

The year of the Redpoll

David C. Hannam, *Ilkley Golf Club*

At the beginning of 1969, here at Ilkley, we had a peaceful revolution. Perhaps more realistically, a reformation, a renaissance, which today continues with the same fervour as it began. Under a new regime, a start was made on consolidating the course's reputation as the best in the area.

Although it is a course of low relief physically, the landscape lends itself to the surrounding moors and adjacent highland: this, coupled with a ribbon of rippling river and endless variety of colour, makes ample contribution towards a delightfully stimulating scene.

However, my story deals with trees and our tree-planting activities, here, in picturesque Wharfedale over the last three years. Initially a three-year planting programme was planned and a contract was made with a local arboricultural nursery to supply, stock and advise on species. At the same time club-members should contribute £1 (pound a piece) towards a tree-planting fund so that annual expenditure would not be affected. A healthy amount soon accrued for the afforestation scheme.

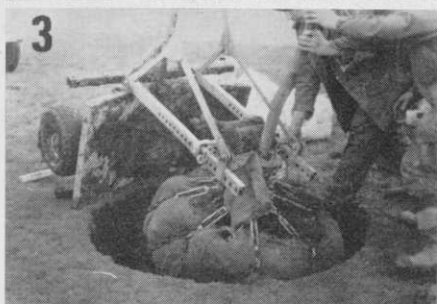
Things began in a modest way by the re-locating of indigenous saplings such as *Fraxinus*, *Acer*, *Crataegus*. Then the first bought specimens arrived, a varied selection both in substance and quality, examples being types of *Alnus*, *Sorbus*, *Quercus*, *Salix* and *Prunus*. We augmented the expensive imports with Silver Birch, thinnings from a nearby estate ranging from two to eight feet or more. After witnessing three consecutive leaf-bursts, we believe that the trouble taken was well justified.

Care was exercised in the lifting process with the aim of including as much root fibre as possible with the root-ball. Planting progressed as supplies became available and before long selected areas which had recently been open spaces, took on a fresh dimension. Along with the nursery stock came a quantity of planting manure, a compound of dubious makeup, but included in the contract. This appointment came to a fateful end when it was found that the firm concerned had overcharged for trees and sundries.

All trees were staked and tied and rabbit guards fitted where necessary; the stakes obtained from a local sawmill, were ties of the 'Tom' variety. A point of interest arose in the rabbit guards. Two designs were employed, one of cylindrical flexible plastic material, cut spirally to facilitate rapid fitting and entire protection. The other was simply a piece of folded polythene sheet with a zip on one side. It arrived in a roll which could be cut to the desired length; a very simple method, less durable than the other, yet useful during the establishment period.

Thus the seeds were sown: the inaugural step taken, and stage one completed. The oncoming season demanded that attentions be directed to other more routine forms of work. In the landscaping of these trees careful thought went into the siting of the plants with respect to shape, type and colour; the ultimate objective was to create not only a break in the empty avenues of fairways but also, in some cases, to govern play in minor ways and, perhaps most important of all, to combine these factors to produce something of aesthetic value.

The task was not a mean one. There is so much space to play with in trying to evolve a well integrated feature while envisaging the shape of things in, say, thirty years hence. An agreement was reached with the Forestry Commission enabling us to take pine trees from a site some thirteen miles from Ilkley. Together with these, as a result of further enquiries, a batch of about 1400 container-grown *Larix* saplings was secured. During a period between January and March/early April 1971, a total of around 2½ thousand plants were put into fresh locations on Ilkley golf course. If this sounds a paltry figure to anyone, let him come and see the results.



(1) Preparing a load of pines in readiness for transit to Ilkley. (2) Semi-mature tree after arrival on site. Willing hands manoeuvre into position. (3) Entire plant with bolus swung into position over pre-dug hole. The tree structure is able to swing away from trailer platform out into the hole because of a hinge pin which passes through a hole drilled through the tree trunk and attached to arms of the truck frame. (4) Finally, the wrapping is taken off before the tree is planted.

As with the birch trees, the imported pines, consisting of *Sylvestris* and *Contorta* varieties, ranged from three to eight feet in height. With experience gained in the previous year, the same techniques were applied to the lifting and re-positioning of the stock. A method was adopted which it was thought would cause least damage to the tree and, at the same time, allow for collecting intact an amount of the valuable fibrous root. It began by three or four people slitting vertically a circle of some one-to-two feet radius, depending on the height, from the plant stem to the depth of a spade.

Having done this, the tree, together with the generous ball of soil, was prised until free to be portable, then lifted on to a trailer. On average, a cart-load of pines would number about forty. Reckon up to 15 or more, six-hour, 26 mile round trips, each with 40 trees, and you begin to grasp the meaning of concerted effort. The larches were transported in two removal-van loads. From this same source were purchased more *Betula* saplings, plus one thousand *Lodgepole Pines* intended for nursery stock.

