impressed upon us three key about change for the better: thus override or outweigh any individual whims or personali-
ties. Second, that greenkeepers just the right seasoning of between Unions, Clubs and conducive a hard act to follow, but perhaps created. We shall be back

One might imagine this ses-

A learning experience

David Norton, the TORO Greenkeeper of the Year, recently spent two months in America as part of his winners award. These are his observations...

Airports can be chaotic enough in themselves and I had been quite enough organised chaos on both sides of the Atlantic, with my journey taking over 20 hours from Beverly to the University of Massachusetts. Just when I felt the worst was over along came a sting in the tail. That sting was the 15 minute ride on Boston’s underground, though without taking you on a similar ride I cannot begin to explain its nastiness. Suffice to say that in the whole eight weeks away it was the low spot of my tour, and I count myself lucky to have arrived with luggage intact. When I finally reached the campus it was dark; below freezing; snowing; and the dormitory was locked!

I was soon inducted into American ways and began the seven-week, eleven subject, course in fine spirits. These included turfgrass management; golf course architecture; turfgrass diseases; entomology; irrigation; physiology; personnel management; calculations; soils and fertilisers; trees and shrubs; and the options we students being tested by exam or practical project, sometimes both.

There was never a dull moment, for the excellent course material was both informative and practically based and through classroom days were long – 8am to 5.30pm – the time flew past. Some of the material was familiar from my days at Ashham Bryan, with the presentation made doubly fascinating by its ‘Americanisation’. For example, our meadow grass is known as Kentucky Blue Grass (which sounds much nicer) and came to light when Latin names were used in the classroom. My American dawn grew when a talk turned to American warm season grasses – so different from those few varieties we have here in Britain – and the management practices necessary for their survival.

The essential ingredient in any learning experience is, in my opinion, the dialogue that comes after school. My unfounded though long-held views on America and the Americans were soon changed through such conversations and I now feel that no big gap exists in the capability of ‘them’ as opposed to ‘us’. What is clear, however, is that education is a high priority, high profile subject, and this we must emulate at every opportunity if we are to gain the same professional recognition enjoyed by our American cousins.

Did I tell you about the war? It broke out whilst I was there, giving me an exposure to American news coverage that was truly mind-blasting. Twenty-four hour TV coverage on four channels, newspapers crammed to capacity and in Ashhurst itself the sight of demos and peace protesters marching on the streets. This climaxed on George Washington’s Birthday when a peace protestor incinerated himself on the village green. Thankfully a cease-fire was called before I flew home.

This was no “all work and no play” trip and I lived it up in Las Vegas at the GCSAA show. I had been psyched by several weeks away it was the low spot of my tour, and I count myself lucky to have arrived with luggage intact. When I finally reached the campus it was dark; below freezing; snowing; and the dormitory was locked!

One day to go, with the morning spent at Riverside in

The Tamarisk Course, southern California

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One day to go, with the morning spent at Riverside in mind-blowing discussion with Jon Williams on irrigation systems past, present and future. I do hope he achieves all that he is aiming for. Indeed, on reflection, I’m sure he will. Now the end is looming, though I could happily stay on for several more weeks in California, and I am sorry to leave. The airport newstand offers an English newspaper for £5.50 and I begin to feel drawn homeward bound. Calculations now reveal that I’ve covered 20,000 miles, being transported through Boston’s subway nightmare to the desert. Palm Springs is where TORO have a desert outlet and from this base we visited several eye-popping courses and talked with green maintenance staff. The courses at PGA West, La Quinta and Tamarisk especially impressed me and it was at Tamarisk that I saw my first ever Pov trialis greens, which in both Britain and America we were taught were ‘too go’. Seeing was definitely believing! Funny thing, they were suffering the effects of a 5 year drought, though on the day I visited it rained more than it had in two whole years – typical!

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