

Out·On·The·Course

Jimmie Neilson

Jimmie Neilson is the course manager of Murrayfield Golf Club and president of the Scottish And International Golf Greenkeepers' Association.

THERE are few courses with more enthralling views of the surrounding landscape than Murrayfield Golf Club, Edinburgh, which lies on the eastern slopes of Corstorphine Hill in a dominating position overlooking the beautiful Scottish capital city. The course is always kept in immaculate condition by an enthusiastic team of greenkeepers under the direction of course manager, Jimmie Neilson, 51.

"I've always been a keen golfer and it was my enthusiasm for the game that really attracted me to greenkeeping," Jimmie said. He's a friendly, genial Scot with an intelligent and shrewd viewpoint on many aspects of his chosen profession. "I have great support from a patient and understanding wife, my married daughter and nineteen-year-old son, who has decided to follow in his father's footsteps and is in the fourth year of a greenkeeper apprenticeship, training with me at Murrayfield.

"In addition to being addicted to the game, I play quite a bit of darts in winter. Wine making is another hobby that interests me and I enjoy sampling the product!

"I originally trained as an agricultural engineer and followed that occupation for 16 years, but found being involved with farming and harvesting work meant long hours in the summer, which limited the amount of golf I was able to play, so I decided to take up greenkeeping. I thought there might be more opportunities to indulge in the sport I love so much.

"In 1968, I started work at Swanston Golf Club on the south side of Edinburgh as pro/greenkeeper where I was responsible for the golf shop, as well as running the course. I was there for nine years and found it interesting and stimulating. At that time, sheep grazing was allowed on the course and you can well imagine the trials and tribulations of trying to keep the place in reasonable shape with animals roving around in bunkers and fouling the greens, tees and fairways. It was also very time-



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consuming and it finally came to the stage when I decided to have a change and concentrate more on greenkeeping.

"In 1977, I applied for, and was offered, the post of course manager at Murrayfield, which I was honoured to accept. We have an 18-hole course with some 900 members and a nine-hole course, Ravelston, which is run as a separate club with 450 members. We maintain the grounds and course."

Jimmie has a foreman and five assistant greenkeepers. He also has a self-employed estate handyman who, with an assistant, maintains walls, trees and ditches around the club grounds. He also has a retired man on a part-time basis to look after the lawns and gardens.

Jimmie has always been a loyal and enthusiastic member of SIGGA, which he joined in 1970. "I have served the association in the capacity of secretary and chairman of the east section, have done a stint as general secretary of the national association and am now serving a term of office as president of SIGGA. I was also involved with the Greenkeeper Training Committee and helped to organise the greenkeeping educational syllabus for SCOTEC, which is now being implemented by our colleges."

I asked his opinion on greenkeeping as a career. "Let's put it this way, a greenkeeper won't become a millionaire through his job, but it's very satisfying to watch the course as it progresses through the seasons. Every year there is always a challenge to be faced and new lessons to be learned. The work is



Murrayfield's 18th green.



A panoramic view of Edinburgh can be seen from behind the 2nd green.

never dull and you get to meet a lot of nice people and make many friends in the industry. You can command great respect if you are willing to work hard and diligently to achieve high standards.

"Greenkeeping is a job for which you have to be healthy and there are good opportunities for any man if he is prepared to get the right training. He should join a greenkeepers' association and get involved with his branch, which allows you to meet greenkeepers from other courses and broadens your outlook and experience of the profession.

"Murrayfield has a policy of training and education for all the greenkeeping staff, which is fully encouraged and supported by the club. It is unfortunate some head greenkeepers are not interested in training young staff because they are afraid they might eventually take over their job. This is a negative attitude. We have to encourage young men of the right calibre to come into the profession.

"At my club, we have excellent administration procedures with long-term plans for the benefit of the course. We have a green chairman and committee, plus the club captain and myself present at all meetings and no sudden changes can be made overnight. Everything has to be discussed in council. Our long-term plan is to improve the drainage and we have been doing this now for the past three years with another two to go. In addition, up till now, we have planted over 4,000 trees and this will continue.

"I am fortunate to have a good green chairman, who has worked with me for over four years and is extremely interested in all that we do on the course. Our continuity of policy does not give us any of the problems that some clubs have. Constant change is not good for greenkeeping, is worse for the course and is a sad reflection on the way some clubs are run."

I asked Jimmie his views on golf-course machinery. "There seems to

be a reluctance on the part of some manufacturers to listen to suggestions from greenkeepers on machinery improvements and it is usually left to the local blacksmith to get simple alterations done. Equipment companies should pay more attention to our comments. After all, we are the people using the machines.

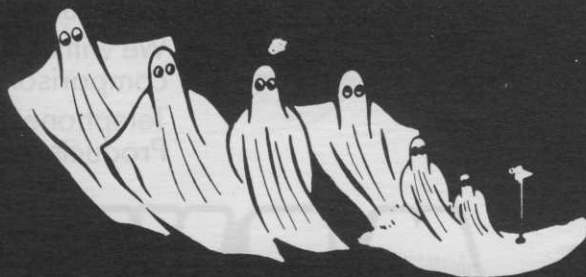
"Within the last 20 years, there have been great advancements in the multiplicity and sophistication of golf course machinery and the wide range of attachments now available has made a significant impact on the ease and speed with which most routine jobs can be done. I still prefer to cut greens and tees on the main course with hand mowers, such as the Auto-Certes, and mow the nine-hole with a triplex machine to save time and labour.

"Because of my early training in engineering, you will appreciate I am very particular about machinery and I insist that accurate daily records be maintained on the amount of repairs, spares and performance, etc, of every single machine. This is something I would advise every course manager to do. At the end of each season, it allows us to assess the condition and cost effectiveness of each item of equipment so that we are able to justify any new investment to the club committee when the time comes for replacement.

"When I was an agricultural engineer, I used to visit many courses in Scotland doing tractor repairs. I came into contact with some great characters in greenkeeping, who were well worth listening to. Names that spring to mind are Jim King, who was at Luffness for many years, Jock Newlands and Harry Smith (Bruntsfield Links), Davie Paterson (Ferenze) and the two Willie Ritchies (Kirriemuir and Montrose) to name a few. They were all good greenkeepers and we would do well to emulate them and their kind."



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