

A New Golf Concept at Foxhills

J.K. Campbell

TO leave St. Andrews and join Foxhills might seem to many like reaching the top of the ladder, jumping off, and commencing the ascent to the top all over again.

To move from the oldest and most famous golf links in the world with all the tradition that has grown up with it over the centuries to one of the youngest and most modern golf complexes recently built in Britain, is probably an experience that very few superintendents have shared.

The character and nature of these two golf complexes could not be more different. On the one hand the links at St. Andrews is a flat expanse of natural golfing territory completely devoid of trees and situated on an exposed promontory of land on the edge of the North Sea, and relying on the elements which frequently prevail to make it a severe test of golfing skill.

By contrast, Foxhills is a beautiful 400 acre estate, some 30 miles from London. Set in undulating territory with indigenous heather and pine, lakes and rhododendrons with two magnificently contrasting courses on a bed of Bagshot sand, the base soil of the

famous neighbouring courses, Wentworth and Sunningdale.

The earliest map references to Foxhills is on a map of Surrey published in 1765. On this, and subsequent 18th century maps the area is shown as open heath land. Foxhills became an enclosed estate in the early part of the 19th century. The existing manor house was erected in 1840 and the estate was purchased from the family who owned it by Aer Lingus in January 1973.

One is immediately impressed by the two great 18 hole layouts which were designed by the famous golf course architect, Fred Hawtree. They are laid out in two nine hole loops, and the finishing hole on both courses share the same massive double green in true St. Andrews tradition. The Foxhills courses are named after the town and village in the vicinity — Chertsey and Longcross. The Chertsey course is situated on the east part of the estate and measures 6,890 yards, par 73, with dips and elevated tees and greens; and Longcross, 6,731 yards, par 72, follows the natural contours of the ground through a beautiful woodland setting. Both courses



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have many exciting features to test the skill and retain the interest of every player, whatever his handicap.

Although permanent memberships are limited, the policy of "Pay-as-you-play" is the basic operating principle for both courses. All golfers are welcome to play on payment of a green fee, both during the week and at weekends. The emphasis is on catering for the many thriving golf societies in and around London.

The golf courses and the clubhouse comprise the first phase of the total Foxhills complex which will ultimately include a country club, leisure centre, and residential accommodation for visitors. The existing 19th century manor house is being retained and is an integral part of the overall development.

The concept for golf at Foxhills is unusual and pioneering in nature. Of the 1,500 or so golf courses in Britain, about 90% are members clubs, run for the benefit of the membership and not for purely commercial considerations. The remainder are public courses, and the operation is based on the payment of green fees for every occasion on which the golfer plays, although this

does not preclude a season ticket arrangement.

Public courses are generally owned and operated by municipal authorities, have a high level of play, charge low fees and with notable exceptions, are not of a very high standard. A feature of public courses is very heavy demand at modest charges but no substantial evidence exists to suggest that the same demand will be forthcoming if top prices are charged for a round of golf.

The objective at Foxhills is to create a demand for top-class golfing facilities at a quality price on the reputation achieved by the high standard of the courses and other amenities.

In dealing with promotion, the initial objective of the marketing operation for Foxhills was to increase awareness in as wide a section of the golfing public as possible. Every opportunity was taken to interest local and national media in Foxhills, during the pre-opening period, at the launch, and while in operation. Press releases incorporating up-to-date information on course progress and the appointments, was combined with local and golf press advertising to build up a full awareness of the project.

A line up of Staff and equipment at Foxhills



In the early stages, the main method of communication with the individual market was by advertising and public relations outlets. At the same time, contact was made with other establishments such as hotels, and special promotions were used via other clubs to capture the interested market.

In the medium and long term there is heavy dependence on repeat business with the aim of increasing the frequency of play as well as attracting a constant flow of new players to the Club.

About two thirds of the land earmarked for the layout of the two courses was densely wooded and massive site clearance operations to carve out fairways from soil and woodland so thick as to be impenetrable by foot, had to be undertaken. In all, some 150 acres were cleared on both courses. All greens were constructed and shaped to soil formation and contours, fully drained and stone and sand drainage layers were introduced. Specially mixed compost was transported to greens to be spread, cultivated and seeded. At strategic points on both courses the creation of seven artificial lakes was undertaken. Each lake was prepared and lined with polythene to ensure long term stability. All fairways were fully drained with a massive clay tile drainage system (approx. 35 miles) and a large ditching programme to facilitate movement of water, through site. The basic completion of golf course construction for all 36 holes was achieved within 16 months — quite a feat bearing in mind the extent of the contract, especially the clearance works.

Many problems arose over soil conditions as many areas of running sand, iron clay seams and a multitude of natural springs became evident. These caused considerable surface water problems, which were eventually overcome. They also made construction work by machine quite hazardous. Unusually wet weather was experienced and this resulted in poor ground conditions for long periods during the construction work.

