

# THE YANKS ARE COMING TO THE BONNY, BONNY BANKS OF LOCH LOMOND

**Why a Scottish Greenkeeper is not considered good enough to manage Scotland's latest golf complex . . . . . John Lelean reports**

**A**n historical peninsula of tree scaped parkland in the ownership of one of Scotland's principal lairds, is about to suffer the ultimate indignity in the eyes of the Scottish traditionalists.

By 1992 it will be transformed into a golf course, designed, bulldozed and sculptured by an American professional golfer and his compatriot architect partner.

This first Scottish course where total American design has been introduced by the Weiskopf/Morrish partnership is not for the plebeian golfer from Clydebank Municipal or even the Bearsden or Helensburgh club member, the £52m development is aimed strictly at the company corporate market with an annual fee at present set at £25,000 or £10,000 for individual international membership.

That does not only mean to say this figure will not give value for money to those taking up the offer, undoubtedly the eventual two golf courses, the High Road and the Low Road on the Rosdhu Estate, plus the luxurious infrastructure will provide the ultimate in golfing excellence. The High Road course is anticipated by many of the game's sages to become a sparkling jewel in the crown, of the home of golf.

**W**hat is likely to add to the controversy at Loch Lomond, will be the decision to appoint an American Superintendent to take charge of the course. Although the supremo has not been named it would appear to be a foregone conclusion that the position will go to someone from the other side of the Atlantic.

Why Scotland's newest course should be given to an American to maintain is explained by Tom Weiskopf. "First and foremost they have qualifications and know how to manage golf courses. From my experience there is a reluctance in this country for greenkeepers to carry out intensive aeration programmes, use fertilizers and regularly

top dress."

"It could be that they are held back by their club committees or restricted budgets, but that won't happen here". The issue has been well aired by all in charge of the Loch Lomond project. Developer David Brench has sought the best advice and is prepared to act on it. As a member of Woburn, he had the ear of Alex Hay, who acts as a consultant to David.

Hay has strong views on course management. A green committee of one - him; and no budgets. What needs to be spent at Woburn will be found without cutting any corners.

It has been a policy that cannot be faulted at the Duke of Bedford's courses, because it has proved to be very successful, though that does not mean to say he does not listen to the suggestions of his greenstaff.

Alex Hay is an ardent supporter of greenkeeper education and training, though he fervently believes it is 20 years behind the times in Britain. Where he can help a greenkeeper with drive and ambition he will, but until the know-how, demonstrated by qualifications are readily available, he will support the Weiskopf decision to bring in the man who is fully conversant with the construction methods used. In his view twenty years of practical experience, say on a golf course in one part of the world can be no substitute for a degree in agronomy and a demonstrable track record, when new methods are being applied.

"Once the golf courses are established and experience gained in the field on American methods, the British greenkeeper will certainly take over," he added.

Hay said that he is confident that there will be stepping up of the greenkeeper's education programme in this area and the benefits of American construction methods going on in many parts of the UK will provide the classroom for our young trainee greenkeepers.

The story of Loch Lomond's conception has been quoted previously, but is worth repeating. It all emerged out of an idea from Stirling Investments property developer, David Brench, who had been involved in a project at the south end of the Loch.

The scheme was not feasible, but it sparked off a train of thought which led to him broaching the golf course idea with Sir Ivar Colquhoun, the owner of Rosdhu House, a stately ancestral home, dating back to 1772, but vacated by the family for something smaller, warmer and more liveable. Now David is a self-confessed "golfer" and on his world travels had played the two Arizona courses in cow-boy and indian country, Desert Highlands and Troon. The latter course was a Tom Weiskopf/Jay Morrish design and it so happened, Tom was around at the time.

David was introduced, broached the subject of his dream and persuaded Tom Weiskopf to come over and take a look. From that moment on the "dream" became reality.

Tom recalls that when he and Jay drove into the estate off the A82, they had laid out the 16th, 17th and 18th holes before they reached Rosdhu House. His reaction on arrival was - "We've designed the finishing holes, let's now look at the rest!"

**H**e has been quoted before, but he said it again. "This is the finest piece of land we have ever been given to build a golf course". He is not necessarily looking for a memorial to the Weiskopf/Morrish partnership, though this could become a possibility. Rather, he said, he would like the course to have the appearance of having been built by a Scot over a hundred years ago.

The greens at Loch Lomond are under construction to the USGA specification, or nearly. The herringbone drainage system has been installed, but there is no stone carpet. "We don't



need it", said Tom Weiskopf. "Jay (Morrish) has designed 97 golf courses, the last 14 with me, and he believes there is no need for a stone carpet on this site. As you can see the greens have been formed, drained and pea graveled and the drainage is working perfectly."

"There is standing water around the course after the wettest winter period anyone can remember, but none on the green areas or where we have put in the fairway drainage system."

"When the growing medium goes on we will be using 12 inches of a sand/peat/soil mix, using some of the suitable peat we have dug out of the course."

**A**sksed what seed they will be using at Loch Lomond, Weiskopf said without hesitation. "Pencross, for greens and a bent with three varieties of fescue for the fairways."

