

WALTER G. FOVARGUE

Glen Arven's second resident professional enjoyed an international reputation which catapulted him into the highest tier of American competitive golf. Walter G. Fovargue was at the forefront of the "home bred invasion" of golf in America. Throughout the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, much of American professional golf was dominated by Scots and Englishmen who immigrated from Scotland, Ireland and England to these shores. The American Open was dominated by foreign names like Willie Anderson (1901, 1903, 1904, 1905), Alex Smith (1906, 1910), Alex Ross (1907), Fred McLeod (1908) and George Sargent (1909). It was not until the spell was broken by American John J. McDermott in back-to-back victories in 1911-1912 that the "home-breds" began to make their marks. These native born sons included Tom MacNamara, Walter Hagen, Mike Brady, McDermott and a special man indeed from Cleveland named Walter G. Fovargue.

Before he was through, Fovargue played in 11 U.S. Open Championships, played in the 1913 British Open Championship at Hoylake, played in scores of exhibition matches, and won the 1917 Northwest Open Championship at the Waverly Links in Portland, Oregon.

Fovargue was born March 13, 1882, in Cleveland, Ohio. He began his golfing career as a "puny" young caddie at the Cleveland Country Club in 1896 and took lessons from professional Joe Mitchell. Fovargue's poor health as a child was one of the reasons he turned to golf. He loved being outdoors in the fresh air. His parents initially objected to him taking up the game professionally, but they dropped their objections when they saw how beneficial it was to his health. It was undoubtedly at Cleveland where Fovargue met Senator Mark A. Hanna and John D. Rockefeller who became golf enthusiasts. They also developed ultimate ties to Thomasville and to Glen Arven.

Walter's first position in the summers was at London Country Club in London, Ontario. During the winters, however, Walter went south to the Thomasville CC in 1899 and 1900. It was at Thomasville CC that Walter rekindled his acquaintanceship with Senator Hanna and Rockefeller. It was also at Glen Arven where Fovargue gave them golf lessons.

During the next seven seasons, Fovargue moved around to a handful of positions in the summers but always returned to Thomasville for the winters. His movements included the following:

1899	CC at Thousand Islands, MI
1900	Lagrange (Ill) CC
1901	Marietta, Ohio
1901	St. Paul CC (Minn.)
1902-04	Philadelphia CC
1905	Memphis (Tenn) CC (Maplewood NH: Spring & Fall)
1906	Kent Country Club (Grand Rapids, Mich.)
1906-08	El Paso, Texas (during winters)
1907	Pasadena, Calif (Winter)
1907-16	Skokie CC (Chicago, Ill)
1910	Town & Country CC (St. Paul, Minn.)

One of the American players who knew Fovargue well was Chick Evans who won "The Double" in 1916 – both the U.S. Open Championship and the British Amateur title. Evans wrote about Fovargue enthusiastically: "Fovargue is one of the most popular players and a great credit in every way to professional golf. He expects to put in several hours everyday after April 1 in practice for the big foreign events. He has had a long and hard training and he is not afraid of

work. His Chicago friends have the greatest possible confidence in him. They know that he can be trusted to keep himself in the best possible condition. He plays a fine game.”

Fovargue made a big name for himself when he went on the first ever Golf Tour of the South in 1913. He traveled with the 1911-1912 U.S. Open champion, J.J. McDermott, Mike Brady, and Tom McNamara.

The inaugural Southern Golf Tour began January 1 starting with a tournament at Pinehurst, North Carolina, and included stops at Hampden, Tennessee, Sommerville, Palm Beach, Ormond, Belleair, Dallas, San Antonio, New Orleans, Birmingham, Memphis, Atlanta and back to Pinehurst. The tour ended with the North and South Open Championship.

During this tour, Fovargue never figured higher in the final standings than sixth place. At Belleair he twice came within two strokes of the course record. As a result of Fovargue’s superior performance, several Chicago professional golfers decided to sponsor him into the 1913 British Open Championship at Hoylake by paying his expenses.

