

Trevor's greatest challenge

Trevor Smith seemed to have everything... then he decided to go back to golf, as Cedric John reports

Three years ago, Trevor Smith, Yorkshireman and former greenkeeper, was contentedly managing Woodlands Manor Farm estate set in rolling Dorset countryside.

Standing close to the historic market town of Wimborne Minster, a comfortable morning's hack from Casterbridge, scene of Hardy's 'Madding Crowd' rural classic, the estate – and Trevor's lifestyle – might reasonably be described as idyllic, compared that is, to the never-ending demands of golf.

Bound-up in the world of sporting guns, clay-pigeon, duck and pheasant shooting plus a spot of gamekeeping thrown in for good measure, many would go further and say that Trevor was indeed a man to be envied.

So why change it? Maybe golf gets into the blood or perhaps, once the personal challenge of managing manicured wide open spaces of fine turf against the vagaries of nature has been tested – and bested – the urge, as in Trevor's case, to do it all over again is never too far away.

When he was approached and offered the chance to help create a brand new pay-and-play course, at nearby Canford Magna, Trevor Smith didn't hesitate. "Having gained some experience of building greens and tees on my previous courses, I was keen to prove that I could achieve bigger things," he said.

In reality, Trevor's new role held a dual purpose. Having com-

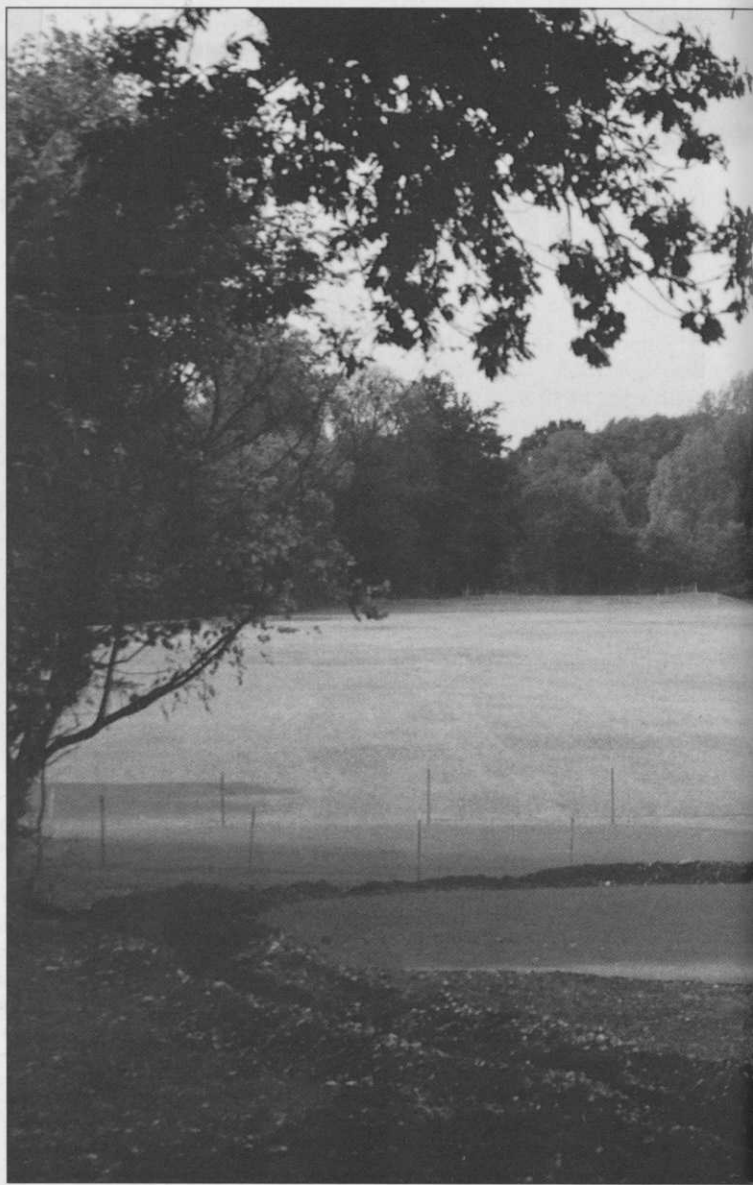
pleted the construction and brought both courses into play, he would then manage the results of his – and his team's – labours.

That, by any standard, must be the ultimate achievement for any progressive greenkeeper. From the developer's point of view, such continuity makes common sense. That's just how the owners of the Canford Magna club, quarryman Bill Riddle, and his partner, Richard Harding, a farmer, viewed the proposed development. As time has shown, their judgement was sound. They now have a golf course, two in fact, which they can justifiably boast about... but that is to anticipate events.

Machinery

Toro 217 rotary greens mower
John Deere 32/38 fairway mower
Toro GM 3000 greens mower (2)
Ransomes Super Certes (4)
Allen National (2)
Jacobsen 7-unit hydraulic gang mower
Jacobsen TriKing tees mower
Kubota 360 mini-digger
Cushman (2) plus attachments
Tractors (2)

Irrigation: ISS/Toro green, tees and approaches fully automatic system operated by computerised controller linked to weather station.



