

We went back to basics with the first golf club in East Germany

British greenkeepers Stuart Bishop and his partner Elaine Holland, a trained hairdresser who now cuts greens and fairways and mends machinery with the best of them, have been telling us about their experiences at Potsdam Golf Club, the first golf club in East Germany.

When they arrived in the east of the country after 18 months in the west, Stuart was surprised to find that it took the greenkeepers just eight hours to cut 18 fairways and the driving range with one machine. Asked how they did this, they demonstrated: the driver proceeded to cut the driving range at about 35mph with a 6-ton tractor followed by a flying set of gang mowers. Later, a close examination of the gang mowers revealed no set on (and they'd never heard of this).

The equipment at the course was mainly farming implements of which the 6-ton Russian tractor was their favourite. It was used to cut the fairways and semi-rough – well, almost everything. One problem was that the course was built on a swamp and the tractor kept sinking and making large holes. The answer? Fill the holes with sand and create another bunker!

They had tried to update their inventory with an electric Flymo – but it had to be returned when they couldn't find a long enough cable in East Germany to go around the course. Parts would take 3-4 weeks to arrive from the west. In the event that some-

thing arrived the same day, the staff would break it or insist it didn't fit!

One day the owner decided he wanted the fairways top-dressed. Stuart didn't know this until the top-dresser arrived – a farm manure spreader that discharged out of the rear by a conveyor belt with two bars with flailing rods on them. So going up hill it discharged at a rate of 1 ton per square metre and going down hill, nothing. Stuart and Elaine were assured by the greenkeepers that this was normal practice. Only when Stuart insisted that they all get a shovel and rake to smooth out the 2ft hills did they all remember they had doctor's appointments.

The arrival of a Jacobsen Turf Cat was similar to Unification Day. Suddenly everyone wanted to cut the semi-rough.

The Easteners are very easy going, so it wasn't a complete surprise to Stuart when the day before a big skins game featuring Bernard Langer and David Gilford that one greenkeeper had a day off for shopping plus a visit to the hairdresser's.

The mechanic had spent most of his time working on Russian tractors, which required nothing more than a huge hammer and a 42mm spanner, so when Stuart asked him to adjust the bit of play in the groomers he did just that – he welded the groomers to the frame of the mower, in the down position. Just the job for rotorvating the greens, which brings us to verti-cutting.

"They would normally rotor-

vate the greens because they were set so low and always finishing with twice around the green (as mowing) and once around the foregreen while decapitating any sprinklers in their path," recalls Elaine.

As a rule the greenkeepers were rewarded with a party given by the course owner or with presents of beer – and plenty of it. Stuart, a teetotaler, therefore was not the most popular man in Germany when he banned alcohol from the course.

'This man turned out to be our worst nightmare'

Most of the German greenkeepers are really farmers by profession, so Stuart and Elaine were delighted when their boss told them they were to get a new man with three years' experience. Their smiles turned to laughter when they found out his name was Herr Shiverdick. Their laughter turned to horror soon after he arrived. "This man turned out to be our worst nightmare," said Elaine. "Within two or three days the 6-ton tractor was in one of the streams complete with gang mowers and driver. This was after he had severed a high-pressure standpipe, which produced a 100m fountain. Every day there was some kind of catastrophe, but it was good for the others. It made them look competent!"

The mechanic did his fair share of wrecking, too. In the

shed was a reel grinder, two years old and never used as no-one had any idea what it was. Stuart removed the polythene and taught the mechanic how to use it, giving detailed instruction and demonstrations about what could go wrong. The mechanic appeared to have got the idea, so Stuart left him to it. An hour later Stuart returned expecting to see at least one finished. He was a little surprised to see all seven fairway reels finished – with a 5mm convex shape to them!

In Germany they like to apply quartz sand as topdressing, and a lot of it. Stuart decided he would mix soil and sand, which they did by throwing sand and soil in a small cement mixer, mixing it, then tipping it out and throwing it through a fine mesh screen with a shovel. What went through was used, what didn't was scrapped. "When you require 40 or 50 tons this procedure could take about six months," said Stuart. "Germany has not heard of power screens."

Stuart and Elaine have now left that club – "We both felt we had to leave for the sake of our own sanity," said Elaine. "But we hope we have left quite a bit of knowledge and know-how there. At least we know they'll be cutting the grass, not running over it at 35mph."

She adds: "It was a lot of fun and we met some very nice people. The staff are all now competent greenkeepers. It was a joy to work with them and we learnt a lot about life behind The Wall."

Summer madness hits St Enodoc

Picturesque St Enodoc Golf Club in Cornwall has been hit by a spell of summer madness.

One night 10 flags, six tee markers and six boards screwed to stone tee boxes disappeared and five greens were damaged. The vandals had made the holes about 18in in diameter by gouging them out with their hands. They also gouged other holes in the greens as well.

A security guard was brought in, but this did not stop the vandalism. A mini-Stonehenge was built on the 11th green using 6in wooden tee blocks from various

tees. Rakes were put in the holes and flags were planted in bunkers. Stones along a footpath were thrown in bushes.

While the security guard was throwing someone off one part of the course holidaymakers from nearby caravan sites were letting rip on the other side of the links. A second security guard with a dog was employed and, according to head greenkeeper Stuart Dymond, this seems to have worked.

There was no more damage during the summer holidays although the guards' daily reports

to the club showed that every night they escorted someone off the course.

Sticker winner

The winner of our recent sticker slogan competition is Mrs JR Whatling, wife of the head greenkeeper at Heworth Golf Club, York. She receives a £15 WH Smith voucher for her effort: *BIGGA greenkeepers – a cut above the rest*. One slogan that was rejected by the girls at HQ, due to lack of proof, stated: *Greenkeepers do it with BIGGA ones!*

NEW FACES

■ The new head greenkeeper at Brickendon Grange Golf and Country Club, a picturesque parkland course near Hertford, is Trevor Booth, 32. Previously he was head greenkeeper at Oakridge, Nuneaton. He replaces Mike Reece who has gone to King's Norton in Birmingham.

■ Bob Lawton, 39, has moved from South Shields GC, where he was head greenkeeper, to take over as course manager at Billingham GC, Cleveland. Harry Lees has gone to Ramside Hall.