



# **The Ideal ‘Summerland’ – Golf history on Phillip Island**

By [Neil Crafter](#) | [Issue 18](#) | [0 comment](#) | 14 May, 2018 | 0

The story behind Alex Russell’s Golf Links on [Phillip Island](#)

*Phillip Island, at the mouth of Victoria’s Western Port Bay, has long been viewed as an ideal holiday destination for Melbourne’s masses. One man alone – Melbourne consulting engineer and later the inaugural Shire President of the Phillip Island Council, Albert (A.K.T.) Sambell – did much to develop the island as a tourist mecca, development that continues to this day. Phillip Island is blessed with great natural attractions including spectacular scenery and beaches, and the twin blessings of cute animals – in the form of koalas and Little Penguins – not to mention a mild maritime climate. – Neil Crafter*



What was once the golf and holiday destination ‘Summerland’ on Phillip Island, Victoria- The Ideal ‘Summerland’ –  
Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter



A brochure with aerial map showing the site – The Ideal ‘Summerland’ – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter



AKT Sambell was one of the first to identify and push Phillip Island as a tourist hotspot – The Ideal ‘Summerland’ – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter

The island, with an area of some 100 square kilometres, was home to the Boonwurrung/Bunurong peoples; it was first explored by white men in 1798 when George Bass and his party sailed a whaleboat south from Sydney, attempting to find a passage between the mainland and Tasmania – the strait that today bears his name. The island was named after Governor Phillip and the first settlements were sealers’ camps until the island was granted to the McHaffie brothers as a squatting run in 1842. Permanent townships were eventually laid out and the island gradually developed. Even in those early days the island was viewed as a holiday destination, with two hotels and the first of what were to become many guest houses established.

The western end of the island was more isolated and remote from the established townships of Cowes, Newhaven and Rhyll, leading to the spectacular Nobbies – a chain of small rocky islands trailing off the westernmost point. Irish immigrant Patrick Phelan first purchased land here in 1870, and he cropped it for chicory and grazed sheep and cattle. Over the ensuing years he purchased a number of adjoining land parcels until, by the time of his death in 1913, he owned all of the western peninsula of the island along with a large parcel on the eastern side of Swan Lake, a total of 617 acres. After Phelan’s death, this land was scooped up by A.K.T. Sambell who had a much grander vision

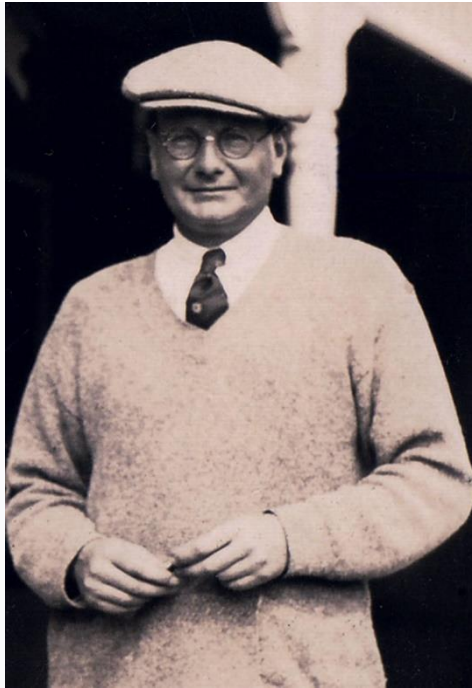
for the land than farming, and he was willing to pay over three times the then going rate for farmland to secure the peninsula

### **Phillip Island Holidays Development Company**

Albert Keaston Trenavin Sambell was born near Violet Town in north-eastern Victoria in 1879. He developed an early interest in engineering, and when he was appointed municipal engineer at Tallangatta at 23, he was the youngest man to be appointed to such a role in Victoria to that time. He later held the post of municipal engineer in a number of rural councils, including Traralgon, Sale, Warburton, Frankston & Hastings and Mornington, and was instrumental in developing the water supply projects for the Mornington Peninsula and the Flinders Naval Base. Sambell first acquired land on Phillip Island in 1912, purchasing 455 acres near Ventnor on the northern coast of the island facing Western Port Bay; here he later built a substantial house known as Trenavin Park. After acquiring Phelan's land in 1914 it would appear that the outbreak of World War I that year put paid to any immediate development plans, but Sambell slowly began to acquire the first pieces of the holiday and recreation jigsaw that his landholding on the western end of the island would ultimately fit into – and that initial piece was the ferry service to the island.

As an isolated island, the only way onto it was via the ships belonging to the Phillip Island Shipping Service that ran from Stony Point, adjacent to the Flinders Naval Base on the eastern shores of the Mornington Peninsula. Once acquired in 1917, Sambell controlled the only commercial means of accessing the island. Over the years he continued to invest in the service, bringing in newer and larger ferries including the S.S. Alvina and the Narrabeen, an ex-Sydney Harbour ferry with a capacity of 500 passengers and 15 motor vehicles. Passengers to the island increased from 12,000 in 1923 up to 25,000 in 1926, a doubling in just three years. Sambell also eventually acquired the two hotels on the island – the Isle of Wight Hotel and the Phillip Island Hotel, both in Cowes.

By the mid 1920s the Victorian economy was sufficiently buoyant to encourage land speculation and Sambell saw that his land bank on the western end of the island could be developed gradually to meet a need for coastal holiday residences. With partners, he formed the Phillip Island Holidays Development Pty Ltd based at offices at 60 Market Street, Melbourne, while his other businesses Sambell & Candy (consulting hydraulic and civil engineers), Sambell, Candy and White (surveyors) and Sambell & Cranny (real estate agents and auctioneers) were headquartered on Collins Street. Sambell's primary partner was Charles Candy, also a municipal engineer, and they first ventured into partnership in 1921.



UNDER WRAPS: The involvement of Alex Russell as designer was not announced until a brochure on the project was made public in January 1928 – The Ideal ‘Summerland’ – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter

### **Summerland**

In July 1926 the firm of Sambell, Candy and White, Surveyors, advertised in the Melbourne newspapers a call to Surveyors, Architects and Town Planners for designs for “A New Township for Phillip Island”, offering 90 guineas’ worth of prizes for the best designs. Prospective designers were asked to “Submit designs for an extensive area situated at ‘The Nobbies’, Phillip Island,” and that a new 500-foot long jetty would be constructed in the adjacent Cat Bay at which a steamer – one of Sambell’s fleet – would call in regularly. “Golf Links, Tennis Courts and Other Sporting Facilities” would also be provided, while the site was described as “Ideal, and Provides Unlimited Opportunity for Distinctive Design.” Which firms were awarded the first prize of 75 guineas and the second prize of 15 guineas is not known, but soon a separate development company The Phillip Island Holidays Development Pty Ltd with a capital of £40,000 – was established. Later that year surveyors began working to lay out the access road and establishing a network of roads and housing allotments.

