finance meant we had to wait. For many years we had struggled to attract visiting players from Mildura and Riverside golf clubs to our annual tournament because many of them were not prepared to play on sand scapes. In 1974 / 75 the club worked with the Turf Research Institute on a feasibility study regarding the introduction of grass greens. Given the positive outcome of the study, a decision was taken to implement a staged approach with the introduction of grass greens. The 7th, 8th, 9th and 18th holes were selected due to their proximity to the clubhouse and a start was made. Everyone was very enthusiastic and once again, in true Red Cliffs spirit, working bees were very well attended, with plenty of block and farm equipment at our disposal.

It was also decided to change the location of the 8th green and tee at the same time as the new greens went in. The old 8th tee used to be located in the Mallee scrub to the left of the where the 7th green is now located and the sand scrape was over the hill, behind the current location of the green. The tee shot to the sand scrape was a 'blind' shot over the hill and you weren't allowed to tee off until the group in front had rung a bell indicating that they had left the putting surface. Moving the 8th green to its current location meant that this practice was no longer necessary, thus speeding up play as

well as improving the look of the hole. To complete the process the tee was moved back to where it is today, making the par 3 8th one of the best looking holes on the Red Cliffs layout. When the members got to play on the new greens, they were so enthusiastic that there was no hesitation in proceeding with the remaining 14 holes on the course immediately the suggestion was made. Yet another major development at Red Cliffs Golf Club had been achieved as a result of the hard work of the members coupled with their dedication to drive the club forward.

Once the greens were in and established, things settled down for several years until action commenced to install sprinklers on the fairways and do away with the flood irrigation. In 1986 the General Committee sought quotes from several local irrigation system suppliers on the cost of installing sprinklers on the fairways. A bit of a shudder went through the club when it was revealed that it would cost approximately \$210,000.00 to carry out the work. There were some that argued that this would be the financial ruination of the club and recommended that only half the course should be done, leaving the remainder to a later date. I couldn't see the sense in this suggestion and argued strongly that we should go ahead with the full project, knowing that once again the members would rally to the cause. I won the day and in 1987 the project went ahead, signalling the last major development on the course.

I can look back with pride on my time as an active member of the club when I realise all the things we were able to achieve during those years. As I said at the outset, I'm not claiming credit for the gains we made, although I played a part in them all. The credit must go to everyone associated with the club during those years for their foresight, determination and sheer hard work to benefit the club they loved.

I wish the Red Cliffs Golf Club all the best for the future and I'm sure that it will be a bright one.

Bob Langford.