The six-foot-three-inch Fovargue towered over many of his professional colleagues. He had a graceful upright swing with a dramatic arc that took full advantage of his height.

Walter’s brother, Arthur Fovargue, was also a golf professional serving at Skokie CC (1907-09), Louisville, Kentucky (1911), Calumet CC, Chicago (1915-16, CC of San Francisco (1916-17), Mid City CC, Chicago (1924-226), and Westbrook CC, Mansfield, Ohio (1928).

Called “Wallie” by his professional friends including Chick Evans, Fovargue was lauded for his genial manner and sportsmanlike instinct which endeared him to scores of golfers. In 1912, Walter played in the Western Open contested at the Idlewild CC for the 13<sup>th</sup> occasion. The tournament was won by MacDonald Smith with a total score 299. Alec Robertson came second with 302 followed by Johnny McDermott with 303. Fovargue and Tom MacNamara divided

fourth and fifth places with equal scores of 305. Fovargue's score eclipsed form Open champions, Fred McLeon, Alec Smith, and Jock Hutchison.

The next year, American Amateur Francis Ouimet shook the foundations of golf with his historic victory over Harry Vardon and Ted Ray in the 1913 U.S. Open Championship contested at Brookline. Before the tournament began, six professionals played an exhibition match on the Country Club golf links. The two Vardons, Harry and Tom, played partners with Walter Fovargue against Ted Ray, J. Croke and Leith. Fovargue's team won the sixsome match. When it came to star power in golf, Walter had friends in high places.

During his tenure at Skokie CC in Chicago, Fovargue continued to impress all those around him with his good character. In 1912, he set a new course record 68 while eclipsing the old record of 69 set by Harry Turpie of Edgewater. The prior year, Skokie's \$25,000 clubhouse burned to the ground together with \$10,000 worth of golf equipment owned by Fovargue. The building burned while Skokie's directors dined at a banquet at the Chicago Athletic Club. While surveying the ruin, Skokie member, Mrs. Harvey Pound, openly cried for "her dear old clubhouse with its decorations and memories of many a golfing gathering." Walter Fovargue gently comforted Mrs. Pound, "Why, Mrs. Pound, it will be rebuilt. It will be better than ever. Your loss is nothing. I lost nearly all I had in the world – thousands of dollars worth of clubs and supplies for the Spring opening." Instantly Mrs. Pound dried her eyes and forgetting her sentimental loss gave Fovargue an order for a new set of clubs. "You are the jollier, Mr. Fovargue, not my husband who usually plays that role."

After Philadelphia, Fovargue went to the Memphis (Tennessee) Country Club. He then did a short stay at the Kent Country Club of Grand Rapids, Michigan. After his stay at Thomasville, in 1906 Fovargue became the professional at Skokie CC near Chicago, Illinois. It

was at Skokie that Fovargue became the close friend of Chick Evans, the 1916 American Open champion and 1916 British Amateur champion. Evans believed and wrote that "Wallie" Fovargue was "one of the most popular players and a great credit in every way to professional golf."

Fovargue was a superb teacher and many of his students attained prominence in their golfing pursuits including: Fraser Hale; Gordon Copeland; Phil Stanton, former Michigan champion; Kenneth Burns; Miss Mildred Smith; Miss Myra Helmer; Miss Georgiana Bishop, the 1904 Women's Amateur National Champion at Merion Cricket Club.

In 1916, Fovargue ended his decade at Skokie and left Chicago for San Francisco. He decided to divide his loyalties between the Mungo Manufacturing Company and to act as an understudy to Donald Ross, the eastern golf course architect of national and indeed international acclaim. Fovargue spent several weeks traveling with Ross inspecting courses and learning the fundamentals of golf course architecture from him. Fovargue first worked with Ross in redesigning the North Shore Golf Links at Skokie. They reversed the play on the first nine holes, filled in little fairway bunkers, shifted the greens, added more effective "real" hazards and lengthened some of the holes.