In the early days of the island there was only an unmade track through this peninsula and out to The Nobbies (more than a two-hour trek by horse and cart from Cowes), following the same route that today’s highway takes. The road – previously called Nobbies Road – that gave early visitor access to the surf beach near Swan Lake and the nesting area of the colony of Little Penguins, was named by Sambell’s wife Eleanor as St Helens Road. Sambell also constructed a road down to that surf beach – today’s Summerland Beach – and with it gave visitors to the island direct access to the penguin colony here. Three local residents began a guided tour service that would meet visitors at the Cowes ferry and drive them out to the beach for a personal viewing of the penguins at sunset, and so began what soon became known as the Penguin Parade.

By late 1927 Sambell’s development company had settled on the design of their township – which was far more than a simple speculative subdivision – containing as it did a commercial strip along the coastal road and a residential hinterland. In early January 1928 the company began to market the new development that it called ‘Summerland’. The company had prepared a lavish 16-page brochure entitled ‘Ideal Summerland On the Nobbies, Phillip Island,’ complete with maps and a fold-out, coloured aerial view of the island showing the location of Summerland. The map of the initial phase of development also shows the location of the land that had been “Reserved for 18-Hole Golf

Links Designed by MacKenzie & Russell.” This is the first clue that Sambell and his investors were quite serious about the golf component of their development.

### **Golf on Phillip Island**

Golf was likely played on Phillip Island in the 19th Century but not in any organised form. Six golf courses were laid out on the island before the present one, and all of these are now long gone. In 1910 the island’s first golf course was laid out at the racecourse, which today is a koala reserve. The next golf course to be established was associated with the Isle of Wight Hotel in Cowes, which had been purchased by Sambell. The rudimentary course was laid out “within three-quarters of a mile of the town, on undulating ground, commanding spacious views of Westernport,” according to an article in *The Argus* on the opening of the new course by His Excellency the Governor of Victoria, the Earl of Stradbroke, in November 1921. His Excellency played a game on the links later that day with Sambell and two other men.

In March 1922 Sambell brought over ‘Dick’ Banks, the Albert Park professional, to properly lay out a course of nine holes and this was opened for play in November 1922; it was known as the Cowes Golf Club. An exhibition match was played between four professionals on the day – ‘Dick’ Banks and his brother Rowley, Arthur Le Fevre and Allan Maiden – along with amateur events. The quality and condition of the course came in for ongoing criticism though, with one article from 1924 suggesting that, “Golfers do not praise it very highly; they describe it as ‘rough’.”

In 1926 Rowley Banks was brought over to look at establishing another nine-hole golf course on the island, this time on a 50-acre site only half a mile from Cowes, with capital being raised to “... make an up-to-date links.” This course was laid out on the ‘Innis-Howen’ historic property owned by D.W. Bryce. To add to the confusion, a report in December 1927 noted that there were two courses on the island that were playable, the first of these at the Surf Beach on the southern coast would be opened that month, while the Prime Minister of Australia, Stanley Bruce, was scheduled to open a nine-hole course near Cowes on the 7th January, 1928. ‘Table Talk’ in Melbourne on 29th December 1927 reported on Bruce’s activities, noting that he would be opening the new Phillip Island Golf Club links on 7th January, but incorrectly reporting that it had been “... laid out by Mr Bruce’s one-time secretary, Mr. Alex Russell.” Russell had no involvement with this course near Cowes, and clearly the writer mixed up Russell’s involvement at Summerland with this course. (Other reports indicated that the course Bruce had opened was for the Cowes Golf Club. In April 1930 the Cowes Golf Club had intimated that they would play on Mr A.P. Smith’s course that was the nearest course to Cowes, and it appears clear that the Cowes club did not have a fixed home and played wherever they could make the best arrangements.)

By the time the Summerland links were playable, it would appear that there were still three other golf courses in use on the island, which, according to the golf writer for the *Sporting Globe*, Jack Dillon, he found “... to be just as rough and relatively of no attracting powers outside the immediate locality, as I expected from the accounts I received. However, in the matter of the fourth course I received a pleasant surprise.” And that surprise was Alex Russell’s Summerland Golf Links.

### **Summerland Golf Links**

The timing of the planning of Sambell’s new development at Summerland in 1926 and 1927 could not have been any better for Alex Russell. In December 1926 it was announced that he had been appointed the Australian partner of Dr Alister MacKenzie on the back of MacKenzie’s hugely successful Australian foray that year, and the new firm of MacKenzie and Russell was open for business. It is not known if Sambell was a serious golfer but he played well enough to play with the Governor who certainly was, and so he was likely to have heard of the 1924 Australian Open

champion Alex Russell and his new career. Regardless, the fledgling firm of MacKenzie and Russell soon had a new commission to design an 18-hole golf course at the eastern end of the Summerland development.

The project was briefly reported upon in the 1st September 1927 issue of Golf magazine:

“We are informed that there is a scheme afloat for the construction of a first-class course for Phillip Island. Experts, who have inspected the proposed site, and a couple of the State’s leading golfers were most enthusiastic regarding the nature of the country to be utilised. It is the nearest approach, they say, to the genuine links country that they have seen anywhere in Australia.”

The involvement of Alex Russell as the designer of the course was not released until the brochure was made public in January 1928, and an extract from Russell’s report to the company was included on one page of the brochure entitled ‘A Perfect Golf Course in an Island Setting’, accompanied by a photograph of the site that was captioned ‘A Beautiful Stretch of Golf Country’:

“In a magnificent scenic setting, and possessing many distinctive features, the golf course at SUMMERLAND will be a masterpiece – one of the very finest in the whole of Australia. The links, which will be in easy reach of your own front door. Will be greatly enhanced by natural hazards and bunkers, which will provide interesting problems for the thoughtful golfer, while offering an excellent test for the beginner.



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The scheme provides for a modern golf house to add the required note of distinction and charm to a course which will take its place among the favoured few of the Commonwealth.

In the opinion of Mr. Alex. Russell, the well-known champion and golf architect (now partner of Dr. MacKenzie) there is no finer golfing country in Victoria. The greens and fairways, in their situation and formation, are exceptionally fine; and of such character and condition as to attract golfing enthusiasts from far and near. In his own words: "I have seen and played on practically all the first-class courses in Australia, and have been shown many proposed sites for golf courses, and can confidently say that not one of them has such good natural features as this area has, or so nearly approaches the great seaside courses in England and Scotland. There is no doubt that a championship course can be constructed here which will have no superior in Australia."

