With its bright green course and colourful flourishing backdrop Augusta National is the bane of most greenkeepers' lives.
A Word with Alliss

With April heralding the annual outbreak of Augusta Syndrome Scott MacCallum speaks with a man who has been a feature of Augusta for nearly 40 years.

So here we are again. April, and the Masters will be filling the television screens with spectacular golf on a course which fits every club member's vision of what a golf course should be.

Augusta National is perfection personified. Very few of us have ever been lucky enough to visit but we all know the course, particularly the back nine, as if it were our own.

A little draw to get the big bounce down the 10th fairway; a deep breath for Amen Corner - avoid the lake to the left of the 11th; vital club selection on the 12th and hitting a perfect right to left drive on 13 to give a chance of making the green in two - Amen to that; but then there is the terrifyingly slopey 14th green; the 15th where you can find water both in front or behind the green; up comes the 16th where every well struck tee shot feeds down to the hole and looks a dead cert to go in; the 17th with a well positioned tee shot giving a chance to just clear the bunker guarding the green and leave a birdie putt; then a deep breath before attempting the claustrophobic drive up the last, hopefully missing the bunkers, gives a chance to leave a makeable putt on the famous last green.

The colours are amazing. The caddies' white overalls setting off the vivid green of the fairways and greens; the stunning rhododendrons and azaleas; the carpeted bridges, the pure white sand in the bunkers and the blue water of Rae's Creek and the many lakes.

Then there's the greens themselves. Is there anything more extraordinary than watching a player strike a putt away from the hole and wait 40 seconds for it to find its way all around the green to the hole side or sometimes, miraculously, in?

Now, if you just spent a little more time preparing your own course properly, surely you could come up with something nearly as good. I'm not so stupid as to expect something exactly the same, after all I know the weather's always better in America and from what I see there are a few more staff at Augusta than at your place, but how much sun or people does it need to get greens to stimp at 14?

It's the same every year. The US Masters is the bane of greenkeepers' lives but you do have a champion out there and he comes from an unlikely source.

"For people to think that their own courses should be like Augusta is like dreaming of living in Buckingham Palace. It is completely unobtainable."
He is also an advocate of traditional golf and is left open mouthed by some of the new style courses which are being built, particularly in the States.

"Some of the courses in the States are like ornamental gardens. For example, I went to see the new Donald Trump course last year and it had some wonderful, but ridiculous, waterfalls. Great feats of engineering and silliness. It's like playing golf in an artificial world."

He also feels that there are a lot of golf developers who live in a fantasy world with every new golf course supposed to be a par-72.

"You produce a wonderful golf course with a par of 70 and people think it's Mickey Mouse, because it's only par-70 - God forbid if it were to be par-68. But I maintain the most difficult course in the world would be four par-3s between 190 and 225 yards and 14 par-4s at 470 yards long. It would be a par-68 but you could bring Tiger Woods over and he'd go round all day long and not break par."

So here's a chance for Peter, with the ear of the greenkeeping profession, to get anything of his own off his chest.

"Sand in the bunker! I would like to start a campaign at every golf course in the country to have bunkers forked over on April 1. Everywhere I go I see bunkers with no sand in them, probably because of the raking system. I don't want a foot of sand but you could tickle the sand to loosen up a couple of inches. That's the one criticism I'd make," he said.

Warming to his theme he laid out his blueprint for a well run golf club.

"I'd try to get the very best greenkeeper I could, but also the best steward; the best cook - you don't want a chef; a good Secretary; a good pro and a good assistant. If you've got all those ingredients it will work. The course can be very ordinary but if you keep it neat and tidy with a good attention to detail people will say how nice it looks and keep coming back. It's like having a cheap pair of shoes, if they are clean and looked after they will be fine but if they are dirty and neglected they look awful," said Peter, who has great respect for greenkeepers.

"It's a hell of a job for greenkeepers. It's not a thankless task as it is very rewarding but I don't think in all honesty enough good greenkeepers get enough praise. They are the hub of any club.

"As for the Augusta Syndrome. It's silly and unobtainable."

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