

# **An Interview with Walter J. Travis Society Scholarship Recipient Clyde Johnson**

## **By Ron Montesano, Scholarship Chairman**

### **1. Tell us a bit about who Clyde Johnson was, leading up to application for the Walter J. Travis Society Scholarship, which was conferred in 2012.**

I had grown up on the periphery of England's Lake District National Park. A little field alongside our house gave me the chance to mow out my own greens from as young as about 6 or 7 (even if I struggled to get it started.) Childhood holidays with non-golfing parents became based around various parts of the coastline of Great Britain and Ireland. I was obsessed with golf courses, and wanted to become a golf course architect, but didn't know how. Studying Structural Engineering & Architecture (at the University of Sheffield) seemed like a sensible fallback - I could perhaps design football stadiums, even if I would never get to play in them. As graduation loomed, I realised that I would never be more than just another Engineer. So, with that, I thought it seemed to make sense to head to the US - that was the centre of the golf business, and that's where they were actually building (a few) golf courses. Though with hindsight I perhaps would have enjoyed studying more about turf, a post-grad study in Landscape Architecture (at the University of Georgia) provided a great base for me to see types of golf courses I had never seen before, meet some great people in the business, and better understand an alien golfing culture.

### **2. Describe as much as you recall about the application process, and what you thought your chances might be.**

The application was based around a short essay, detailing my career aspirations. My passion for golf course architecture, with an emphasis on economical and environmental sensibilities inspired by early courses and designers, was central to my piece.

### **3. If you can remember, what did the scholarship money allow you to do?**

The scholarship money allowed me to attend the Walter Travis Society annual meeting, which just happened to be at Cape Arundel. Even though we got rained off after playing 9 holes, I spent the rest of my rain-soaked afternoon walking the back 9. I had seen plenty of compact and quaint courses back home, but no green complexes like that! They left an indelible mark. That trip also allowed me to take a walk around Myopia Hunt Club and The Country Club. That short trip has been my only trip to New England, but it's a part of the world I would love to spend more time exploring.

**4. What have you been able to achieve in the golf industry, thanks to your passion and desire?**

I spent the summer of 2012 interning for Tom Doak/Renaissance Golf Design at Dismal River - It was a summer of hard graft, lots of fun, and even more learning, but one that left me only hungrier to follow my passion. After graduating in the spring of 2013, I headed off to Tara Iti (in New Zealand) for 19 months, on only a couple of weeks notice. Since then, I've continued to help out on Tom's overseas projects, including Woodhall Spa, The Gunnamatta Course at The National (in Australia), and most recently St Patrick's Links (in Ireland.) I couldn't have wished for a better apprenticeship! At the same time, I've been quietly building a client base of my own, at places like Titirangi in New Zealand, Seacroft and Alwoodley in England - courses with a rich architectural pedigree that would really shine with a little polish.

**5. If you stop and consider the Travis style of golf course architecture, do you see any traces of it in the work that you do?**

I've been fortunate to spend the majority of my time in the business working on natural and/or sandy soiled sites. Though I greatly admire Travis' clever use of bold features, I am not sure his abrupt and (in some ways) artificial greens contours would have been as well-suited to such environments. One day, I would love to build an inland course in the UK/Europe inspired by the great parkland courses of the US, and for that I would certainly be leaning heavily on Travis' ideals. Beyond his greens, I was particularly struck by the eclectic nature of Travis' bunkering (as restored by Brian Schneider) at Hollywood - there is room for that sort of artistry and variety on almost any course.