*A Perfect  
Golf Course in  
an Island Setting*



	Hole	Length	Hole	Length	
10	1	480	10	480	3 Par 5
11	2	580	11	270	4 : 4
14	3	400	12	380	5 : 4-1
15	4	290	13	150	6 3
16	5	150	14	420	12
17	6	470	15	390	13
18	7	330	16	430	7 Par 5-
Par 4. 1	8	380	17	160	8 3
3. 2	9	170	18	380	9 4
	OUT	3050	IN	3060	
<u>TOTAL 6110 yds</u>					

*Alex Russell*  
 15.12.27  
 Par for nine holes 34.  
 scratch score for - 36

The card of the course from Russell's plan with his signature and dated December 15, 1927 – The Ideal 'Summerland' – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter  
The site for the golf course was at

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The brochure also indicated that an exclusive Sports Club would be formed as part of the development, "... under the management of a committee which will include Alex Russell and other well-known golfers, the membership of which will be confined to those who purchase a residential site." The plan was to hand back the golf course and other recreation areas to the club once a sufficient number of blocks had been sold, with the owners paying the sum of £10 from the proceeds of the sale of each block into a fund from which they would draw from time to time to recoup their expenditure on the erection of buildings, the construction of the golf course and other recreation amenities.



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RUGGED & NATURAL: A panorama of Summerland in the 1930s. – The Ideal 'Summerland' – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter



AGREEABLE PLACE TO MEET: The Summerland 'Golf House' boasted excellent views across the nine-hole course and also the beach. – The Ideal 'Summerland' – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter picturesque course today, and were

The site for the golf course was at the eastern end of the Summerland development and in behind the Summerland Beach where the penguins went into and came out of the ocean each day. In the end, this proximity to the penguin colony would be one of the main causes of the eventual demise of the course. The holes stretched out as far as the shores of Swan Lake and two holes of the course were to the north of the main road, separated from the balance of the course. Fortunately, Alex Russell's plan for the Summerland links has miraculously survived – a rare example of a signed and dated Alex Russell routing plan – in the collection of the Phillip Island District Historical Society. The plan is dated "15. 12. 27" and includes a card of the course – and in the manner of his mentor Dr MacKenzie, Russell just included the length of each hole with no reference as to bogey or to par figures. This card has been subsequently marked up to show which were the nine holes constructed first, as sadly the remaining nine were never realised. The land was sandy and contained broken sand dunes and grassed-over old dunes, as well as drainage courses leading out from Swan Lake. The ocean was not far away – on either side of the course – and Russell must have been reminded of some of the coastal links in Britain when he first set foot on the site sometime in 1927. A clubhouse was to be located on the new easternmost road of the development that led down to the beach and the penguins, with delightful views across the golf course and along Summerland Beach.

### **Construction**

A report entitled 'A Visit to Summerland' graced the pages of the Frankston and Somerville Standard newspaper on 6th January 1928 and described the Summerland development as:

"... the new model township that is in the process of formation out at the nobby end of the Island and we were surprised to see the amount of work that had been put in and the progress made in the way of laying out the roads and the planting of them with ornamental trees, while a golf house is in the course of erection. The selection of the site for this has shown great wisdom for the view from the verandah is one of the finest to be found along the southern coastline of the whole island."

It also noted that good progress had been made on building the jetty on the Western Port Bay side of the development. The Age reported on 8th February 1928 that:

"Work has commenced on the new golf course at Summerland. It is hoped that five holes will be ready at Easter and the full eighteen holes will be in excellent playing condition next season. When this course is completed there will be three courses on the island, and golfing enthusiasts will be fully catered for."

This estimate though was well off the mark and in June that year the company announced in the pages of the Frankston and Somerville Standard newspaper:

"... that their nine hole course will be ready for play next spring and that a water supply will be provided for each green before next summer. A café is also under construction and will be opened for the convenience of visitors next summer."

In April 1928 the company advertised for operators to run the guest house that formed part of the golf clubhouse, with the new building constructed by a local builder, Mr Henry Sykes. About three years later, in 1931, the guesthouse was enlarged to accommodate more people, the builder being Mr Vic McRae.

Notably the course was now described as a nine-hole course and it was apparent that the company had decided to only construct this initial nine and leave the remaining holes until a future stage. Water was planned to be laid on to each green, and in December 1929 the Shire of Phillip Island, now a new council solely for the island and headed by its first Shire President A.K.T. Sambell, granted permission to the company to lay water pipe to the Summerland golf

links from Green Lake, located just to the north-east of the two holes on the northern side of the main road from Cowes, subject to the approval of the engineer (which in this case, was no doubt a formality given that it was the Shire President's company).

The golf holes were constructed and maintained by local man Mr Rees Jones, with assistance from his son Les and other local farmers. Jones was a good golfer, playing off a plus-2 handicap and later won the 1938 club championship of the Summerland Golf Club. During construction Rees lived for two years in a tent and a tin shed with his wife and two children, according to his grandson Howard Jones. Many cubic yards of Merri Creek soil were imported on to the golf course site in a measure to try and provide "improved" soil conditions from the existing native sands. Irrigation water was pumped from the spring at Green Lake, now known as Flynn's surfing area, and was reticulated to the course from a large holding tank on a dune nearby. Local farmer Rupert Harris and his brother Gren, who worked their family property near Ventnor, were also employed by Sambell in the construction of the course. They took out to Summerland a sledge, two draught horses and a dam scoop, which they used to form the bunkers.

The jetty, with its access road that was sluiced through a 60-foot high sand dune, was built with Tasmanian timber but was used only a few times by the ferry 'Narrabeen' before going out of use as Cat Bay proved to be a difficult harbour. Today, remnants of the jetty's supports can still be seen on the beach at Cat Bay.

Open at last After a good deal of hard work in establishing turf in this sandy country, the course finally reached a playable condition in early 1930 and Sambell decided to open the nine holes at Summerland with a professional tournament to be held on 23rd April, for which the company put up prizemoney of £50. Twelve of Victoria's leading professionals were invited and the event was well covered by the Melbourne newspapers. A week before the event the Sporting Globereporter visited the island to check out the new course and he wrote:

"At the weekend I visited this course, and was pleased to discover nine excellently laid out and well kept, class golf holes. Alex Russell was the designer, and he did a sound job. Without any exaggeration, it may be said that this course could become one of the most popular in Victoria. At the present time there is very good turf on the greens, water is laid on, and the fairways are coming on promisingly. I am sure the professionals will be as pleasantly surprised next week as I was on Sunday. The course is eight miles from Cowes, and the road is good."

The professionals – included amongst their number were 'Jock' Young, Arthur Le Fevre, George Naismith and Reg Jupp – played a practice round on the Tuesday before tackling 36 holes of stroke play – four trips around the nine-holer. The Age commented that:

## THE SUMMERLAND GOLF CLUB

### ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS.

**PHILLIP ISLAND**

**RESIDENTS:** Gentlemen - £2/2/0  
Ladies - £1/1/-

**VISITORS:** Gentlemen - £1/1/-  
Ladies - 10/6

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### GREEN FEES.

One Week - - - 10/6  
One Day - - - 2/6  
Half Day - - - 1/6

Fees must be paid in advance at Summerland House, and the ticket attached to golf bag for inspection by greenkeeper

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## THE SUMMERLAND GOLF CLUB

PHILLIP ISLAND.

