

GolfStyles

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Carolina

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CAROLINAS
SECTION

STORIES from the GRAVE



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BY PATRICK JONES

You've seen them. There by the fourth tee, the 12th green, a few paces into the woods near the 16th fairway. We glance their way, acknowledge their presence, but we don't want to intrude. We certainly don't want to hit a ball in there. We might glance in and pay our respects, but that's about it. Golf courses in the Carolinas have been built near and even around cemeteries. And that got us to thinking: Who's buried there, and what story might they tell golfers who pass by?





A GRAVESTONE IN THE SMALL CEMETERY AT BLOODY POINT

It is not an overstatement to say that many golfers love the game to death. Some take it a step further.

Prior to drawing their final breath, more than a few golfers have requested that their earthly remains be spread like slow-release fertilizer across their favorite golf course or, optionally, buried a straight six-footer below in close proximity.

Talk about your preferred lies.

Only true fans likely know that renowned golf architect Alister MacKenzie, whose designs include three of the game's treasures – Augusta National, Royal Melbourne and

Cypress Point – had his ashes strewn across Pastiempo Golf Club (another of his California courses) upon his death in 1934.

A Google search referenced a story on two deceased members of Delray Beach (Fla.) Golf Club who had their, well, reconstituted makeup added to the mix in a greenside bunker on No. 18. Obviously, they were still dying for a game.

There is a final note on this macabre subject: Golfers playing Pebble Beach Golf Links, perhaps the most scenic and revered public-access course in the world, must remember to pay proper

respect to grit cleaned from the grooves of their clubs after a round. Let's just say that vigilant security patrols are not sufficient to stop the frequent urn dumps on this serene stretch of golfing heaven. It is, after all, a drop-dead gorgeous location. And never, ever brag after your round that you cremated your approach shot to the course's famous finishing hole along Monterey Bay. That would be considered a triple bogey in poor taste.

Golfers, without question, have proven their loyalties to the game when it comes to choosing their plot for stepping into the hereafter.

Because of this penchant, it is a bit surprising that spirit sightings are not more frequent on golf courses. Common paranormal theory is that the souls of the departed remain earthbound until they can attend to unfinished business. (Extensive academic research on this topic was accomplished by watching reruns of Patrick Swayze in *Ghost*.) Name one golfer you know who wouldn't want to stick around for just nine more holes after his demise.

Though the use of the word scary on a golf course usually applies to slick, breaking downhill putts, sometimes its meaning is more ominous.

Numerous golf courses around the world – some found in the Carolinas – include deathly elements about them. Creaky, drafty old clubhouses still abound. Eerie graveyards on and around layouts are not uncommon. It is not unheard of for final resting grounds to come into play after egregiously errant swings, which, morbidly speaking, lends new meaning to golf's lingo of a bad shot being dead.

With the bewitching occasion of Halloween upon us, numerous Carolinas PGA Section members were recently quizzed on spooky personal encounters with the supernatural. Horrifying swings spotted on the practice range did not qualify. While no one admitted to encountering apparitions, several pros shared anecdotes that ranged from unsettling to hauntingly comical.

Reports of nearby graveyards, reminders to aboveground golfers to relish every round, were the most prevalent accounts.

The following intelligence on cemeteries rolled in from club professionals across the Carolinas. All of the graveyards mentioned on these courses were treated with appropriate

sanctity by the designers forced to circumvent these existing natural hazards.

Arguably, the most gruesomely named golf course in the Carolinas is Bloody Point on Daufuskie Island, South Carolina. There is historical relevance to the name, according to head professional Kevin Foley. Its basis was a deadly battle on the island between Yemassee Indians and English settlers in the early 1700s. The bloody skirmish unfolded near what is today the 18th hole.

A graveyard remains situated on the back nine of the layout designed by Tom Weiskopf and Jay Morrish that opened in 1991. The cemetery does not, however, contain the remains of any of the deceased combatants. Instead, according to Foley, local historians identified the burial plots as those of plantation slaves and their descendants.

"Actually, it's pretty creepy," says Foley. "(The cemetery) sits right on Mungen Creek between the 17th green and the 18th tee. You drive right through the graveyard to get to the last hole. There is a miniature avenue of oaks that leads into it. It can be kind of spooky out there when the wind is howling. It's not for the faint of heart sometimes. I would not be out there on Halloween night by myself – that is for sure."

