

History Of the Prince George Golf Club

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The Prince George Golf Club is born

Why is Shaughnessy important? Mr. Gee Ternan, the father of golf in northern B.C, caddied at Shaughnessy. He entered UBC in the forestry department in 1920 by financing his education from his caddying jobs and from the generous support of the members. While at UBC, Ternan established himself as an outstanding athlete. Proficient in many sports news reports indicate he excelled best at rugby. When he graduated in 1925, like most forestry graduates, he commenced employment with the B.C. Forest Service. The Ministry posted him in the Prince George region as a tree scaler. When interviewed about his recollections regarding his relationship to the Prince George GC, his dates appeared blurry. Newspaper accounts show, he began organizing a golf club almost immediately upon his arrival. In 1925, about 2300 residents occupied the former Hudson's Bay Fort territory. A large number, probably about one hundred "businessmen", serviced the community. Because of his strong sports background, Gee noticed few sports activities existed especially during the summer. Most of the residents curled in the winter. Gee encouraged the business community to play golf. Realize no one knew anything about this new game. Two Scottish businessmen quickly solved the equipment problem. In June 1925, Fred Bunton, proprietor of Fraser River Hardware, and Alex Moffatt, proprietor of Northern Hardware and Furniture, advertised their new stock of golf clubs, balls and bags had arrived.

Where was the most convenient location for a course?

During the interview, Ternan indicated he chose an abandoned tract of land on the Prince George south Fort George Road. The original Hudson's Bay Fort bordered the Indian cemetery near the river. In fact, the cemetery became one of the natural hazards on the course. Today the course occupied the Lheidli Teneh Memorial Park area next to the Fraser River. After unorganized play from June until September, the Prince George Golf Club held its first tournament on September 20, 1925. The *Prince George Citizen* reported the event as follows "For last Sunday's performance there were almost as many alibis as there were players; but the ice was broken and the shyness incidental to initial appearance has been overcome in most cases." For the record, the newspaper reported R.B. Carter and C.G. Ternan as scratch golfers because of their previous experience. Stanley W. George, the city clerk and assessor, won the competition 38 less 7 equals 31 net score." For the second tournament the following Sunday sixty participants entered. Fred Moffatt won with net 70. From a spectator viewpoint, the round played by Hiram Carney and Henry Wilson provided the most comedy. "They started late, after thirteen holes the light abandoned them with Carney scoring 136 to Wilson's 138. Both agreed, the game had great possibilities; but they would make a suggestion to the committee that they be allowed to commence before breakfast in order to complete the round before

dark.” Like all golfers, the Prince George pioneers soon learned alibis. Post-mortems filled the air after a complete round. After striking the ball with a mighty wallop, Jimmy Wilson, a local barrister, believed he erred because he stood too close to the ball.

On March 16th, 1927, Ternan, Carter, and the other founders summoned all prospective golfers to a meeting to incorporate the Prince George Golf Club. W.K. Nichols, the president, Chas A. Pyne, the vice-president and W.L. Armstrong, the secretary-treasurer formed the executive committee of the new club. Even at this early date, the membership longed for a complete 9-hole. This did not happen for several years. An interesting foursome of W.L. Armstrong, William Coop, F.A. Matheson, and CN superintendent Toby played on the local links on June 2, 1927. The result was uncertain but two course records were established during the battle. Matheson established one by driving five balls into the Fraser River and Coop surpassed the previous performance of Earl Fulmer by throwing his driver a further twenty-five feet into the Fraser.

Judging by the reports in *the Citizen*, the members clearly enjoyed their 8-hole course. In an article entitled “Golfing in the Frozen North”, in the June 1928 issue of *Golf Illustrated*, Mr. Harry E. Taylor poked fun at the local course. The *Citizen* reported, “We have long regarded the local course as bordering on the ludicrous, but we did not realize how funny it could be made to appear until our former citizen [Mr. Harry E. Taylor Prince George’s town jester] got out his fountain pen and commenced to draw the picture for the entertainment of the golfers in the east.” Mr. Taylor does not allow any of the features of the local golf course to escape him in the description that he gives out. He says it (the course) is as rough as the primeval forest, but dodging and crosscutting provide an 8-hole course. The distance around which is less than a mile. The description is topped off with a photo of the old government offices, with the Indian graveyard on the left that is referred to as one of the hazards. Mr. Taylor says twelve months on this course will provide either a proficient golfer or a gibbering maniac. For further entertainment for the eastern readers Mr. Taylor gives some experiences he has had in going around the course on a summer evening to the accompaniment of the yelping coyotes and one evening he says he came up to the fourth tee to find a moose and a calf examining the fenced in green. Par for the course he gives at 28, but he adds that by playing careful billiards, and knowing the laws of tangents and rebounds some player may eventually achieve a niche among the immortals by going around within this figure. In fact, on June 10, 1928 C.G. Ternan did just that. Playing with Dr. Laishly of Gismo he made the eight holes in 27. Mr. Ternan commenced badly taking a 5 on the 326-yard first hole. His score for the record was 533 333 43-27. The Prince George Golf Club may have been the joke of the caribou, but it was indeed the first.” In 1930, Dignitaries open golf courses in Quesnel and Williams Lake