Besides all this tree-planting, other duties, common to golf courses were carried out simultaneously, depending on weather conditions and time available, over the past three seasons. Projects accomplished included a monster drain, remodelling, making new and filling redundant bunkers, enlarging tees, other draining, as well as complete machine overhauls. During the winter period 71/72, considerably fewer trees were put in, mainly because of other commitments, and partly over a noticeable decline in interest from the administrative end of the concern.

In addition to stock purchased out of the funds, there was also a remarkable response from individuals. One quite sizeable gift, comprising *Sorbus*, *Cerasus* and *Prunus*, was employed to break the emptiness beside the short 13th tee. Perhaps the item which attracted most attention and publicity, and required the most sophisticated techniques,

was a 25 feet high Sequoia Sempervirens (Wellingtonia). This donation arrived on the site with all the important growing crown broken off which indicated that, in the event of it ever thriving, it would remain a mere shrub compared to the height an unspoiled example could attain. Bang went our hopes of being able to drive the triples through the hole in its bole in about 1000 years time!

This, now somewhat tired-looking chunk of redwood was supplied and planted by a national independent forestry concern. From the photographs it is possible to get some idea of how the relatively huge structure was moved and positioned. Incidentally, the specimen on the trolley is actually a Fagus Sylvatica (copper), a complimentary expression from the forestry contractor. Strange to relate, the way in which these commercial giants were planted was not dissimilar to our own planting design. Although lacking a custom-built truck, we tailor-dug holes for each individual plant to assist maximum anchorage and avoid root-cramp.

To speak of the spectacular results prevailing from this venture and how we have juggled with the virtual impossible, is mildly embarrassing. To say that there have been no failures would be sheer lies, although I would be correct in stating that the loss-rate is very negligible. Most noticeable is the unwilling way in which the Scots Pines seem to be taking to their new environment. All the other species appear to be re-establishing themselves very well indeed. A 'breed' of pine to recommend in view of its apparent ability to withstand moving would be the Contorta variety. Visual signs indicate that it is a vigorous grower, seemingly content in a number of different situations; the growth on the great majority of our plants this year reached or exceeded four inches.

To complement the thousands of utility trees planted in large batches, certain spots were considered ideal for ornamental specimens. This has been approached in a relatively small way but the impression is most favourable. The use of Laburnum at one hole adds delicate refreshment to the cool river aspect facing one in front of the fourth tee. In this

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area are also planted two Lilac bushes, still young but sure to provide a better show in successive years. A group of three Golden Weeping Willow (*Salix Babylonica*) list gently to the breeze midway along the unbroken riverside stretch up to the Fourth, and suggest the interesting possibility of more being introduced at some future date.

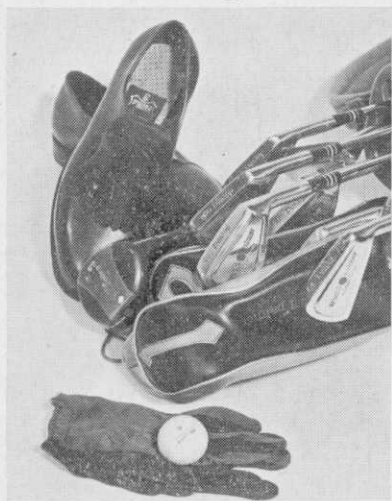
The appearance of two large patches of rhododendrons planted in the heights to the rear of our short 15th, promise a colourful prospect for the golfer in years to come. Since these 'rhodies' are products of dense woodland they are naturally drawn in habit and, consequently, the seasons since their installation has been spent adjusting to the comparatively open situation and producing stronger growth. They make a very useful and pleasing break in the one-time grassy escarpment between green and the stand of middle-aged spruce and larch.

One small item worth touching on again is the tree nursery. The stock consists of one thousand Lodgepole Pines, together with a dozen or two spruce, and other odd bits. Bought at one year old, the pines were planted in small plastic bag containers and at present appear to be forging ahead in a healthy condition.

A foreseeable problem arose out of having large blocks of land taken up by closely planted trees: what had been well tended semi-rough, easily mown with quintuple gangs, now became the centre of a new duty, that of mowing between the darn things. At first this tiresome task was undertaken with a Flymo Contractor, the only machine readily available. Necessity, in slow time, led to the acquisition of a Hayter Condor, a tough tool highly suited to the job.



It will not be long before golf courses, especially those situated within urban areas, are among the few patches of open green space left. As our trees increase in size the amenity already created to the benefit of the valley's wild life population will undoubtedly be enhanced. Already, with the introduction of these miniature conifer and birch forests, two pairs of redpoll have successfully nested – a brave beginning to a brave effort.

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