Trevor Smith's association with Canford Magna, then an undulating mixture of arable land and pasture, began in January 1993.

Armed with a detailed blueprint, drawn-up by golf course architect Howard Swan, one of Trevor's first tasks was that of forming a team to tackle the construction.

This was made easier by the fact that both Bill Riddle and Richard Harding put their own men and considerable machinery at Trevor's disposal, when needed.

More importantly for Trevor was the fact that Tim Sherman joined him to supervise day-to-day construction, while Matthew Maryon was appointed deputy course manager. Apart from peat, brought in to help establish root zones on the sand based greens, little else was purchased off-site.

"We recycled soil and gravel to suit our needs. We did the same with many of the young trees growing where fairways were to be laid."

Hundreds of mature trees, some of the sturdy oaks no doubt stretching back to Hardy's days of

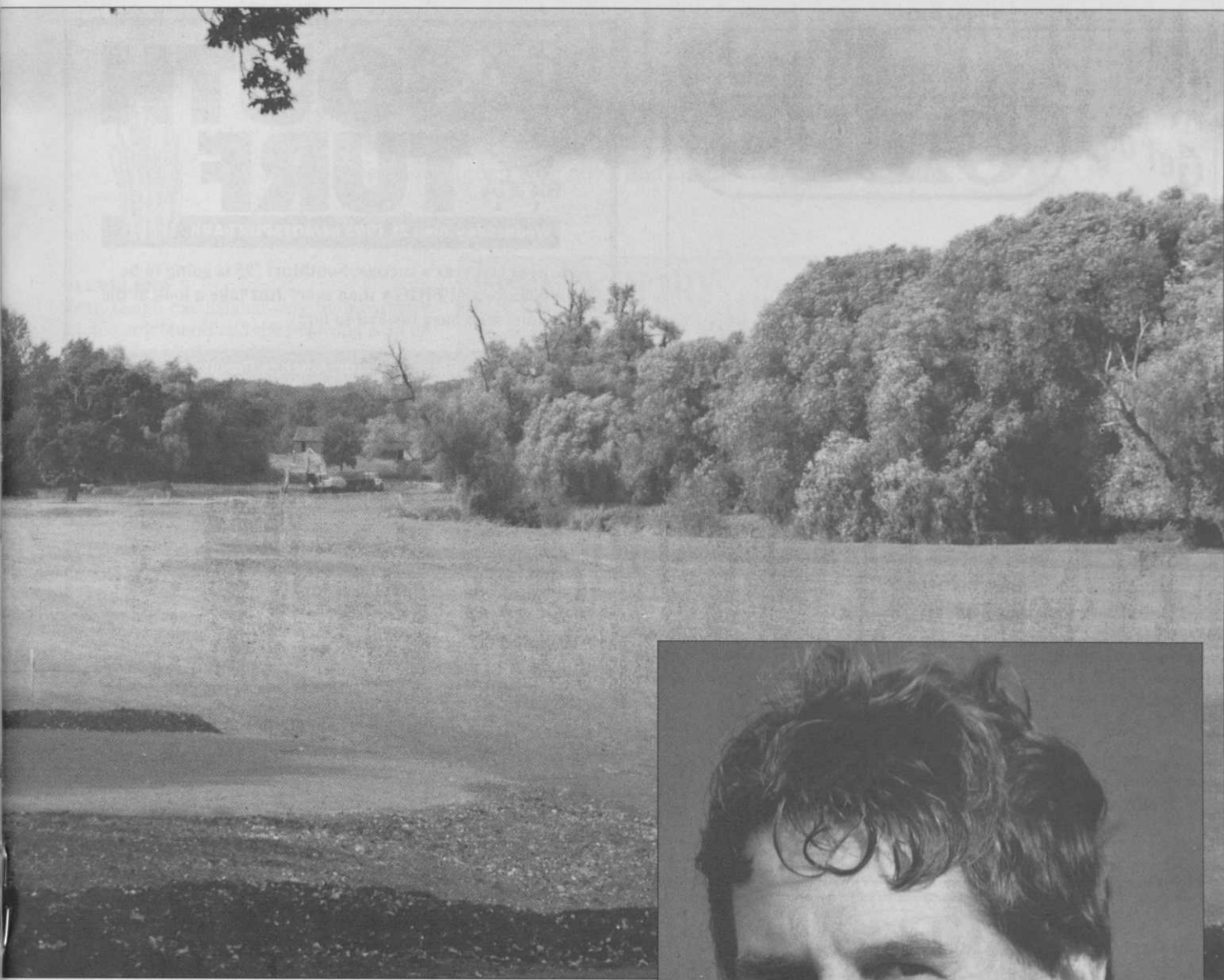
riding the Dorset countryside, were woven into Howard Swan's design.

A nice touch that. When I first saw the emerging courses, in the late summer of last year, the trees gave the new fairways a comfortable, lived-in look, even though it will be many more months before the final 18-holes have matured and been groomed to play.

