

On the bonny, bonny banks...

Loch Lomond Golf Club has received more accolades before it's opened than most courses receive in a lifetime. Professional golfers have hailed it as "the best modern-style course in the UK and the most enjoyable, picturesque layout". Magazine editors have called it "the finest inland course in Europe". Golf photographers say it's "a national treasure". And one of the designers, Tom Weiskopf, is on record as saying: "I consider Loch Lomond my lasting memorial to golf." But what does a greenkeeper think? Duncan Gray, course manager at Mitchell-Struthers GC, Ayrshire, went along to see what all the fuss is about.

Loch Lomond

A greenkeeper's verdict

What's already been said about the course

"I consider Loch Lomond my lasting memorial to golf" – designer Tom Weiskopf. "I truly believe it is one of the 10 most outstanding courses in the world."

"Loch Lomond may be the finest inland course not only in Great Britain but all of Europe" – George Peper, editor-in-chief, Golf Magazine.

"I think Loch Lomond is one of the best courses I've played. It's the best modern-style course in the UK and the most enjoyable, picturesque layout" – Ian Baker-Finch.

"If I had to play the same golf course every day of the year, I wouldn't have to look a lot further than Loch Lomond. Not only is the setting magnificent... but the quality of the design and maintenance of the course makes it a pleasure to play" – Sandy Lyle.

"A site most golf architects would sell their souls for" – Bill Robertson, Today's Golfer

"It is one of the most beautiful, peaceful places I have ever seen, and the golf course is superb" – Lyle Anderson

"A national treasure. The finest inland course in Europe" – photographer Brian Morgan.

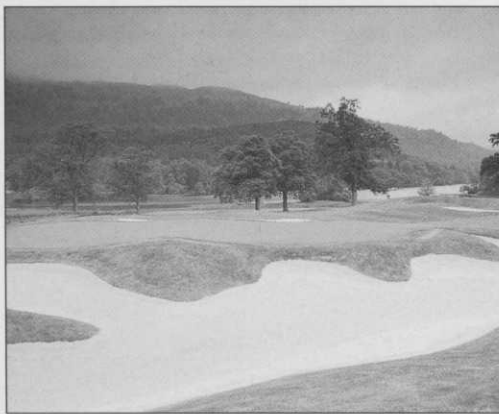
Loch Lomond conjures up images of vast expanses of water bordered by majestic backdrops of mountainsides and, to be honest, the reality is, if anything, even better. It is in this setting that the latest addition to Scotland's unparalleled array of fine golf courses has been created.

When Tom Weiskopf and Jay Morrish were asked to create a layout befitting such a setting I have to say my first reaction was to ask if it was possible for an American design team to create something that would not look completely out of place in a situation and climate so foreign to their way of thinking. It was with this thought in mind that I paid a visit to the Loch Lomond Golf Club earlier this year.

The site, Rossdhu-in-Luss, has been the family home of the Chiefs of the Clan Colquhoun since the 12th century and is steeped in the rich heritage of the area. Deeds of courage and treachery, stories of passion, love and revenge, saints, blackguards and even black magic abound. The family mansion, Rossdhu House, was built in the 18th century and is a magnificent building which is to become the main clubhouse. Among the many special features are the "Chinese Drawing Room" with hand painted silk wall coverings and "The Moor and the Loch" room which houses a huge collection of stuffed animals and birds collected during the 19th century by John Colquhoun, great grandfather of the present Chief. Only

specimens shot by himself, and latterly his sons, were admitted to the collection. Next to Rossdhu House is the ruin of the original castle home of the Colquhoun clan, no doubt haunted by the ghost of an earlier John Colquhoun who was a necromancer skilled in black magic, and was the last known person to openly practice witchcraft in Scotland.

This then was the background into which Stirling Investments asked Weiskopf and Morrish to mould a true test of golf.



