IN THE NEWS

FROM PARIS WITH LOVE...

In the last issue of GI Tony Martin offered advice for greenkeepers thinking of working in Europe. With last summer Ben Kebby left his role as Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Gaton Manor Golf Club to move to Golf de Joyenval – one of the top courses in France. This was not only a difficult move for Ben to make, but also for everyone involved in the UK. Here’s his story.

I studied the BSc (Hons) Turfgrass Science at Myerscough College and worked at various clubs including Royal Melbourne until I applied for the role of Assistant Golf Course Superintendent at this course, which is west of Paris. It was the biggest decision of my life, but the lure of an exclusive Championship 36 hole complex, the challenge, and the opportunity to learn and develop under Steve Okula (who holds both the GCSA and MG certificates) proved too much. So, after long discussions with friends inside and outside the industry and most importantly my partner Francesca, I decided to accept the offer and start learning French.

Golf de Joyenval was designed by R.T. Jones Sr., and opened in 1992. The greens on both courses are sand-based with predominantly Poa/Creeeping Bent based sward, whilst the tees are pure Creeeping Bent. Both courses are situated on heavy clay throughout, and although the course boasts full fairways and tee drainage, the inherent drainage problems still persist after heavy rains.

Agronomically the course and maintenance practices are very similar to those in the UK, with an emphasis on fortnightly verticutting and topdressing alongside core aeration in both early spring and late summer. The main climatic difference to the UK is the disease pressure between the months of October and May.

F fortnightly and even weekly fungicide applications are absolutely essential in keeping a clean surface, which, alongside the factor of green speed and the finer details, is the most important aspect of the clubs’ mission statement. If I were to say the relocation abroad has been easy then I would be lying. Problems with banks, car insurance and pet passports added costs and delays. I need to look at learning French via audio CDs for a number of weeks prior to the move, but in no way did this prepare me! This was a complete shock to the system for the initial weeks, with the language barrier and the differences in greenkeeping culture being the most difficult. Unfortunately there is little or no career progression or educational path to follow within France for the trainee greenkeeper and apprenticeships are extremely rare. Most disappointing however, is the attitude towards the position of a greenkeeper, for most it is seen as a last resort.

The UK is extremely privileged to have such a supportive body in BIGGA alongside the various education establishments who offer turf related educational pathways. Nevertheless, after a few months, I was able to understand and most importantly, be understood. A year on, although far from fluent, I am much more confident with the language, allowing me to manage the 20-strong team.

The initial problems aside, the relocation has been fantastic and one that I would recommend to all. On top of everything, it’s been a superb opportunity to network and make new friendships.

I feel extremely fortunate to experience and embrace changes that have occurred and do not regret for a moment taking the leap and choosing to relocate abroad. I’d particularly like to thank Dave Edmundson at The Island Club, Jon White at Morfontaine and of course Steve Okula who has been a fantastic support from the beginning, and of course my incredibly supportive girlfriend. It is rare to work within an industry that, if you allow it, can take you around the world. Make the most of it.

IT’S A WRAP

BIGGA have been speaking to the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP) about the level of interest and debate among members about the use of compost on golf courses. As it happens, WRAP has been seeking information on a range of land managers about the use of compost and anaerobic digestate (biostimulant). As part of this, they are keen to get the opinions of golf greenkeepers, so we have joined forces to set up a short online survey to capture your opinions and experiences. We would really appreciate you spending five minutes completing this survey. Please visit http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/WRAPBIGGA to complete a quick and simple questionnaire.

Once we’ve got your responses we will publish a chart and report your findings. If you have any queries about the survey you can contact Tricia Scott, in WRAP’s Research & Evaluation team, on 01295 817887. For further information about WRAP’s work, please visit: www.wrap.org.uk/category/sector/landscape-and-regeneration