

Correct cultural methods help to control fusarium at Liphook

John Campbell visits this charming Surrey course to talk to Cameron McMillan about his role as head greenkeeper.

Liphook Golf Club has a charming heathland course laid out over Wheatsheaf Common and is bisected by the A3 trunk road between Guildford and Petersfield. The attractive clubhouse building blends admirably with the wooded surroundings. Skilful use has been made of the gently undulating terrain and natural woodland features to create 18 holes measuring 6,250 yards.

Although a comparatively short course, Liphook has been cited by keen students of golf course architecture as a classic example of the kind of course capable of defeating for all time any improvements to ball or club by the difficulty of the approach to the green. Liphook has some splendid holes like the 5th, 14th and 13th aptly named 'The Two Counties' where you drive off in Sussex and putt out in Hampshire. The indigenous tightly knit fairway turf is ideal for golf,



Cameron McMillan

easy to walk on and tough enough to take the wear and tear of traffic and play.

Head greenkeeper, Cameron McMillan at the age of 23 is a knowledgeable and enthusiastic man

with impeccable credentials. Coming as he does from a unique greenkeeping family he is well qualified to tread the footsteps of his father, Jack McMillan, the course supervisor at Sunningdale Golf Club and his four older brothers who are also devotees of the noble profession of greenkeeping.

Cameron said pensively, "It was always on the cards that I should follow the family tradition although I never really gave it much thought until I was in the sixth form at school. One day my father said he had a staff vacancy at Sunningdale and offered me a job on the course which I accepted with alacrity and have never regretted the decision. I suppose it was second nature to take up greenkeeping for I was never off the course as a small boy always doing jobs at weekends and school holidays etc., it was in the blood and I was quite capable of tackling any kind of work on the course at a very



ON THE COURSE

early age under the eagle eye of my father."

"When I was at Sunningdale I generally used my imagination as I went around and decided what needed doing then I duly reported this when I got back to the sheds. My father always said 'try and think like a head greenkeeper for one day you will be in charge of your own course' and I have never really had any doubts about my greenkeeping ability. As long as one has the basic knowledge about what needs to be done and how to go about it is the most important factor."

"Obviously my father's knowledge and long experience in greenkeeping has been a valuable guiding influence in my career and much has rubbed off on me. Being an individualist I probably do things a little differently from him using my own ideas, thoughts and input to accomplish objectives. The course characteristics at Liphook are very similar to Sunningdale, its a heathland situation and the management programme is very much the same so I am quite familiar with the routine upkeep and the kind of problems one might encounter."

Cameron supervises four staff, one is a mechanic who also helps out on the course, although he usually spends most of his time in the workshop through the winter repairing and servicing the equipment. The other three men have their own sections to look after on the course, that is their main responsibility, all are reliable and industrious workers. In the past the club employed one or two students to help with the work during the summer when the permanent staff was only three but now it has been increased to four with the objective cutting down on casual labour which can be quite expensive.

The main items of machinery are three triplex mowers, consisting of two Ransomes 171s and a Jacobsen Greensking with Turf Groomers. There are three tractors two Massey Fergusons and a Ford, a set of five hydraulic gangmowers and four Ransomes Auto-Certes mowers, and there are several items of equipment for slitting plus a Cushman with slitters and a full range of attachments. The course has a lot of sharp undulations and a tractor mounted

rotary is used to keep down the rough but in some inaccessible places a pedestrian rotary completes the work.

From October through to March Cameron aims to slit tine the greens every week when weather and surface conditions permit. Part of this programme this winter also included spraying the heather with Dalapon. This kills Mollinia and Fescue grasses which are smothering the heather, but does not affect the heather leaving a clean sward. It will be done early in March, which he feels - is the the only time of the year it can be treated.

There is quite an amount of construction work now under way and several new tees have already been built this winter. 600 yards of pathways on the course has been tidied up and laid with a more permanent surface. The base of the paths were consolidated with four inches of roadway hoggin, then blinded with an ash layer and packed down with a vibrating roller. The track was finally completed with a finishing layer of cockle shells. The whole effect is an excellent firm pathway in keeping with the surroundings, pleasing to the eye and easy for golfers to walk on, says Cameron.

One problem seen on the course at the moment is Fusarium disease but Cameron admitted that Jim Arthur gave him a friendly warning about this before he went to Liphook. The plan is to control the outbreak by frequent aeration and regular applications of Roevral and Mascot contact fungicides. Basically he says, "we are trying to reduce the incidence of infection by correct cultural practices and I think the battle is gradually being won."

When asked about his approach to machinery selection Cameron McMillian said, "Before buying anything I would study the requirements of the course. Then invite suppliers to demonstrate the type of machinery within their range which seems right for the job before making a final decision. All the leading manufacturers like Ransomes, Toro and Jacobsen have an extensive range of equipment for all phases of our work. Obviously one might have preferences one way or the other but the important point is to

chose the machine that performs best under the conditions prevailing on your particular course."

Being a working head greenkeeper Cameron can only spend a limited amount of time supervising the staff. Generally this is done first thing in the morning when the work programme is discussed and specific tasks are individually assigned. Enough work is given to each man to keep him busy for the day, if the job finishes sooner than expected they are all quite conscientious and will look around for something else to do. He likes to encourage everybody to come up with their own suggestions and sometimes they put forward good ideas with regard to the work programme which are put into practice.

"I think the British & International Golf Greenkeepers Association is moving in the right direction," Cameron continued, "the set-up is much better than it has ever been and it is up to the membership to provide the support and enthusiasm to keep the momentum going. It has to be a strong and effective organisation that will be respected and recognised as a formidable mouthpiece for greenkeepers in all parts of the country."

"The presence of our members playing an important role at the Open Championship is good for public relations and has given us international status of which we are proud. Yes, we have come a long way and have every reason to look forward to future of our profession for the years ahead."

Ode from a Greenkeeper

CANS

Cans that are a brilliant hue,
with dregs of Coke and Shandy, too,
Are strewn around our pretty course
or buried deep amongst the gorse
and placed in forks of sapling trees,
or thrown in streams besides the tees.

Another 'Topic' of course is 'Mars',
and other makes of chocolate bars,
Their wrapper's thrown upon the ground
by thoughtless golfers playing round.
To help us keep it neat and tidied
Please, do use the bins provided.

An empty can is not a drag,
please place it back into your bag.
At the 18th tee you will find a bin
to place your wrappers and empties in.

By Peter Richmond
(Midland Section)