

The Battle Between Heather And Grass

Heather on a golf course has always produced mixed emotions from golfers and greenkeepers. To the golfer who finds his ball resting among its wiry stems, it can be a problem but, at the same time, he probably marvels at the sight of a course ablaze in drifts of colour. The greenkeeper, too, appreciates the attractive features of the heather, but it is often the case that where the heather is inundated with grasses, the area is, in fact, very unattractive.

The heather and grasses battle it out and neither wins, occasionally the coarser grasses will gain the upper hand, but more usually the appearance is of patchy weak heather with grass foliage and flower stems sticking out and large clumps of grass, particularly along the sides of paths.

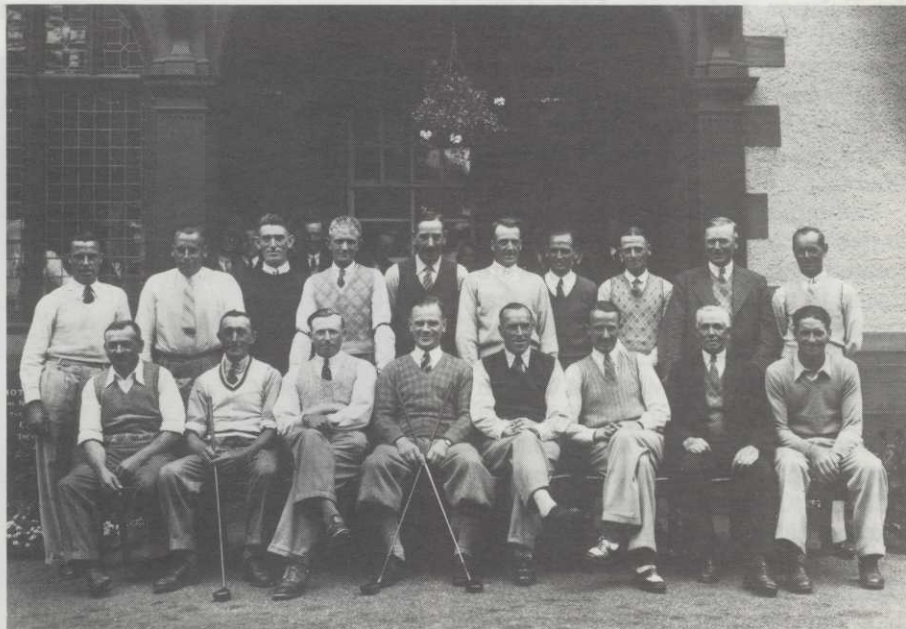
Traditional management of heather does little to control the grass. Cutting hard back in the spring will encourage the grass at the expense of the heather; autumn trimming will improve the appearance, but in mild winters especially the grasses will continue to grow slowly.

A close examination of the rough in a natural heathland soil will show a diversity of young plants including young heather seedlings, but they appear to be suppressed by the mat of vigorous grasses and only the young trees and gorse seedlings appear to be able to compete effectively for light and nutrients. The solution to this problem would seem to be the repression or removal of the grass to allow the heather to dominate.

A glance through some text books

Can You Help Name Names?

This photo is believed to have been taken before the first international greenkeepers' match between England and Scotland, in the mid-1930s at Barnton, Edinburgh. If older greenkeepers recognise anyone, they are asked to contact the editor at Greenkeeper, 121-123 High Street, Dovercourt, Harwich CO12 3AP. ☎ 0255 507526.



on the subject usually only reveals talk of eradication of heather with little or no advice on the management of heathland rough. An example of this is a section on heaths in Reginald Beales' book *Lawns For Sports*, published in 1924. He wrote: 'Some of the best and most beautiful inland courses have been won out of rough heaths, such as Sunningdale and Walton Heath. Gorse, bracken and heather should be cut and the ground broken up by steam tackle and allowed to lie fallow for as long as conveniently possible.'

In 1984, some preliminary work was

carried out at St George's Hill to assess the potential of Dalapon as a controller of a diverse range of grasses, while leaving the heather undamaged and free to grow away to form a thick cover. At Walton Heath, some spraying was also carried out with the same aim, but head greenkeeper Clive Osgood decided to try larger areas using the Cushman.

Dalapon is not recommended for overspraying any plant and spray guards are used to prevent accidental spray drift. However, there have been

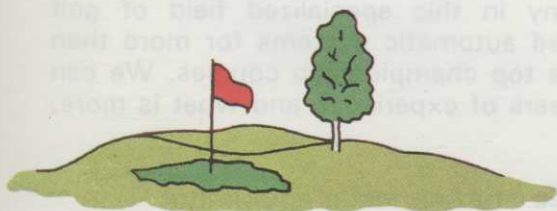
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reports that when applied as an overall spray before heather growth commences in January/February there is no damage. As there are a number of different application rates for Dalapon and some of these are applied as dormant sprays, the objective was to find a rate of application and a time when the grasses would be controlled or suppressed allowing the heather to flourish.

The rate of application for Dalapon varies according to the crop being treated and, so, various rates were tested to try and establish a rate that would kill grass, but not heather. Treatment commenced in February at St George's Hill and March at Walton Heath. A knapsack sprayer fitted with a flooding jet and set at low pressure, 1 bar (10 psi), was used at St George's Hill. The Cushman fitted with size 0 nozzles was used at Walton Heath.

The results indicated that when the Dalapon was applied at between 10-11.2 kilos per hectare (9-10 lbs per acre) in February-March in a water volume of 337-560 litre/hectare (30-50 gallons per acre) a good kill was achieved with most of the grasses.

At Walton Heath, the treated areas showed a marked difference in their untreated surroundings. The majority of the grasses were killed and by mid-season there was a proliferation of wild flora and a considerable increase in growth by the established heather. The young second generation heathers were also growing out of the areas of dead grass.

The site at Walton Heath was inspected again in October and November and the treated area was still easy to identify by its lack of long

Watermation Wins Again

Jack Wheeler, Watermation's customer services manager, received a golden circle distributor award from Weather-Matic at its annual sales conference in Houston, Texas recently. Weather-Matic manufactures lawn and turf irrigation products and Watermation of Woking, Surrey has been the sole UK distributor for 15 years. Due to Watermation's success, largely in golf irrigation, Weather-Matic has increased sales steadily. Watermation has now received the award a record eight times since 1975.



grass. A close inspection did show that the fescues in particular were coming back but, as yet, only as young plants. This application rate seemed to be the best from the point of view of tolerance by the heather, very little effect was noticed and they grew away well after treatment.

Some important lessons were learned during these trials particularly when using the Cushman—great care is needed to avoid any spray drift on to fairways, tees, etc; when spraying has been completed, avoid driving or walking across other areas until sprayer wheels and feet have been washed

down; as a general precaution, it is best to avoid spraying near greens, tees, etc and cleaning out spraying equipment, paying particular attention to nozzles and filters, is very important to avoid the possibility of spray damage with later treatments.

Work is continuing on this project and it is hoped that more specific information on heather and grass species treated will be gathered. Synchemicals would be pleased to hear from clubs preparing to carry out trials. The company can supply a trial report upon request. Full details from Synchemicals, 44 Grange Walk, London SE1 3EN. ☎ 01-232 1225.

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