

ON the night of 16th October last year the worst storm in living memory hit the south-east of England - leaving the countryside devastated, with a reported 15 million trees down.

If the reported losses are correct, it would be fair to say that a good percentage of what has taken out that night could at best be described as scrub timber. Many of the better quality hardwoods lost were long past maturity and had begun to rot away at their centres.

No matter the value, that one night of wind is still affecting the lives of many greenkeepers. Courses have had to be cleared and many dangerous trees made safe. The time devoted to wood clearing has affected the day-to-day presentation of courses and planned winter programmes have been forgotten.

The cost of clearing timber is very real and in many cases this will determine how long the clear-up will take. Many clubs will be levying their members to finance the clear-up. Many are hopeful of realising something from the sale of timber to help with the cost, but with so much timber available, the price obtainable hardly pays for getting it off the site.

To be of any value, some types of trees should be cleared as soon as possible as there is a very real danger of invasion by pests - making the wood only fit for burning. Clubs should take professional advice if in doubt.



Every experience brings a harvest and the real beneficiaries of the hurricane are the saw millers and pulp mills. The manufacturers and retailers of chainsaws could not keep up with the demand. Many retailers were completely sold out the day after the storm. There are not enough professional woodcutters available and this influences the cost as well. I recently heard of someone being asked £500 to remove a medium sized Acacia tree from their garden!

On the day before the hurricane, I had arranged for six of the staff here at Sunningdale to attend a course on the safe handling and care of saws, through Peter Bridgeman Associates. I was obviously unaware at that time

that the skills learned were going to prove invaluable over the next few weeks.

Since the storm there have been reports of hundreds of accidents involving inexperienced users of chainsaws. And accidents will happen even with experienced users.

I was surprised to find that at many clubs no provision has been made for basic instruction on the safe handling and care of saws. We are responsible under the 1974 Health and Safety Act, to ensure that staff are given this essential instruction. There is a requirement for certain protective clothing and equipment safety helmets, eye protectors, ear defenders, gloves with protective guarding on the back of the left hand, leg protectors, safety boots and non-sag outer clothing. Another essential piece of on-sit equipment is a first-aid kit, including large wound dressings and hand cleaning materials. It is an added advantage if one member of the team has had some first aid training.

A good training course ensures that everyone becomes familiar with the saw and how to use it safely. It is also a long term economy to see that everyone knows how to



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sharpen and care for a saw. Courses can include instruction on felling, snedding, cross-cutting and stacking, the take-down of hung-up trees, chainsaw clearance of wind-blow, felling large hardwoods and tree climbing and pruning.

Bert Watson of Tyrells Wood Golf Club lost a lot of trees up on the Downs. He had the good fortune, however, of having a first class squad of woodcutters from the north-east working on a nearby Estate. They have cleared a lot of the timber, with the Tyrells Wood greenkeepers working behind them, burning the rubbish and restoring any damage created by getting the timber off the course.

Jim Liddington of New Zealand Golf Club was confronted with a loss of some 2,00 Birch and Pine trees. The club have been able to get a pulp company to take the timber. They provide the labour to get the timber they want, and a squad of greenkeepers burn the debris. Jim reckons it will be some years before he catches up with the burning operation.

Kevin Munt was, at the time of the hurricane, into the second day of the Suntory World Matchplay at Wentworth. Anyone who witnessed the scenes of havoc on television created by the storm must be aware of how Kevin felt. Access roads to the course were completely blocked, large trees were down all over the West Course and television towers, complete with valuable cameras, were destroyed. The Wentworth club, Kevin and his staff, are to be commended that the course was made playable and the tournament completed.



Puttenham Golf Club have, in the last two years, been undergoing extensive alterations to lengthen their course. This has entailed cutting five new holes through woodland. By the time of the storm, the new holes had been completed and greens, tees and fairways were all sown. Ian Lowe now has his work cut out clearing some 700 trees, left to define the new holes, that were blown into a knot.

Jim Russell, assistant course manager at Hankley Common, awakened on the morning of the 16th to find himself without a car. A nearby tree had come down in the night and gone through the garage - wrecking both garage and car. Jim later discovered that the club secretary had suffered similarly - his car was also written off!

Alex "Lex" Armitage was basking in the sunshine in Spain when he first heard of

the hurricane. On arriving home he could hardly believe the scene that confronted him. The first hole at Richmond was completely blocked with blown Lime, Beach, Oak and Hornbeams. The course had to be completely closed for a week to allow for essential clearing and to make it safe for members. It took four weeks for the first hole to be cleared and made ready for play. Alex believes Richmond have lost 80 per cent of their timber.

The 18 holes at Selsdon Park Golf Course were only opened for play on 1st January. Clearance and restoration has cost a lot of money - the sum of £60,000 has been mentioned in the Press. Ian Hamilton, the course manager, says in all, 300 mature trees were brought down by the winds and a further 150 had to be felled in the interests of safety. Ian reckons he has something like two acres of replanting to complete. Selsdon Park's hotel carpark also suffered - twenty cars were completely written off and many more were badly damaged.

The loss of trees has made some courses seem rather bleak. Clubhouses were damaged, irrigation systems torn up, storage tanks smashed, vehicles lost, shelters and storage sheds brought down. But, driving across the home counties, I am amazed at the number of trees we will have, and I am sure every effort will be made to restore things for the future.

