It is an interesting fact, well it certainly was to me, that Cleveland Golf Club, in Redcar, is the only true links course in Yorkshire.

That piece of information was one of many which emerged from a meeting with Course Manager, Ian Pemberton, whose enthusiasm for the job is quite infectious. Ian moved to his home-town club four years ago, from the inland Bedale Golf Club, and since then he has barely taken a backward step in ensuring that the course develops.

“The club has a great history. It was founded in 1887 and really is a sleeping giant,” said Ian.

“Looking around the course you would find no reason to suggest that Ian was exaggerating.”

His first task on arrival was to make improvements to the rough, an area which had been causing problems for some time.

“It was a laborious task and it took two years to get it where we wanted, but was very worthwhile. We now have improved the native flora and fauna and turned it back into proper links rough,” Ian Pemberton, Course Manager

“We had some samples taken and the potash levels were non-existent – there just wasn’t any potash in them at all – and the balance was never going to allow anything to grow.

“We corrected that with a potash feed, very low in nitrogen, and then overseeded with pure fescue and up to now we’ve been very pleased with the results.”

While this work was being carried they had worked hard on improving the club’s practice ground and also looked at the 18th and 10th fairways, which were, by his own admission, “wall to wall chickweed”.

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“It was a laborious task and it took two years to get it where we wanted, but was very worthwhile. We now have improved the native flora and fauna and turned it back into proper links rough.”

“I would say that I have managed to get a lot further forward than I could ever have hoped in the four years I’ve been here, I told them that I would have managed to get a lot further forward than I could ever have hoped in the four years I’ve been here, I told them that it would be a five year plan but I think we zapped that in about two and a half.”

“Keith Rutherford was looking for an area in which to dispose of soil and brick and we were looking for the material to create character and definition to an area of the course around the 3rd and 4th holes which was fairly featureless and full of small peaks and hollows, making it very difficult to maintain.”

“Ian’s aim was to create an inland dune and build new tees with the material with the added bonus that the club would generate income from the material brought in.

“It’s a win-win situation for us,” said Ian, who admits to being the driving force behind the project.

“The Chairman of Green, Dave Atfield, has been extremely supportive during this process, but he sometimes hides when he sees me coming at him with another idea,” joked Ian.

That 20,000 tonnes has enabled Ian to build a huge inland dune, five to eight metres high, to add definition to the right side of the 3rd hole and a backdrop to the
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Other ‘hybrids’ still use hydraulic motors for propulsion, so when we say no hydraulics, we mean it. Traction, reel drive and lift/lower operations are all electrically driven using either a small petrol or diesel engine running a 48 volt generator. And now there’s an all-electric version using a battery pack. It’s stealth quiet and ideal for greens close to housing or hotel rooms.

For greener operation on your greens, less maintenance and lower operating costs, it has to be the Jacobsen Eclipse 322.

By the way, did we mention ... no hydraulics.

7th green to ensure that there is no distraction to people putting of those playing off the nearby 12th tee.

“The great thing is that the digger operator, the digger and its diesel is paid for by the contractor so we don’t have any outgoing at all,” said Ian, who admits he has been very lucky that the operator has shown a real flare for the work and a desire to do it as well as he can.

“He is outstanding – a craftsman!” is Ian’s assessment.

It is an on-going programme and the current Club Captain, Keith Cooper, has also identified an area behind the 4th green which he feels would benefit from a mound.

“That would be purely for aesthetics, to shield the hole from the Steel Works, which borders the course, but we are aware that too much would be as damaging as nothing at all as it could alter the character of the place beyond all recognition.”

However, the work so far has received great acclaim from the membership and improved that particular area of the golf course no end.

“We can have as many as 20 wagons a day while other days we may only have three and others none at all but we looked at the situation and got in touch with the council to identify the shortest possible route over the course for access.

“All the drivers are informed that the golfers’ safety takes priority and we don’t have any problems.”

