With a crumbling coastline nibbling at the edges, Barton-on-Sea Golf Club had little choice but to move inland. Course manager Tony Gadd tells Cedric Johns how he handled the task – and kept 18 holes open for play throughout.

When Tony Gadd was appointed course manager at the Barton-on-Sea Golf Club, his brief was simple and straight to the point. Call-in a contractor or manage the project yourself, he was told. Given the choice, Tony decided to put his reputation on the line. He opted to plan and control events, using his experience and judgement to achieve the success his new employers had spent years planning for.

The project? To rebuild, extend and revitalise a 95-year-old cliff-top golf course threatened by a crumbling coastline, move it inland and turn it into a modern, 27-hole complex, complete with brand new clubhouse; at a total cost of £2 million.

Apart from the importance of selecting a group of reliable subcontractors, this entailed planning the movement of tens of thousands of tons of soil, pegging-out three nine-hole loops, recycling spoil to build features, updating drainage, extending the irrigation system, overseeing progressive seeding and turfing, coping with all the relevant paperwork, maintaining phased work schedules – and making sure that each stage was completed to budget.

Anything else? “Yes”, said the club’s management committee, “It is essential that you keep 18 holes open for play at all times.”

Some brief, some welcome back to this country! Prior to joining the Hampshire club, Tony had spent a decade out of the country gaining invaluable experience helping to build and manage golf courses in Africa and central Europe.

During that period of his life, he learned to cope with arid heat and tropical downpours (which washed away entire fairways) in the Ivory Coast.
Coast and the teeth-chattering contrast of mid-European winter temperatures plunging to -20°C or more.

In Germany, melting snow and continuous rains combined to flood his Schloss Weitnburg course to the point where, as the waters subsided, trout were discovered swimming in the bunkers.

On the face of it then, Tony Gadd’s move to the English south coast appeared to offer many advantages; a pleasantly mild climate, a team of professional sub-contractors at his disposal plus the bonus of established support in the shape of a six-man team led by head ‘keeper Bob Parsons.

The reality was different! The Barton project turned out to be the biggest challenge of his life, he told me. “But I don’t regret a moment of it.”

One of Tony’s main headaches was - and still is - wind erosion. During one particularly stormy night, high winds blowing in off the sea shifted an inch of carefully laid seeded soil. Within days, freshly sanded bunkers turned a pale shade of green.

“I didn’t use covers. If I had, they would only have ended up floating in the bay”.

Storm-force winds are not the everyday norm at Barton but the Solent channel can be fickle. Light winds suddenly turn into squalls gusting to a strength four or five; enough to cause soil movement.

When this happened, Tony and his team had to forget whatever they had planned. For a period, raking, over-seeding, light rolling and watering were daily necessities.

Yet just a few paces further inland, where the course was extended away from the crumbling cliffs, heavier farm soil resisting the affects of the winds threw-up another challenge. Weeds.

Classified as Grade ‘D’ farmland, the soil was alive with camomile, white flowering clover, plantains and a botanists’ book full of other species. On top of that, the owner, a local farmer had, in Tony’s estimation, only paid lip service to drainage. “That was a whole new ball game,” he commented with a wry smile.

Water was an important priority. Acknowledging his scant knowledge of the technicalities of irrigation system design, Tony readily agreed to let ISS (Irrigation Contracts) take responsibility for this aspect of the development.

They had installed Barton’s original system; they knew the ropes. “We had to plan and re-plan the new system depending on the various stages of construction and seeding,” says Gary Parker, whose company adapted and extended old with new over a twelve month period.

In addition to setting-up a temporary pump station, repositioning pipelines and re-assessing application rates on a weekly basis, the ISS installation team was not helped when the odd JCB dug-up newly laid pipe or, in one heart-stopping escapade, pulled up what seemed like miles of cable!

There was a time when even Tony admitted he was desperate for water - for seeded fairways not included in the irrigation plan. “I was seriously thinking of hiring bowser but then it rained - and rained.”

Talking of seeding, Tony told me that he planted a traditional mixture of fescue and creeping bent on the greens and tees, pre-mixed fes-
The new club house at Barton-on-Sea

BARTON LOGISTICS

Rebuilding the Barton-on-Sea golf course involved the following statistics — according to Tony Gadd’s records; dated May ’91–June ’92.

Earth: 250,000 sq yds moved
Stone: 5,000 tons used for drainage and stone carpets
Water: 2.5 million gallons stored in six lakes of varying size
Machinery: five bulldozers, eight slew ing excavators, one mini-digger, two JCB wheeled excavators, one wheeled shovel, four 22-ton dump trucks, two continuous trenchers, five agricultural shovels, four 22-ton dump trucks, two Ransomes, one bunker rake
Fuel: 24,167 gallons of diesel

COURSE EQUIPMENT

MOWERS
Huxley — two 358 greens mowers
Huxley — one 358 for tees and approaches
Ransome — one 180D for surrounds
Brouwer — one hydraulic 5-gang mower for fairways
Brouwer — one trailed gang mower
Ransome — 350D for semi-rough and rough
John Deere — Front line rotary for rough
Ransome — one 24in motorised mower
Auto Certes — Three motor mowers
Allen Flymo — four brushcutters

BUNKER RAKES
John Deere — one bunker rake
Ransome — one bunker rake

In addition to the above, a (very old) Ransome 171 model is used for vertical cutting.

TRACTORS
John Deere 1750 with powerloader
Ford 3600
Massey Ferguson

TRUCKSTERS
Cushman — three vehicles with attachments

IRRIGATION
27 greens, tees and approaches — Toro 650 independent head control sprinklers, computerised AquaFlow control system designed, installed and maintained by ISS (Irrigation Contracts) Ltd.

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