

# Golfing in the Sudan

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Prologue: I was a consultant situated in Khartoum Sudan and under contract to John Payne, Inc. of Hawaii who was in turn contracted with the World Bank on a project for the Ministry of Agriculture of the Government of Sudan.

I served on site from the period of April 1, 1984 to June 30, 1985. My work there centered around the planning for major agricultural equipment acquisitions and equipment repair shop improvements for the government's four sugar plantations.

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The other day I thought I'd try the golf course. You know how it is, just go down, and rent some clubs, and play, right? Wrong!! Royce, who was from our office, and I went with a guy named Andy. Andy is a real nice guy who works at a local hotel. It is a real pressure job, so he enjoys a chance to get to the golf course to relax.



Let me describe to you my first impression of the Khartoum Golf Course. Royce drove our Toyota pickup truck about 10 km out of town following a paved road which came to an end, then turned right onto a smaller paved road which also came to an end. We then took off cross-country through the sand heading for a patch of trees where the course was supposed to be.

As we drove across the barren acres, we saw cattle corrals made of old junk car bodies. Half a dozen cattle were in each corral. The road was deep with dust, sometimes almost bogging the pickup we were driving. Where it wasn't full of bull dust as the Aussies say, it was very wash board-like. We crossed over a railroad track onto a narrow road and almost got stuck in the mud ó wheels spinning z-z-z-z ó almost mired down!

Finally we get to this fence surrounding a beat up old brick building, and spotted a friendly old man standing there to greet us. A few small boys were there anxious for us to hire them as caddy. Andy had one set of right-handed clubs for the three of us.



By now you must have realized there *weren't* any clubs to rent out there. In fact there was *nothing*, literally nothing out there. We grabbed our one set of clubs and stepped up to the first tee.

**Now visualize this:** The tee is a brick square somewhat like a horseshoe throwing pit. It's filled with compacted cow dung! No lie! That's one thing they have a lot of around here. So you stick your tee in the ground or, uh, the dung, making numerous stabs trying to find a spot that will relent to the tee, and get the ball ready.

You tee off!! As your ball sails (hopefully) down the center of the rather straight 380+ yard fairway, you observe its landing by the puff of dust when it hits.

It's like playing in a 380 yard sand trap; balls don't roll very far at all. You see, the fairways are nothing but dirt or no grass, just dirt. Once you get used to the idea it is isn't so bad. It is kind of amusing to be playing among the numerous high piles of cow poop, around or over 6" deep footprints left by cows during the wet weather, and dust holes where the animals have churned themselves a place to sleep at night.

Sometimes, animals are even on the course during play. The fairways and holes are separated by roughs of plowed ground, and sparse clumps of thorny bushes.



As you approach the hole you soon note that there is no grass on the green or in fact the greens are called *obrownsö*!! There are made of sand mixed with oil and then they are rolled smooth. Golf balls roll easily and fast on this hardened surface.

Surprisingly, they can challenge you, albeit they're a bit unusual. We were told to look out for snakes in the cup, but we didn't see any. Andy says that sometimes there are little brown snakes coiled up inside the cups. Golf balls roll easily and fast on this hardened surface.

After we played 6 holes, (actually, I didn't play, because I just couldn't manage a swing trying to do it right handed which is totally backwards for me, a lefty) or we stopped at the halfway point rest stop.

This is, or was, a nice place, but the shade frame had no roof, the bench had no back, and there was no water anywhere. Seasoned golfers brought their own drinks, but we didn't know any better. So there we were sitting at the halfway rest stop in the blazing sun. Toward the end, I finally did attempt a couple of swats with a 5 iron and a few putts on the last hole. By 10:30 it was getting beastly hot.



The course is a 12 holer, with 3 variations on hole order and tee location, so you could play 36 holes if you were really an ardent player and could stand the heat.



We finished our 12 holes and went inside the club house. From the ruins still there, one could see that a few people years back had tried to create a real nice situation on this course.

Old plaques on the wall listed names of winners of various tournaments back in the years 1964 ó 1974. The evaporative air cooler, which once welcomed hot and tired golfers, no longer worked, windows were broken, and the steel pipe homemade chairs had no cushions. Storage closets, which probably warehoused cases of beer and soft drinks were now full of junk, broken boards, and debris.

Of course, there was no beer anywhere legally in the entire country, because of the Muslim Sharia Law which was instituted on September 10, 1983.



Even with these depressing circumstances, we asked the elderly grounds keeper (in Arabic) if he had any cold water (moi-ya bardthe?) To our surprise he responded in the affirmative (eye-wa!) He brought out this old plastic jug out that you would even think twice about using for an emergency supply of gas for your car (it may have even been used for that) í and one aluminum cup. The water was cool and it tasted good, in spite of the unusual circumstances.

Now for the privilege of playing golf at the Khartoum Course, one paid ten pounds ó which was about 5 bucks! Well, look at it this way: it was probably the only course in the entire country. And surprising enough there were several hardy golfers out there, men and women.

Anyway, thought you'd like to know what golfing in the Sudan is like. The next time you play on a rough course, think us out here - - actually you have it pretty darned good!

**P.S. Take a look at Khartoum's [Fenti Golf Course in 2020!](#)**