

FILM STAR



As a photographer Brian Morgan can be spoken of in the same breath as Bailey and Lichfield. When it comes to golf course photography he's the top man.

It's not often you get the opportunity to sit down for an hour with someone who is regarded, almost without fear of contradiction, as the best in his field. When that person is involved in your own industry and is prepared to talk openly and enthusiastically about it it makes the experience all the more valuable.

Brian Morgan is the best golf course photographer in the world. Don't just take my word for it. He has been the official photographer for all four Major Championships taking the pictures for the souvenir programmes; is the man Jack Nicklaus – another whose claims for world best wouldn't meet too many detractors – employs to photograph all his golf courses; had courses closed for a week because he is coming to photograph them and had signs up saying "Brian Morgan coming. No Carts on the fairways" while his services are in demand every-

where that golf is played.

He has shot over 800 different courses in 43 countries over the last 20 years and has concentrated on golf courses alone for the past 10 years.

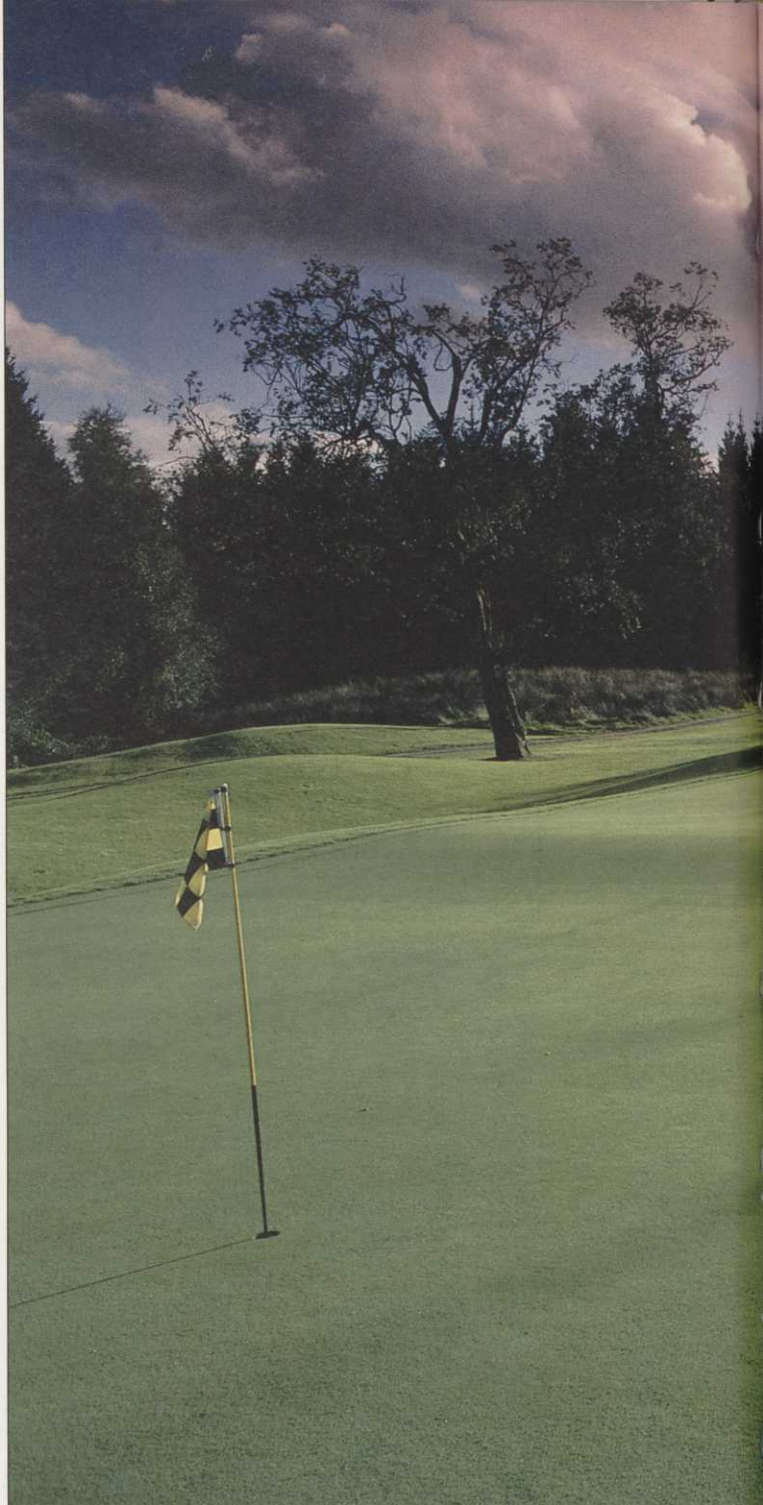
He has therefore seen his share of greenkeeping set ups and prides himself of having a good relationship with the greenkeeping staff he meets up with – they're often the only other people on the course when he's working.

