

Desert island risks

When your golf course is bounded by water on all sides, bringing in even the most fundamental supplies can be a logistical nightmare...

The problem for Walter McDonald is not what he puts on his course or how he spreads it, but how he gets it there.

The King James VI Golf Club is on an island in the middle of the River Tay.

When Walter first came to the course on Moncreiffe Island, Perth, Scotland, a small boat was used to ferry things across from the mainland. "But that was bloody dangerous," says 56-year-old Walter, who came to the course 15 years ago.

The head greenkeeper at the time loved his boat and used it to transport fertiliser, top dressing and beer (the essentials) to the course.

One day the boat's small out-



How the course will look in May - with the hawthorne bushes in flower. The 11th and 13th greens and 12th and 14th tees at the southern end of the pear-shaped island are built outside the flood bank and regularly get swamped with the wash from big ships coming in and out of Perth Harbour.

board engine packed in - and there were no oars in the boat, so the head greenkeeper had to use his hands to paddle the craft and supplies ashore. "I thought, that's not for me," said Walter. And when he became head greenkeeper he got rid of the boat.

Walter uses the small footbridge that runs alongside the railway bridge. His three-man

team carry the essentials up the steps and load them onto a four-wheel buggy which was specially made to fit on the footbridge. Once across the river they can throw the goods down to the waiting tractor/trailer (or carry them down, depending on how fit they feel).

"There's less chance of hurting yourself carrying the barrels up

the steps than lifting them in and out of a rocking boat," adds Walter who remembers stripping down a Sisis Hydromain 14 13 years ago and carrying it over bit by bit - wheels, chassis, engine...

In the summer they can drive a small tractor/trailer (under 10-ton) across the river at low tide. There are concrete blocks set in the riverbed at the narrowest

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Walter McDonald faces up to his problem – how to get goods across the river from Perth

point from the north of the island to a car park on the east bank of the river. But it means careful planning of deliveries.

"It's all about arranging with the contractor and getting them to deliver at a certain time before the tide comes in or just after the tide's gone out. If you have to wait an hour you could be in big trouble, especially if you've got 30-ton of sand in the car park on the other side. You've really got to get rid of it out of that car park pretty sharp, although the town understands our predicament," says Walter.

The path can be exposed for six

to eight hours but if high tide is mid-day it means they can't do anything from 10am-2pm. The path can be seen six months of the year and sometimes in the winter when heavy frost halts the water higher up in the mountains.

Just after the path had been put in, and before it had time to settle, King James VI club lost a tractor off it – the engine was still running when the path disappeared into a hole. Even Walter couldn't get it going – and he was a mechanic in his pre-greenkeeping days.

He worked for a construction

company, "But I got sick of being away from home and I'd not long been married."

His uncle was a greenkeeper at Alyth and had offered Walter a job before he became a mechanic. It got him thinking about the profession when he was looking for something else to do. Walter's first greenkeeping post was as the first full-time greenkeeper at nine-hole Dunkeld. While there he started going to college and collecting his City and Guilds and Scotvec qualifications.

He came to the 700-member King James VI club as first assistant, and after about a year got the head greenkeeper's job. He is in charge of another qualified greenkeeper (his first assistant), a tractor man and an apprentice.

"Being a trained mechanic comes in handy, very handy at times," says Walter.

Getting things to the course will become easier next year when another, wider footbridge is erected (to take walkers to a new picnic area on the island). Walter believes he (and the allotment gardeners with whom he shares the island) will be able to drive a compact tractor and trailer across it.

This will make life much easier for him when he receives his deliveries of half a ton of fertiliser in spring (1 1/2 a year), 80-100 ton of top dressing, and bunker

sand. They are turving the bunker faces at the moment and replacing the quarry sand with yellow sand (it's what the club members wanted). They have done about 14 of the course's 30 greenside bunkers at the moment, so more sand will have to be brought in.

How to get these things to the 97-year-old, Tom Morris-designed course is not the only problem. The course has been flooded twice in the last four years. But it's an ill wind... last year's flood washed away the greenkeepers' small wooden shed – and now they have a new one, built on higher ground. But they had to bring all the upfill and concrete over by hand. "We were days on end bringing that stuff over," remembers Walter.

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