

Six years has elapsed since I attended the last American Golf Course Superintendent's Conference and on a cold damp morning I set forth from Heathrow with a party bound for Phoenix, Arizona, for the 58th Annual Conference.

Phoenix is a fairly modern city, literally cut out of the Arizona desert in the 1920's and covers some 476 sq. miles with a population of over a million people. This well organised conference was held at the magnificent Phoenix Civic Plaza which offered every possible facility and from the opening session on the Friday to the close on the following Monday we were kept busy with a continuous choice of lectures covering every conceivable subject connected with golf course construction and management. The exhibition was held in the main hall on the Saturday and Sunday and attracted large enthusiastic crowds.

Many of the lectures were given by staff from the various universities and polytechnic colleges which were well presented and made one realise how much research work is carried on by these academic institutions and also how much money is being made available for turf research purposes.

At the international session a number of speakers from as far afield as Japan and China treated us to some interesting facts of the enormous potential for golf in these countries. Rolf Loewgren of the Swedish Golf Federation, claimed that they could not build golf courses fast enough in Scandinavia to meet the enormous public demand.

Jack McMillan, the Head Greenkeeper, from Sunningdale Golf Club, and BIGGA Vice Chairman, gave an interesting talk, giving details of how he maintained his Surrey heathland course. He went on to give a short history of the role of the British Greenkeeper and he welcomed the amalgamation of the three old greenkeeper associations in the UK to form the new BIGGA, which he felt was a step in the right direction. He thought the new association would be accepted with enthusiasm by the majority of the British Greenkeepers.

Howard Swan, the Managing Director of Golf Landscapes Ltd. and Chairman of the National Turf Grass Council, presented a well illustrated talk entitled *The British Isles - The Traditional Home of the Golf Course*, which must have made many Americans envious of our many traditional courses, which we are fortunate to have in this country.

The afternoon was rounded off by a spirited talk entitled *Common Sense and Technology* - by Jim Arthur, the Consultant Agronomist to the R&A, who put forward his well publicised theories on golf course maintenance in his traditional style.

On the first morning of the exhibition, I walked from my hotel in torrential rain bringing back happy memories of the Groundsman Exhibition at Windsor. I was therefore thankful that the exhibition was being held in a large, well lit hall, where just over 300 exhibitors were showing everything from the latest machinery and equipment to chemicals, fertilisers and of course grass seed. I was particularly

pleased to see Ransomes flying the British flag with a well laid out stand, the centre of attention. They are now obviously well established in the American market.

Traditionally the Americans have always used Kentucky Blue Grass (Smooth Stalk Meadow Grass) in large quantities on their golf courses, and I was interested to learn that the new turf type perennial ryegrasses are now favoured for use on many course fairways, particularly on those courses in the South, where they overseed Bermuda Grass with ryegrass during the cold season. The Americans use many of the same turf type ryegrasses that are now available to us in this country, including Barry, Loretta, Pennfine, Gator, Derby and Citation.

A Seedsmans view of the Phoenix Conference & Exhibition.

.... by Jonathan Franks

One of the many advantages of attending this major conference and exhibition is that one has a marvellous opportunity to rub shoulders with a wide variety of people who arrive literally from all over the world and they are all in some way connected with either the construction or maintenance of golf courses. Not only are there excellent lectures but I find that one also learns new ideas from fellow delegates perhaps at the bar of your hotel, or at one of the many receptions held during the week.

It was at one of these receptions that I met Tom Burrows of the Turtle Creek Country Club, who told me how he overseeded his greens and fairways using the Cushman Sprayer, which on reflection seemed to me a simple method which needed further investigation. Apparently they overseed the greens and fairways with straight Penncross once or twice a season, carefully mixing the seed with water in the tank of the sprayer and then simply spray the seed straight into the existing sward. The force of the water places the seed evenly in the ground and they also obtain a good germination by this method. Bent seed is very fine (12,000 seeds/gram), and they experience no trouble with blocking jets and obviously can cover a large area quickly and economically.

I have never heard of this method of overseeding in this country, possibly because we normally sow a mixture containing fescue and bents, but if a coarse nozzle were used and the seed applied under pressure I see no reason why blockage should occur. This simple idea might give one or two of our greenkeepers some food for thought.

The American Businessman's 'Working Breakfast' has always been a legend in this country and I was therefore very pleased to receive an invitation from Bill Rose, the President of the Tee 2 Green Corporation, to a special breakfast launching ceremony of their new creeping bentgrass called PennLink.

The breakfast was held at the Apache Room of the Phoenix Hilton Hotel at 7.30 a.m. on the Sunday Morning, when normally I must confess I am not at my best. However 200 guests were given a warm welcome and firstly we were treated to a magnificent breakfast consisting of strawberries, slices of melon, fried eggs, (easy over), Canadian bacon, Cumberland sausage, hash brown (grated fried potatoes), mushrooms, together with a doughnut, which we were invited to wash down with fresh orange juice or hot coffee. American kindness is never done by half and such a meal is certainly worth getting up for even on a Sunday morning.

We were then treated to several excellent talks, firstly by three golf superintendent's who told us how they had sown PennLink Creeping Bentgrass on their golf greens and fairways and had found this bent to give a considerably improved performance over earlier strains of bent grasses. Dr. Joe Dutch, from Pennsylvania State University, who is the breeder of PennLink, told us that he had been breeding bent grasses since 1984 and PennLink was the result of crossing some twenty-one creeping bents and the new strain gave a really upright dense sward with less thatch than Penncross.

PennLink, he claimed, had a strong colour and a good resistance to fungal disease and competed aggressively with annual meadow grass. PennLink had been sown on some 240 different golf courses throughout America and they had analysed the results obtained from 52 of these golf clubs, and were quietly confident that they had an excellent creeping bent for the future. Bill Rose explained that the supply position of bent grasses was likely to be limited for the 1987 season, but they were doing everything possible to increase the tonnage available from 1988 onwards. With the continued increase in the use of creeping bent in this country it will be interesting to see how the PennLink performs over here in the UK.

On my last day it was a great privilege to shake hands with one of the best known names in the golf construction business, namely Robert Trent-Jones, who was quite rightly selected to receive the GCSAA's most prestigious Old Tom Morris Award. This coveted prize is presented to the individual who through a continuing selfless commitment to golf has helped to further the game with dedication and inspiration. We were told that Robert Trent-Jones had constructed more than 400 golf courses in 42 American States and in 23 different countries, which is no mean achievement. He apparently claimed that he would only retire 'when they build that last bunker and put me in it', which shows the spirit of a great man and perhaps the spirit of American golf.