

AT EASE WITH WINTER TEES

MICHAEL BIRD learns the secrets of Gordon Child's latest success

Picturesque Churston golf course, overlooking Torbay in south Devon, has doubled in size during the past year – without taking on any extra land. The secret behind this amazing feat lies in the design and laying out of an 18 hole winter course on Churston's 140 rolling acres by head greenkeeper, Gordon Child.

Retaining all the existing greens, Gordon has established 18 new tees for both men and ladies, all strategically placed so that players approach and leave the winter tees on a different route from those used for summer play. The result has been so successful that there are now 18 measured holes at Churston utilised for winter golf, meriting their own card and providing golfers with a new challenge which has been met with virtually universal approval.

"Wear, tear and compaction were causing increasing problems between green and tee and on the pathways from the existing tees to the fairways," explained Gordon. "Although we had started using winter tees on a few holes several years ago, the recent dry summers pushed us into taking a close look

at the whole course to see if we could reduce the overall level and rate of wear throughout the year." With active encouragement from Andrew Chaundy, the manager of Churston Golf Club, an active programme of doubling the number of tee positions was started on the course in 1991. The objective from the start was to get 'traffic' moving along a different route for six months of the year, providing the green staff with more time, space and safety in which to renovate and repair worn and compacted turf.

"Although the course is quite fertile on the down-slopes and in hollows, there are places where the underlying sandstone is close to the surface with very little soil cover," commented Gordon. "These areas simply never recovered and the erosion had begun to spread onto adjacent turf as players looked to avoid the stone and rock with their spikes and trollies. In winter, the same happened on the lower-lying clay soils, which puddled up quickly when autumn rains fell on turf where grass cover was thin or non-existent due to wear."

The first step in planning the 18 winter holes involved walking the course to ascertain and note where the ground damage was greatest. As on many courses, wear and compaction was found to be most pronounced on the approaches to tees from the preceding green, on the waiting area beside the tees and on the turf between the tee and the fairway landing zone. However, altering the pattern and density of such wear involved more than simply building a new tee alongside an existing one or mowing an area of the fairway ahead of the normal tee. In all cases, Gordon wanted to re-route the traffic so that it approached and left the new winter tees in a completely different direction from those used during the summer. Yet this had to be achieved while still allowing a clear, safe and challenging shot towards the next green. The bonus of this scheme was that it also produced new ball landing zones on the fairways, cutting the level of compaction in any one area and giving the green staff greater time to repair divots and treat turf wear over the first 150

to 200 yards of each par four and par five hole. "In a number of cases, we built a temporary tee and let the golfers try out and comment on the new position before building the proper winter tee," commented Gordon. "All the tee building has been accompanied by a fair amount of pathway construction to guide the players along the desired route, helped by white lines and decorative hoops in the ground."

One other measure taken by Gordon to reduce turf wear and tear is to make the fairways a little narrower on the approaches and at the entrances to the greens: "This has produced more walking on the semi-rough, which is able to absorb wear better than closer mown fairways," he explained. "All in all, our first winter season with 18 new tee positions has proved most successful. However, it'll take a couple of years before everything is in place as there are still several tees to be built or to complete. Despite this, the course has definitely benefited from the measures taken, with improvements noted by both the golfers and green staff."

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A completely new combined summer and winter tee has been built for the ladies on the 12th. The ladies former tee, on the far left, is now used by the men in winter

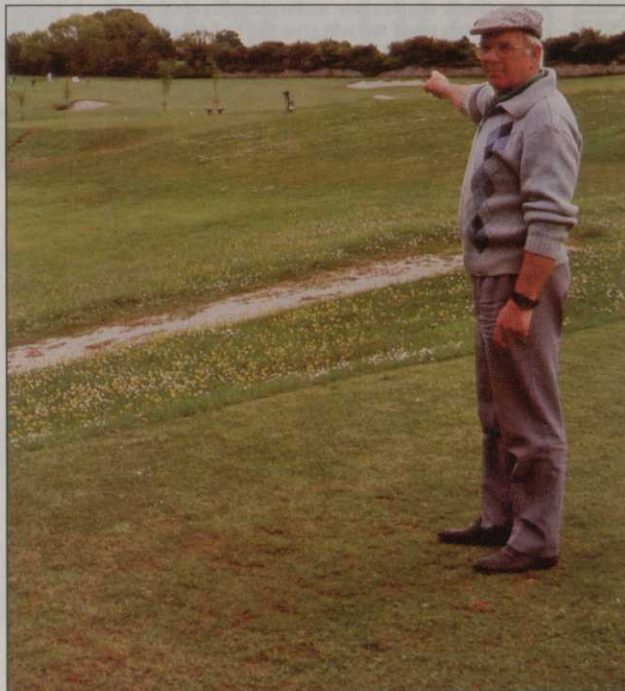
1st Positioned on an area cut out of flat ground some 60 yards forward and to the right of the summer tee. Players now approach the tee from in front of the practice green, keeping traffic away from the clubhouse. At 181 yards instead of 242 yards, this is a very good short winter hole.