Quantities

Clearance for fairways, approximately 150 acres. Quantity of earth movement 140,000 cubic yards. Fairway and green drainage 50,000 yards of clay tiles. Two acres of artificial lakes. Ditching 3 miles.

Irrigation

A fully automatic pop-up sprinkler system for 36 greens and tees and the approaches to greens has been installed using Weathermatic Equipment. The water for the system is drawn from domestic mains supply and is conveyed via 3" pipe to a 100,000 gallon butyl rubber lines reservoir located on the highest point of the course. Over 10 miles of irrigation pipe have been installed.

Grass Seed Mixtures

Greens

8 parts OECD Certified Highlight
Chewings Fescue
2 parts OECD Certified Highland
Brown-top Bent

Sowing Rate: 1½ ozs per sq. yd.

Tees

40% OECD Certified Highlight Chew-
ings Fescue
40% British „ Aberystwyth S.59
Creeping Red
Fescue
20% OECD „ Highland Brown-
top Bent

Sowing Rate: 1½ ozs per sq. yd.

Fairways

35% OECD Certified Fylking Smooth-
stalked Meadow Grass
30% OECD „ Highlight Chewings
Fescue
25% British „ Aberystwyth S.59
Creeping Red Fes-
cue
10% OECD „ Highland Brown-
top Bent

Sowing Rate: 4 cwts per acre.

Rough

20% British Certified Aberystwyth S.23
Perennial Ryegrass
35% OECD „ Fylking Smooth-
stalked Meadow
Grass

35% OECD ,, Highlight Chewings
Fescue
10% OECD ,, Highland Brown-
top Bent
Sowing Rate: 2 cwts per acre.

Soil Amerlioration Greens

Soil mixture comprising by volume—
1 part Soil from site
3 parts Approved sand
1 part Approved peat

Tees

(per 100 sq. yds. of surface)
7½ tons Approved Sand (P.C.)
1 ton Approved Peat (P.C.)

Approaches

(per 25 yds. x 10 yds. at each Green
entrance)

15 Tons Approved Sand
2 Tons Approved Peat

In the early stages when many trees, shrubs and ground cover were removed, there seemed to be for a period a complete absence of any form of wild life on the estate. Now it is apparent that many creatures and birds are returning to redress the balance of nature. Canada geese have already moved in and taken advantage of the peace and serenity of the lakes as though they had been there from the beginning of time.

There are 132 bunkers on the Foxhills courses and they have been artificially constructed so that their contours blend with the character of the ground in relation to the scenery as a background to obtain a harmonious and satisfactory effect. Such results are only achieved by close co-operation between architect and contractor.

Every course manager will confirm that it is no easy matter to find experienced greenkeeping staff for there is a shortage of trained men in this profession. One of the first assignments was to recruit the necessary number of greenkeeping staff to fill the vacancies. For two 18 hole courses this seemed no easy matter. However, men of the right calibre and experience were attracted to some extent by advance publicity

on the new project. Generous terms of service and a wage scale in keeping with that laid down by the British Golf Greenkeepers Association induced them to join the Club. An additional incentive to those seeking employment was the prospect of working with the very latest sophisticated equipment on which more than £30,000 was spent to maintain the courses.

Soft ground conditions brought about by heavy rain during the autumn and winter of last year delayed one of the major operations until the final stages. For the task of filling bunkers

**Mr. John K. Campbell, Course Manager
Foxhills Golf & Country Club.**



with sand it was vitally important to have firm, dry ground. Routes were carefully plotted for heavy sand lorries around the perimeter of the playing areas to avoid excessive damage to turf. Where bunkers were situated in awkward places around the edges of greens, the sand was stockpiled at a convenient point for transport by tractor and trailer in lighter loads.

Finally, after months of contemplating a lunar landscape of cavernous empty bunkers, the sanding operation appeared to bring about a transformation — and a golf course emerged, proudly displaying all its little islands of sand among a sea of green fairways.

Completion of this task set the final seal of authority on the course as an inviting test of golf. The pools of golden sand loom menacingly to the inexperienced player, while the expert plots his way by using the bunkers as a landmark to frame his route to the green.

The birth of a new golf complex must always be good news for those who are enthusiasts of the game. Watching the course being shaped from a tract of virgin land through all the stages of construction is a unique experience shared only by a dedicated body of experienced men who are the specialists in this particular form of landscaping peculiar to golf. It must be the dream of every designer that his course will achieve championship standard eventually in the future.

The project at Foxhills has all the potential ingredients to make it a golfers' paradise, and under the skilled guidance of its famous architect everything possible has been done to make it a first-class test of golf for players of every calibre. The ambitions for the future is that one day it will host a major golf tournament, and plans are being made to have all the necessary amenities when the courses have reached the desired state of maturity.

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