"I can now go on to a golf course anywhere in the world and within five or ten minutes guess at the standard the course is generally kept at. If I go into the sheds I can tell right away at what standard the course is maintained," explained Brian from his library in the heart of his native Glasgow overlooking the Clyde.

"The sheds which are the tidiest, the best kept, and where the machinery is kept clean usually turn out to be the same on the golf course."

He is extremely forthright when highlighting the problems at many golf courses in the United Kingdom.

"To be perfectly honest I haven't seen much improvement



Loch Lomond: A site golf architects would kill for

in the condition of golf courses in Britain over the last 20 years. That's because the budgets greenkeepers been given to work with haven't gone up sufficiently in that time.

"We should really be looking at more realistic fees. The subscriptions at a typical British golf club haven't moved over than 2 or 3% a year over the last 10 years but the cost of labour and specialised equipment have gone up a lot more. There is some superb new equipment on the market but it is expensive and clubs can't afford it because their fees are so low," explained Brian.

"The problem is that they still have the yearly subscription system so someone is hit by a bill for

£400 in February instead of having a monthly standing order. People don't notice their electricity bill going up by 14% because they pay monthly but they notice if their golf fees go up by £20."

Brian also identifies another area of waste he sees at many British clubs.

"Clubs haven't looked at the changes there have been in the last 20 years. Twenty years ago most people came to the course by bus or four in a car and had their golf clubs at the club. Now most golfers have their clubs in the back of the car because they don't just play one golf course or they take their clubs home to clean them because they are now so valuable. They don't need a



locker. What they need is a club storage area – a secure room where clubs can be locked in cages. Changing rooms could be built for half the price without lockers and the rest of the money spent on the golf course.”

Another area which Brian has identified as causing problems is in the over playing of the course.

“Clubs haven’t looked at the problems of extra traffic yet – a lot of courses don’t even operate a tee time system yet so you get the course crowded with a whole bunch of people in a short space of time pushing each other round then space behind them. Spacing helps the greenkeeper so he can work out what he is going to do and when. It is so simple.”



Brian’s philosophy is to combine the best of the new advances in the industry but at the same time retain or rediscover the original feelings of the golf course.

“Golf courses, in my opinion,

should be looking at a 10 to 20 year plan. They should be looking at the new technology grasses, replacing all their greens with USGA spec at £10,000 at time and changing all their bunker

All aboard: The new St Andrews, Japan

sand so that it is more consistent.

“Also, they should look at the original design of the course and try to get back to the same feeling it had then. Too many courses have been interfered with by amateurs over the years and as a result the shape of bunkers has changed and others filled in. Clubs need to get hold of old photographs of how the course used to look like and try to get the new things to match it,” said Brian, whose 50th birthday this month has signalled an end to his tournament work and the sad retirement from public life of the famous Morgan tartan kilt he always wore on the final day of Majors.

He is a huge fan of British greenkeepers and those in Scotland, in



Above: Augusta National. Below: Casa de Campo

particular, because they have to cope with the weather but, across the board, feels the standards in America are a lot higher.

"Greens superintendent is a big job in America and you can earn up to \$100,000 a year. I know of a public course in Arizona where it is \$150 a round and it makes \$2 million a year profit. With that sort of situation you get a lot of very well kept courses."

To many of us who are relatively competent with our point and shoot automatic cameras a job where you travel the world photographing golf courses seems idyllic and not particularly taxing but when you're the best the best results are required and expect and Brian's dedication has is what has helped him to the peak of the profession.

"I've been stuck in Japan for eight days just waiting for the conditions to be right to take pictures and between 4am and 6am is often the best time for a picture – just when the sun is coming up.

"I always know if I've got a good picture and when I do I'll often take two rolls of film just changing the angles, the lenses and the style of picture – upright or across. I'm always thinking about how the picture might be used and if a picture is the wrong shape it can't be used."

■ Look forward to seeing more Brian Morgan photography in *Greenkeeper International* in the coming months.

Brian's best...

Favourite Course

Augusta National. I photograph the course the week before the Masters every year and I've been fortunate enough to play it with a member for the last six years. It's a golfer's dream.

Most Impressive New Development

Loch Lomond. It's a site golf architects would kill for.

Most Photogenic Course

Casa de Campo in the Dominican Republic. It's virtually in the ocean with a lot of holes right on the surface of the water.

Most Unusual Feature

Elevators to take you from green to tee on Japanese courses which have to be tiered on the sides of hills because of lack of space.

Attitudes to Golf

In Japan they practice a lot and perhaps play only every two months. It can take up to two-three hours to get to the course by train and they have a club delivery service where you leave your clubs a local shop and collect them at the golf club.