Ian is very much an advocate of good traditional sustainable golf.

“We’ve just applied Rescue to a couple of greens and achieved a successful outcome, but it’s minimal feed – we just do a 3-0-8 to start them off and then go on to liquids while we will put on a half rate 4-0-24 application at the back end of the year just to ensure they are healthy going into the winter.”

He was particularly pleased a couple of years ago when the club hosted an R&A Sustainable Golf Seminar when Nick Park, a member of the Golf Course Committee and a great advocate of Sustainable Golf, complimented him on the quality and quantity of fescue in the greens.

In his four years at the club, Ian and the team have continued to build tees and now the vast majority of the project, designed to add length to the course, has been done.
CoUrSE FEAtUrE

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However, the work so far has received great acclaim from the membership and improved that particular area of the golf course no end.

"The one small downside is having lorries driving over the course to deliver their loads. "We can have as many as 20 wagons a day while other days we may only have three and others none at all but we looked at the situation and got in touch with the council to identify the shortest possible route over the course for access."

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“We do it all in-house and I’ve got a great team here – Deputy Les Hunt, who has been here 20 years; Jamie Chester, who has been here 18 years; Kevin Bartram, who has been here 12 years and Aiden Coates, who has been here three,” said Ian, who added that Kevin and Aiden have proven themselves to be particularly skilled when it comes to building steps and paths.

The club has a very strong membership, and green fees have seen a marked increase over the last couple of years. “We had a member, Bill Franks, come in and build us a mini Swilken Bridge while he also helped us construct the litter bins, with bricks given to us by Keith Rutherford, that we have on the course. People take a pride in the club and it’s great to see."

As I was leaving Ian pointed out another member who was repairing one of the outside lights on the clubhouse wall. Ian was always aware of the fact that he had arrived at a links from an inland course and that he was particularly careful to steer clear of anything which might have been perceived of bringing parkland to the seaside.

“That said, I’m not a big advocate of the great divide between links greenkeepers and parkland greenkeepers. I class myself as a greenkeeper as simple as that. I love my job passionately and it is about grass be it on links or parkland.”

“Always be proactive not reactive.”

Having achieved so much in his first four years Ian now has his sights set on becoming an Open Qualifying venue and has already been in touch with the R&A to set up a visit of the course in 2011. It would be a fitting reward for the only true links in the largest county in the country.

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Going that extra mile

In the aftermath of the Ryder Cup, Celtic Manor bore the scars from thousands of rain-soaked people conveying around roped-off sections during those tense final days. Jim Cook spoke with Director of Golf Courses and Estates Management, Jim McKenzie, about the tremendous efforts which have gone into restoring the damaged areas in time for the forthcoming Wales Open in June.

When the Ryder Cup circus moved into Celtic Manor in September last year a ‘golf town’ was effectively constructed. It had its own traffic system, its own shops and places to eat and with 50,000 people on site each day, more inhabitants than most towns and villages in the surrounding area.

Inevitably this, combined with heavy rainfall, took its toll on the site. Back in the November issue of Greenkeeper International, Jim McKenzie said from an aerial shot taken after the tournament, it resembled a desert course, with islands of green surrounded by mud.

Whereas there was no damage to the actual course itself, on the other side of the ropes where the crowds were, was a different story.

Jim said: “A third of a million people walked through within the space of six days and it acted like a huge rotovator. Off the course, along the rope lines, we had significant grass cover that was lost. Alongside this, it took months for all of the infrastructure to be removed so by the time it was gone, a lot of it had been up for four or five months, so the areas beneath the tents and temporary facilities
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“A lot of the turf has been laid in huge, wide rolls that rely on specialist equipment to roll it so we’ve brought in local, Bridgend-based contractor, Inscapes” Jim McKenzie

and that were going to take a while to recover, bearing in mind we were almost in October by then though. Then there were parts that we felt would recover naturally.