One of his first design projects was at Fairhope, Alabama, in what was then believed to be the record for the quickest golf course construction in America. Fovargue had the course laid out and play began over it within one week from the day he arrived in Fairhope. All tees and greens were made of red clay. Few bunkers were constructed because of the natural hazards already existing on the property. The population of Fairhope was then only 600.

In 1916, Fovargue was hired by the Annandale Golf Club in California to remodel its course. The clubhouse was relocated from one end of the course to the other necessitating a

complete redesign which Walter skillfully accomplished.

In 1917, Fovargue teamed up with James A. Donaldson and Wilfred Reid to design the Lakeside Golf Club links. It was celebrated for its combination of seaside and inland golf holes. The first half of the course was laid over rolling hills and natural inland hazards while the remaining stretch traversed natural sand dunes close to the oceanside. The inland holes were protected from the wind by a natural plateau while the ocean holes were unprotected from the vicissitudes of the wind. The course was favorably compared on its opening with Pine Valley GC and National Golf Links on Long Island. The course borders on Lake Merced.

While in San Francisco in 1917, Fovargue won the Northwest Open Championship on the Waverly Country Club links against a distinguished field of golf champions. In assembling the winning score 290, Walter broke the course record with a 69 in the third round. Fovargue defeated former National Amateur Champion H. Chandler Egan and 1916 Northwest Open Champion Russell Smith.

In 1921, Fovargue went to Japan to design the Hodogayo GC. This was Japan's first 18-hole golf links located in the suburbs of Tokyo. Also in 1921, Walter redesigned the Grays Harbor CC.

In another complete change of pace, along with his architectural pursuits, Walter also decided to represent the St. Mungo Manufacturing Company which made the "Colonel" golf ball. Chick Evans went to San Francisco to visit Fovargue after he relocated. Evans noticed Walter had a new white car with "Colonel" on the side door. Evans learned about a sympathetic friend of Mrs. Fovargue who asked whether Mrs. Fovargue was worried about her husband "being in the military" with the war going on. After regaining his amateur status, Fovargue competed in the 1923 Washington State Amateur Championship.

Fovargue moved to Aberdeen, Washington in 1917 when his friend, W.J. (Billy) Patterson told him about the new golf course called Grays Harbor CC. Sitting in the locker room of the Seattle CC, Patterson extolled the beauty of Grays Harbor established in 1912.

After moving to Aberdeen, Fovargue went to work for the Grays Harbor Motorship Company while World War I was being waged. Walter was 38 years old when war broke out. He laid out the Oakridge GC, Beachway GC (no longer in existence), Raymond GC and Olympia CC courses after he moved to Aberdeen. He also entered the energy business becoming a partner in the Harry Phipps and Watson Fuel Company, ultimately becoming sole owner. His fuel business gradually shifted from wood to oil and was very successful.

During the war years, Walter played little golf and actually regained his amateur standing. As an amateur, he carried off the 1922 Washington State Amateur Championship title defeating the former champion Ben Stein 144 to 146.

In 1953, Fovargue moved to La Jolla where he spent his last decade before his death on March 27, 1963. At the time he had completed 50 years as a member of his beloved Grays Harbor CC.

Today Fovargue's grandson, Johnathan Fovargue carries on the family tradition of playing golf for fun at Grays Harbor. Johnathan proudly regales all who listen about his famous golfing grandfather and shares his grandfather's scrapbooks which contain historic photographs and newspaper clippings about Walter Fovargue's career.

On the first page of the photo scrapbook is a full-size 8x10 photo of the "Thomasville Country Club" titled in Walter's own handwriting. It is accompanied by numerous photographs of players at Glen Arven including Frances Griscom. It is obvious that Walter Fovargue treasured his time spent at Thomasville in a day when life was not so hurried.

metal pole and a numbered sign, most of them leaning at a decided angle.

Battered markers signify each teeing ground, mowed at the same height as the fairways. Finding a suitable spot to place our tees is futile in some instances, and instead we hit off clumps of turf.

The walking is easy, with no hills to climb or hazards to avoid, and it proves to be an enjoyable day and worth the trip. We just hope that our putting strokes can be revived in time for our next round on grass greens, the following day on the wild putting surfaces of Prairie Dunes.

