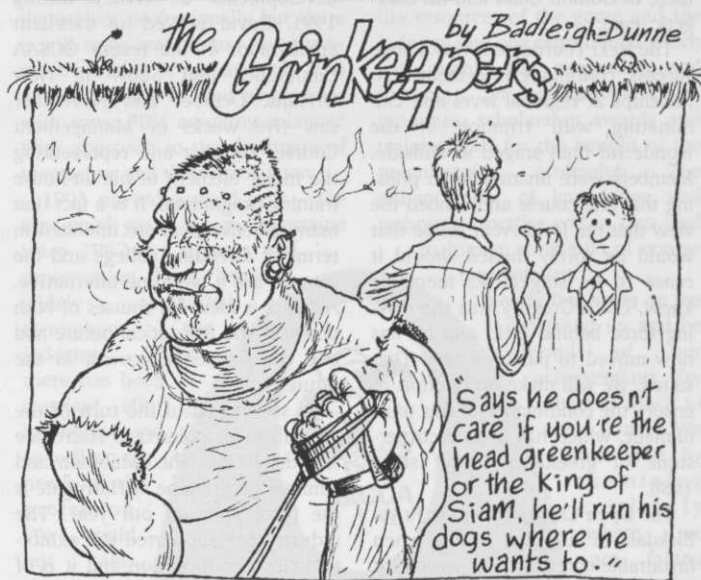


The old saw about not picking up a 'lost' ball until it has stopped rolling is one that has an ironic ring of truth on many golf courses. Indeed, one course abutting a 'difficult tenant' council housing estate with an unusually high crime rate reported no less than 300 incidents of common theft of golf balls in a single season – helplessly witnessed by players as they hacked their way round the outer perimeters of the battlefield. Such thefts are not unusual, and are certainly not restricted to impoverished areas, though this Club's membership hit upon a novel if tedious method for combating the crime: Four-balls split into two groups with the first pair hitting toward the second, strategically positioned at 200 yards. When the first pair come alongside their balls the defenders walk back to the tee and hit to the area protected by their opponents. It works, but at the cost of tediously long rounds and added frustration in an already frustrating game – not surprisingly, foursomes are now increasingly popular! Earlier attempts at installing heavy chain link fencing topped with barbed wire had proven abortive, the miscreants simply hacking their way through or burrowing under the fence. A further unwritten law at this Club forbids members buying balls from any casual on course sources, no matter how cheap they may be.

Ball theft is the thin edge, though the demons that manifest themselves in the nightmares of most greenkeepers are of a far more grim nature. One major source of vandalism is that of the ill-titled 'joyriding' of stolen cars – with a golf green an inviting target for drag strip accelerations and hand brake turns. There is nothing joyful in the resultant misery and damage, which can range from deep surface rutting to broken irrigation pipes and almost always involves loss of play for several weeks – longer if the act takes place during the winter when grass just cannot heal itself. Increasingly the villains are not content with just taking out one green and delight in ruining several at once, on occasions culminating in rolling and burning the stolen car on the green.

Cars are not the only cause of wheeled damage however, for many courses with large open areas away from the clubhouse have been hit with a lesser version of skid-pan antics, these in the form of younger brethren with mountain bikes or lightweight pseudo dirt track motorcycles, who have discovered that bunkers and adjacent contoured areas make ideal tracks for performing 'wheelies'. Control of these antics,

WANDALISM



The battle against destructive forces

often performed in daylight, are not easy, for the riders can be exceedingly swift when confronted by authority – though one good ruse used to superb effect was the thrusting of an umbrella between spokes, the resulting damage seen as a very real deterrent.

Less traumatic though equally frustrating is the stealing of pins and yardage markers, these often lobbed into deep rough. The obvious answer on all high risk sites is to remove pins at end of play and to install permanently fixed markers (heavy timber or stone are best), embedding them deeply into the ground with cement.

Vandalism is not totally restricted to hooligans, for on many common land courses Joe Public is not above setting up a picnic for himself and his family on a green, with cricket stumps embedded in the fine turf for 'the kids to enjoy themselves'. I will remember on one occasion accosting such a gathering, only to be told in no uncertain terms to b----- off!

Few would deny that free roaming dogs are another problem, and it is hard to find suitable words of discouragement when the fangs of a Rotweiler or similar beast are slaving for action.

Canine defecation on turf is unpleasant to say the least and urine can cause severe scorching. Additionally, a rampaging dog hell-bent on hunting rabbits or wildfowl can cause untold damage in short time. Incidentally, have you noticed how dog owners so often resemble their 'pets'?

If your trolley shed is open to the elements, this can be an invitation for malicious invasion which often culminates in wheels being strewn over a wide area and trolleys drowned in the nearest pond or stream, or thrown through windows of the clubhouse or maintenance shed. Maintenance sheds have always presented their own special security problems, since they are often located (indeed, hidden) in remote areas away from watchful eyes. Here the rule must be to ensure maximum security at every point of entry, barring all windows and immobilising machinery whilst keeping fuel, lubricants, tools and valuable equipment additionally locked away in bullet proof chests or brick built rooms with very stout doors. Never forget that a flimsy door can easily be smashed open with a fire extinguisher or similar heavy object, so ensure the door itself is very stout hardwood or steel reinforced and

well protected by deadlocks and properly installed heavy hinges – if in any doubt, ask your local crime prevention officer to visit and follow his recommendations.

On the subject of fuel, lubricant or weedkiller, greenkeepers will be all too aware of the havoc that even a slight spillage on greens can cause, and one recent act of vandalism reported will serve to remind of the dire consequences. A disgruntled former employee broke into the sheds, purloined what was later discovered to be gramoxone, and spilled the contents over a green, wiping out a large area. It was necessary to cut out the offending area and completely re-turf, a costly and heartbreaking exercise.

Combating crime has never been an easy task, but there are a few ground rules which the wise greenkeeper will want to see implemented. At all vulnerable points of wheeled entry the installation of very solid precast concrete posts can deter all but the heaviest of vehicles, whilst the digging of deep and wide outer perimeter ditches will stop all vehicles save those that can be lifted, and the laying of 'sleeping policemen' on all approach roads will cause added frustration – deterrents all. On private roads, the fitting of iron gates will stop most intruders, who will be thwarted upon finding their way locked and barred at night.

Why do vandals especially target golf courses? Is it that they mistakenly perceive golfers as some kind of rich kids on the block: hurt the rich and you hurt ordered society? I have a theory that vandalism stems from the attitudes of couldn't-care-less parents, giving vent to violence, anger and frustration from their unloved offspring. Theories apart, if you are victim to vandalism and all else fails, consider the course of action taken by one Club, that of vigilante patrols over the peak hours of 10pm to midnight. Even the most persistent vandal jibs at being caught and a posse on the war-path will often prove the ultimate deterrent.