

NEW DEVELOPMENTS

HELLIDON LAKES - A GOLFING NATURE RESERVE IN THE WARWICKSHIRE COUNTRYSIDE

Electronics expert, Stuart Nicoll and his attractive wife Jackie are both dog lovers. A mere glance at their two fine retrievers, Sam and Sally and one can see why.

A year or so ago a semi-wild wooded valley, within a mile or so of their elegant house in the village of Priors Marston came on to the market and the Nicolls thought it an ideal place for secluded country walks with the dogs, never thinking at the time of its potential as a golf course.

But now, under the direction of David Snell, a former tournament professional and later club professional at Lindrick, this secluded nature reserve has been transformed into a ten lake, 6676 yard golf course.

Hellidon Lakes as it has been named is within eight miles of Daventry, reached by a minor road off the A361 to Banbury. It promises to be one of the best courses in the Warwickshire area when it opens for play in 1991.

Greens, tees and fairways are already laid out to a design by David Snell, the golf director at Hellidon Lakes. The construction of the course and day to day maintenance is in the hands of Les Shaw previously at Ullesthorpe Court, near Lutterworth.

All the greens have been built on a six inch deep base of 40mm gravel covered by two inches of quarter gravel and finished with a ten inch sand/soil mix, with a drainage system running into one of the lakes. The irrigation for tees and greens was installed by Cameron.

The whole course was seeded to a specification from the STRI, using a Chewings bent/fescue mix for the greens, fescue/ryegrass/with a touch of smooth stalk annual meadow grass and bent for the tees, with a similar mixture but slightly different formula for the fairways.

Les Shaw has bought a set of Beaver gangs for the fairways but is making do with a second hand Hahn for his greens until he feels the time is right to purchase a new triplex. During the next few months he will let the course grow in, aerating when necessary and employing the usual cultural techniques.

"It is our intention to have a golf course



Stuart Nicoll (right) and golf director David Snell

playable for the full twelve months of the year", said David Snell. "We will play off the tees not mats, to the regular greens. I am not a subscriber to the shortened course to temporary pin positions in the winter months. The course has been set up to test and reward all classes of player, from a choice of tee position. Most holes offer a challenging and dangerous line of approach or an alternative safer route.

For example a generous sponsor has put up a Cartier watch for the first lady to drive the green at the last. It is a par-4 of 470 yards, but there is a short tempting route over the largest lake on the course."

The clubhouse, yet to be built, will overlook the 18th green with a two tiered members bar giving views over the splendid Hellidon Lakes. As well as a restaurant, conference room and professionals shop, the clubhouse complex will

incorporate 20 ensuite bedrooms, for overnight guests.

"Hellidon Lakes will be a members club, limited to a ceiling of 500, plus 50 junior members, said owner Stuart Nicoll." The subscription has been set at £500, with a joining fee of £2,000 for a member and their partner. Although we have only just opened the lists, around a hundred have already applied, most being established golfers."

To launch the new course, on a fine clear sunny day in February, ex-England footballer, Bobby Charlton flew in by helicopter to plant the first of thousands of new trees and christen the course by hitting golf balls into the major lake.

It was no surprise that he chose the right day to perform the opening ceremony, Bobby's girl is none other than BBC weather forecaster, Suzanne Charlton!



Bobby Charlton and Stuart Nicoll with dogs Sam and Sally