### LOCAL RULES.

(To be read in conjunction with the RULES OF GOLF.)

1. The ball must be played from where it lies, with the exception of rabbit scrapes and those portions of the course marked G.U.R., when it may be lifted and dropped without penalty as provided in the Rules of Golf.
2. There is no out of bounds.
3. If a ball lie within one club's length of any fence, player may lift same and drop within two club's length, but not nearer the hole, without penalty.
4. If a ball lie within one club's length of any seat, drain pipe, water pipe, tap or notice board, and interferes with the stroke, the player may lift the ball and drop within two club's length from the place where it lay, but not nearer the hole, without penalty. A ball lifted in a hazard under such circumstances shall be dropped in the hazard.
5. A ball lodging in creek at 8th and 9th hole may be lifted and dropped not nearer the hole—penalty, one stroke
6. A ball lying on a green other than that which the player is approaching, must not be played, but lifted and dropped not nearer the hole played to, and upon the side of the green where the ball lies, without penalty.

It is the duty of every golfer to replace, or see replaced, any portion of turf cut out in the act of playing.

### REPLACE DIVOTS.

CARD OF THE COURSE: The Summerland Golf Club card carried the annual fees for island residents, guests as well as weekly, daily and half-daily green fees –one of the earliest examples of offering unlimited play for a set price – :1 – The Ideal 'Summerland' – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter

SUMMERLAND GOLF CLUB.															
PLAYER <i>Russell Weir</i>										Stroke		Match			
HANDICAP										18					
HOLES	Distance Yards	Holes where strokes taken	BOGEY	PLAYER		MARKER		HOLES	Distance Yards	Holes where strokes taken	BOGEY	PLAYER		MARKER	
				Strokes	+ Won - Lost O Half	Strokes	+ Won - Lost O Half					Strokes	+ Won - Lost O Half	Strokes	+ Won - Lost O Half
1	336	11	4	5	0	3	0	10	336	13	4	7	4	0	
2	164	15	3	4	0	3	0	11	164	16	3	5	4	-	
3	450	1	5	7	-	4	-	12	450	3	5	8	6	0	
4	251	5	4	6	+	4	+	13	251	6	4	9	4	+	
5	372	8	5	10	-	7	-	14	372	9	5	7	6	0	
6	110	17	3	5	0	3	0	15	110	18	3	5	4	-	
7	444	2	5	7	+	4	+	16	444	4	5	7	4	+	
8	168	12	3	5	-	4	-	17	168	14	3	5	4	-	
9	382	7	5	8	0	6	0	18	382	10	5	8	5	+	
OUT	2677		37	57	43	-1		IN	2677		37	61	41	Sgn	
								OUT	2677		37	57	43	-1	
				SIGNATURE <i>W. Addison</i>								TOTAL		74	
				DATE <i>12/6/37</i>								DEDUCT H'CAP			
				<b>REPLACE DIVOTS</b>								NET TOTAL			

CARD OF THE COURSE: The Summerland Golf Club card carried the annual fees for island residents, guests as well as weekly, daily and half-daily green fees –one of the earliest examples of offering unlimited play for a set price – The Ideal 'Summerland' – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter

“The visitors played over the picturesque course today, and were agreeably surprised at the excellence of the layout and the freshness of the turf. An up-to-date watering system has been introduced at all the greens, which are in good order throughout. So far nine holes have been constructed, and the committee is very wisely concentrating on establishing the work begun, which was undertaken under the expert supervision of Alex Russell. Excellent golfing country has been selected, with a splendid sandy subsoil, and if the present sound policy is maintained the course should mature into an admirable seaside links.

Par for the 18 holes is 68. Some of the holes have admirably exploited the scenic effects of the country, notably the ninth, which is played towards the beach. The fourth and fifth, both blind holes, have to carry the saddleback of a large sand hill from the tee and opened out into miniature valleys on the way to the green. Large galleries witnessed the visitors at play today.”

The Argus described the course as:

“... still somewhat in the rough, but the intrinsic interest of the round is already very great. The undulating terrain is of the most approved pattern, with brush covered sand dunes on all sides and many beautiful nooks for the putting green.”

The company supported the publicity for this event with paid advertisements, espousing the Summerland course as the “most attractive one out of Melbourne” and that visitors should reserve accommodation at Sambell’s Isle of Wight Hotel in Cowes, where the professionals were put up during the trip. The day of the tournament saw the course freshened up by some overnight rain and the morning scores were good, with Boorer, Le Fevre and Jupp tied for the lead on 71. The afternoon scores worsened, likely due to a freshening breeze, and Horace Boorer ended up tied for first prize, after an afternoon 77, with Ernest Wood who shot 75 and 73. The Argus report of the tournament noted that the other nine holes had “... been laid out and would gradually come into play,” suggesting that a start may have been made on building the remaining holes. At the conclusion of the day’s play the prizes were awarded to the winners by A.K.T. Sambell in his role as Shire President.

