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Replacing divots on tees: British views are sought by American eager to learn

This letter is to enquire about the opinion of the British and International Golf Greenkeepers Association on the subject of replacing divots on tees covered by cool-season grass (normally, I suppose, either creeping bent, Kentucky bluegrass or perennial ryegrass). The subject seems to be one of increasing disagreement. Some will argue that golfers should replace divots on tees to relieve the workload for the greenkeeper. Personally I have always understood that one should not replace divots on tees, since this only leads to loose and inconsistent turf texture, slow play and unsatisfactory recovery results due to the frequent scattering of divots.

In my experience, I have found two general approaches to maintenance of tees: One is the placement of soil-seed mixture in divot marks, carried out in accordance to, and immediately following the changing of the tee-markers (on a daily to weekly basis, depending on the ambitions and budget of the club). The other is hand plugging with fresh sod from the greenkeepers' turf nursery (if he has one), also carried out after the tee markers have been shifted. However, the art and science of greenkeeping is a dynamic affair, and there may well be a new order of the day, so to speak. As a non-greenkeeper, I can therefore only hope to be aware and appreciative of the new and improved techniques. I shall be looking forward to hearing from you.

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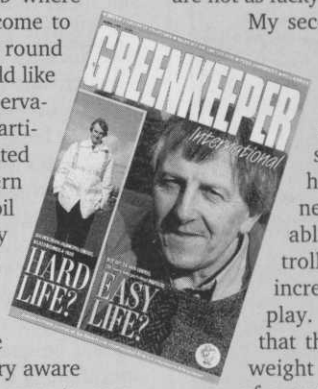
Comparisons make me think again about temporary greens and trolleys

I would like to congratulate you on the article comparing Middlesbrough Municipal Golf Centre with its 80,000 rounds of golf a year and Royal Worlington Golf Club, with its 350 (some very part time) members. It was extremely interesting to read how the two Head Greenkeepers manage their courses with their different soil conditions and play conditions.

However, as a greenkeeper at a private club where members have come to expect all year round golf, I feel I would like to raise two observations from the article. We are situated on the Chiltern Uplands on a soil classed as Pebbly Clay. Although free draining during periods of excessive rainfall, I am very aware that the soil is open to compaction.



I have been lucky enough to have played Royal Worlington and have to agree that it is an outstanding test of golf, with free draining firm and very true putting surfaces.

However, I feel the comment, "There should not be temporary greens anywhere in this country because the weather is not that bad. If you look after the greens in the summer, you will not need temporary greens in the winter", is slightly unfair to greenkeepers in this country who need to use temporary greens. In the article it states that Royal Worlington is built on a superb parcel of land with a sandy loam soil. For this reason and the fact that Royal Worlington only has 350 members (many of whom only play once or twice a year), I can understand why Mr Gee does not need to use temporary greens. However, some of us are not as lucky as he.

My second point concerns trolley restrictions during winter months. On some courses it has become a necessity to be able to restrict trolleys because of increased winter play. I totally agree that there is as much weight on the bottom of a trolley as there is on the bottom of a pair of feet. However golfers with trolleys will navigate a very similar path, leading to worn turf surfaces and compacted soils.

We all realise from first hand experience that golf is now more popular than ever before, and courses are expected to be presented to higher and higher standards. Only with the use of temporary holes and trolley restrictions can some courses achieve this.

G Bruce, Head Greenkeeper, Berkhamsted Golf Club

'Illogical' ideas need clarification

Apropos the article on the link between phosphatic fertilisers and annual meadow grass invasion of bent/fescue turf, it does seem to me that the illogicality of Mr Laycock's views and deductions need to be challenged.

The basis of greenkeeping over the past century or longer, that phosphatic fertilisers (as opposed to phosphates in non-fertiliser form) encourage annual meadow grass invasion, is questioned. Yet this was the basis of the acid theory of the twenties (on which STRI was formed as the Board of Greenkeeping Research then) and long before that old greenkeepers were noting the adverse effect of agricultural fertilisers, including basis slag, applied to feed the sheep on the course. Their stand-by was soot, a purely nitrogenous 'fertiliser'. Certainly immediately after the war, my colleagues and I at St Ives Research Station were advising as standard practice ammonia, blood, hoof and horn and iron – and that was only echoing what was standard practice, on links courses anyway, before the war. Are we to dismiss the proven soundness of advice and practice over a century, merely to further the gimmick of frequently repeated chemical soil analyses, which at best merely confirm what an experienced eye, be it of greenkeeper or agronomist, knows anyway?

I would be the first to admit that many trials could be faulted for sloppy techniques or on technical foundations. STRI trials and others were not with conventional root zones but with sand-only and it is fully accepted that such sterile root zones need not only NPK but lime and even trace elements, but these are quite atypical. Nevertheless there are trials (and I have read them in detail) where the link is proven, but even if this were not true, then hundreds of experienced head men and advisers have first hand experience of the invasion of annual meadow grass into fine bent or fescue turf as a result of one incautious dose of complete fertiliser.

We are told that most soils contain too much phosphate even in agricultural work. Precisely! So why apply more, wasting money and producing negative results. There are many excellent examples of bent/fescue greens with soil analyses showing 3 ppm of phosphates and hundreds of very bad overfed annual meadow grass greens with levels of around 1,000 ppm, as proven by surveys reported by STRI (reference Hayes, Arthur: 'Greenkeeper' July 1986). ➡