Bernhard delegates

...where are they now?

If you’re still undecided about applying to join the next BIGGA Delegation to America, read on to find out how much influence the trip had on delegates from the last few years.

Jaime Acton, 2012 Delegate.
THEN: Head Greenkeeper, Worlebury Golf Club
NOW: Golf Course Manager, Rushmore Golf Club

I had no idea just how much the trip would impact on me both professionally and personally.

I feel it has given me the confidence to hold my own professionally, to push myself more in new situations and to move my career to the next level. A few months ago I was offered a new job and took on the challenge of running a lovely proprietary club set in ancient parkland on a private estate. The Show, seminars and site visits we all attended in the States gave me a real thirst to improve myself.

Rob Sandilands, 2011 Delegate.
THEN: Deputy Head Greenkeeper, Elsham Golf Club
NOW: Head Greenkeeper, Grange-over-Sands Golf Club

I was the only deputy on the trip, and the group of Course Managers and Head Greenkeepers during the week in Orlando had a big influence on me at the time, and they’ve continued to have a major influence on me since. They gave me some great advice, including some really important tips you don’t always get in the textbooks!

I really feel the experience gave me that boost to get my first Head Greenkeeper job, which I secured just two months later.

Richard Jenkinson, 2013 Delegate.
THEN: Deputy Course Manager G West
NOW: Same position

It truly was the most unforgettable experience I’ve had in my career. One real highlight were the tours around Torrey Pines and La Costa. It was fascinating to see the differences between them even though they are only ten minutes apart.

The management style is similar but the terrain and composition of the courses are completely different. I now understand why previous delegates described it as a very tough but life-changing week.

In August Greenkeeper International will again be asking for members to apply to become a member of the Bernhard’s Delegation heading to the States and the Golf Industry Show in January.

It’s a fabulous shared experience, an opportunity to build new friendships and make new business contacts, but most importantly a priceless tool for learning, educating, training and growing. But don’t just take our word for it. We spoke to some of the delegates from the last decade to find out how much the trip influenced them professionally and personally…
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Lee Howkins MG, 2004 Delegate.

THEN: Head Greenkeeper, Cleethorpes Golf Club
NOW: Course Manager, The Richmond Golf Club

I remember thinking on my trip that the US were much more advanced in certain areas, although I do feel we’ve caught up now. I recall we went to a seminar discussing absolutely everything about Primo, which at that time was unavailable in the UK. This meant that when Primo did become available over here, I had a head start over other greenkeepers and wasn’t afraid to use it because I was very well informed about it. The Golf Industry Show was also an amazing experience, the scale of it was colossal.

Another thing that sticks in my mind is one of the course visits to a course called The Bridges. They had 55 staff and 14 gardeners looking after an 18-hole course, and they couldn’t believe how few staff we had in comparison! You’ve looked after so well while you’re out there and I can’t imagine why a greenkeeper would not want to apply to join the delegation.

“A year after my trip, I secured my first Course Managers position at Muswell Hill and the Bernhard Delegation certainly helped – I was told it made my CV stand out. It’s a fantastic, amazing experience”

Matt Pleston, 2006 Delegate

Gordon McKie, 2003 Delegate.

THEN: Head Greenkeeper, The Eden Course, St Andrews
NOW: Course Manager, The Old Course, St Andrews

The ten years since I went has flown by but I still remember so many elements of the trip. A real highlight for me was the educational side. I recall attending a GCMA Seminar on Communications which I found particularly useful, and I referred back to it repeatedly as my career progressed. I also learnt a lot from the guys I travelled with. We were all able to offer advice to each other, and we really built up a great camaraderie between us. Several of us still stay in touch now, either meeting at BTME or on Facebook or Twitter. I’ve no doubt that the whole experience really enhanced my career.

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The USA Experience

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The US visit is hugely important not just as a fabulous shared experience, an opportunity to build new friendships and make new business contacts, but most importantly as a tool for learning, educating, training and growing, as last years delegates are keen to testify.

Stuart Yarwood, Course Manager at Lymn Golf Club said:

“For me the trip dispelled lots of myths. I realised that in the US education comes from the top down alongside their practical knowledge.

“I have been trying to apply this back home - to think like the person I want to be perceived as. In the UK we tend to start at the bottom and work up, learning on the way, so that for many people, when they find themselves in a managerial position they don’t have any of the basic skills to do that job. If you put lads in a terrible tin shed with the wind howling through it they will apply those standards on the golf course.”

Neill Ballingall, Course Manager at Fairmont St Andrews, said:

“I found some of the seminars at GIS really useful.

“We had a long session on growth-retardant which was great, very in depth.

“Knew it stopped the grass growing, but I didn’t know how or why. We learned that if you don’t reapply at the correct time it can have the opposite effect.

“Such a small thing that had such a big effect, and I’ve had a really successful year because I am using it properly.”

David Gray, First Assistant Greenkeeper at Ladybank Golf Club, agrees.

“The trip gave me a greater drive for education. I loved the seminars and bouncing off the other guys. The trip will always benefit me”

“I actually learned new things and new ways to work. It was invaluable.

“To give you an example, just last month I had an engineering problem with something. I just couldn’t find an answer.

“In the end I called Stuart Hall, who was also on the trip, and he solved the problem in a few minutes.

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“Then you realise the importance of friends and shared experiences.

“The moment I was selected I knew I was always going to make the most of it, but it has changed my career big time and I will always refer back to it.”

“The trip spurred my education and encouraged me to pass on knowledge to fellow colleagues and discuss things with my boss.”