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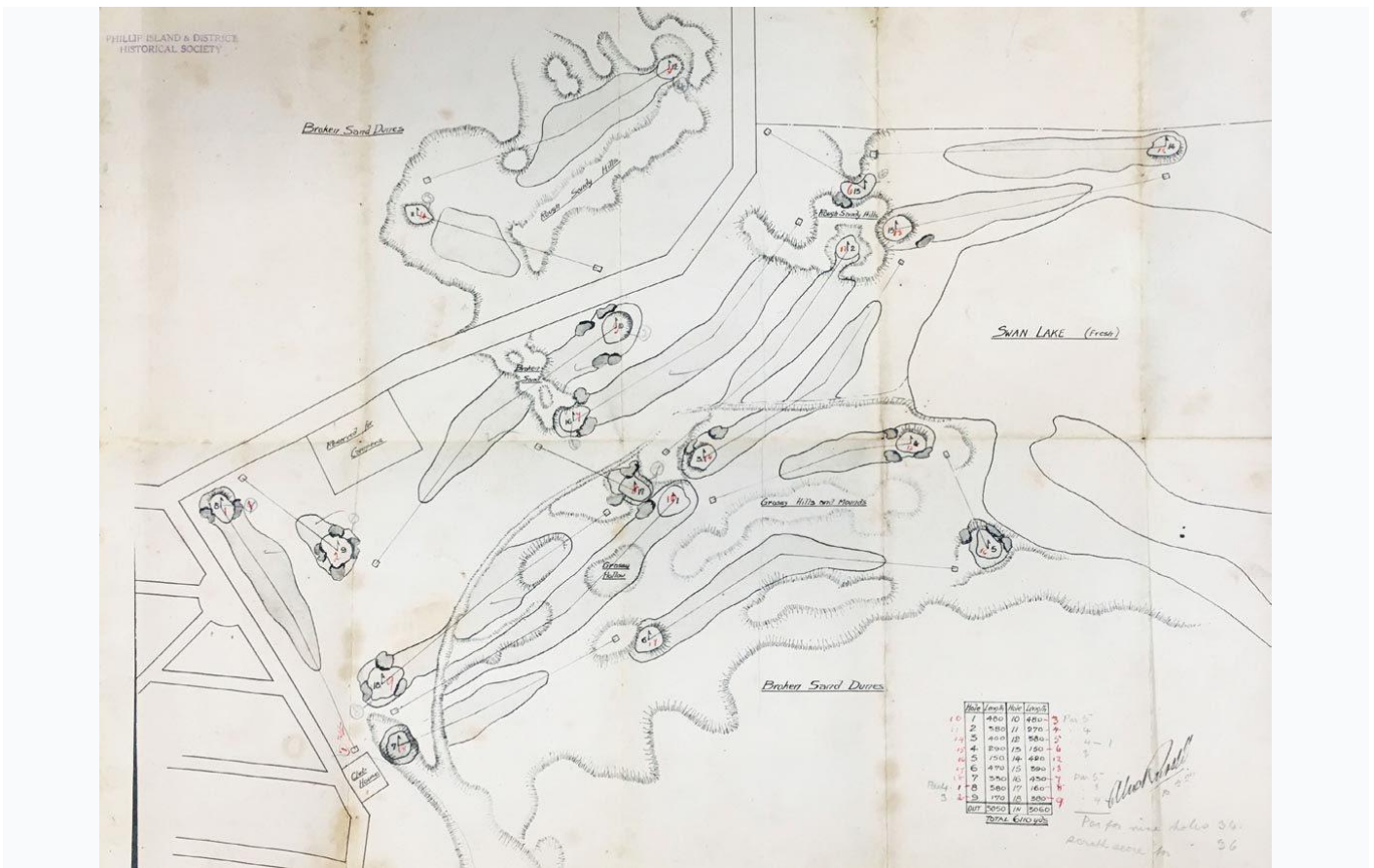
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Alex Russell’s hand-drawn plan shows the provision for 18 holes but sadly just nine saw the light of day – The Ideal ‘Summerland’ – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter Summerland links, at Phillip Island, will

Harry Culliton, Riversdale club identity and golf writer, attended the tournament and wrote glowingly of the new course and its similarities to Scottish links in The Australasian newspaper on 3rd May 1930:

“The occasion was the opening of the Summerland links, laid out some three years ago by Alex Russell, over terrain that could scarcely fail to delight the heart of any player possessing an eye for the truly beautiful and interesting in golf holes. For the land in use is rolling links country that, if it were geographically possible, might be part of the eastern Scottish seaboard. At any rate, the imported professionals, J. Young, Arthur Le Fevre, and the Thomsons (these brothers used to golf on what is perhaps the finest natural links in the world – Macrihanish, on the west coast of Scotland), share that opinion with me. My own game, too, such as it is, began on a links, Dornoch, Sutherlandshire, of such rare quality... So we were able to judge the new course by the very highest standards.

Naturally the course has a long way to go before the rough places become smooth, and the fairways and greens have settled down to their final perfection, but all the elements are there, and it requires only time and proper attention to develop them into a splendid and attractive links, and one that is pervaded by the true golfing atmosphere.”

### Links Description

Jack Dillon, the golf writer for the Sporting Globe, visited the Summerland links a few months after the opening tournament and was pleasantly surprised by what he found, providing the only known hole-by-hole description of the course. In his review article published on 7th June 1930 he wrote:

“In the nine holes of the Summerland links I discovered a golfing place that is certain to interest followers of the game. Very fine golf country has been admirably used by the designer, Alex Russell. Greens have been sown with

good turf and well looked after. At present these putting places present surfaces as true and suitable for golf as will be found outside the metropolitan area.

The Summerland links is not part of a registered club, but early steps are to be taken to include it among or registered courses. Then it should immediately become popular with linksmen, and it will certainly add to the appealing holiday charms of the island. Some of the holes would advantageously fit in on the championship links of the city.

**Hole 1** – The opening hole is a straight-ahead drive and pitch of 345 yards, an admirable length for a first hole.

**Hole 2** – There follows an iron shot of about 160 yards on level country, and at present without notable feature.

**Hole 3** – Of considerable golfing merit is the third, of 480 yards. There is some fine natural bunkering to be carried with the second wood shot.

**Hole 4** – The fourth of 270 yards is the first hole in the exceptional country. The drive is made straight ahead to a cleared patch, and a nice short pitch is left to an interesting green. However, the main feature of the hole is the fact that the man who fancies his driving ability may take a risk and shoot straight ahead for the green over high and rugged sand hills. The short cut does not call for tremendous hit, but if it comes off it gives a thrill of course, the short cut means a blind drive.

**Hole 5** – Somewhat similar is the position that a player may take from the tee at the 380 yards 5th. He may go safely out to the right to a cleared position, or he may “give it a go” and drive over sand hills to get an easy and shorter shot home if the drive comes off.

**Hole 6** – All the advantages of a naturally bunkered piece of country for a one-shotter are found at the 111 yards 6th. This hole looks quite an uninteresting proposition by reason of the fact that there is at first glance, just a tee and a nice little green near enough to look simple. But that pitch must get the green or real trouble follows. Sand hills on the left, rugged country on the right, nasty, desperate places at the back, and none too sweet spots short, reveal themselves to those who fail to make the pitch as it should be made.

**Hole 7** – Another blind tee shot is encountered at the 430 yards 7th, which in some ways, is reminiscent of the 8th at Royal Melbourne.

**Hole 8** – Then comes a good one-shotter of about 160 yards up to a plateau green.

**Hole 9** – To my mind the ninth is the most cleverly laid out hole of the present nine. The drive may be sent as far as one can hit along a tongue that gets narrower the further it goes, and the perfectly hit tee shot stops on a plateau which gives an ideal location for the pitch home. A drive off the line gives plenty of natural troubles.

While actual selection of places for holes has been well considered, there has up to date been no serious effort to titivate and generally give point and beauty to the bunkering round the greens. Russell will, doubtless, do this in the competent manner of which he is capable. When that work is done the course will provide a test that will give any amount of trouble to the best, and as much pleasure to all as can reasonably be expected from a course. While the country is rugged and truly seaside, there is remarkably little climbing called for in the round.”

### **Settling in**

In early October 1930 it was announced that the Summerland links would host the Cowes Golf Club’s first annual Open Meeting later that month. The entry form contained “... an attractive plan of the course at Summerland,” and the report noted that “... it is not many months since a professional contest was held over this course, and one and all the visiting tutors expressed themselves as well pleased with the site selected, and with the enterprise in the construction of the links designed by Alex Russell.” Sambell put on a special steamer to bring golfers across from Stony Point for the event.