2nd This tee is yet to be constructed, winter play having been from a mat 30 yards in front of the existing tee. A good pathway has meant that players stay off the turf from green to tee in winter and summer.

3rd One of the first new winter tees built, positioned forward and to the right of the summer tee. Players now leave the green to the side rather than at the front. The new tee position has actually improved the hole due to the better line to the fairway.

4th Constructed on spare ground adjacent and slightly forward of the existing tee, it is also used by the ladies in summer. Has shortened the men's hole by 20 yards with minimal change to the view from tee to green.

5th Moved forward by 100 yards, turning the hole from a par 5 into a par 4. The new tee position is approached along a signed pathway from the



Gordon Child, standing on the new winter tee for the 14th hole, points back 80 yards to the summer tee

opposite side of the 4th green to the normal summer pathway.

6th Positioned to the left and about 25 yards behind the summer tee, turning the hole from a par 4 to a par 5. A signed pathway has been laid from the front of the green to the far side of the new tee, ensuring that players and trollies approach and leave the tee along a fixed route.

7th An existing small tee ahead of the original is

to be extended on this dog leg par 4, reducing the hole's length by 35 yards. A white line on the turf helps keep trollies away from the front of the green, where turf wear has been highest.

8th This is an unusual par 3 hole in that a completely new summer tee has been built to the rear of the original, which has become the winter tee, thereby extending the hole by 12 yards during the summer. Players now

leave the green in different directions during the summer and winter months.

9th A new winter tee has been constructed 30 yards ahead of the summer tee, approached by a new pathway from the green. Having seen the tee, the ladies requested that it be adopted for their use all year round due to the improved driving position, removing the need to hit the ball over dense gorse.

10th Two winter tee positions have been tried on this par 4 hole, giving completely different shots to the green. The first, just ahead of the summer tee, retains the par 4 measure; the second, to the rear of the 9th green, makes the hole a challenging par 3 and has proved popular with players.

11th This was an interesting exercise. The existing men's tee was extended sideways and a new ladies tee built ahead of it for summer use. The original ladies summer tee was then joined by a second new tee to make two new winter tees – one for men and one for ladies. Again, both sets of tees are approached from different directions from the preceding green.

12th A completely new summer/winter tee was built for the ladies offset to the left and ahead of the original,

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with the ladies old summer tee becoming the new winter tee for men. The result has reduced the driving distance onto the uphill fairway for the ladies, thereby improving the hole.

13th Again, a completely new forward tee has been built for men's winter use with the summer tee extended to spread the wear. Traffic approaches and leaves the two sets of tees on different paths.

14th A new winter tee has been constructed well forward and to the right of the original, reducing the hole from a 508 yard par 5 to a 438 yard par 4. The two tees are approached by two separate gravel paths from the 13th green.

15th A new medal tee has been built for summer use with the old medal tee becoming the normal summer tee and the old summer tee switching to winter use, giving different approaches during winter and summer. The ladies tees have not changed.

16th This is still under deliberation. At present, an area of grass has been cut to the left of the summer tee with a further

two possible teeing areas to be assessed next winter.

17th The existing tees were removed on this superb par 3, and one huge tee constructed in its place for the drive across a valley. The single tee provides sufficient room for moving the tee boxes to a host of new positions during the year with wear from tee to green minimised by a permanent gravel pathway.

18th Here, lack of space dictated that the new winter tee be cut out of the fairway ahead of the existing tee, reducing the hole's length by just 23 yards, while providing a new landing area for drives from the tee. As on other holes, this has helped to spread fairway wear and tear, while enabling divot holes to be repaired successfully.

Summer course: 5981 yards, par 70. Four par 3's, 12 par 4's, two par 5's.

Winter course: 5574 yards, par 69. Four par 3's, 13 par 4's, one par 5.



Right: A new tee position and a pathway from tee to green on the short 8th will give the turf time to recover during the summer months.

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