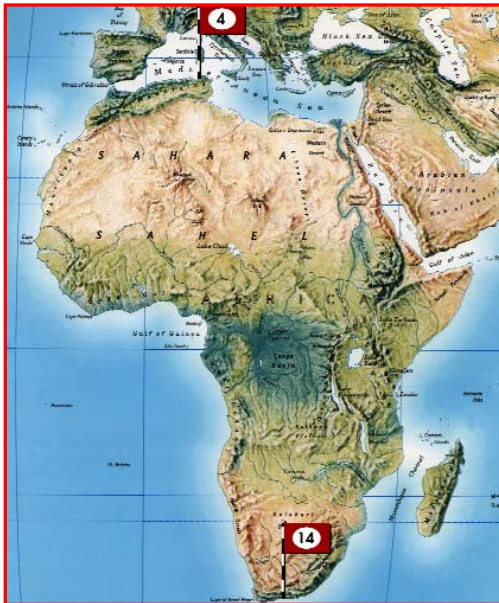


# Book Ends on the



# African Continent

by Ronald W. Fream



Reprinted from the July-August Issue of:

**GOLF**  
IN EGYPT



Unique is an overused word in golf. However, there are two golf courses situated in spectacular and dissimilar, yet complimentary settings, that offer unparalleled golfing experiences. Two different courses on exotic terrain, with magnificent vistas, perched on the edges of a continent. Two courses where it is summer and winter - North Star and Southern Cross – each offering the playing and visual traditions of the Scottish origins of the game. Two courses designed by the same American golf architects, Golfplan of Santa Rosa, California, and each the farthest up and farthest down on the continent of Africa.....bookends.

Bookends describes the Golf de Tabarka course in Tunisia and Sparrebosch Clifftop Estate & Country Club in Knysna, South Africa. Even though they are the farthest apart on the African continent - approximately 5320 miles (8560 km) north to south - in some ways they are mirror images of each other. Each course is set in a tranquil, quaint and historic village. Both are resort courses, each with dramatic natural environmental settings that include whitewater seafront views and stunning cliff top situations. Both were designed with the great traditions of golfing history in mind.

One hole does not make a golf course, even if the overused term "signature hole" is applied. Add a supporting cast of exceptional Scottish-style holes on sites to die for - one of a kind and reminiscent of other already great locations - and the result really can be called spectacular, challenging, exceptional and memorable.

Today, Tabarka is a village of 10,000 residents hugging the rocky northern Mediterranean coast of Tunisia hard by the Algerian border. The area is not only rich in natural beauty, but history as well. This is a location that was a safe harbor to the Phoenician fishing and trading fleet over 2500 years ago. The Carthaginian general, Hannibal, marched past here with his elephant army en route to Gibraltar and on to the Alps and Rome. Hannibal's last name was Barka,

as in Tabarka. The Romans sailed and fished these waters and hunted wild boar, gazelle and even lions here 2000 years ago. Native Berber tribes earned this forested coastal land the title "Barbary Coast" over 1,000 years ago. The fields to the south were the granary of Rome. The Arabs began arriving more than 1,200 years ago. The Spanish built a fortress atop the offshore island in the 1500s. This fortress is the aiming point for the tee shot on hole 14. The oak covered and occasionally snow covered mountains provide a picturesque backdrop to the area. Cork is still harvested and wild boar hunts are an autumn tradition.

Almost 25 years ago, Ronald Fream, acting as a consultant to the Ministry of Tourism, selected this area as a desirable location for a golf resort development. D deservedly likened to Cypress Point and Pebble Beach in California by Fream, this sand dune wrinkled, cork oak and umbrella pine tree covered stretch of untouched seacoast was fronted by 50 to 80 foot (15 to 25 m) high cliffs and the unobstructed forces of the Mediterranean Sea. The prevailing northwesterly winds force the aggressive surf hard against these history-riddled shores. Views to the fortress and miles of surf-pounded seacoast provide spectacular visual sensations. The winds have mounded the sand into huge dunes stabilized by the cork oak and pine trees. An under story of scrub oak provides cover for boar and gazelle that trod the golf course after nightfall. Unlike the hot southern deserts, this northwest coast enjoys year round moderate temperatures and plentiful seasonal rainfall.