The 9th green

The completion of the first of the planned two courses has been delayed for several years due to Stirling Investments going into receivership, but the Bank of Scotland decided to go ahead and finish the first course in order to secure the future of the project. This has only now come to fruition with the Lyle Anderson Corporation, owners of the Desert Highland and Desert Mountain Golf Communities in Arizona, together with another Phoenix company, DMB, forming a UK company to run the club as prin-

cipal shareholders.

The course has been carved through some very inhospitable areas with possibly the biggest problem being the stretch from the 13th to the 16th which was very wet peat bog. Luckily, at the time of building, the new Luss bypass was being constructed and huge quantities of blasted rock were available. This was used to infill all the fairway areas down to solid bedrock, or in deep areas, on top of a layer of terram. The displaced peat was then used, in conjunction with sand, to form a seed bed on top of the rock.

Over 200 acres of ground has been allocated for each course which together with the abundance of trees allows each hole to appear isolated giving a great feeling of peace and solitude and allowing the teeming wildlife to live in harmony with the golfers. On my walk round I noted hundreds of native and imported specimen trees, including maple, douglas fir, Scots pine, giant redwood, monkey puzzle, yew and limes. Also huge bands of rhododendron and azaleas. The wildlife I saw included golden eagles, buzzards, foxes, stoats, hares, jays, ospreys, roe and sitka deer, swans, pheasants and herons.

The design concept is certainly very American but in keeping with other Weiskopf designs I have seen, such as Troon in Scotsdale, Arizona. Both are proof that American designers can produce outstanding courses without going over the top. Huge bands of bunkers guard many of the



Above: the 17th green across Loch Lomond. On Page 25: the 9th green looking west.

Photographs by Gavin Newman

greens, some of which have fairly severe undulations and the golfer must face several very intimidating long carries over marshland which all add up to a pretty severe test of golf.

Construction methods were to USGA specifications, and although the green surfaces are fairly hard, the creeping bent grass was looking very healthy at the time of my visit. *Poa* is kept at bay by hand picking every few weeks and although the surrounds are fairly heavily infested I could see no sign of it on the greens. Fairway drainage is proving to be a major headache as the original construction was of the run-off and collection system. Over the past two years or so Dave Sammells of Edinburgh Landscapes, the company which has been growing in and maintaining the course for the bank, has installed over 20,000 metres of herringbone drainage, with the intention of installing another 10,000 metres shortly. In con-

What it will cost the golfer

When the course formally opens in 1995 it will be an international membership club with member costs closely related to actual use.

Initially, membership is by invitation only. After a while existing members will be able to sponsor new members.

The 'international' membership is designed for golfers who only visit Scotland occasionally. For them, during the launch phase, the initiation fee is £1,000, which includes the first six rounds of golf for member or member and spouse but no guest privileges. After that per round fees comparable to

other well-known courses will be charged. Annual dues – described as "modest" – will begin in 1996.

'Regular' membership is being offered initially for £3,350 including the first six rounds of golf by a member or member and spouse. Regular membership carries guest privileges. Additional rounds are available at a "reasonable price".

The club will also have a limited number of Scottish memberships.

Future plans include cottage-style accommodation near the 220-year-old manor house for members and guests.

junction with intensive aeration using the vertidrain and deep slitting, followed by regular sand dressings, it is hoped that the drainage problems will be over-

come fairly quickly.

The many streams running through the course have been crossed with hand built dry stone bridges and many of the tees are

supported by dry stone walls. An undisturbed dry stone dyke crosses the 2nd fairway in front of the green with the unusual feature of the ground behind the wall being on the same level as the top stones.

One feature which I was particularly pleased to see was the extensive practice ground adjacent to the 1st tee, set into a huge depression with target greens and tees at both ends.

Now that the future of the club has been secured, thoughts have turned to the creation of the intended sister course, to be designed by Jack Nicklaus, and having looked over the site I will certainly look forward to that with great anticipation.

As I drove down the exit road winding past the 17th and 18th holes near to the old castle, I could swear the old necromancer was chuckling at the thought of so many balls vanishing into a watery grave.

I'll be back!