

What do greenkeepers do when they finally get away from their courses? Visit other people's courses. Here are three different views of different courses in different countries.

GREENKEEPERS

ZIMBABWE

Retired head greenkeeper Sam Sylvester, chairman of the East Anglian section, went to Zimbabwe for an African golf safari. He was met at Harare by a friend whom he had last seen at the '93 Open. That afternoon he played at Royal Harare GC, which he describes as "a lovely parkland course in excellent condition.

"I believe they have 60 greenstaff! The greens are extremely difficult as there is a very strong nap to contend with as well as the usual borrows. The cards are measured in metres, but I eventually found out that because of the height above sea level, where the ball flies further, to count the metres as yards.

"The cost of the green fee was about £3.80. Due to a relaxation of currency control, Royal Harare has now got a Toro greens machine. Needless to say, spares are a big problem. Another of the problems is that the kikuyu grass, which makes up most of the course, tends to creep onto the



The clubhouse at Vilamoura III in the Algarve

greens. To prevent this the green surrounds and apron have been planted with another grass to prevent the approach shot plugging. Not a success as the grass was much too fluffy and the ball nestled right down.

"The following afternoon we played at Wingate Park GC which is a bit out of town. This is a tree-lined course which is very intimidating for a player from a heathland course. It was not of such a high standard but the club

has neither the membership nor the money. Yet again the nap on the greens - ugh!

"The following morning I flew to Bulawayo and drove 400km to Victoria Falls, where I played in a small competition at the Ele-

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ON HOLIDAY

phants Hills GC with Brian Evans, secretary of the Kent Golf Union. On the first tee I met course manager Doug McClymont. His biggest problem seems to be game running over the course and in particular families of wart hog, which are quite tame. They find a damp area and then start snuffling like pigs, looking for roots. The mess is enormous, though I saw no signs on the greens.

"The course was pleasant and not too long with quite a few water hazards. There is no shortage of water from the Zambezi, but the evaporation is very high during the day. The short rough is very tough with the ball nestling right down. No point in trying for distance. The long rough is jungle, so forget about it!

"I found judging distance to the greens very difficult as the grey/brown flagsticks were very hard to see against the background.

"Another course I played during my visit was at the Bulawayo Country Club. The greens were excellent with only a little nap, but there is always a water shortage in this area, so the fairways and rough are rather thin. The course has been turned round since I last played there four years ago and now both 9s finish at the clubhouse, which makes it much easier for halfway drinks and food. A lot of alterations have been made to the course by the sort of ex-officio course planner who seemingly is answerable to no-one. However, he is prepared to put in the time and effort and is left to his own devices. He is attempting to make the course more difficult which does not suit the average member. Asked how often he changes the holes, he replied 'once a month'.

"The greens mowers are all electric, with power points at each green and tee. The water hoses are connected to stand

pipes around the greens and the fairway watering is by connected irrigation pipes with standing sprinklers.

"Another club we played in Bulawayo was owned by the railways before independence. Now it is owned by the members. It suffers from being extremely dry and with many harvester ants which take bits of the good grass into their nests. As a result, the fairways are very patchy. However, the greens are good, though only hand-watered. We played a nine-hole stableford - some players on each nine. There was a five-ball in the middle of the competition and the prize was won by a professional! I managed to win £1 for best joint nett score on a nominated hole. I never did find out which hole!

"The following day we played at Bulawayo Golf Club which celebrates its centenary in 1995. This is the best course in town as it has the most members and hence most income. The fairways

were good, as were the greens with some nicely cut approaches. Another tree-lined course, if you missed the fairway there was very little chance of hitting the green in two shots."

ALGARVE

Antony Bindley, assistant greenkeeper Kirby Muxloe Golf Club, visited a new course in Portugal. "I spent an awful lot of my time at Villamoura raking an awful lot of sand. The course is three years old and the greens are a year younger. It was said to be an American designed course but I was beginning to doubt this until I reached the 8th tee and saw a large lake which required a carry of some 180 yards. This was again required at the 14th tee and, in total, water came into play on seven of the holes.

"The greens were in excellent condition and contained a lot of fescues and bent grasses although a certain amount of annual meadow grass had found its way in from the surrounding fairways where *Poa* was very prominent and was already showing its seed heads in early March. The greenkeepers there were in the process of hand-weeding the greens for *Poa*.

"Unfortunately I could not communicate with the greenkeepers as their English was

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GREENKEEPERS ON HOLIDAY

almost as bad as my Portuguese, so all the information I have is what I saw while walking around. The fairways were a bit sparse in places but not too bad for a course which appeared to be heavily played by tourists (we had to wait two hours for a tee time). The tees were all large and rectangular in shape with predominantly *Poa* species.

"A lot of construction was taking place on the course with an extra nine holes being built and a lot of large lakes being dug out. The machinery was very much the same as here with Triplex mowers, compact tractors, work trucks. The whole course was irrigated by Rainbird sprinklers – including the semi rough. There weren't many trees on the course, just a few palm trees and some bushes."

UNITED STATES

John Nudds, course manager Gerrards Cross GC, had a three-week holiday in America, first staying with old friends in a

small Texas town one hour's drive from Houston, then visiting his wife's sister and her husband in Delaware. The day after he arrived, his nephew took him to play at Garrisons Lake Golf Club, a 6595-yard par 72.

