



Flying the flag for

CARNOUSTIE

After 20 years, a sleeping giant is awakening to challenge the world's leading players.

Carnoustie – generally regarded as the most difficult and certainly the longest links of all the Championship courses – has been restored to championship status in more ways than one. And its sister courses, Burnside and Buddon Links, have also been updated over the past ten years, since John Philp took over as links superintendent.

The first formal layout of 10 holes at Carnoustie has been accredited to Alan Robertson of St Andrews, the first professional golfer, in the late 1840s although records of golf being played on the Barry Links go back as far as 1527.

Over 120 years ago, renovation work at Carnoustie meant carving holes in frozen turf with a mallet and chisel. John Philp, links superintendent, today uses a more subtle approach as Arne van Amerongen discovers

The first 18-hole course was laid out by old Tom Morris who developed Robertson's 10 holes. This new course opened for play in 1872, the holes being cut out of the frozen turf using a mallet and chisel by apprentice Geordie Lowe, later to become instrumental in the formation of Hoylake and Lytham St Annes to name but two of the many well known layouts he subsequently became involved in. Five years earlier

young Tom Morris won his first important event against all the best players of the day in three rounds over the 10-hole course following a play-off.

Bob Simpson, one of three famous golfing brothers, came to Carnoustie in 1883 and as curator of the links instigated many alterations and improvements to the course. Further changes took place as well as the development of a second course, the Burnside,

until the mid-1920s when James Braid was called in to review the course. Braid introduced several new greens and tees as well as numerous prominent bunkers and with the construction of a new 13th hole in 1930 his changes formed the course that exists today. Such was the impression created later that year during the Scottish Amateur Championship that the R&A promptly announced that Carnoustie would be the venue for The Open the following year.

Alterations have been carried out in recent times and are still under way but all with a view to maintaining the character of the course and, according to Philp, "any revisions deemed necessary are no more than Braid would

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most likely be endorsing if he were alive today."

Philp was appointed links superintendent in 1985 as part of the move to restore the course to Championship condition. He began his career at Pitreavie Golf Club in 1964 and gained promotion to head greenkeeper there in 1970. Following five years as head man at The Links Golf Club, Newmarket, from 1974-79 he was appointed to the new position of deputy links supervisor at St Andrews where he worked under Walter Woods for six years gaining experience in preparing The Old Course for the Open Championship in 1984 in addition to various national and international amateur events. Philp is quick to point out the invaluable experience he gained in many aspects of golf course management during his years at St Andrews and he is indebted to Walter Woods and agronomist Jim Arthur for what he considers the completion of his training. As he puts it: "No matter what variety of golf courses you may have worked on, your education is not complete until you have experienced the links and thereby become involved first hand with the origins and true values of the game of golf."

Over the last ten years he and his greenkeeping staff of 20 for the three courses have improved the condition of the links. The reward for their efforts is that the Open is to return to Carnoustie in 1999 and, as an added bonus, the links will host the Scottish Open this year and next.

One of the factors affecting play is the wind, as you'd expect with a links course, but at Carnoustie the effect is enhanced as no more than two consecutive holes run in the same direction and that happens only once. The course indeed becomes progressively harder and each hole has an individual character with its own variety of shot-making requirements. The finishing holes are particularly difficult with the Barry Burn, described by Darwin as "that ubiquitous circum-bendibus", playing an important role in the last two. Par for the last four reads 4, 3, 4, 5 with championship yardage of 461, 250, 457 and 516 respectively.

The potential championship length is over 7,350 yards.

Golfing standards have changed over the years with major improvements to equipment and technique and there are many more top-class professional players around the world who are better prepared both mentally and physically than the best players from past eras. With this in mind, the policy at Carnoustie is to ensure that the reputation of the course is maintained. Indeed it is the ambition of everyone concerned that Carnoustie will set the standard for links golf as we enter the next millennium.

To add to the character of the course and maintain the challenge to the modern experts, improvements are being made to bunkering, especially greenside, in conjunction with a general narrowing of green entrances. Further green reconstruction and recontouring is scheduled to follow the five already completed, placing an emphasis on skilful chipping and putting. "Green and surround contouring is a critical aspect in reconstruction work as this is considered to be an area where developing the challenge to the top players can be most effective," says Philp.

Turf from Carnoustie's own 15 acres of turf nursery, which includes a 5,000 sq yd greens nursery, has been used in all construction projects. Philp reckons it is well worth the time, cost and effort to produce his own sand-grown turf of chosen varieties without which a good deal of the restoration and development work accomplished on the links would have been impossible. He says he is looking forward to the establishment of two new areas of turf nursery, one sown with a mixture including the new crested hairgrass variety Barkoel from Barenbrug, the other with a special mixture formulated for the purpose of producing an aggressive bunker revetting turf.

Bunkers are constructed in typical links fashion using "half" turves in strips 6in wide by 2ft long. Bunker wall bases are formed using "full" turves set about 15ins below anticipated finished sand levels. Turf is cut thick and layers are set back a little over an inch per row to pro-

Realising the full potential of the three courses is the aim and since 1986 Philp and his staff have been gradually winning back the fine fescue and bent grasses



Previous page: John Philp at the 10th green.

Above: a close-up of the 'spectacles' at the 14th hole

Right: revetting greenside bunkers at the 9th green



duce a revetted angle of approximately 30 to the vertical. Care is taken to blend the construction into surrounding contours. The finished article has a top and sides which run slightly to the wall, producing a more natural appearance. Much work has been done to bunker 'lead-in' areas to improve the gathering effect and at the same time enhance the look and character of the hazards.