Except for the occasional car or truck on Highway No. 17, we do not see a soul during our entire ninety-minute round. We play alongside massive fields, and I am mesmerized by the hundreds of acres of waist-high April wheat rippling in the steady north wind that brings a feeling of desolation. Out here on the vast Kansas plains, golf on a sand green course can be a lonely experience.

# Wawona

## Into Another Time

It would be so simple to say of the Wawona Hotel and accompanying golf course that to be there is to feel as if you've stepped back in time. This little nook on the southern tip of Yosemite National Forest is much more of a time-travel immersion than that.

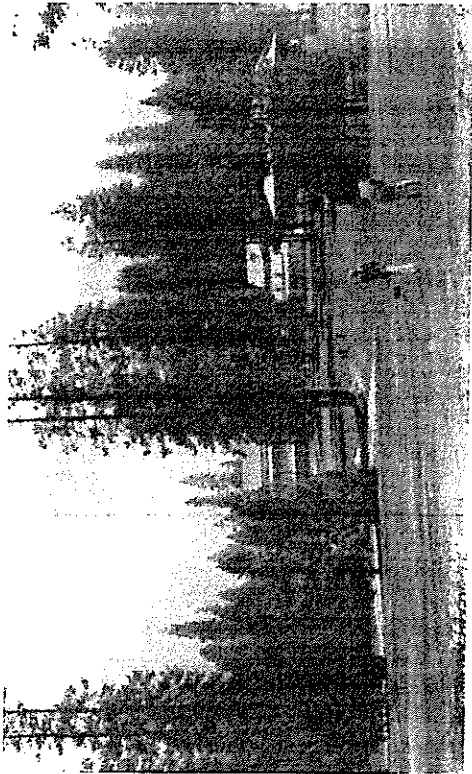
From the two-story wooden hotel that dates back to 1879, with its wraparound porches and common showers and lavatories, to the understated rooms that come with neither television nor telephone, to its comfortable parlor, where nightly the tunes spanning the lifetime of the resort glide off the fingers and silvery tongue of pianist/vocalist Tom Bopp, this is America in the early 1900s.

Across the street, the Wawona Hotel Golf Course accentuates the feeling with its charming design that begins and ends in a meadow after meandering its way through dense forest and alongside rushing streams. Holes are bookended by small teeing grounds and greens, indicative of the time ninety years ago when golf was a leisurely activity enjoyed by all, for fun and exercise and perhaps, in this case, a break from viewing the waterfalls and mountains that drew tourists to Yosemite Valley in the first place.

Galen Clark first set up Clark Station in 1857, near the present-day Wawona Hotel in an area called "palahchun" by the local Indians, meaning "good place to stop." It sits four thousand feet above sea level, halfway between the foothills and Yosemite Valley, six miles from the famous Mariposa Grove of sequoias.

Later Henry Washburn took over the operation of what was by then known as Big Tree Station. Henry's three brothers soon joined him. Henry's wife Jean bestowed the name "Wawona,"





Since Wawona first opened little has changed, the course today looking much the way it did in this 1920 postcard. Nestled into the Wawona Valley at an elevation of 4,000 feet, it's the only golf course inside a U.S. national park. (Courtesy of Rick Lund)

meaning "Big Tree" in the dialect of the North Fork Mono tribe, upon the newly constructed hotel.

It was Henry's nephew Clarence Washburn who made the decision in the second decade of the 1900s to provide outdoor activities as an added enticement to vacationers.

As with many courses that began as almost an addendum to the accompanying resort—a swimming tank and a croquet court were added about the same time—much of the history has been forgotten or lost. For years it was incorrectly stated that Alistair MacKenzie designed Wawona, the only course located inside a U.S. national park. Walter Fovargue, though, is responsible for the enjoyable layout.

On some holes Fovargue offered ample areas to drive the golf ball, while others require dart-like accuracy off the tee. Some greens are guarded in front, while others penalize only shots that stray to the sides or sail long.

