

# Where golf courses h

## Master Golf Head Greenkeeper – Jukka Silventoinen.

One of the most popular courses in Finland with 43 thousand rounds a year. Currently 27 holes with another course under construction. "These are not USGA spec. They are my own greens," said Jukka, proudly.

He has a staff of five including himself for the existing course with another 15 working on the construction of the new course. They dig their own gravel and make their own root zone on site.

They have wall to wall Rain-bird irrigation and under soil heating on all greens which is considered ideal for bringing seeds along in the spring.

The practice course also doubles as a testing station for new



Novel way of dealing with rakes at

### Master Golf

types of grass – up to four on one green.

"We started with 14 different types and are now down to seven. Poa Supina is very aggressive and is very strong against disease but it requires mowing three times a day."



Jukka Silventoinen with his Master Golf complex

## Helsinki GC Head Greenkeeper – Petteri Lehmuskoski

The oldest golf course in Finland having been formed in 1932.

It is a beautiful parkland course with many Salix trees which are native to Finland. Ideal tree for golf because they catch the ball and once the bottom few branches have been pruned there is enough room to allow a player to play from beneath them.

The course averages 30,000 rounds a year, there are 1,200 members 850 of them are active and the average age of the member is 52. There are 900 on the waiting list.

The FGA has excellent relations with the Finnish Golf Union and the two have worked closely



Finnish Golf Union Secretary Osmo

### Saaicinen with Helsinki GC Head

### Greenkeeper Petteri Lehmuskoski

on research work which is benefiting golf all over Scandinavia. A report on the research work will appear next month.



## Golf Talma

### Head Greenkeeper – Pekka Nieminen

One of the country's newest and most lavish golf developments, with a par 3 course as well as the magnificent 18 hole layout. Six years old, costing £9 million with some spectacular holes and stunning views. Attractive bridges span the stream which winds its way over the course.

The club has 400 members and there is a greenkeeping staff of 11.

Magnificent Greenkeeping facilities with yard full of Toro equipment.

"Winter is the chance to empty the brain and fill the

belly. In the summer work is extremely hard with long days," explained Pekka, who was previously the Head Greenkeeper at Helsinki GC.



Pekka Nieminen at Golf Talma

## The attractive equipment store at Helsinki



# ve a superior Finnish

**Finland may not be widely known for its golf but in the limited playing season the quality of both the courses and the course maintenance is second to none. Report and pictures by Scott MacCallum**

**T**hink of Finland and the brain immediately heads for its files marked "S" and "Ski jumping", "Saunas" and "Snow", while also taking in the "Ms" and the "Js" for "Middle Distance Running" and "Javelin Throwing".

For those who have not had the pleasure of visiting the country it's likely that the "G...s" and "Golf" would not be given a moment's thought.

However, despite the complications of being so far north and with a long non-playing season, golf is very much a growth sport in Finland and the quality of the golf courses and people who maintain them are second to none.

There are 83 golf courses in the country with many more under construction and the Finnish Greenkeepers Association, in harness with the Finnish Golf Union and the Government, are ensuring that each step in the development of the courses and game in general is taken in the knowledge that everyone is pulling in the same direction.

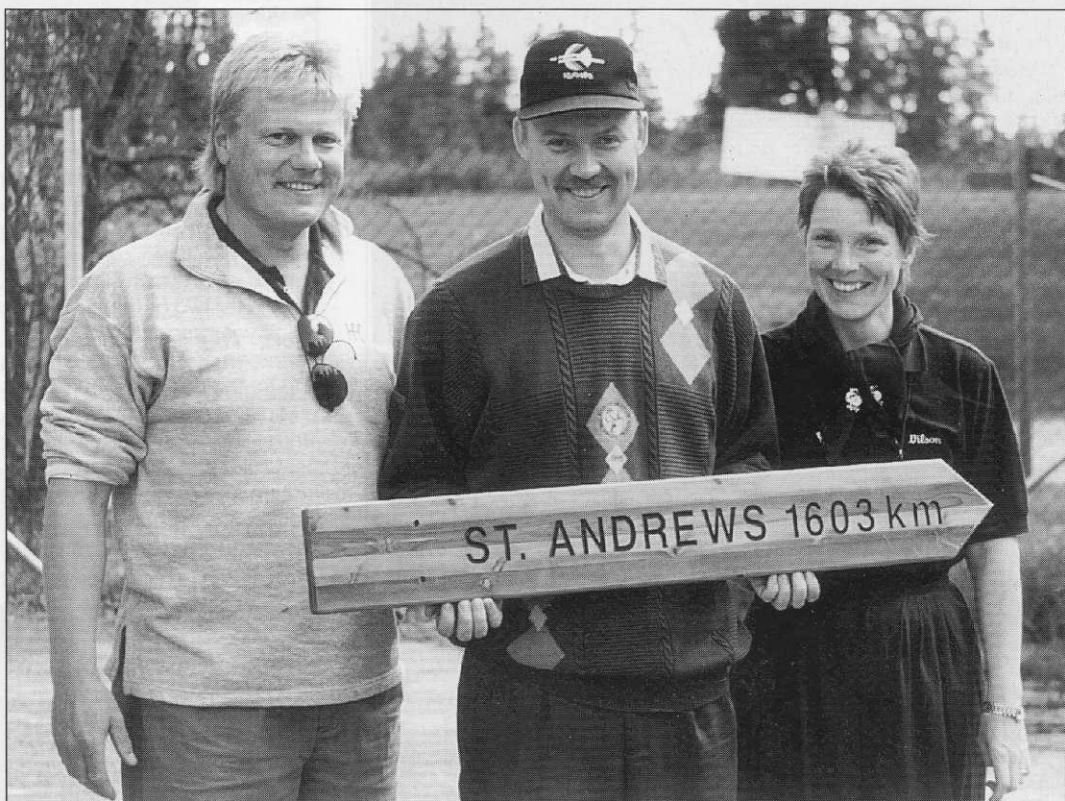
The FGA is filled with committed, enthusiastic and talented individuals who work closely together – in a country of five million population there are over one million mobile phones and having spent five days in the country I am convinced that the highest proportion of calls is made by Finnish greenkeepers to each other.

