

# WHEN THE GOING WAS ROUGH

by PATRICK SMARTT

Glancing through an old book in my collection, my eye fell with pleasure on a photograph depicting two horse-drawn machines on a golf course; in the background were old-time cross-bunkers.

The first thing that came to mind was the disappearance with the passage of time of three things. The horse as the power motive, the roller which on these fairway mowers was set immediately behind the cutting blades, and the "boots" on the hooves of the horses to avoid their imprints on the fairways.

A year or so ago I was engaged in tracing the early history of those clubs in Sussex which had been formed in the 19th century—several no longer in existence. At one I was shown a "boot" which had been preserved. On another occasion I called in at that rarity of today, a smithy, to seek assistance in finding a "lost" course. My reception was: "Lor' bless you, sir, I used to shoe the old horses there. Here's one of them 'boots' they used to wear."

History is a long time a-dying.

So too are the habits with those who have not kept up with the times. It must be a decade ago that I was passing a green at a club of which I had relinquished the secretaryship a few years earlier. A dear friend of mine, now dead, was then chairman of the green committee. With sleeves turned up, he was about to *roll* that green! He liked to do things himself, but in this instance I suspect the green staff had declined to have anything to do with it.

Some six inches below the surface lay a "pan" of clay. Our main task had been to let air into the top soil, not to mention dressings. This we did by hollow-tining twice a year. And here was this enthusiast about to pack it all down again! In answer to my

vividly expressed horror, he pointed out rather huffily that a roller was used on cricket pitches. After reminding him that the wicket was changed for every match, and that fast bowlers and some spinners caused a deal of wear and tear, it was highly unlikely that a green would be subjected to such treatment, and that pitch-marks should be lifted—not pressed down, he gave way.

I am old enough to have played on greens cut with hand-pushed mowers, light and exuding no nauseous gases. I have played on a course where ropes guarded the greens as a protection against the inroads of sheep, there for the purpose of grazing the fairways. Odd as it may seem, we enjoyed our golf.

It is important to reflect on those conditions and the consequences. The acceptable number of putts for a good player was two per green. By the time Walter Hagen came along and changed golf thinking to getting down in two from off the green, conditions had improved to an extent.

With things as they were, the triumvirate, Vardon, Taylor and Braid, and their companions in honour, Herd and Ray, did not set their sights so high. Today, with smooth, watered greens and the sand-wedge it would have been well within their compass.

There is a degree of difference between the horse and the mechanical age that is not always grasped. It is the matter of weight, and manifests itself on the older courses. The course for which I was at one time responsible was laid out in 1894, parts of it a little later. At times it became necessary to clear underground drains by rodding. Our work was considerably impeded (I write of the 1950s) by the rods being brought to a halt by twisted drains.

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These drainpipes had been laid in the long ago not many inches below the surface. The passage of horse and single mower had insufficient pressure to move the soil beneath them. Heavy tractors had caused sufficient earth movement to shift the pipes out of alignment.

Perhaps I am one of those who has not moved with the times. While they have to be used, shortage of manpower demands it, I still dislike to see a heavy motor-mower on a green, or a light one for that matter. It is all very well to say that the exhaust fumes are dispersed in the air. As with spraying from flying machines, they settle on the ground.

None of which is to deny that the modern green is a vast improvement on its predecessors. But look at the chemicals (unnatural) that we use, and watering. A subject on which (to borrow from Sherlock Holmes via Henry Longhurst) I hope to write a trifling monologue.

### \$20,000 per hole

Golf course construction costs have more than doubled in the past decade, according to the National Golf Foundation.

Ten years ago a lot of fine golf courses were built for \$10,000 per hole, it claims, some for even less. *Today the minimum cost is usually around \$20,000 per hole and many 18-hole layouts are running \$600,000 or more.* This does not include land costs or clubhouse facilities; just the golf courses—ready for play.

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### Grave Defeat

A golfing clergyman had been beaten badly on the links by a parishioner 30 years his senior, and returned to the clubhouse rather disgruntled.

“Cheer up,” his opponent said. “Remember, you win at the finish. You’ll probably be burying me some day.”

“Even then,” said the preacher, “it will be your hole.”

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