Newspaper accounts in the *Prince George Citizen* and the *Caribou Observer* reported on April 17th, 1930, “Mr. C.R. Malcolm organized a meeting for the purpose of forming a golf club. The members chose a splendid location for the links on lands owned by the PGE Railway Co. Five of the nine holes lay between the railway track and the Quesnel River and the other four being on the west side of the track. By all reports the location provided one of the finest settings in the province. The fairways appeared lush and relatively free of dandelions.” The greens did not meet the general course standards, however, constant complaints about them appeared in *the Observer* pages. The Quesnel links have one distinction few if any other courses in Canada can

claim. Coincidentally, on Thursday April 24, 1930, their Excellencies, Lord and Lady Willingdon traveled north on their excursion through the Caribou. The club seized upon the good fortune requesting the vice-regal couple to officially open their course. Her Excellency, Lady Willingdon, after playing the first hole, christened the links "The Willingdon Links". To honor this occasion, she and Lord Willingdon donated a cup, the Willingdon Cup that became the Willingdon Golf Club Men's Championship Cup. Shortly after the Willingdon Links opened, on June 16th 1930 the Williams Lake Golf Course had a distinguished guest open their links. "The Williams Lake G&CC had a cleaning bee on Sunday morning. E.W. Sawyer, Assistant Secretary of State for the Interior of the US. Hit the official shot." Premier Tolmie's motor caravan that included dignitaries from the US, WA, and BC inspected the proposed Pacific Coast Highway through BC, the Yukon, and Alaska.

The prosperous years

With courses being born from Prince Rupert to Williams Lake, the Prince George members under R.B. Carter's direction attempted to improve their course in order to maintain supremacy in the North. In 1934, the club finally managed to secure additional land from the CNR to expand the course to nine holes. . Following the normal practice in small towns throughout BC, the Prince George membership gave their free time willingly to assist in improving their "palatial retreat". The call to the course came as a newspaper announcement that a "work bee" would happen on Friday evening. "Bring rakes, scythes or a push mower if you own one." Realize Canada suffered under The Great Depression, but the Prince George survived and fulfilled a need for the community. To be able to play, the course required regular cutting. The low budget operations could not afford mechanized machinery. . Much to the surprise of all members, a clubhouse appeared on the grounds on May 16, 1935. Soon through a donation of lumber, the members constructed a veranda with screens to the main structure. This little abode served its function more than adequately until the course's demise. In 1935 to improve the quality of the course, the board hired Mr. Lambert as greens keeper. Due to financial difficulties, the club severed his services one year later. Clearly with no golf professional at the course, the members relied on each other for instruction. Les Woods, a fishing guide and woodsman, solved this problem to a great extent. Apparently, he worked at golf courses in California before coming north. The local players sought his advice. Near the second tee he erected a driving net and proceeded to give lessons to all comers.

In 1936 Cater, James and Pettis embarked on major renovations to lengthen the course. #4 tee moved northward 50 yards. The first and fifth greens consolidated into one. They improved the 7th hole greatly by extending the tee 50 yards closer the 6th green. Each year during the late 30s the group attempted to lengthen and improve the course to make the layout more challenging to the members and guests especially those from Quesnel and Williams Lake. A strong interclub rivalry existed encouraging a strong impetus to this constant desire to improve. Interclub matches and the Caribou Open

Commencing in 1933, the Quesnel and Prince George clubs commenced an interclub rivalry that still exists today. Each club assembled twenty to thirty members and motored to the rivals

for a weekend golf outing. A festive atmosphere prevailed in each town during these interclub matches. Of course each club had its own clown or entertainer. Claude Foot and William Bexon appear to be in high demand in this area. Soon Williams Lake joined in these weekend excursions. Because the Quesnel course appeared to be the best, the three clubs conducted their "friendly encounters" there.