A 1931 report on the attractions of Phillip Island noted that the new golf course at Summerland was “... one of the best seaside links in Victoria” and that it was “... now in perfect condition.” The second annual Open Meeting was again held at Summerland in May 1931 and a report from Jack Dillon in the Sporting Globe suggested that it was a course “... that those who have not visited are recommended to try. They will find it a pleasant surprise. Alex Russell laid it out in great golfing country. With the exception of Barwon Heads and Warrnambool, it is as fine a test as will be found outside the metropolitan area.”

In January 1932 the Sporting Globe reported on improvements made to the course:



The Honour Board stops at 1939 – The Ideal ‘Summerland’ – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter





The trophy won by course curator Rees Jones in 1938 - The Ideal 'Summerland' - Golf history on Phillip Island -  
Issue 18 - Neil Crafter



Jones posing with some of the island's local inhabitants –not exactly the politically correct thing to do today – The Ideal 'Summerland' – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter

“Recent improvement to Summerland links, at Phillip Island, will be appreciated by players during the open meeting there. The blind tee shots at the fifth and seventh holes have been eliminated, and the fifth fairway is now well grassed.” A further report noted that the course had been well patronised by holiday golfers over the 1931 Christmas period.

Summerland continued to be a popular holiday destination through the 1930s and the guest house, known as either Summerland House or Summerland Golf House, with its spectacular views down the coast, continued to be high on the list of choices when staying on the island. Sambell continued to promote his Isle of Wight Hotel in Cowes and his Summerland House as well as the golf course in the advertising that his ferry service undertook.

Sometime around 1937 the Summerland Golf Club was formed, with a course card from that year showing the name of the new club, while in 1939 the club held its third Open meeting indicating an establishment date around 1936 or 1937. Sambell's son, also A.K.T Sambell, was one of the club's vice-presidents in 1938 and course curator Rees Jones won the club's championship in 1938. It appears that the club itself did not survive past the onset of World War II as the club's championship honour board, still held by the family of Rees Jones, stops at 1939.

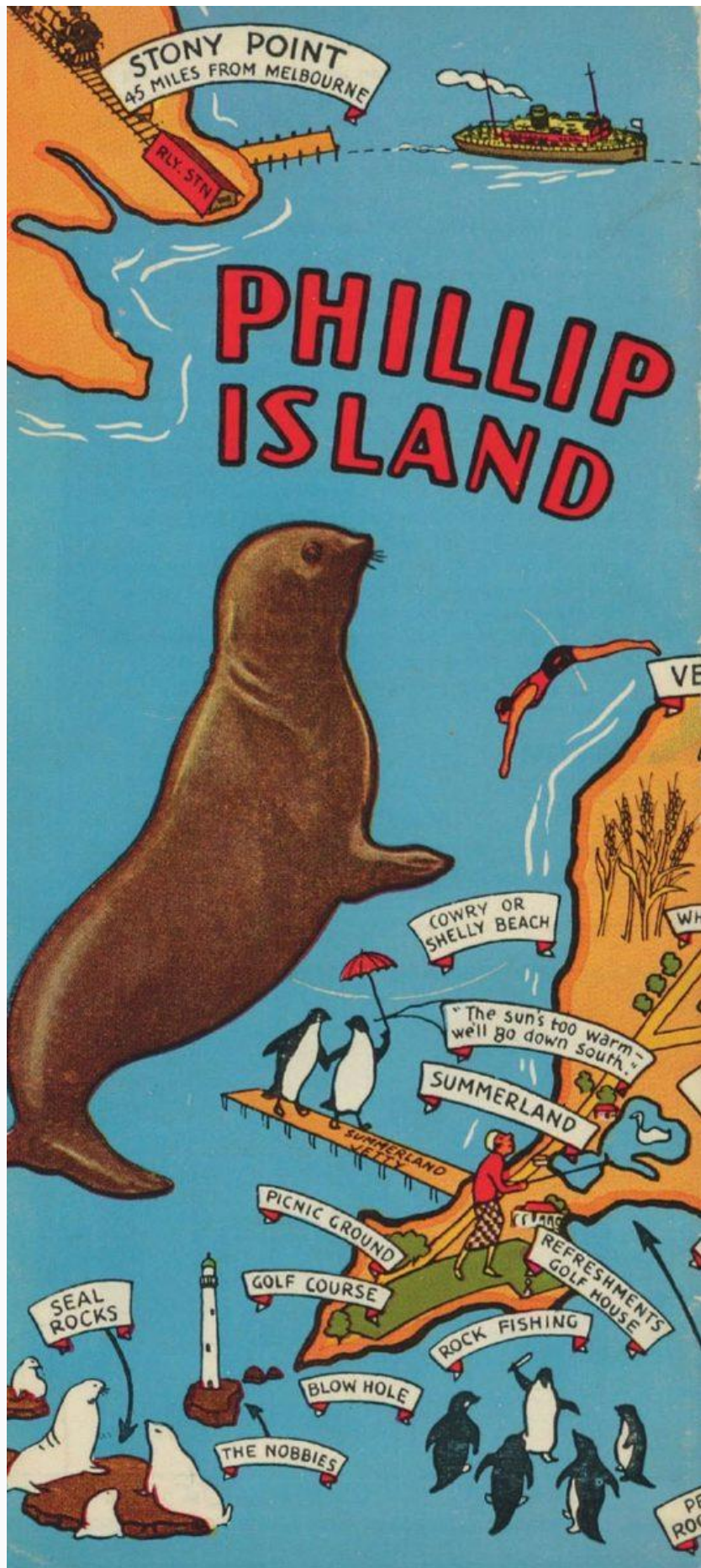
### **Petering out**

Sadly, the course was not able to be kept open during World War II, and suffered another blow shortly after the war when golfers from Cowes, led by Arthur Jones who was the owner of a guest house in the town, wanted a closer course in the days of petrol rationing. A site was chosen near Cowes and Jones called a public meeting in 1947 but was turned down – the majority present wanted to re-establish the now out-of-use Summerland links. Summerland was still owned by the Sambell family and they managed to get the golf course back into some semblance of playable condition and golf recommenced. Later that same year Jones persevered with his proposal and another meeting gave it the go-ahead. The land was still available and a company was formed to purchase the land and construct a golf course, and is the course of today's Phillip Island Golf Club. Reports about the island's attractions still mentioned a golf course at Summerland as late as 1951, but it likely fell out of use shortly after, and reverted to farmland.

### **Sambell and Summerland**

In 1928 Sambell purchased the punt that connected Newhaven at the eastern end of the island that connected with nearby San Remo on the mainland and upgraded the approaches. Along with his ownership of the ferry service, he now controlled all means of getting to the island. In the early 1930s Sambell, along with his son, was instrumental in the establishment of an aerodrome on the island, in fact giving over a large area of his own land to site it. He was very keen to establish more expeditious means of linking the island with Melbourne and the new aerodrome was established in less than a year, opening for use in January 1931. Sambell continued to serve as the Shire President through the 1930s until his premature death in 1936, aged 57. This man was almost single-handedly responsible for promoting the attractions of Phillip Island and invested a considerable amount of his own money to do so.

