This issue
JANUARY/FEBRUARY 1986

Front cover: John Campbell travelled to Letham Grange in Scotland where he met Ken Smith (pictured above). Full story on facing page.

ROAD WORKS AHEAD!
Jim Arthur returns to the subject of golf course traffic and associated wear

PARKLAND!
Everything you've ever wanted to know about trees, as told by Gordon Childs

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NOTEBOOK
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ISEKI
The very best in turf
CREATING a hotel and sports complex to the highest standard in beautiful surroundings was a burning ambition that began in 1976 for Ken Smith, chairman of F.P.C. (Developments).

He was being shown over the estate at Letham Grange, near Arbroath by a farming partner who was a descendant of the original owner and builder of the unusual Victorian mansion.

It took him another seven years to buy the land and obtain essential planning approval before the project finally began in 1983. The mansion has now been Continued on page 8...

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I MAKE no excuse for returning, yet again, to one of the major problems in course management today, namely traffic and associated wear. This is most obvious on the busiest courses, but every course shows more wear-related damage today than it did a decade ago.

My experience indicated that the most outstanding feature of course improvement in 1985 — which will be long remembered for its late spring and monsoon-like summer — related to fairways mown by hydraulic-powered, direct-mounted gang mowers and also where broad surrounds and very deep aprons — literally foregreens — were mown by triple mowers fitted with seven-bladed reels and floating heads and where cuttings were removed in boxes.

Quite apart from a dramatic improvement in playing conditions around the greens, this combination kept tractors well away from aprons, as well as putting surfaces, and especially narrow entrances to greens.

How often do you still see good greens and, often, excellent fairways with some five to ten yards of appallingly uneven, damaged, eroded, coarse-textured, open, muddy turf in the no-man’s land between? One cause is simply because tractors, especially if towing trailed gangs, have to go over and over almost the same area of ground to mow awkward corners and what with constant traffic and tight turns and tyre marking, if not ruts, run-up conditions are unpredictable. I find that such areas are often the worst feature of many courses.

For too long in greenkeeping (farming learned the lesson decades earlier), we have treated tractors as horses. The design of some trailed gangs has not intrinsically altered since the days when they were fitted with shafts not draw-bars. In more than one greenkeeping shed, I have been shown the old leather boots used to prevent horses’ hoof marks on wheels consequently skid.

With hydraulic gangs, the higher reel speed, independent of the land speed, meant a better finish for three reasons. One, fairways could be cut more frequently, since it was simplicity itself, especially with weatherproof cabs, to mow fairways even in the pouring rain. Second, a finer finish was achieved with more cuts per yard, leaving no ribbing. Third, the high reel speed flung the finer cuttings further and so there was none of that unsightly ‘silage crop’ effect that so disfigured some inland fairways last summer.

More and more, we must try to divorce greenkeeper and golfer traffic, especially from vulnerable areas where both play and maintenance converge. Nowhere is this more serious, in both cause and effect, than at entrances to greens and walk-offs from green to tee.

I feel that architects should consider traffic more when designing courses — certainly in the case of potentially busy courses, especially those attached to hotels, to the extent of building ‘orbital motorways’ in the rough as part of the initial design concept. You can only deplore such extravagant and contrived bunkering around greens that forces all traffic into a narrow entrance. Inevitably, this becomes bare and eroded, while walk-off traffic is similarly constricted, with the same results.

Paths are really no answer. If they are in play, then problems are inevitable and, in any case, paths only transfer the problem to the end of the path. If paths must be made, they must be wide enough to take two players abreast, towing trolleys and with a surface kind to studded shoes. All too often, we see paths unusable because they are hard underfoot to spikes. Yet, either side of the path, the turf is worn bare by players walking off.

Materials must also not damage mowers. I abhor chippings or
even red blaze and the best material I find is chopped brashings (a cheap source of supply on heathland courses, where only constant culling of seedling birch keeps this invasive weed at bay) or bark, which can be purchased. Shell (cockle shell used so widely on Lancashire links and in Essex), is satisfactory, except where the soil is acid, as it kills heather. With brashings, you need a chopper, such as the old turnip chopper of my farming youth. But there are efficient ones on the market, either pto driven or self-propelled.

Prevention is always better than cure, but at times we have to cure as well. Constant deep aeration of areas subjected to compaction will help, but there is no guarantee against erosion, by wheels or feet, as those in charge of famous beauty spots have discovered!

This is why better mowing and better preparation of wide surrounds, with its implication of constant aeration; regular mowing three times a week; even top dressing and certainly controlled, periodic, rather than permanent, irrigation helps such vulnerable areas to survive the effects of traffic better.

Even so, patching – especially of paths from tees, as well as from greens to tees – is inevitable, often on an annual basis. Too often, imported turf – either seeded turf, which can never be hard-wearing enough initially (and it rarely gets a chance to survive long enough to become mature), or coarse meadow turf – is used. Contrary to opinions still being expressed, ryegrass does not form a hard-wearing turf because it is so open and easily invaded by annual meadow grass and it gives an unsightly finish.