Characters like Fovargue have faded from the golf world in the era of specialization. He was an accomplished player, teaching professional, architect, and multifaceted salesman.

He earned his reputation as a player by making the cut in the 1902 and 1903 U.S. Opens. Then, after a two-year absence, he made every cut from 1906 to 1916.

Included in that run was the 1913 Open, where Francis Ouimet captured the title and the heart of the golfing world at The Country Club in Brookline, Massachusetts. Fovargue shot a four-round total of 330, a mere twenty-six shots out of the legendary play-off with Ouimet, Harry Vardon, and Ted Ray.

His best finishes came in 1906 (at the Onwentsia Club) and 1916 (at the Minikahda Club) when he placed thirteenth each time.

As Fovargue was forging his reputation as a player, he was also establishing himself as one of the best teachers of the golf swing in the Chicago area while working as a professional at Skokie Country Club. A number of accomplished women were under his tutelage, including Georgianna Bishop, U.S. Women's Amateur champion of 1904.

His popularity was strong enough that in 1910, he and George O'Neil, head professional of Beverly Country Club, opened an indoor golf practice facility in downtown Chicago that was immediately popular among area golfers seeking to keep their games sharp during the winter months.

In 1916, though, Fovargue made a major career change and set himself on a path that would lead him to Yosemite.

Walter Travis's magazine *The American Golfer* noted the move in its December 1916 issue, stating that Fovargue had left Skokie CC after ten years for San Francisco to represent St. Mungo Manufacturing Company on the Pacific Coast, "and also act as an understudy to Donald Ross, the eastern golf course architect. Fovargue spent several weeks this fall traveling with Ross inspecting courses and absorbing the latest ideas in course construction. He will superintend the making of the new course of the Santa Barbara Country Club."

The Ross/Fovargue relationship would most likely have begun at Skokie when Ross redesigned the Tom Bendelow layout from 1914 to 1915. Fovargue did the same at Santa Barbara, also a Bendelow layout that no longer exists.

His job with St. Mungo was nothing to scoff at. The company was the largest manufacturer of golf balls in the United Kingdom and was looking for a piece of the American market.

Fovargue may have stocked not only golf balls, but also other supplies such as scorecards. Letters from Clarence Washburn indicate that Fovargue may have been the course maintenance equipment salesman as well.

Fovargue's arrival at Wawona was mentioned in Clarence Washburn's diary, albeit briefly, though that brevity is no surprise. He noted an addition to his family this way: "Baby born."

According to Washburn, Fovargue first arrived at Wawona on August 2, 1917. The entry for the next day read, "Mr. Fovargue laying out golf course in meadow."

Two days later, Washburn wrote that Fovargue was finished laying out the course in the meadow and had apparently switched hats, taking on a role as teacher. "I had my first lesson in golf," Washburn continued. Three days after that, work on the golf course in "the field" commenced.

A September letter updated Fovargue on the exact number of each kind of tree—674 in all—removed from what would become the seventh fairway.

Fovargue was back in early March of 1918, and in April Washburn was writing to let Fovargue know that the men were maintaining the golf course and that the greens were fine, but that the fairways were getting long because "the mower has not reached Raymond yet." He also noted that Fovargue's recommendation for golf professional, Peter Hay of the Del Monte Club in Stockton, California, had agreed to take the job for the upcoming summer season. Hay and his wife would be a hit at the course. He would become pro at Pebble Beach Golf Links and later at Peter Hay Golf Course, also in Pebble Beach.

The diary noted that fairways were cut for the first time "with one unit of the mower" and then raked.

On May 21, Fovargue and Washburn's mother arrived on the same day. Earlier in the month, Fovargue had told Washburn that he needed to visit the course again to make sure the scorecards would be accurate. Washburn also noted that horse boots cost \$14 for sets of four, and that each hoof needed to be measured for width and length, and that he would check on the status of the mower.

Hay, a native of St. Andrews, Scotland, arrived a week later and gave Washburn his first lesson the same day that "Mrs. Hay commenced working on the switchboard."