Unfortunately, the Summerland development was not an ongoing success. Few houses were built on the first stage of 282 allotments that his company developed, but enough lots must have been sold to warrant an additional area being subdivided in 1933. Further subdivisions were made in 1951-52, 1954 and 1962, yielding a total of some 773 lots, but as late as 1985 Summerland was home to only 183 houses, a motel and a shop.



ENTICING: A tourist map showing Summerland on Phillip Island, circa 1933 – The Ideal 'Summerland' – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter

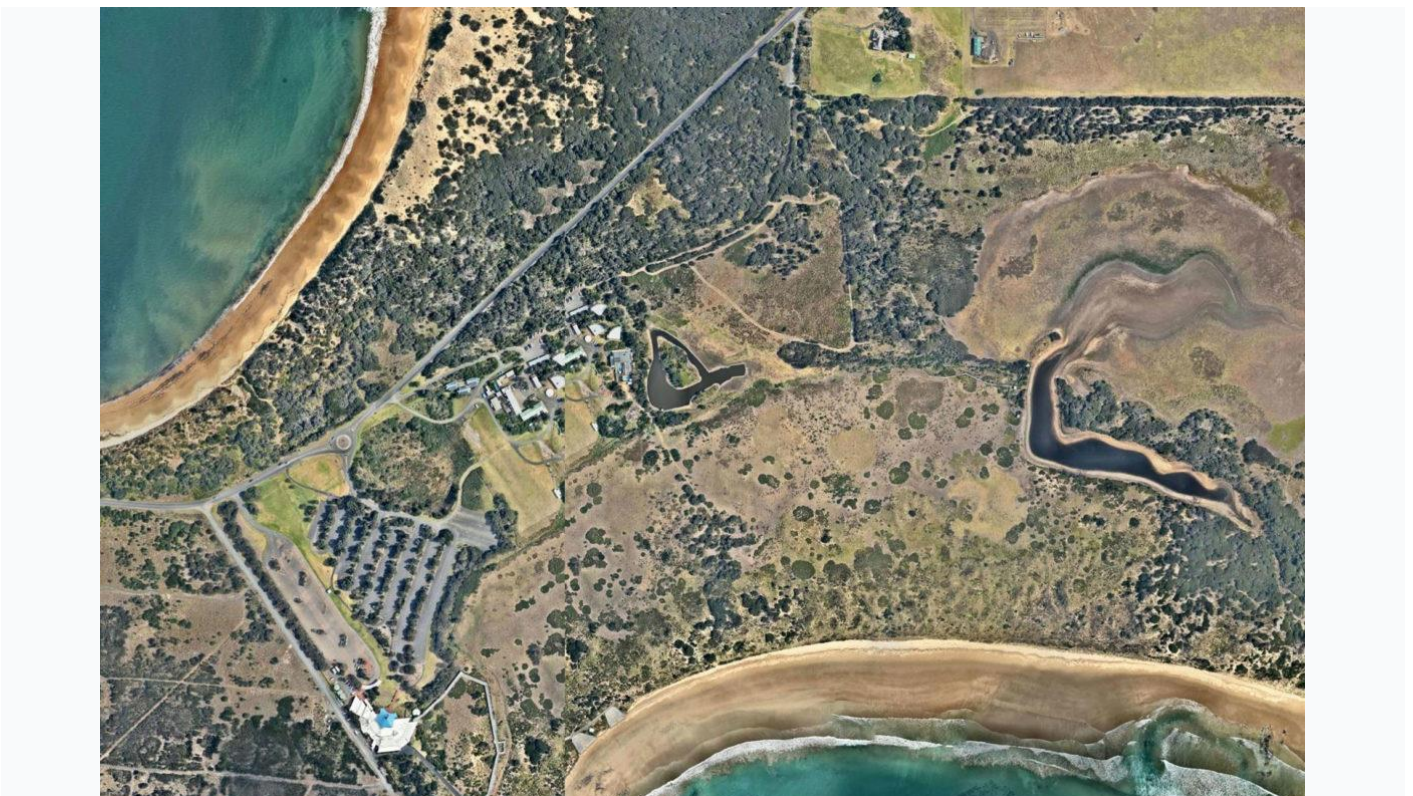
## Summerland Guest House

Summerland House was conceived to serve the dual purpose of providing a clubhouse for the golf course while accommodating guests in comfortable surroundings. The building itself was of a simple, unprepossessing design but attracted wealthy visitors from Melbourne to its secluded setting. Initially the accommodations could only cater for around 10 guests but a later expansion increased that number to 24, with nine double bedrooms and six singles. The guest-house was also used as the setting for author Miranda McElwain's 1954 novel 'Penguin Island Murders'. Eventually the guest house was converted into flats and the building slowly deteriorated. As the Penguin Parade grew in popularity, the idyllic and quiet location became busier and the popularity of the guest house waned. Eventually the Sambell family wanted to demolish the building and construct six flats and a restaurant in 1978, but this was rejected on appeal and the building was eventually demolished prior to purchase of the land by the government in 1987.