In 1933, Robert Malcolm attempted to arrange a tournament for the championship of the Caribou. This idea became reality one year later. Annually the Caribou Open became part of the Labour Day festivities at one of the three clubs. In true Prince George Golf club style, the members under Bob Carter's direction diligently worked to prepare the course for the first Caribou Open. In particular the crew installed new teeing platforms. Thirty-two men and four women competed for the John A Fraser Cup, the Vaughan Shield, the Rod McKenzie Trophy and the Prince George Cup in various individual and mixed events. In 1938 the Carpenter Cup and the Scott Trophy were added in 1938 the ladies competed for two additional trophies the Carpenter Cup and the Scott Trophy. Prince George won the first team event by having the lowest stroke average turned in by all members of that club. In later years, the lowest total of the eight best scores of the club determined the victor. Dr. Ewart, the first winner of the Rod McKenzie Cup (individual men's champion) shoot 81 in the qualifying round and 68 in the championship round. This championship became the premiere golfing event in the Caribou during the 30s and 40s. Today, the event is held at the 108 Golf Course. Unfortunately, it appears the original trophies have been lost. The Prince George GC hosts a similar event called the Simon Fraser Open for men and women.

The waning years

At the close of the 30s, the club still appeared strong. The members paid annual dues of: \$7 for men, \$4 for ladies, \$2 for juniors, and \$5 for non-residents. In fact, the club hired their second greens keeper Sandy Duncan. To assist him, the club purchased a \$150 power mower. The B.C. government granted the club a twenty-one year lease for the southerly portion of the property. This enabled the club to erect a fence to keep the course free of livestock. With a sense of security, the long-desired course improvements commenced. The major changes involved holes number two, three and four. The number two green was moved westerly several feet thus clearing number five considerably. Number three green was moved westerly 200 feet and the number three tee was shifted to the northwest corner of the Indian Cemetery. The number four tee was moved closer to the number three green developing a sporty dogleg hole. All greens were resanded and the barbed wire fencing around the green's perimeter was removed. The first appearance of difficulties in the club arose with the cancellation of all interclub activities due to gas rationing – the Caribou Championship was cancelled. The war began to affect the club. Soon more and more male members left for overseas duty causing a decrease in club revenues. The first signs of a major problem appeared in the Prince George Citizen March 29, 1945. Golfers "seek to create greater interest in their golf course". The old-timers hosted a meeting to revive the club. They hoped the Prince George citizens would respond positively to the argument an active club would induce business visitors to spend extra days in the areas.

The plea fell on deaf ears. The second major problem now surfaced. Under Jimmy James' direction the club commenced a campaign to raise \$1850 for course improvements to attract additional members. Even Quesnel and Williams Lake, longtime supporters, indicated they would not travel north to play on the inadequate links. Because only three holes occupied city land, the council, although sympathetic to the Prince George members, could not assist. The founding fathers fought valiantly to save their beloved home. Councilor Harold Moffat, in a last-ditch stand, sponsored a motion to add several city blocks adjacent to the present golf course. This would enable the council to provide funding to the club. The city council hoped to save the golf by proposing to lease the old airport to the members. "Take a leaf out of Senator Gerry McGeer's book, float a bunch of baby bonds" prompted club member Major Jack Nicholson. Thirty die hard golf enthusiasts pondered over the financial problems connected with constructing a golf course on the old airport site. Rallied by Bill Dobson, president of the club encouraged the members to move to the airport site. The city approved a generous 20-year lease with a nominal rental fee plus taxes. Optimistically, the membership felt confident they could raise the estimated \$10,000 for the new course. J.A. Wood and W.H. Brinkworth of Jasper supervised the design and construction of the new course. The general feeling of the membership at the April 10, 1947 general meeting could best be summed up by Mr. Morgan's words "A good golf course is the responsibility of the city as well as the club because a golf course is only as good as the city it's found in and this being a "tourist Mecca" we need a golf course. We must get people golf course conscious. It's a high-class course we need."

Official opening of the new course

On May 24th, 1949, "150 people attended the opening of new nine hole Prince George G&CC. Bill Brinkworth, the pro at Jasper and the course designer hit the first shot. Congratulations to the Prince George Golf and Curling Club on their 70th anniversary of the opening of the second course.