The winter and following spring were apparently kind to the Washburns, and the course opened in time for the summer tourist season.

On June 1, 1918, Washburn wrote to his friend George Uhl about the successful opening of the golf course: "Golf balls you sent arrived all OK. Started course off this morning and people playing over say it is in fine shape for play."

As the course was growing in, Washburn's game was improving. He noted this in his diary as well. In early July he played and lost three balls. Three days later he played again, shot 86 for nine, and lost two balls. The next week he shot 68, and two weeks after that it was a 56. The last golf entry came in August, when he noted that he had taken his second lesson.

It was not just Washburn's game that was improving—the course was improving as well. By the end of the year the layout was so good that Washburn was able to take a major step, ordering 150 sheep. "For the first time we have a whole golf course in which we can pasture them," he wrote to the farmer supplying the animals.

In 1919, the popularity of the course increased. A story in the August issue of *Pacific Golf and Motor* profiled the course in detail and covered an amateur tournament held over the Fourth of July holidays and hosted by pro Hay, "the untiring, good-natured professional. His rich Scottish accent and witty remarks created much merriment."

While Fovargue was working on Wawona, he was also one of four designers of the Lakeside Golf and Country Club course that was being built on what is now the Olympic Club in San Francisco.

With the inevitable entry of the United States into World War I looming, Fovargue made another major career move in what must have been an attempt to avoid combat, most likely giving up his job with St. Mungo, but continuing to design.

As *The American Golfer* wrote, "There is a general feeling among the professionals of the Middle West that those in the new draft age will be called on to enter some branch of war service. Walter Fovargue, who was located in Chicago for a number of years, and who subsequently became a ball manufacturer's agent at San Francisco, has entered the employ of a shipyard in Washington Territory."

At that time, Fovargue also returned to the amateur ranks, but his game remained sharp. He won the 1917 Northwest Amateur as an amateur. In 1920 *The American Golfer* noted that "Walter Fovargue, the former professional, who has been reinstated as an amateur, recently set a record of 68 for the Grays Harbor Country Club of Aberdeen. His previous best mark was 70, made in a game with Mr. Heine Schmidt, former western amateur champion."

Fovargue had a slight edge on other golfers. While working in shipbuilding he also designed the Grays Harbor nine-hole layout.

After the war, Fovargue surfaced in Japan and, according to *The History of Golf Course Design*, made a significant contribution: "It was in the 1920s that the quality of golf architecture slowly began to improve. Hodgaya was the first modern Japanese design—it was carried out by Walter Fovargue." The course opened in 1921.

His final project may have been another Washington nine-hole, Willapa Harbor Golf Course, which dates to 1927.

His Wawona design, however, was falling from favor. In 1934, Clarence Washburn responded to a letter from Mr. and Mrs. John Smith, who had written to say they would not be back to the hotel unless changes were made to the course. "When you fix it so that we don't lose so many balls and when you have grass on the seventh fairway, we'll be back to play," they wrote.

Turf was so sparse on the seventh that the scorecard noted that players could tee up the ball anywhere on the hole.

Washburn invited them to return, writing, "Well we've done this and much more. Now it's a 1934 model course in every respect and I'm expecting all these golfers to return this year."

Apparently Wawona in its original incarnation was markedly tougher than the updated version, redesigned by Wawona's longtime professional, Harold Sampson, and Washburn. Ironically, Sampson had applied to design the original layout in 1917.

Fovargue possibly could have been designing for his own considerable skill level. For instance, the green of the downhill second that plays from 165 to 210 yards now has only a stream running behind the small putting surface. The first incarnation had "a small creek" protecting the front and left of the green, and behind "a grass mound and stream": quite the demanding hole, especially for 1918.