Ronald Fream's Golfplan firm provided the master planning and design for the proposed resort and 27 holes of remarkable links-style golf. Eight of the first 18 holes offer sea and whitewater views. The remainder play within the forest with mountain views. Construction began in 1988. The first 18 holes opened in 1991. A decade later this course is blossoming as tourist hotels loom and increased awareness of the forested northern Tunisian landscape



attracts new European and Middle East visitors. An international airport has enhanced access. Tabarka is a surprisingly distinct contrast from golf in the better-known seaside resort destinations of Port El Kantaoui, Hammamet and Monastir to the south. Tabarka is the best course in Tunisia today. Golfplan has prepared the design concept for holes 19 to 27 which should be under construction by 2004. Four of the new holes will have sea views.

## The Northern Bookend

Hole 4 at Tabarka is the northern bookend of this remarkable duo. The northernmost golf course and the northernmost golf hole, is a monumental par 3, 245 yards (215m) from the championship back tee, a full whitewater and cliff edge carry of unbelievable challenge and beauty. Water here is on the left; at 16 of Cypress Point it is on the right. The cliffs here are higher by half than those at Cypress Point. From the left, northwesterly winds often push the ball right towards scrub oak woodland, the cliff and dunes calling for a waterborne shot leftward that must drift back to the elongated contoured putting green sitting atop a rock faced promontory. Cliffs run tee to green along the right. Whitewater and coastline extend southeastward almost eight miles to the distant headland behind the

green. Tees of 225 yards, 196 yards, 177 yards, 158 and 133 yards offer wide diversity of play and challenge. The shorter tees play progressively from more inward locations avoiding the full water carry. Whitewater, however, is always in view. After all, this is a resort course, and golf should be fun! In total, Tabarka plays to 6900 yards and a vigorous 72 par from its back tees. A more reasonable 6500, 6100 and 5686 yards (6300, 5945, 5585, 5200 meters) are provided for most players. The nearby four-star Rui Méhari Hotel provides golf packages. At the Port, the excellent restaurants with local gastronomic delicacies, are not be missed. The Tunisian wines are very agreeable. The clubhouse is an Arabian confection of style and comfort. Rental clubs are available as are golf carts.





## The Southern Bookend

The complimentary southernmost bookend to Tabarka on the African continent is Sparrebosch Clifftop Estate and Resort, located on East Head, a seafront landmass overlooking the town and lagoon of Knysna along the famous Garden Route east of Cape Town, South Africa.

Sparrebosch opened for play in August 2000, southern Africa's springtime. It is already rated the best course in South Africa. Ronald Fream, David Dale and their Golfplan team began the planning and design for the course early in 1996. David Klages of Newport Beach, California provided real estate planning consultation. Considerable time and effort were required to process the subdivision plan and obtain complex environmental approvals. The fragile native Fynbos shrub vegetation and the Sparrebosch forest ecosystem are unique to this coastal part of South Africa. Erosion control was essential to Sparrebosch forest protec-



tion. The Fynbos, is in part heather, also native to Scotland. Preservation was the watchword. Reclaimed sewage water from Knysna was utilized as the irrigation source. Environmentalists avidly watched each phase of construction, and only became friendly as the project was completed with careful attention to environmental matters clearly proven.

Knysna is a wonderful lagoon fronting community, established as a way station for sailing vessels transiting from Europe to India and Asia in the early 1800's. Today Knysna is a less crowded, less costly version of Carmel-by-the-Sea at Pebble Beach in California. The weather here, as at Tabarka, is similar to that enjoyed at Pebble Beach and Carmel - mild and fresh year round with intermittent rains.