The 3rd and 6th greens have been reconstructed this winter along with three new Championship tees for the 5th, 7th and 18th holes. Five new bunkers have also been introduced: one at the 1st green, one on the 4th hole and three on the 5th.

Two large spectator mounds have recently been completed which add to the aesthetics of the course with a few more scheduled in ensuing years.

Completion of all these and other aspects is scheduled for 1999 and form a large part of the course's third five-year development programme.

Since the announcements that have given just rewards to the successful team effort to restore

one of our great courses, there has been a buzz about the links reminiscent of past times. But still the work goes on...

From early summer this year fairway landing areas will be narrowed at appropriate distances and roughs will be encouraged to afford a suitable penalty for wayward shots. Some 700 tonnes of fresh bunker sand will be used to top up the 119 bunkers on the course, over 80 of which have been revetted over the winter. The routine maintenance programme will be under way and intensified as the weather dictates.

Philp believes that turf quality is more critical to the game of golf than in any other sport played on grass and following a close examination of sward composition throughout the links, especially greens, by far and away the most important surfaces on any course, along with soil conditions, a corrective programme was devised to encourage the fine perennial species indigenous to the links at the expense of annual meadowgrass which had been a major problem in the production of quality sur-

faces for many years.

Realising the full potential of the three courses is the aim and since 1986 Philp and his staff have been gradually winning back the fine fescue and bent grasses by way of well established greenkeeping principles, controlled nutrition, minimal watering, frequent topdressing with consistent good quality materials including seaweed products to encourage root development and drought tolerance, combined with "the single most important aspect of modern greenkeeping" – an intense and varied aeration programme. "Aerobic conditions have to be maintained, and a free-draining uncomplicated medium is essential for the development of the finer species," says Philp.

Additional verti-draining on traffic routes and weak areas as well as main playing surfaces together with regular slitting have been Philp's weapons in the battle to beat *Poa*. A variety of tines are used – from 5-40cm. Shallow in the summer, deeper in the autumn and winter. The larger tines help to alleviate compaction in the main problem area

– down below 4ins, where previous aeration work stopped. The shorter tines are used for root pruning, assisting the incorporation of topdressings and generally keeping the immediate rootzone open for entry of air and water. Hollow-tining is not normal practice on greens save for overseeding purposes where deemed necessary and is carried out when annual meadow grass is very much in recession, September being the typical month. Hollow-tining has however proved most useful as part of the fairway improvement work.

Little and often is the philosophy behind the topdressing programme. The fairways are topdressed with a 90:10 sand-fensoi mixture. Greens receive an 80:20 mix but using fendress purchased at 60:40 and let down with a similar quantity of beach sand. During the summer, greens are topdressed every three weeks, golfing calendar and weather permitting.

"Maintaining some acidity at the leaf surface has proved useful in stressing annual meadow grass in a mixed sward situation," according to 47-year-old Philp.

Together with the other main effects of the programme, ie promotion of a dry surface, minimal nitrogen nutrition, regular light topdressings and verti-cutting allied to slitting, meadowgrass plants become chlorotic and much smaller physically giving a very much "tightened down" appearance to the sward. This all lends a competitive edge for ground cover to the more desirable species in the resulting thinner sward.

A common spray applied to fairways contains liquid seaweed extract, liquid iron and wetting agent. Occasionally some liquid organic manure is included for certain fairways. Greens generally receive a dressing of ammonia and iron in the 'false spring' period with sandy topdressings taking over from April through to September. Tees are dressed with SSD (8-0-0) in the spring followed by occasional topdressings and liquid sprays.

The roughs have received more nutrition than anywhere else on the links in recent years by way of a mild organic pelleted



manure. Bunker faces are sprayed usually with a liquid organic fertiliser and wetting agent. All new constructions and repair work receive appropriate nutrition during the critical establishment period along with extra topdressings.

Very little fungicide is used on the links and any local outbreaks of fusarium patch are controlled using dry iron sulphate bulked up with sandy compost.

The irrigation system is used to keep the fine grasses alive and any additional requirements are applied by hand to local dry areas or by setting sprinklers to aid establishment of new turfing work when required.

Ryegrass patches on greens, a legacy from many years ago, are conspicuous among fine species and are removed by taking circular plugs. Philp finds these blend in better on smaller areas.

The maintenance programme

then is fine-tuned with "blanket" treatments seldom used. Surfaces are treated according to individual need and the situation is monitored on a day-by-day basis. This means some greens are topdressed more frequently, some are oversown, some are not. Some get additional iron dressings, seaweed treatment or wetting agent but mowing regimes are never severe.

"The experience of seeing the recovery of native fine grasses at

Carnoustie and the long-term benefit for the heritage of the game and the future generations of golfers has been very satisfying," adds Philp. He is well aware, however, of the challenges that lie ahead and in particular the staging of the last Open of this century.

Only five Opens have been played over the massive links since 1931 but the names of the past winners speak volumes for the challenge the course has set:

1931 - Tommy Armour, the Silver Scot; 1937 - Henry Cotton, The Maestro; 1953 - the legendary Ben Hogan in his one and only appearance in the event; 1968 - Gary Player, the Man in Black; and, most recently, 1975 - Tom Watson winning his first 'major'.

The man who adds his name to that list by holding aloft the old Claret Jug in 1999 will truly deserve his place in one of golf's most elite clubs.

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