This pamphlet tours the Wawona course and the pitch-and-putt layout of the Ahwahnee Hotel, laid out by Robert Hunter Jr., who helped Chandler Egan remodel Pebble Beach Golf Links. Sadly, the course was bulldozed in the 1980s. (Courtesy of Rick Lund)

**GOLF**

On the sporty marshie course on the Ahwahnee Grounds and on the newly rebuilt Wawona course



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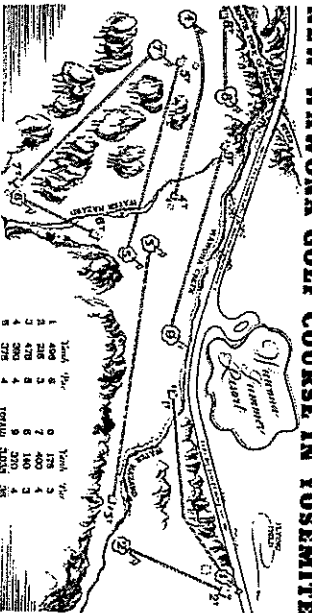
Accommodations in Yosemite National Park throughout the year range from low-priced comfort of The Ahwahnee, so that there is a complete choice of rates. During the golfing season, approximately May 1 to October 1, you may choose between The Ahwahnee, Camp Curry, Yosemite Lodge, Glacier Point Hotel, Big Trees Lodge and Wawona Hotel which is an ideal family resort—a splendid place for children—and adults to the Wawona golf course. In addition to golf, Wawona offers swimming, riding, fishing, canoeing, camping trips. Since 1925, when the Wawona area was included in Yosemite National Park, Wawona Hotel has benefited by many improvements offered by the National Park Service in water supply, roads, trails, sanitation.

*Important hospitals at Wawona Hotel*

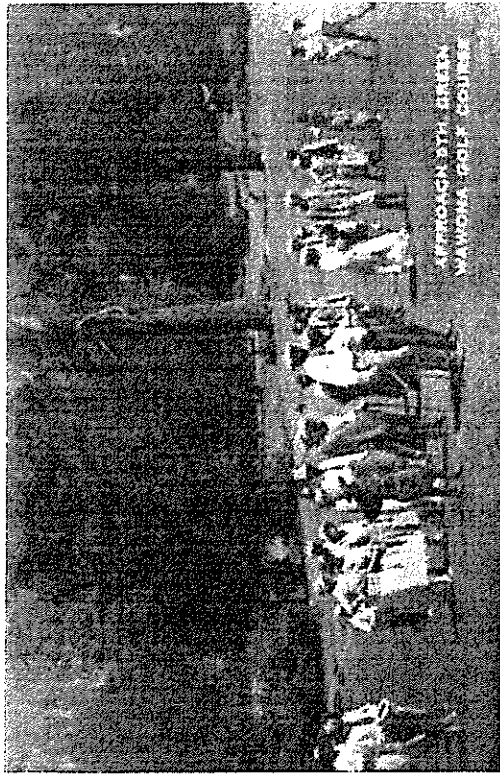
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By the 1930s Wawona did not just attract vacationing golfers but also brought in some of the best club pros in California who made the trip to participate in tournaments that attracted a gallery. (Courtesy of Rick Lund)

Today the seventh is a dastardly 440 yards. Fovargue's design was 550 yards, with a more demanding tee shot than the updated version.

The tough finishing hole was somewhat subdued when, in 1932, the road separating the hotel from most of the golf course was widened to accommodate the increased motor traffic into the valley. As a result, the ninth green was relocated from near the pro shop across the road to an area adjacent to the ninth tee where it remains today. The original ninth serves as a putting green.

A number of bunkers were added during the renovation as well, becoming the first artificial hazards for Wawona.

The improvements seemed to rekindle interest in the course, as did a major marketing effort. Within the next few years, Wawona was hosting golf tournaments for amateurs and club pros from as far away as San Francisco, but the tournaments were as much about enjoying Yosemite as about playing golf.

The invitation for the 1936 Wawona Four-Man Team Championship pointed out that there were other activities besides golf at the hotel: "And all golfers who become disgusted with

their game early in the match, may have the choice of swimming, fishing, riding or taking the 15-minute drive to the Big Trees—to reflect beneath the splendor of those trees, and to wonder what happened to those well-meant iron shots."

Golfers today will be left wondering whether there is any place better to enjoy the game.