The extensive renovation work required since the tournament would have been a full-time venture for his team of staff at the course for two high-profile tournaments. Also the fact that the Ryder Cup will be at the Wales Open, so the television pictures and feedback from the players needs to be good. We can’t get it wrong,” Jim said.

With this in mind and spring just around the corner, efforts to get the damaged areas back to their best were well on their way.

“The site is getting back into shape. We’ve had no complaints from any of the visitors because the course itself is fine. The damage was restricted to the areas behind the ropes, because the players who played in the Ryder Cup didn’t do any damage at all.”

“The actual playing of the golf course is fine and always has been, but it’s the extremities to the left and right of holes, the hospitality and catering areas. In some instances on the same hole multiple tasks have been carried out. Some bits have been seeded, some turfed, and some will come back on their own as we recover, so it’s different.”

Reflecting on the Ryder Cup, Jim stressed the efforts of everybody involved in going that extra mile during the week.

“It was not just us, but everybody involved who put in that extra effort. The marshals, referees, people who drove the buses, manned the car parks, right across the board. There were a lot of people who went that extra mile in order to make sure the event took place. Colin Montgomerie said in his closing speech that the world was watching and Wales were a lot of people who went that extra mile to put the city on the map, so we’ve won that for our efforts.”

The Extra Mile Awards was introduced last year and is an initiative run by Newport City Council and the South Wales Argus newspaper, where individuals or organisations are nominated for going that extra distance.

Jim explained part of the motivation for the achievement.

“It wasn’t the most enjoyable week I have ever had but it has certainly turned out to be the most satisfying, irrespective of how many days it took to play the Ryder Cup, the most important thing was that we got it finished and we succeeded in playing for the 28 points. The main thing was that the integrity of the Ryder Cup remained uncompromised.”

For this accomplishment then, and for being the first greenkeeping team in history to help win the Ryder Cup, the Extra Mile Award must be the icing on the cake.

Recognition from outside the industry is always a positive because, after all, without greenkeepers there would be no golf courses.

For the job done last year and little respite before the Wales Open, all praise toward Jim and his crew is thoroughly deserved for the way in which they continue to do our profession proud.
were pretty much dead as well. So the damage was to spectator areas, hospitality areas, merchandising areas and places like that and was very significant.”

The last piece of physical structure related to the Ryder Cup, a skip used for the final clear up, was only removed on January 6. Jim mentioned this would have been sooner, though, had it not been for the inclement weather and snow towards the end of last year.

Celtic Manor is due to host the Wales Open at the beginning of June and with this prospect at the forefront of his mind, Jim implemented an expedient recovery programme to bring the damaged areas of the course back up to pre-Ryder Cup conditions.

“The week after the Ryder Cup we split the course into three areas and started turfing the areas that we felt either needed to get back into shape very quickly or were fundamental for the Wales Open. Then there were other areas where we seeded that weren’t close to play for all of the restorations, we just wouldn’t have got it all done.”

One of the worst affected areas was the driving range, where the tented village had stood. “We are still turfing the driving range at present. There’s something like £35,000 worth of turf going on it, because that was the site of the tented village during the Ryder Cup and it got absolutely hammered. With the Wales Open going on here at the start of June there is not a lot of recovery time, so that area has to be turfed. Basically we went in, scraped the mud and dead grass off and set new turf down. We used the local contractors for a lot of the turfing, and our own staff have done a significant amount as well.”

To give an idea of scale Jim said how, overall, enough turf has been put down to turf the Millennium Stadium pitch four times over. “With the best part of three-and-a-half to four weeks of snow split into three different periods of time at the end of last year, the weather has not helped the recovery programme. Jim admitted that in preparing a course for two high-profile tournaments in relatively quick succession comes a certain degree of pressure. He said: “The expectation from the members and guests is very high because the course has held the Ryder Cup and multiple other tournaments. Also the fact that the Wales Open is in June adds a huge amount of pressure to us, since we’ll only have a matter of weeks of good weather between the end of spring and the start of the Wales Open week.

