

DEVIL'S ADVOCATE 5

by
Goblin

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WHAT PRICE FROST HOLES?

EVERY year the Green Committee decides to have them. Every year the turf research people publish solemn warnings about the need for them. Every year the greenkeeper eventually cuts them—after a fashion. And every year there is absolute merry hell if on any morning the Captain, Committee, Secretary, or Head Greenkeeper decides that now is the time to use them.

Members, at many clubs anyway, care more about the fun of the particular morning than the state of the greens in one month, three months' or six months' time; and "frost holes" are something they don't really understand the need for. "After all", Muggins will say to Plomp, as they set out on one of those horrible mornings when a two inch deep frost is just beginning to thaw on the top, "After all, we played when it was like this last year, and the greens were all thawed out by mid-afternoon. Make a lot of fuss about nothing, some of these people. The course *is* for the members, isn't it?"

Deciding factors

What the answer is to people like this only well-run clubs can say. Perhaps well-run clubs don't have people like that—on the principle that the morale of the troops depends on the R.S.M. and that it is part of a good Secretary's job to be one. But there is an undoubted practical difficulty about the exact moment and circumstances at which it really is essential, or at least wisest, to declare the greens themselves out of play, and turn the players on to the frost holes on the approaches.

How do you guess what the weather is going to do next? Do you worry

more if the greens are hard all the way down, or frozen just on top, or frozen underneath but thawing on top, or just slushy and beginning to freeze in an east wind: or what? Do you adopt a rule-of-thumb penknife test—so much depth of blade before you hit frozen ground and it's O.K. (or not O.K.?) to play on them today? Do you invoke oracles for advice, examine entrails, search the sky or believe the 8-0 a.m. weather forecast. ("Fog, some bright intervals, slight rain or snow, possibly frost later in some areas.")? Or do you just go on the principle of taking no risks?

No argument

Why not the latter? But who's to say? Really—and we all know it—the only man to say is the Head Greenkeeper. If he doesn't know his ground, his grasses, his greens and his local weather signs—then he shouldn't be there at all! Even if he doesn't, he may as well be presumed to be in the position of "the best prime minister we've got". If he is to say, he is to do also: just put the flags in the frost holes and be obeyed. But is he? It is not unknown for opinionated members, out early, to want to know who's been tampering with the flag sticks—and put them all back in the greens again. The answer is, that if the Head Greenkeeper tells the Secretary he is going to put the flags in the frost holes, and the Secretary puts up a notice saying that's where they are, there should be no argument about it.

What, of course, is ludicrous, is where things get to the state in a club where some of the older (and perhaps lower handicap members) are more concerned

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about possible damage through playing on half frozen greens than either the Committee, the Secretary, or the Greenkeeper. Once the "anything for a quiet life" school takes over the running of a club, or lets itself weaken with the years into that attitude, then hope dies.

Never recovers

Worse still than indecision is the failure to provide, year by year, decent sites for frost holes, where the grass is evened and looked after well enough to make some substitute for normal putting. If the frost hole is just stuck in an uneven bit of fairway or approach, you can't blame the members for grumbling at being expected to use them. Even this, though, may not be so bad as the weakest way out of all—compromise. Under this system the holes are merely placed near the front of the green throughout the winter, frost or no frost, and left there—throughout the dressing period, and throughout any foul weather that may come. The result, of course, is progressively fouler and more uneven putting throughout the winter, and the whole front part of the green knocked so badly to hell between November and March that it never really recovers from year to year.

It is really a libel on the greenkeeping profession to suggest that such a thing could ever happen. But it does. The only laugh I ever had out of the whole business was when one impatient member solemnly asked: "What's all the fuss? It never *really* freezes in this country anyway!"

Next Month—Why is a Weed?

appeared to be a set pattern around the grassy arena.

Now and then she—for I believe the leader was an old doe—would take her troop out of sight over the dunes to reappear again in the ring with her entourage complete. I do not know how long this performance would have lasted for it was suddenly interrupted by the appearance of a shepherd and his collie. The hares quite unhurriedly, and in single file, evacuated their dance floor and disappeared.

Again, in May, 1959, I saw a similar performance by 14 hares in a grass field, near Grantown on Spey and in October, 1958 I saw a party of eight mountain hares perform in the deer forest of Clova, in Angus.

With grateful acknowledgments to the "Farmers' Weekly", 24th November, 1961.

OF SOILS AND SPECIES—*continued.*

or early August with 6 lb. dalapon to the acre and top dressed with 2 tons of ground limestone. 10 cwt of basic slag, sown in the following spring, given 3 cwt. of a compound fertiliser and not grazed until autumn.

The object in chemical ploughing is to change sward composition completely, but there may be advantages in selectively changing the composition of natural hill pasture.

With grateful acknowledgments to the "Farmers' Weekly", 8th December, 1961.

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