

Age of the trolley

Judging by their inexorable proliferation on the golf course, this is indeed 'the age' of the golf trolley, especially the sleek, electrically powered model. The procession of golfers following in the wake of their occasionally self-willed machines up and down our fairways has perhaps eased the burden of carrying clubs, but what are the implications of using trolleys in terms of depreciating course conditions?

Their primary drawback can be related to the constant attrition of the same 'paths', notably around the playing areas of greens and tees. Without restrictions being enforced the most economical routes are always adopted and at the extreme this can culminate in the golfer navigating a precipitous path between putting surface and adjacent green-side bunkers! The inevitable consequences of the same route being exploited through entry and exit are worn turf surfaces and compacted soils where the weight of golf traffic has been focussed. In contrast, golfers who prefer to carry their clubs can circumvent obstacles with

greater ease and traverse the putting surfaces, thus adopting a much wider range of traffic routes. Furthermore, the restrictions placed on golf trolleys can reduce the pace of throughput, notably when the ball strays from the straight and narrow into rough! This is a source of frustration for the golfer, the cumulative effects of which may impinge on the potential playing levels which can practically be supported by the golf course.

The pressures imposed by golf trolleys are particularly acute during the late autumn and winter months, when the decline is aggravated by the lack of natural turf recovery and the vulnerability of wet soils to compaction forces. The rigidity of traffic flow patterns around tees and green sites, enforced by the use of trolleys, is often reflected by distinct, heavily worn arcs or muddy streaks in the following Spring which are slow to make a satisfactory recovery. The advent of wide-wheeled trolleys has eased the pressure to a degree, but the emergence of heavier electrically driven trolleys has increased the 'scouring' effect on the turf –

notably under wet surface conditions.

An appropriate course of action should be formulated in accordance with individual site conditions, with the following factors taken into consideration:

- The drainage potential of the course.
- Course layout and design, eg. compact or expansive, flat or undulating.
- The aspect of the course, ie. exposed or protected.
- The prevailing ground and weather conditions.
- The intensity of play and its distribution throughout the year.

Undoubtedly, the temporary suspension in the use of golf trolleys will, in most instances, have a marked influence on the viability and quality of the turf surfaces. Enforcing a local rule that clubs **MUST** be carried will help to break the pattern and spread the load of golf traffic more evenly. The majority of golfers should be sufficiently fit to carry a golf bag without significantly diminishing their enjoyment of the game. Indeed, a golfer armed with, say, eight clubs and a lightweight bag may appreciate a different perspective of the course with no significant increase in exertion! There may (very exceptionally) be mitigating circumstances on the grounds of ill-health, but doctor's certificates must be warily scrutinised to ensure the rule is not abused.

A ban on trolleys will prove most effective through the winter months when the surfaces are most vulnerable, although this needs to be tailored to each sites requirements. The ban should encompass both pulled and powered trolleys, as this will prove simpler and less divisive.

Where good channels of communication are established and the cooperation of all golfers is assured, then temporary suspensions – in accordance with prevailing ground and weather conditions – may just

be a workable compromise. However, this strategy is usually less effective due to the difficulties of decision making, monitoring and enforcement within the usual structure of course management.

The use of trolleys is inextricably linked with the need for adequate traffic control directives. These can take several forms, including ropes, hoops and white lines; backed up by clear, strategically placed signs. Through these means, vulnerable areas can be protected and different traffic routes brought into use. The designation of 'trolley parks' may serve a similar purpose and dictate an alternative route from fairway to green and green to next tee. To realise the potential of these devices requires that good channels of communication be established at all levels within the Club so that strategies can be agreed and objectives clearly defined prior to implementation.

Development of separate, 'alternative' tees, mainly for Winter play – but possibly pressed into use during the summer if required – can have a profound influence on patterns of traffic flow. Where there is sufficient scope for the strategic placement of these tees, the golfers will be forced to take alternate routes to those adopted during the summer. This will ease the pressures on the turf surfaces, provide a valuable period of recuperation and enable the benefits of remedial procedures to be realised. Furthermore, the introduction of purpose-built trolley traffic paths may be warranted in certain situations, eg. alongside tees, but they must satisfy golfing, management and aesthetic criteria.

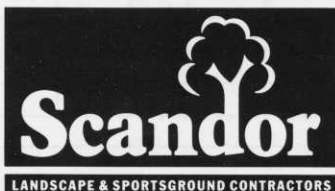
The above measures should not be regarded as a substitute for a trolley ban, but rather as being complementary with the objective of countering the increased pressures on our golf courses and maintaining optimum playing conditions year round!

● The author, Jonathan Tucker, is the STRI's Advisory Agronomist.

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on March 10th, 1992
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9am to 4pm

Speakers include Danny Godfrey, Ben Simpson, Wentworth's Chris Kennedy and Turnberry's George Brown. Neil Thomas will address the conference on the progress of BIGGA in the 1990s. Cost including morning coffee and lunch: £14 BIGGA members, £16 non-members.

More details from Elliott Small, Tel: 0259 31445