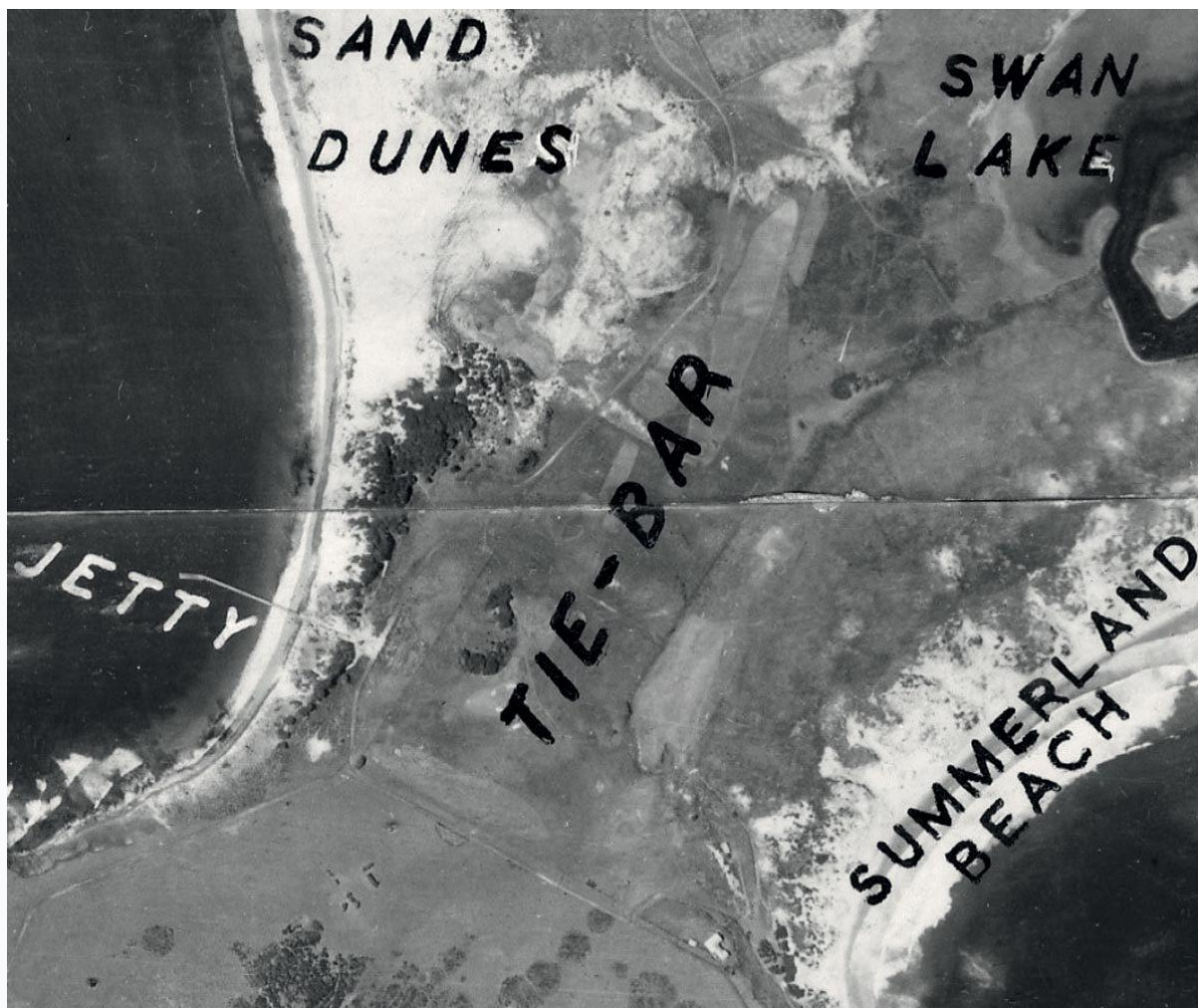
## Penguins priority

From the time of the first guided tours to view the penguins at Summerland Beach, the popularity grew and soon a Chevrolet bus – the first tourist bus to be registered in the state – was needed to bring the tourists out from Cowes to view the nightly parade of the penguins.

It had become apparent to a number of residents and visitors that the destruction and isolation of the penguin's breeding grounds on shore at Summerland would eventually result in the collapse of the colony, and the first conservation measure was the donation of a 10-acre parcel to the State of Victoria around 1950 by Spencer Jackson and his wife Alexandrina, specifically for the purpose of penguin protection. Jackson was the director of a Melbourne real estate firm who was then in control of all the land owned by the Phillip Island Holidays Development Pty Ltd. The establishment of the bridge to the island in 1940 unleashed a new influx of tourists and by 1955 it proved necessary to establish a much larger reserve and soon after fences were upgraded and viewing areas erected. The Penguin Parade's management was then taken over by the Shire of Phillip Island in 1961, before being taken under State Government control in 1981.



NOW: An aerial photograph of the former Summerland site taken in 2015 – The Ideal ‘Summerland’ – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter



THEN: during the late 1930s following construction of the first nine holes – The Ideal ‘Summerland’ – Golf history on Phillip Island – Issue 18 – Neil Crafter



For many years the Penguin Parade lacked permanent off-street parking and this was provided as a commercial venture by the Reith family on the site of the old 1st hole of the Summerland golf links. Elaine Sambell, A.K.T. Sambell’s youngest daughter, had married Dr Alexander Reith and together they owned the land where the golf course was located, as well as an old house that the 2nd and 3rd holes of the course skirted around – their farm was called ‘Lammarwells.’ The Reiths had plans to replace the old run-down house with a new house closer to the coastal dunes and close to the edge of the penguin reserve, but their planning application in 1961 was refused, not once but twice. Following protracted legal battles the family eventually sold their land to the State Government in 1979, overseen by their son Peter Reith, the former Howard Government minister. The Summerland Guest House was eventually demolished and purchased by the government in 1987. With this land acquired the government set about constructing a Visitor Centre and permanent car parking on the land to cater for the steadily increasing visitor numbers. Further work was undertaken to enlarge the viewing terraces on the beach with a network of elevated walkways.

The first moves to begin a buy-back of land at the Nobbies end of the Summerland Peninsula to add to the penguin reserve occurred in 1974; the majority of properties on Summerland were acquired between 1985 and 2010, with all buildings now demolished and power poles removed. The government has plans in train for a major upgrade of the Penguin Parade that would move the visitor centre further away from Summerland Beach and closer to Ventnor Road. Today, it is estimated that more than 32,000 penguins live in the colony, making it one of the largest in Australia and an increasingly popular destination for both local and overseas visitors.

### **Now and then**

Surprisingly there is still some evidence of the golf links remaining on the ground at Summerland and the Penguin Parade has not yet obliterated all evidence of the old course.

One of the most apparent remaining features is the tee of the par-3 6th. Today this feature sits within an area of turf near the head of a walking trail that leads to Swan Lake. The Kikuyu turfed area here is quite large, and local lore is that it the grass escaped from the golf course. The banks at the sides of the tee are apparent and its alignment is towards the general area where the green was sited. A clearing next to a large dune some 100 metres away is likely the old green location – Jack Dillon described this hole as 110 yards in length with a green that had sand hills at its left. The 4th and 5th holes that were on land to the other side of the main road from Cowes have now been reclaimed by scrub and the alignment of today’s road cuts right through these holes. A flattish plateau in open ground could be the site of the 3rd green, but other later works such as pond excavations, workshop buildings and car parks appear to have obliterated any traces of the remaining golf holes. The clubhouse building is long gone too – but the views from its exposed location are spectacular still today and it is no wonder that this position was selected.

**Summary** Alex Russell’s Summerland course was rated by good judges as one of the best courses in country Victoria, and he must have been thrilled by the sandy linksland site he was given so soon after coming into partnership with Dr MacKenzie. Unfortunately, his full 18-hole vision was never realized, and the holes he planned along the banks of the Swan Lake would have been spectacular. A.K.T. Sambell’s vision of making the Summerland Peninsula a holiday playground never fully eventuated and although the Summerland Golf Links was a very early example of a

destination golf facility, a number of factors conspired against the course's longevity, with the penguins of Summerland being the ultimate beneficiaries of its eventual demise.

## **Acknowledgements and Sources**

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With thanks to the Phillip Island & District Historical Society for their assistance, especially Christine Grayden, Julie Box and John Jansson.

With thanks to Howard Jones, grandson of the course constructor and curator Rees Jones.

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