

GREENKEEPING ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATLANTIC

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IN such a large country as the U.S.A. there are, of course, wide variations in climate. However, it may be of some interest to make certain general comparisons between greenkeeping in the U.S.A. and greenkeeping in Britain.

Broadly speaking, maintenance of golf courses in the U.S.A. is on a much higher plane than in Britain. I am not saying that the greenkeeper is better educated or experienced, but the clubs in the United States spend more money on maintenance, more on materials and have at their disposal a far greater range of equipment.

Costs

In the U.S. it is generally accepted that a minimum of £1,400 per hole is spent each year on maintenance (this is the average 18-hole golf club — not the larger plush country club) while in Britain the average maintenance cost would be perhaps £400 per hole. These are only rough estimates but suffice to show the great difference in average maintenance costs per year between the two countries.

It should be noted, however, that clubs regardless of location are quite variable in their maintenance standards and in their budgets. Because of geographical location, length of season may vary in different areas thus affecting the degree of maintenance required.

Mechanical equipment

In the U.S. mechanisation is increasing, and machinery is becoming more and more specialised. The actual headquarters of the greenkeeper are assuming more and more importance in the scheme of things. No longer has he to operate from an antiquated barn, but has a modern, well-equipped building including offices, equipment storage,

up-to-date facilities for his men and a repair shop complete with carpenter. He usually has a skilled mechanic who maintains his expanded range of equipment to a high standard of operating efficiency. Since the end of World War II greenkeeping has undoubtedly made great progress from the point of view of mechanisation — a trend which labour shortages have accelerated. New mowing equipment for instance has come on the market (both rotary and cylinder types) and the time taken to cut the grass has been reduced still further. Although mowers in Britain have had their efficiency increased to the same extent, on British courses the greens are mown only three times a week on average at the height of the growing season. In the U.S. most clubs during the summer season mow every day and very few clubs mow less than five times a week.

New types of sprayers, distributors, spikers, sprinklers, etc., have made the job easier for the greenkeeper, cheaper for the club and have produced superior results.

Some of the American equipment is sold in Britain, through agents, and is proving popular with greenkeepers and groundsmen.

It is, of course, necessary to find the right sort of man to get the best out of improved machines. As in farming, the tendency will probably be to use more and more machines and still fewer men. The natural outcome of this will be improved conditions for the men and higher wages.

Materials

Everywhere now there is a continuous flow of new and more efficient fungicides, herbicides, insecticides, growth

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regulators and fertilizers. They are possibly more readily accepted and more widely used in the U.S. than in Britain.

In the U.S. fertilizer certainly is more generously used on greens, fairways and even in the rough. The average club member likes a good green turf and is willing to spend the extra money to achieve it. The latest in fertilizer, storage facilities and distribution equipment is given to the greenkeeper and the members expect no excuses if he fails to produce results.

From the Playing Angle

British courses offer the best test of golf I personally have ever seen. Typical of so many foreign courses, yet unlike so many courses in the U.S., they put the emphasis on accuracy rather than distance. British courses really make one think. The English greens are also much smaller than the U.S. and the approaches more closely guarded. If the player strays from the fairway the rough will cost him at least a stroke to recover.

Mr Ryan is himself an American, now in the employ of The S.T.R.I.—
Editor.

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