On a Roll in Switzerland

By using the technique of Koroing, Course Manager Richie McGlynn of Bühlisberg Golf Can Country Club, Flinsburg, Switzerland, has kept the course fully open during extensive changes.

BROGA member Richie joined the club in 2011. He found that the fairways in particular had severe problems relating to compaction, excessive thatch and a dominant poa sward, resulting in issues such as dry patch, dieback and chaffer grub infestation. So he began the first stage of an ambitious ten-year project to renovate all the fairways without closing any holes. Various renovation practices were considered to achieve this, culminating in the decision to strip the existing turf off the worst areas, decompact the ground and reseed with some growth and regeneration was evident before the course went into winter dormancy, but by the time the course reopened in the spring, the results were outstanding.

Richie said: “We are now into the second stage of our ten-year fairway renovation project, and believe we made the right decisions not to close any of the holes during the renovations.”

“We are taking out sections of fairways one by one. When we tackled the third fairway last July, we removed a third of the section in question and the golfers could play towards the left of the hole.

“We then made three digging zones for those that were just that bit too far right. Within five weeks we had it open again, first teeing up their shots, and a few weeks later they were able to play normally.”

There was some initial opposition from members, but the difference between the untreated fairways and the newly renovated areas soon became very apparent during July and August.

Richie added: “The difference was so striking, that when we came to work on the other side of the fairway, there was far more support this time. In fact two members actually took the trouble to go to the office and remark at the huge difference it had made. So thankfully we seem to be winning the support of the players – which is half the battle!”

The effectiveness of Koroing and the fast recovery period is the secret of Richie’s approach.

Over time he will completely renovate the whole course with minimum disruption and maximum improvement for the future quality of golf played at Bühlisberg.

Health and Safety Poster

A reminder to BROGA members that the Health and Safety poster became illegal on 1 April and has been replaced by a new, legal version. For more details visit www.hae.org

Phytophthora Lateralis Disappears From The Radar

Phytophthora lateralis first appeared in 2010 on Lawson’s cypress which is the most widely traded and planted conifer in the UK landscape. It was initially treated with great concern by UK plant health authorities but arrival of Chalara fraxinea put paid to that. P. lateralis disappeared from the radar in 2012 when UK government threw a line in the sand following the unprecedented public outcry over chalara ash dieback.

P. lateralis now goes unreported outside the sunburnt country. It had not been confirmed in French nurseries in 2009 and 2010 on Lawson’s cypress which is the most widely traded and planted conifer in the UK landscape, amenity and garden sectors. Management guidance has been effectively downgraded. FC now says suspected cases should only be reported to them if they involve a number of trees on a public site such as a park or churchyard, on the basis that large numbers of visitors will pose a higher risk of spreading the disease. For suspected cases in private gardens (and presumably golf courses) owners are told to consult a reputable arborist, leaving the arborist to decide on and organise safe disposal and different genetic lineages have since been identified indicating separate UK introductions of the pathogen.

The outbreak of P. lateralis at Balloch Country Park Estate was followed by a flurry of more highly publicised findings in Scotland, Northern Ireland and England, including Yorkshire and Devon, in 2011. But with no public utterances from FC or Fera during the whole of 2012 and 2013 (just a website mention in passing of one outbreak in South Wales and one in Sussex) it would appear P. lateralis is no longer considered to be a problem.

P. lateralis may have disappeared from the radar screen but with a spore dissemination potential equivalent to Phytophthora ramorum, and a history of air-borne spore spread in France, it has certainly not gone away. What has disappeared in UK plant health authorities’ earlier concern and consideration for an aggressive and lethal disease of conifer species vital to the landscape, amenity and garden sectors.

In the absence of legal permission for burning large amounts of debris on site, or the facilities for deep burial, then the arborist is forced to take the contaminated debris away, risking spread of disease to other customers and his/her reputation as a reputable arborist. There is as much if not more risk of disease spread by forcing a large number of small-scale arborists, mostly doing domestic work, to deal with this particular disease without proper intervention from the centre.

After all Lawson’s cypress is the most widely planted conifer in the UK landscape, amenity and garden sectors and P. lateralis a highly infective pathogen. This is another example of UK plant health authorities not understanding the needs of the arb and amenity sectors even if they are concerned, which many the industry simply do not believe.

Dr Tony Mabbett

An ITEM FROM PAPER