"Why Pencross - because it has been proved to be the best grass for a putting surface. It is grown in Oregon, where the climate is similar to here. It is used all over the northern part of the USA where the winters are much harder and I cannot understand why there is such an objection to using it in Britain."

We are not building sand only greens, there will be a mix something like 80/20, which might increase to 85/15 depending on the final quality of the sand available".

Pencross first introduced in Britain for sand only greens has not proved successful, though whether this has been due to the climatic conditions or the lack of maintenance know-how is a matter of debate. What may not have been considered



*Tom Weiskopf receives the traditional Scottish welcome*

fully is that most north American courses are closed (often under snow) throughout the winter. Whether it will prove to be the correct grass for Scotland's cold damp climate is equally debateable.

It must be said that Tom Weiskopf's involvement at Loch Lomond is in no way that of the "big name" cashing in on his reputation as a leading light on the tournament circuit, it is total commitment. Last summer he spent eleven solid weeks, living in a cottage on the estate, surveying every inch of the ground, making sketches, and familiarising himself with the trees to such an extent he must know each of them intimately.

His visits to Loch Lomond are regular and frequent, flying in from his home in Phoenix, Arizona every couple of weeks or so, returning with more sketches and plans after consulting

## WEISKOPF QUOTES

**Who would I cross the road to watch playing golf?** Jack Nicklaus. He plays golf like a game of chess, always thinking two or three shots ahead of the one he is playing. Who else? Lee Trevino. Still the finest shot maker in the game and entertaining to be with.

**Nick Faldo?** (and he said this a month before Faldo won the Masters). The best is yet to come, he will win at least four or five majors within the next ten years. He has a perfect swing, superb concentration and plays par golf under extreme pressure.

**Did I come off the circuit too soon?** Yes I think I did. I still play good golf and will enter some tournaments this year. Another three years I will be eligible for the Seniors Tour.

**The best golfer he ever played with?** Ben Hogan. "Mr Hogan", a man of few words, called me Sonny. After a round at the Champions, he murmured "Young man come down to Fort Worth one day and I will give you the key to make you into a great player". A young, headstrong Weiskopf never did.

**His greatest embarrassment?** Watching the closing holes in the 1980 Open Championship at Muirfield in the lounge of the Greywalls Hotel, when in the company of his wife Jeannie, he engaged Princess Margaret in conversation.

Unaware of her distinguished status he asked her if she played golf. Her Royal Highness informed him that she didn't, but her father was quite keen. "Really", said Weiskopf, "and what did he do for a living?"



*Loch Lomond in March prior to reseedling*



with his partner Jay Morrish. David Brench, who spent much of the summer with Tom, said it was not unusual to find him out prowling the course at 3'O'clock in the morning, returning for breakfast, and after two hours sleep, calling for another consultation with the men on site to put into operation a further stage in the plan.

It is his proud boast that less than 10% of the hard woods have had to come out and it is with a profound sense of regret that these have had to be sacrificed.

**C**onservation is the key to development on this 1,200 acre finger of real estate, guarded on three sides by the deep fish-filled waters of Britain's largest Loch, so much so that David Bellamy has been appointed to manage the retention of flora and fauna and a botanist is permanently on site supervising all excavations and tree surgery to ensure that nothing of interest or value is disturbed.

As an example, a group of half a dozen trees were found to be covered in a rare and beautiful lichen, so the line of the fairway from tee to green was changed to preserve them, which has in effect

improved the value of the hole.

Tom Weiskopf insists that every hole on the High Road course has its own significance, but singles out four at the top of his list.

The third, a par five, runs down to the Loch. To the right on the approach to the green, overhanging oaks and marsh demand an accuracy of approach.

The fourteenth, a par 4 can be reached from the tee down wind by the big hitter, though the safer route still offers many challenges.

The fifteenth, a 390 yard, par 4, appropriately named "Arboretum" has almost every specimen of deciduous tree on the golf course within 100 yards of the green.

And the eighteenth - expected to become one of the most photographed holes in golf and one that Weiskopf, bubbling with enthusiasm dragged a somewhat reluctant press corps through a squally shower to view.

Framed by the ruin of an old ivy clad castle, the slightly elevated green nestles picturesquely alongside Rosdhu Bay. The tee 440 yards away demands a shot across the water, though how much distance one dares to cut will depend on the skill of the golfer, the prevailing wind or sheer

bravery.

As a finishing hole for the amateur or professional, it will be one long remembered.

**A**nd so to the club-house, a £5 million re-fit to the home Sir Ivor and Lady Colquhoun had abandoned to the ravages of rot and decay. One room, the baronial hall has already been restored to its former glory, hung with ancestral family portraits, going back through the ages.

By mid-summer, the transformation will be complete, bringing to Rosdhu House, the 20th century luxuries of a swimming pool, saunas, solariums, restaurants and the inevitable corporate suits.

To complete this supreme golf complex, negotiations are at the final stages with an international group for a 200 bedrooomed five star hotel, corporate cottages, a 200 berth yacht marina, riding, shooting and fishing facilities. And a final touch - a caddy school is planned, which falls in line with the policy of buggies for medical reasons only. That is one aspect of Scotland's first American designed course the traditionalist Scottish golfer will approve.

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