Parallel to the ongoing work on the Parklands Course, plans were set into motion to install automatic watering essential to germination and subsequent establishment. The system, serving greens and tees, was designed and installed by ISS, the Salisbury-based Toro irrigation specialists. Richard Parsons, who charted the system's design, also kept an eye on installation work which, by the very nature of construction, had to be progressed on a hole-by-hole basis.

"That makes for a very long drawn-out process," chipped in ISS boss, Gary Parker, "But the whole picture changed completely when we moved onto the Lower course."

Set in the lower reaches of the



Stour Valley, hard by the River Stour which flows down to the sea at Christchurch, the Lower or River Course offered Trevor Smith another challenge. The second 18 holes was to be built on a flood-plain!

Or rather, it has. When I visited Canford Magna last September, the River Course had been built, shaped and seeded.

"I wanted to get seed in quickly because parts of the course would, in all probability, flood if winter rains filled the river.

"Once the seed was down, I hoped it would root well enough to cope with this particular problem."

Irrigation was the key to the operation. Working closely with Trevor Smith, on a daily basis at times, the ISS installation team took just four weeks to cover all 18 greens and tees.

"Four weeks? Perhaps it was a couple of days longer," commented Gary Parker, with a wry smile.

"Given good ground conditions, I would normally expect to take six weeks for this type of installation – but Trevor was in a hurry!"

In the event, the recent winter – the second wettest recorded this century – did push the river over its banks, on four occasions.

But Trevor is philosophical. "The greens are fine and, in fact, about 70% of the newly seeded course had survived intact by early March."

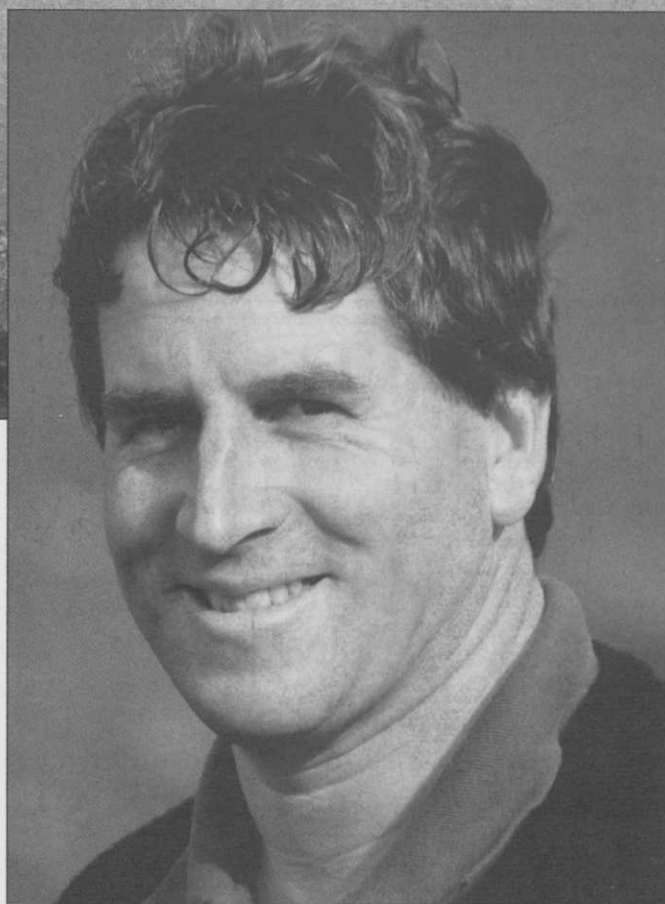
Yet the Parklands Course stood up to its first winter in fine style. Nine holes were in constant demand by visiting golfers whose own courses were waterlogged.

"These who wanted to play 18 holes were given the option of using the back nine – we advised them that some sections were less than perfect but overall, we detected a very favourable reaction," said Canford's director of golf, Keith Hockey.

"There were some iffy patches," said Trevor, "but we officially opened the back nine a few weeks ago."

Establishment of the Higher Course has been so successful in fact, that Keith Hockey had arranged a medal competition for April, 10 months after seeding.

Talking enthusiastically about the Parklands Course, Trevor told



Top: part of the flood plain – now the River course – photographed a month after seeding. Above: Trevor Smith, constructor turned course manager

me that the natural, gravel-based undersoil has proved to be a tremendous benefit in terms of drainage.

But it's the greens that have captured Trevor's imagination. "Constructed to full USGA specification, the putting surfaces have shrugged off the wet in brilliant fashion.

"Mind you, they required constant attention – and feeding – to get the best out of them," he said.

Contrary to traditional methods and starvation regimes, Trevor reckons that the reverse is the case. "I've discarded lots of my old habits and thoughts regarding maintenance of the greens. There's no other way!

"Sown with a 70% fescue and 30% bent mix, the greens really have come good – thanks to Rigby Taylor's Brian Robinson. Brian's experience has helped me tremendously."