Fairway turf

The answer – even if it is unpopular with the members – is to use well-established fairway turf. If the scars are patched at once with imported (or nursery) turf and, if necessary, protected by white lines or even rope and if the turf is lifted away from the main line of traffic, even the least satisfactory replacement turf will eventually establish and become very similar to that surrounding it.

This will happen, if only because the grass type will stabilise and is determined by two factors – natural (the soil below and the weather) and applied (management in the broadest sense).

Needless to say, never patch with ryegrass-contaminated imported turf. The correct solution may mean double work, but no more than patching the same walk-off area twice in one season and still not solving the problem.

The problem of traffic is certainly not new. The great increase in winter play and, therefore, the greatest damage on more easily sealed wet soils, coupled with ever-increasing standards that are expected – indeed, demanded – in course presentation is. Much more repair and remedial work is, therefore, required and we can safely say that the problem of traffic and its results will get worse.

Even if every precaution, such as introducing white lines, banning trolleys in winter, making greenkeeper roadways and intensifying remedial work, is taken, we shall all be needing much larger and better managed turf nurseries in future years.

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LETHAM GRANGE CONTINUED...

converted into a first-class hotel with a four-sheet ice rink for curling – a superb housing development is being integrated into the estate.

There is a championship golf course that should be ready for play early this year. Once more, the man at the hub of things is Ken Smith, a keen golfer who planned the fairway layout and site balance in association with Donald Steel and Cameron Sinclair. Brian D. Pierson was responsible for the construction and landscaping and Jim Arthur the consulting agronomist.

Maximum use has been made of the land’s natural features and the course’s routing has evenly balanced the constraints of the site and the need to develop other activities against essential and desirable design criteria.

The fundamental philosophy was that the existing landscape should direct the golf course layout, rather than the artificial imposition of design theories and dictums.

Water has made an interesting feature on a number of holes and this has added to the strategy, character and aesthetic appeal of the layout. From a greenkeeping point of view, the course has been designed for minimum labour levels through the use of sophisticated machinery. This has been done by the careful planning of slopes on all mouldings, the design and shaping of bunkers and the distances between hazards, greens, tees and planted areas.

John Campbell
WHEN you think of parkland golf courses, you imagine lush green, almost pasture, land with woods and big trees dominating the landscape. In fact, the word park is defined as a large enclosed piece of ground with woodland and pasture attached to a country house. So, if you make the house into a clubhouse and the ground into a golf course, you have a parkland golf course!

There are differences in the maintenance of parkland to other courses. The most important one is tidiness. A parkland course must never look untidy, although I would not suggest that other types should look unkempt.

Trees are vital to parkland and have, in recent years, become a big problem with the ravages of Dutch elm disease and many other destructive elements. We need to be much more aware of the needs for replanting and the types of tree that are going to grow on our courses.

We have often seen greens committees and greenkeepers trying to plant, with all the best intentions, the wrong types of tree and, in many cases, in the wrong place, forgetting how big they become. It is much better to call in a good architect if a programme of tree planting is to be carried out.

Maintenance of trees is also a consideration and, in many cases, there is a tendency to forget this when planting. Plant back-up trees for the more important trees, golfwise, on your course. Then, at least, you will not have a big space left when a tree is lost. Do not plant the same type of tree as the one already there, for if it is lost to disease, it is almost certain you will also lose your back-up tree to the same disease.

Trees can be purchased as semi-mature, up to 25-30ft. Of course, they cost more, but it may be worth spending the money if you have a golf hole spoiled by the loss of a tree. But it is better to plant young as long as time is on your side.

A good selection of trees would always include:
- Horse Chestnuts need only be avoided where wet clay forms the site to be planted on. They grow quickly and will reach 90-100ft with a spread of 60ft or more. All heights and spreads should be taken into account when planting.
- Beech. Although chalk and limestone soils are its natural home, the common beech will grow in most situations, including exposed ones near the sea. They can reach 80-100ft with a spread of 70ft.
- Limes are accommodating and will succeed in most types of soil. They are among the finest of parkland trees with a height of over 100ft and a spread of 50ft-60ft.
- Sycamore is quick growing and hardy. It has a height of 80ft-100ft and a spread of 50ft-60ft.
- Oak. Of all oaks, the turkey oak and the common oak are the best known. The turkey oak is the fastest growing of the two and will grow in any soil as long as there is plenty of depth. It will grow up to 100ft and spread up to 80ft. The common oak will grow 60-70ft and spread 60ft.
- Willows are usually associated with damp, but may be grown in most, soils.
- Hornbeam is one that will also grow in most places, as well as damp heavy soils.

It is well worth spending a little time to become more knowledgeable about your trees. Of course, trees need attention, keeping the low branches trimmed to the needs of the golfer, cutting off the sucker shoots, taking out dead wood, etc. The big task comes each autumn when leaves start to fall and you will probably need a leaf sweeper!

Finally, a word of warning. The tree root will spread to find water. It will often contain a central root, the tap root, with many branches from which a mass of fibrous roots will grow. These can spread well beyond the spread of the tree, so care should be taken not to plant too near to greens, etc.

The above is an extract from a paper given by Gordon Childs at the recent SIGGA educational conference.

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