“So we have pressure both from a tournament point of view and from a customer and business point of view. We have it from all angles really.”

Last year, the Wales Open was broadcast live to over 300 million households worldwide and with this year sure to be no different means the world will be watching Wales once again.

“A lot of the players who played in the Ryder Cup will be at the Wales Open, so the television pictures and the feedback from the players needs to be good. We can’t get it wrong,” Jim said.

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Reflecting on the Ryder Cup, Jim stressed the efforts of everybody involved in going that extra mile during the week.

“It was not just us, but everybody who put in that extra effort. The marshals, referees, people who drove the busses, manned the car parks, right across the board. There were a lot of people who went that extra mile in order to make sure the event took place. Colin Montgomerie said in his closing speech that the world was watching and Wales delivered. It wasn’t just us but the whole combined efforts.”

It was the greenkeeping team, however, which has since been singled out for an award. “A lot of the greenkeepers have worked so hard. The marshals, referees, people who drove the busses, manned the car parks, right across the board. There were a lot of people who went that extra mile in order to make sure the event took place. Colin Montgomerie said in his closing speech that the world was watching and Wales delivered. It wasn’t just us but the whole combined efforts.”

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Jim explained part of the motivation for the achievement. “It wasn’t the most enjoyable week I have ever had but it has certainly turned out to be the most satisfying, irrespective of how many days it took to play the Ryder Cup, the most important thing was that we got it finished and we succeeded in playing for the 28 points. The main thing was that the integrity of the Ryder Cup remained uncompromised.”

For this accomplishment then, and for being the first greenkeeping team in history to help win the Ryder Cup, the Extra Mile Award must be the icing on the cake.

Recognition from outside the industry is always a positive because, after all, without greenkeepers there would be no golf courses.

For the job done last year and little respite before the Wales Open, all praise to Jim and his crew is thoroughly deserved for the way in which they continue to do our profession proud.

“A lot of the turf has been laid in huge, wide rolls that rely on specialist equipment to roll it so we’ve brought in local, Bridgend-based contractor, Inscapes” Jim McKenzie
The 2011 delegation was originally selected to travel to the GIS, in New Orleans, in 2009, however due to a general ‘tightening of belts’ throughout the UK, the trip to the USA flagship greenkeeping show was postponed for two years.

The announcement to recommence the trip to the USA, starting with a visit in February 2011 to Orlando, Florida, was met with delight by the delegation originally selected.

Tuesday, January 18 – Harrogate BTMe

Beyond the interviews, the whole experience started properly at the Bernhard Reception which this year was held at the Old Bell Tavern in Harrogate. Delegates were introduced to each other and were given the opportunity to meet with past delegates, and of course selected members of the GCSAA and our hosts in Florida. It was a great occasion, in an excellent atmosphere and an opportunity to put faces to names. Information packs were distributed and introductions made, anticipation was high.

Saturday, February 5 – Marriott Cypress Harbour, Orlando, Florida

With the flight from London Gatwick behind us, we arrived at the Marriott Cypress Harbour, south of downtown Orlando. A fantastic hotel including self-catering lodges which we shared. Once settled we used the remainder of the evening to get to know each other and, of course, sample the local brews – A typical American Sports Bar - Orena, was highly recommended by one of the hotel staff and was an excellent choice, soon to become our second home for social downtime.

Sunday February 6

Sunday morning was free time; enabling the more familiar with Orlando to introduce the new visitors among us, to the sights and sounds on what was a quite cool morning. Wandering around with cameras photographing upturned buildings and American menus among other things. It really is an assault on the senses.

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A trip worth the wait

The BIGGA Delegation to the Golf Industry Show (GIS) & GCSAA in the USA, is an annual trip sponsored by Bernhard and Company Ltd, as part of an exchange programme to forge and maintain professional and friendship links between British and American golf greenkeepers. Delegation member, Jim Brown, reports on an enjoyable week.