Fortunately, for those easily terrified, a sufficient-sized buffer was left between the holes so that the graveyard at Bloody Point does not come into play.

Similar cemeteries on and around courses were called in from around the Carolinas. None of the sites was personally verified by this writer via midnight visits with a dimming

flashlight. Those mentioned below are not presented as an all-inclusive list:

- Wachesaw Plantation in Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, has a graveyard behind the 14th green while nearby Blackmoor Golf Club has a site left of the 13th hole.
- There were two graveyards reported on the front nine of The Heritage Club in Pawleys Island, South Carolina.
- Adjacent cemeteries were also reported at Berkeley Country Club in Moncks Corner, South Carolina; River Hills Country Club in Clover, South Carolina; Tanglewood Park Golf Club in Clemmons, North Carolina; Florence (South Carolina) Country Club; Carolina Trace Country Club in Sanford, North Carolina; Chapel Hill's (North Carolina) Finley Golf Course; Old North State in Badin Lake, North Carolina; Cleghorn Plantation Golf Club in Rutherfordton, North Carolina; Belvedere Country Club in Hampstead, North Carolina; Blowing Rock (North Carolina) Country Club; Hejaz Shrine Club in Mauldin, South Carolina; and The Pointe Golf Club at the Outer Banks.

- A cemetery at the Regent Park Golf Club in Fort Mill, South Carolina, was cited by Fred Bond, lead instructor at its golf academy. The graveyard sits on the former PTL property once owned by defrocked televangelists Jim and Tammy Faye Bakker. Um, more than just dreams died during the fall of their dubious evangelical empire.

One of the more spirited anecdotes came from Dennis Nicholl, director of golf at World Tour Golf Links in Myrtle Beach. One of Nicholl's previous haunts was as club manager of nearby Pine Lakes International Country Club. Pine

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Lakes is nicknamed "The Granddaddy" because of its status as the original course built on the Grand Strand. It opened in 1927. Snead, Sarazen and lesser golfers with the last names of Rockefeller and Vanderbilt frequented Pine Lakes during its early heydays.

The new ownership of Pine Lakes has recently gone to great lengths and expense to renovate its stately 62-room antebellum clubhouse. But during Nicholl's tenure in the 1990s, large parts of it were unused and in disrepair.

"It was a spooky place to be late at night," says Nicholls. Floors creaked. Pipes clanked. Drafts blew through the hallways. Old wooden doors swelled in the summer and shrunk in the winter causing the doors to creak open and slam shut on their own. Staff members spoke of the "Ghost of the Granddaddy."

The mettle of new hires was always tested at Pine Lakes, according to Nicholl. "We made them go get something on the upper floors after dark, and we shut the door behind them. They would have to walk through the (unused) floors with the

lights off. Almost all of them came running back to the pro shop swearing they heard something in one of the rooms. Some freaky things happened during my time there."

Martin Shorter, believe it or not, had voices from the beyond picking up the phone and calling him during his time as head professional at Kiawah Island's Oak Point Course. Shorter currently serves in the same role at the island's Cassique Golf Club.

Oak Point has a cemetery behind the driving range that sits between the first and 10th holes. The ownership asked that the graveyard be cleaned up. Shorter instructed the superintendent and maintenance crew to cut the weeds, mow the grass and straighten up the headstones. The superstitious local crew refused to do it. Shorter ventured into the cemetery and did it himself.

Every day for weeks afterward, Shorter would find handwritten notes to return phone calls from people he did not know and from area codes that he did not recognize. He returned the

calls to disconnected numbers or was told by those who picked up that no one by that name lived at that number. After three weeks, one of Shorter's assistant professionals, Steve Timperman, finally cracked up and confessed. The bogus messages left for Shorter were from names Timperman had pulled from the headstones on the course's cemetery.

"He went out to the graveyard and wrote down all the names and created a message from a different one every day," says Shorter. "He worked hard on that practical joke."

It is apparent from these stories that golfers, like the rest of humankind, maintain an ongoing curiosity – and even a twisted sense of humor – regarding ghouls, goblins and the afterlife. What golfers seem to share alone, however, is an understanding that not even our physical exit from this earth is sufficient to separate us from an undying devotion to the game.

Remember, those greenside bunkers always need refilling with new material. Boo, y'all. ♦

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