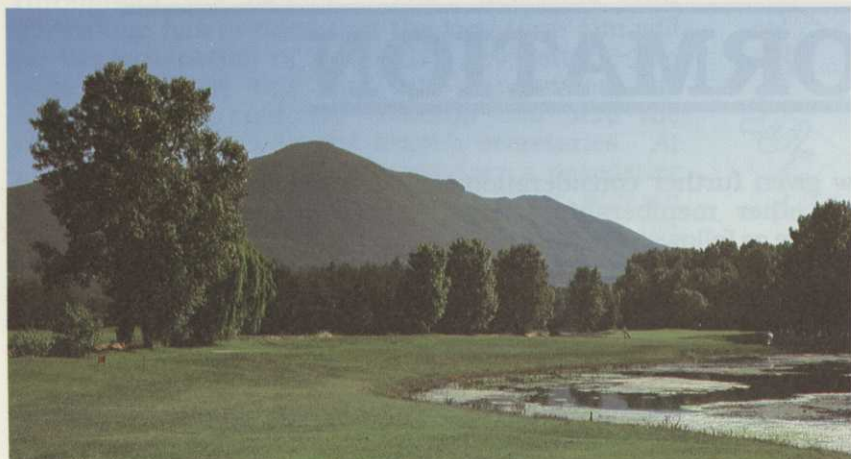


ABROAD on the Golf Course



CORFU GOLF CLUB

in the
beautiful
Ropa Valley

CORFU golf club must be one of the most under-rated courses in the Mediterranean.

Designed by Donald Harradine and opened in 1972, it remains largely undiscovered by comparison with Spanish or Portuguese courses.

Today however, things are set to change. The club has a thriving amateur week each May, this year's championship having been won by the editor of *Golf Monthly*, Malcolm Campbell.

The course is open for seven months of the year, April/October.

The club and course are run by David Crawley, a PGA qualified professional who learnt his trade at Lindrick and who had already spent many years teaching on the continent before taking up his present post in 1984.

At that time the course was in a poor state. For the first ten years it was maintained very well by an English green-keeper, then an inexperienced man took over. The result was overwatering to a phenomenal extent. The daily

routine was "water the greens till they flood, twice a day" receiving up to 40 times more water than was necessary. By 1984 there was stinking thatch and an invasion of crabgrass.

That summer Howard Swan, on a family holiday in Corfu, called in to play a round with a friend. He had heard various stories about the state of the course and was very disappointed with what he found. He had previously played and enjoyed the course in 1978, but by this time the course had deteriorated to such an extent he felt compelled to talk to David Crawley. Much to his surprise and delight, David asked if anything could be done to reverse the downward trend. The answer was "yes" and so together they set about the task of improvement.

The unqualified "head greenkeeper" had by this time departed, so with five Greeks out on the course, the two began analysing the problems, trying to come up with a sensible five year

programme of work.

Three years on and the course has improved out of all recognition. Spiro (all Corfiots are called Spiro after their Patron Saint, St. Spiridon) is now the course foreman, under direction from David Crawley with Howard making three visits a year to offer advice and update the programme.

The original problems of the course were primarily with the greens. They were lush and highly receptive to any shot - good or bad. They were almost pure Pennncross bent, an excellent grass for Corfu's climate if not elsewhere. It wasn't surprising that having been so drastically overwatered for years, when a ball struck the surface it almost disappeared and then popped up again without seeming to leave any pitch mark.

Walking across the greens had certain similarities to trampolining, the putting surfaces having the same properties as jelly. There was, in places, up to four inches of stinking

thatch. So much for overwatering and lack of aeration!

The first part of the programme was to tackle the irrigation system and its operation. Needless to say it was twelve years, old, indifferently designed and not functioning properly. The sprinkler spacing was wrong, the inconsistencies producing localised high precipitation and dry spots. Ideal conditions in fact, to produce thatch in an already thatch producing grass species.

The pop-ups themselves were not working properly, so a phased replacement was introduced. Four or five Toro 650 heads were installed at each green. So far, six greens have been completed and now have the basis for correct irrigation. A full set of replacements should be completed by next year.

A further improvement has been the drilling of several bore holes. Not only has this guaranteed water supply, which had been in the past cut off by the local village

when levels were low, but the lakes on the course can now be maintained at the proper level, adding to the beauty of the course.

The course has already improved significantly, which is due to the drying out process. This, combined with intensive verticutting and aeration, has reduced the four inches of thatch down to a more manageable inch. The greens are certainly truer and faster than they were and are receptive to only the well struck shot.

The previous aeration programme had been virtually non-existent. The Greek staff were told that if they scarified during the summer months the grass would die. So only in October, when all the golfers had gone, did they verticut.

One can only imagine how much grass they removed!

As part of the reclamation the staff were asked to verticut one of the greens during August, to prove the benefits. To their credit they did as they were bidden and then stayed up all night convinced that by dawn they would witness the green's demise. Suffice to say the greens are

now verticut once a week and are better in every respect.

Greens obviously were not the only area for concern. Nutrition to all the grassed areas was always a mystery. Olive skins, chicken manure and inorganic compounds in no particular sequence had been administered. David and Howard have taken three years to discover the problems and to ascertain what had been going on. Now a balanced regime is in operation.

So now, in 1987, with the basics right and improvements made, the team have a chance to tackle some cosmetic alterations.

This spring, again much to the Greek crew's concern, contour mowing of the fairways began. By the simple turn of the tractor steering wheel, the motorway look disappeared and the golfing strategy changed. No doubt Messrs Crawley and Swan enjoyed their chance to be golf course architects, but by this simple operation a large improvement was achieved.

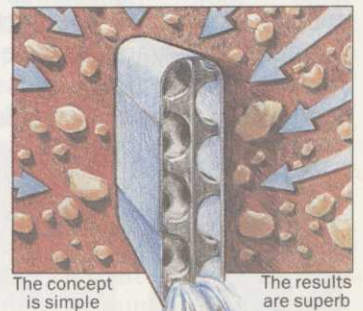
Certainly Corfu is a beautiful place to play golf and the course is firmly on the path to recovery.



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