"I met the professional, Jim Mathias, and told him I was a course manager or greens superintendent in England, at the same time flashing my BIGGA identification card. He said, 'John, your nephew has told me all about you, the course is yours for the next two weeks.' I was dumbfounded and didn't ask him what my nephew had told him!

The following Saturday John and his nephew played in a tournament in Maryland.

"We arrived at the golf club and started by having a monstrous breakfast then at 9.10 a shotgun start with 140 playing. Five and a half hours later we arrived back at the clubhouse – shattered. Wooden tables were all set up outside the clubhouse

with paper tablecloths. Andrew went to the glove compartment of his car to fetch a leather glove and a screwdriver. They had this 24ft long barbecue, all round the tables were big bins of oysters and then I knew what the glove and screwdriver were for. Our team finished one point away from fifth prize.

"After playing round Garrisons Lake I now know why Americans call autumn 'the fall'. I have never seen so many leaves, enough for them to bring in a leaf rule that allows you to drop a ball as near to the spot that you think it finished. This is only in friendly matches.

"Jim, the pro, took me to Wilmington Golf Club, one of the best courses in Delaware. It was lovely – lots of water and quick greens. It was interesting to see that they had stopped buggies because of the wear and tear on the course. You had to have a caddy, my man was a big ex-pro footballer called Oscar. The yardage was marked 200

yards or 150 yards from the green on concrete blocks in the middle of the fairway or on the sprinkler heads – not a bad idea. Oscar continuously tried to get the black marks off the face of my clubs before realising it was not possible with them being a bit dated!

"I had a word with the greenkeepers at two of the golf clubs I visited. What surprised me was they kept talking about how fast our greens looked on TV in events such as the Open – this completely threw me because we think the same about them.

"All the American golfers I met in those three incredible weeks want to talk about the British golf courses such as St Andrews, Carnoustie and Wentworth, and those who hadn't visited the UK had this burning ambition to do so, particularly Jim the pro. He had certainly read up on our history of golf so that after I finished my golf round he would leave the shop to come and sup a beer or two and talk golf."

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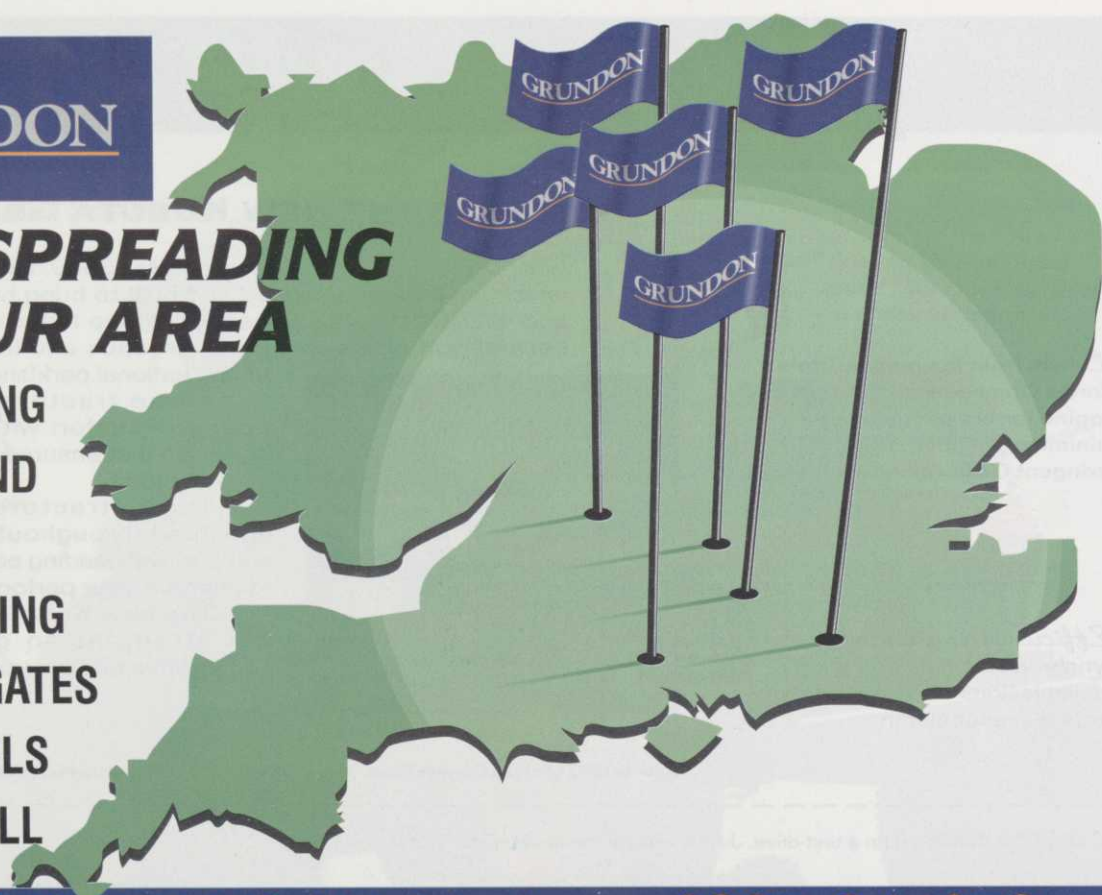
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