

Golf is thought to have started in Kiama around 1903. The Shoalhaven Telegraph reported on 15 July 1903 that “Kiama can now claim a golf club”. It goes on to say that “The club has acted wisely in securing the services of a professional player, who visited Kiama the other day and laid out a 9 hole link, covering a mile, and which he says can be made into one of the best grounds in the state.” This original course was located on Chapman point and behind Kendall’s Beach.



Nell Caird

Golf appears to have thrived until about 1916, when the club ceased operating, presumably because of World War 1. Photos from the time show an army camp on or near the site of the golf course. It has also been said that stray bullets from the adjacent rifle range on Kendall’s Beach were sometimes a little close for comfort.

A Kiama lady, Miss Nell Caird, was runner up in the inaugural NSW Ladies’ Country Championship in 1906. Miss Caird went on to win the NSW Ladies’ Amateur Championship in 1909. A photo of her in 1907 looks to have been taken outside the basalt stone walls of Hartwell House, a historic building on Chapman Point built by her great uncle Thomas Chapman in 1874.

Kiama Golf Club was revived in 1927, and a new course was established on the site of the present high school. Golf continued here until 1934. In seeking to extend the lease another 7 years, the club also made representations to the council to lease extra land at the end of Shoalhaven St and Bland St. Apparently this was necessary avoid having to climb under a barbed wire fence after teeing off on a particular hole. This request was not received favourably, and the club began looking for an alternative site.

Meanwhile, two young boys from Grafton NSW, Sam and Alan Boyd, were bequeathed a dairy farm at Minnamurra. Their father Cyril moved to the farm and commenced farming. Cyril was also a keen golfer and carved out a few holes for himself on the property. When he became aware of the golf club’s problem, he offered them the use of this land, for a rental of 10/- per week.

Both Sam and Alan Boyd were to go on and serve lengthy terms as club president in the 1960s and 70s. Sadly, Alan died in office in 1972.

The club set about building a new course at the Minnamurra site in 1934. They engaged the services of Eric Apperley to design a 9-hole course and built it with volunteer labour using horse drawn equipment made available by Cyril Boyd. The first competition round was played on 11 August 1934, and the new course was officially opened on 16 March 1935.

Mr W J Rumble, President of the Suburban and Country Golf Association of NSW, officiated at the opening. It was reported that “Mr Rumble did not– as is so often the case on such occasions – fozzle when he drove what was officially the first ball. He played a splendid shot, which easily carried the water hazard and travelled well beyond”.

Around 1934, the first greenkeeper was employed. His name was Ken Tate, and as former caddy Evan Evans recalled "... he was also the caddy master, who controlled us boys and kept us in our place, and we had our individual or permanent places. I caddied for the same bloke for some years...".

Course maintenance in the early days was carried out largely with volunteer labour and primitive equipment. Fairways were mowed with a horse drawn gang mower until as Evan Evans tells us:

"We improved on this a bit. In about 1946 we got an old 1920 model Buick motor car that our president in those days Gerry Alphick found in a shed out at Jamberoo and we got it going again. That was a bit better than the horse drawn but it went a bit too fast, thrashed the mowers to pieces and consequently we had to spend a lot of time replacing and repairing mowers."

Presumably the fairway grass was also kept short by the Boyd cattle grazing on the course. The greens were protected by fences, a reasonably common feature of golf courses at that time.

Golf was discontinued during the war years from 1942 to 1946. During this time, the club kept going through the use of the hall for socials, with much encouragement from Dr Stephen and Cyril Boyd. The women would bring a plate and the men paid 4/-. The socials continued until the mid 1960s.

After the war the game of golf was restored and the club progressed. By all accounts the old 9-hole course was an excellent test of golf. Early records showed par as 72, although a card from the 1950s shows Kiama as 6,216 yards par 70. Apparently the 260 yard par 3 third hole was played as a par 4 in the early days.

A "professional purse" tournament was played at Kiama during the 1950s and 60s. The 1959 winner was Billy Dunk, with scores of 66 and 74. His morning round was a course record on the old 9 hole layout. It was also the first ever course record by the man who was to go on and set a record for the number of course records.

As the club continued to grow into the 1950s, it became obvious that the 9-hole layout would be inadequate into the future. One option under consideration was to build more holes on the other side of the railway line where the school and Links, Beach, River and Boyd Streets now stand. This idea lost favour because of the danger of crossing the train line. Another was to extend to the south into Boyd's Farm, now Kiama Downs. Cost was also a consideration.

Golf course designer Al Howard was engaged to advise on the proposed extensions, and he determined that a suitable 18-hole layout could be established on the existing 64 acres, between the railway line and the highway. Mr Howard designed and oversaw construction of the modifications, with the first game on the new course played on 21 October 1961. With one or two minor changes, the par 66 layout remains essentially the same today, with a few more trees.

Around 1964 the land was purchased from the Boyd family for £10,000.00 – well below market value, but still a considerable outlay for the small club. Times were tight for a while. Fortunately the manager of the Commonwealth Bank was also president of the golf club. As Evan Evans recalls:

“Bill Trothan was the manager of the Commonwealth Bank for quite a few years. He did a fine job as far as finance is concerned. He kept everything on an even keel and all the spend thrifts, he kept them under control.”

Funds for the land purchase were raised by issuing voluntary debentures to club members. In 1972 the club became incorporated. By then it was in a healthy enough position to buy back the debentures.

The sandy soil on which the course is based was both a blessing and a curse. It provided links like playing conditions and a wonderful ability to recover from wet weather but got very dry when the rain didn't come. Early each summer a row of white pegs would appear across the course. It was teeing up north of the pegs. A month or so later the pegs disappeared, and teeing up was on through the green.

Until the 1970s, water was obtained from spear points around the course and town water. There was enough for tees and greens, but the fairways relied on rain. In the late 1970s, the new subdivision at Gainsborough was developed. It was the first fully sewerred land in Kiama, and the treated sewage had to be disposed of. The developer arranged to pipe the water to the nearby golf course where the members were levied \$40.00 each to cover the cost of a fully automated fairway watering system. Now there was a permanent supply of water for the entire golf course!



The course in the 1960s – shortly after extension to 18 holes

In the early days the only trees of any note were several established eucalypts at the northern end of the course. Attempts to grow trees elsewhere on the course met with little success in the often dry conditions. This changed when the fairway watering was introduced. A large batch of low priced Radiata Pine seedlings was procured, and green staff and volunteers set about lining the fairways.

The pines thrived in the now moist conditions. Over the next 20 years the course was transformed from a wide open links style layout to one with the lush tree lined fairways we see today.



The course in 1982



The present day course