The Sparrebosch course offers 18 spectacular holes; 16 of which provide Indian Ocean, Knysna lagoon and Otanequa mountain vistas, or all three at once from heights of over 500 feet above the Indian Ocean. Only Antarctica is south of East Head. The sea crashes and foam splashes against towering cliffs of 150 to 300 feet (45 to 90 m) in vertical face. Southern Wright whales and porpoise congregate, and a few Great White sharks patrol just offshore.

Sparrebosch is the southernmost golf course in South Africa. Local golf writers have likened the seafront cliff top setting at Sparrebosch to the Scottish links-style Pebble Beach Golf Course in California. Only the cliffs are higher. Ronald Fream recognized the similarities and distinctions early on. The overall design clearly respects this unique confluence of Pebble Beach and Scotland.

The southernmost hole number 14 rides the cliff top, looking east about 150 feet (45 m) above the white capped roaring waves below. The Indian Ocean stretches along the right horizon to horizon. Hole 14 is a dogleg



right par 4, 316 yards (289 m) from the back tees. The tee shot plays upward some 25 to 30 feet (8 to 10 m) higher than the green. Upon reaching the ball, the golfer now sees the turbulent waters of the cove behind the green and faces a short second shot downhill, 90-125 yards and 25 to 30 (8 to 10 m) feet lower to a greensite that is even more dynamic and as spectacular as the 7th at Pebble Beach. This greensite was designed with all due respect to the 7th at Pebble Beach. The second shot here, particularly if the wind from the west is prominent, can be a 9 iron or less. An east wind substantially stiffens the shot. This 14th greensite has been devilishly positioned so that the second shot view is across the putting surface horizon to a rocky cove of surging surf and sapphire blue water, over 150 feet below the greensite. The greensite has been perched at the very edge of the down slope. An over hit shot may go to the sea. Beyond, eastward, continues the coast with 300-foot (90 m) steep ochre-colored cliffs at a substantial distance across the whitewater cove. Depth perception is distraught. The wind blows, the surf roars, the whales frolic, the shot is 90 to 125 yards more or less across 6 foot deep bunkers encircling the green to a convoluted greensite offering six distinctly different pin placements, none of them a 'gimme'. Three boardwalks offer access to this almost island undulating and contoured greensite.

The golfer who knows Pebble Beach could easily equate the second shot on 14 to the tee shot on 7. However, the playing challenge, visual panorama cliff edge geography and sea surge are far more massive, stunning and dramatic here than the view across the 7th at Carmel Bay.

Sparrebosch provides a wide diversity of playing opportunities from five sets of tees: 6,992 yards (6,394 m) from the tips, 6,547 yards (5,987 m), 6,172 yards (5,644 m), 5,698 yards (5,210 m) and 5,200 yards (4,755 m) par 72 -

rated at 75 from the back tees.

Jeff Clause, Director of Golf, makes everyone very welcome. He really helps guide the first time visitor. The clubhouse offers sophistication, comfort and magnificent views. Leisure Isle Lodge, just five minutes from Sparrebosch, offers exceptional bed and breakfast accommodations on the lagoon. Dining in Knysna is eclectic, delightful and inexpensive. The choices are numerous. The wine is outstanding. Art and African craft shops are of high quality. Knysna is easily accessible by rental car from the George Airport. There are some 40 bed and breakfast inns and lodges available around the lagoon.

Cypress Point 16, Tabarka 4, Pebble Beach 7, Sparrebosch 14 – not bad partners, not bad golf. Bracketing Africa with two spectacular tourist accessible courses, and having designed the southernmost and northernmost golf holes, each comparable to two of the most famous holes in golf, is quite an accomplishment for Ronald Fream and David Dale of Golfplan. Fream's more than 30 years of professional golf architectural experience, in some 60 countries is clearly demonstrated in the unbelievably, must-see, naturalistic drama and beauty of these two courses and in particular, these bookends of Africa.

**For information on Golf de Tabarka, contact Tunisia Voyages, Fax: 216-1-793-521; Hotel Rui Méhari, Fax: 216-8-673-943 Golf de Tabarka Clubhouse, Fax: 216-8-671-026**

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