

Takaka Golf Club origins - contributed by John Falconer in August 2001

Golf was first played in Takaka before World War 1 on the Baigent property, Fairholm, at East Takaka. The original course was on both sides of the road.

In later years a nine-hole course was laid out on Tui Baigent's farm which was memorable for the influence of the totara trees and stony ground. One hole had a tiny green surrounded by trees. It was a par three and the tee shot was like lobbing a ball into a bird's nest.

In the late 40s farming pressure necessitated a shift to an adjoining farm owned by Mrs Franklyn. This land was also cursed by stones. The quality of the course can be judged by the fact that I can only recall one hole, the first.

In 1959 the club had to shift again as the Franklyn farm was sold. There were two options. One was to go next door to Tome Lines's farm where a course of sorts could have been formed immediately, or they could go to some Crown land at Pohara, which had two major advantages. It could be had in perpetuity for a peppercorn rental, and, for the most part it was wonderful links land golfing country. The downside was that the sand was covered in a forest of gorse and it would take forever to establish a course.

The membership of the club in that era was older than now, indeed a substantial number were retired or very near it. To their everlasting credit they carried their old clubhouse, minus the fireplace, to the beach and attacked the gorse. They did have one huge advantage; Bob Haile and the Golden Bay Cement Company backed their efforts. Their sacrifice is something that present members should never forget.

The design of the course was entrusted to an Auckland architect named Babich who had designed Greenacres. He was a disciple of the Scottish genius Alister Mackenzie whose motto was "the lie dictates the play". Bulldozers were used to crush the gorse but not to shape the fairways on the course. The greens, the greatest strength of the course, were sown directly onto the sand.

For years it seemed that the dreaded wire like "rats tail" was all that was going to survive. By the early 70s some grass was growing, trees were planted, the "old shed" was replaced by a substantial clubhouse and the real potential of the course became obvious.

Today the course provides a unique golfing experience. It is not long and long handicappers need not be intimidated by length; one of the most demanding holes on the course is only 100 metres long. Another signature hole, the 4th, is a par 4 but only 263 metres.

The annual Golden Bay Open attracts a top field of amateurs and professionals but only Peter Giles, the New Zealand club pro champion, has broken par for the 36 holes. Murray Macklin calls it "the pearl in the Bay" but former Greenacres pro Mike Olliver is not so complimentary. After a frustrating round of 67(par 70), which included eight birdies, he called it "a tight little bastard with teeth". This is the great attraction of our club. It is not too daunting for the club player but is still a demanding test for the top professionals.