

WOODS IN JAPAN

Walter Woods – links supervisor at St Andrews – recently completed a mission to recreate his beloved linksland on a Tokyo hillside. Greenkeeper carries his report and photos exclusively.

IT'S a long way from St Andrews Scotland to the New St Andrews Golf Club Japan. A flight that takes you over seemingly endless ice-covered land involves a refuelling stop in Anchorage and breathtaking views of Mount McKinlay and Mount Fuji.

On arrival at Tokyo, you are greeted by an intense heat and high humidity that makes your lungs draw deep in search of oxygen.

Tokyo is vast with a population of about 12 million. It sprawls for miles and huge skyscrapers give an appearance more typical of New York.

Motorways go off in all directions, but even these cannot compete against the density of traffic and all vehicle movement draws virtually to a crawl during morning and evening peak periods. The modern subways and trains are more convenient and well-organised taxis offer an alternative to the inconvenience of driving yourself.

One thing that immediately captures your notice is how clean everything is – the shops

are beautiful and the people well-mannered and courteous. You can also walk in any part of the city during the night or day without fear of being accosted.

As you travel out, the countryside looks similar to parts of Scotland, Wales or the Lake District and it is not until you see the different architecture and vast rice fields, that you realise you're on the other side of the world.

It was some 12 years ago that a number of golfing enthusiasts embarked on a scheme to build a golf course similar to the Old Course at St Andrews. They ran into difficulty with government land restrictions and legislation. An alternative was sought and Jack Nicklaus invited to design another 18-hole golf course on a hillside. The result resembles a typical American course with lakes and tightly bunkered greens.

The course is now well-established and receives many visitors, who provide a valuable source of income. Unfortunately, it is well out of the reach of many. To play a round, with the caddie fee and use of clubhouse facilities, can cost £100, excluding any meals. It is also possible to play at night with nine of the holes completely floodlit!

Directors and officials of the New St Andrews Golf Club visit St Andrews periodically to cement a bond of friendship between the two golfing

communities and because of an upsurge in the popularity of golf in Japan, they recently decided to build another nine holes. They hired a young Japanese golf course designer, who has studied British golf course architecture and, in particular, many of the famous golf courses in Scotland. It was mainly for this reason that my services were required.

At the golf club, I was informed of my duties and what was expected of me. I was then introduced to the designer and, between us, using an interpreter, we discussed and implemented the undulations of greens and fairways and the siting of tees and bunkers.

All the golfing holes have different intended character – two holes resemble Carnoustie, some are like Gleneagles or even Sunningdale and one looks like a particular hole at St Andrews. All were individually built to resemble British golf course architecture.

The Japanese government will not allow any golf courses to be constructed on flat or agricultural land, so any new projects have to be built on wasteground or hillsides, but this is no problem to the enthusiastic Japanese. They will move any amount of earth to achieve their aims.

Money is no object and you learn quickly never to commit yourself to your first suggestion. If you did, they would have the task completed by the following day! I overcame this by determining and earmarking bunker locations, deciding what green undulations were necessary or suitable and only then did I mark them out by using chalk, wooden stakes and string. I then checked them myself, usually in the evening.

This eliminated any mistakes and, once completed, their surveyors would put the final decisions to paper. Everybody concerned in the project was asked to attend a meeting every second day and everything, down to the smallest detail, was discussed.

A large workforce, including women, worked from eight until five, six days a week. Each morning, the supervisors would have every detail written on a blackboard and the entire task of that day would be explained



Typically impressive Japanese scenery.



Heavy machinery contouring fairways.



Traffic on the move, almost, in Tokyo.

before work commenced.

Everybody tackled the manual labour conscientiously. Such work included building bunkers, planting trees or bushes, or turfing fairways – no seeding took place, except to the greens.

On the fairways, the turf used was korai, a native grass that provides a dense surface something similar to that you would find on any British inland course. The greens construction was to the specification adopted by the USGA.

Plastic drainage was confined into a gravel and grit carpet, then covered and contoured with a sand and peat mixture.

This was then seeded with Penncross bent, which appeared to be well-suited to the climate.

While the green and tee construction was going on, installation of the irrigation system took place. Not only were pop-up watering heads installed, but also a demisting system. This was organised by the installation of pop-ups at 12 metre intervals on separate pipes right round the greens. These were then linked into valves and could be operated individually or through the irrigation controller.

The fine jets could fire water to create a mist for one-minute intervals and this, in turn, cooled

the air for three to four hours, preventing the grass from wilting in the heat and high humidity.

During my stay, I visited many golf clubs and the pattern was similar at each. Clubhouses were as near perfect as they could be and service was exemplary. Courses were groomed to perfection in settings of azaleas, Japanese flowering cherries or many other beautiful flowering trees or bushes – a lesson learned from Augusta National.

The greens superintendent would have about 20 staff and

Continued overleaf...



Greens drainage follows the USGA specification.



The same the world over!



Night and day, they play – thanks to floodlighting shown in the background.



'Communications' to lorry drivers bringing material.

ten or so ladies to hand weed fairways or rake bunkers. Greens, fairways and tees were cut daily, including Saturday and Sunday, which were the busiest days. Putting surfaces were fast and true and fairways firm. Bad lies were difficult to find.

Most courses had Penncross bent on the greens, but I did see some with a mixture of rye and *Poa annua* – even these were exceptionally good. Machinery was usually maintained by two mechanics and every modern device was available.

Staff rooms were spotless and contained a dining room, changing rooms, wash and shower rooms – shoes had to be removed before entering and slippers were provided. I saw these conditions at every golf club and the ultimate at one club was sleeping rooms for

those who had worked extra overtime.

Japan has four main islands – Honshu, Hokkaido, Kyushu and Shikoku – split into prefectures similar to counties or regions. Tokyo, Yokohama and Osaka are the largest cities. Golf was first introduced to the country in 1903 by Arthur Hesketh Groom, an English merchant trader. With some fellow compatriots, he organised a nine-hole, par-three course. It no longer exists, but an 18-hole golf course has since been constructed nearby.

The sport's popularity has increased tremendously over the last ten years, due totally to the success of Isao Aoki and Tommy Nakajima and as soon as the latter's name is mentioned, people will immediately reflect on the poor fellow's disaster at the Road Hole bunker during the 1978 Open Championship –

an area that is now referred to as the Nakajima Sands.

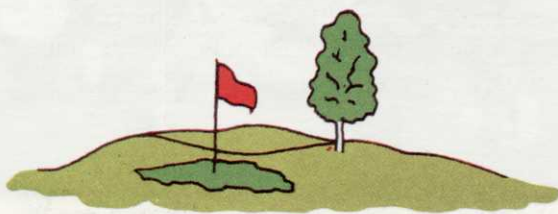
In Japan, there are 1,500 golf courses and over 5,000 driving ranges, used by those who only dream of playing a real golf course.

In the near future, more courses will be built for those of moderate and lesser incomes to enjoy. Playing tennis and watching baseball are the favourite pastimes at the moment, but golf is quickly overtaking them.

Young Japanese now watch the major tournaments on television and copy the superstar's swings and techniques. This encourages them to work hard and to practise during every hour available. Over the next few years, it would not surprise me if they begin to capture the world's major titles.

Whether it be construction, drainage or **TORO** irrigation

GOLF LANDSCAPES LTD.



ASHWELLS ROAD
BENTLEY, BRENTWOOD
ESSEX CM15 9SR.

Coxtie Green (0277) 73720

The proven experience in the field