"There is a network of greenkeepers in Finland and you can always ask a second opinion of another greenkeeper. We don't have consultant agronomists," explained Jukka Silventoinen, Head Greenkeeper at Master Golf, about 15 miles from Helsinki.

While Kristina Laukkanen, Head Greenkeeper at Vierumaki, says "Greenkeeping in Finland is not a profession. It's a disease."

So what are the main golf course maintenance problems in Finland?

Well on many of them they can be covered by up to a metre of snow for as much as five months



**Ilkka Kaivosoja, Pekka Neiminen and Elise Jarvinen prove they're not that far from the home of golf**

of the year. Then in the summer months, because there is so much daylight the grass can grow at up to three times the speed of the UK.

They make up for it in the summer months working long and hard and without holidays which are used up in the winter.

Course maintenance work breaks down into three distinct periods. The spring is when the course is reactivated after the winter shut down, the summer is the playing season when grass cutting takes up much of the time while the autumn is when the "winter programme" work is car-

ried out before the snow returns.

Finland is a country where the visitor can end up doing some strange things.

When anywhere else you would be tucked up in bed dreaming of that next great drive or monster putt in Finland you can be out there doing it – with the midnight sun enabling reduced green fees from 8pm to 7am.

Where else would you strip naked before total strangers, sit in a filthy, smoke filled room whip yourself with birch leave, then fling yourself bodily into seas and lakes where the temperature is far better suited to white wine?

Where else would you eat things that you would ordinarily run away from – wild boar, moose. You even eat reindeer! – without turning a hair?

In Finland all these happen with an air of ordinariness which sucks in visitors and leaves them wondering why they are not common practice at home as well.

During the trip we visited eight golf courses each excellent in its own right and each with a Head Greenkeeper committed to ensuring the highest possible standards. The Equipment Stores were well stocked with the latest equipment with all the major manufacturing companies represented and several pieces of equipment specially devised for working in such extreme conditions.

Space prevents us looking in depth at each of the courses but a "snapshot" from all eight should give a flavour of golf and greenkeeping in Finland.

Next month we will examine the research work carried out by the Finnish greenkeepers and the Finnish Golf Union and take a look at the state of the art Mechanic's workshop in Katinkulta.



**A Finnish sauna backs on to the sea**

# Where golf courses have a superior Finnish



An extra large bunker at Vierumaki Golf

## Vierumaki Golf Head Greenkeeper - Kristina Laukkanen

Part of Finland's biggest and oldest of the 11 sports institutes in the country which gives the country's elite athletes and sports men and women top quality coaching as well as offering sporting holidays to the general population.

Golf is one of the biggest growth sports within the Institute and the golf course which was opened in 1988 is shortly to be extended.

Kristina has a staff of 11 plus a mechanic. "My job is to decide what we don't do. There is just so much," said Kristina.

Like most other clubs in Finland the members offer their services for a weekend to help with course maintenance. "We get around 30-40 members and they rake bunkers, pick stones and fill in the holes left by the stones with sand. It is voluntary and the members do it because they want to see their course looking good. We close the course when it is being done," explained Kristina.

Girls cut the fairways because,



Kristina Laukkanen

says Kristina, golfers are more careful if they see a female on a mower.

"My ambition is to have Nick Faldo come and play my course... just once," she said.

The Director of the Institute is Tapani Ilkka, who was also President of the Finnish Olympic team at Atlanta.

"In 1985 there were just 11 golf courses in Finland and 10,000 players. Now there are 83 courses and 45,000 players," explained Tapani.

"Initially people were saying that golf was not really a sport but now those same people are playing every day. Older people need something to do and they now play golf and swim in the summer and cross country ski in the winter and for many golf is their number one sport and they play as many as 100 rounds during the summer season."

## Imatran Golf Head Greenkeeper - Veijo Kettunen Course Manager - Jorma Pakkänen

Close to the Russian border - you can actually see Russia from several of the holes on the east of Finland - with 12 Russian members.

Excellent conditioned course which has been remodelled recently because of a new road coming through the area. Also three years ago removed 3,000 trees but still need more taken away.

A total of 960 members with 17,500 rounds a year played.

Course has one of the best restaurants in the country.

"Snow is better than straw for insulating greens but I also

## Laukaan Peurunkagolf Head Greenkeeper - Veijo Hamalalainen. Course Manager (Equivalent of Director of Golf) - Jorma Paakkanen.

Course designed by Ronald Fream and 250 miles north of Helsinki.

A total of 12 holes where water comes into play. It is closed from October 31 to the middle of April. Experience one metre of snow in January, February and sometimes March. Can only play on greens for two or three months of the year and often put straw on the greens to insulate them and try to prevent ice burn.

Midsummer day shotgun starts at 8pm finishing at half past midnight and start again at 7am and normally have 242 players a day playing - three players every seven minutes for 11 hours.



Head Greenkeeper Veijo Hamalalainen, left and Course Manager Jorma Paakkanen

Normally start cutting greens at four or five in the morning and because of the long hours staff of five work a shift system. The annual greenkeeping budget is £120,000.

They have also developed an unusually ball collector for the practice range - as our picture (below) shows, a converted Saab!



sometimes put sheeting down if the weather is going to be really bad," explained Veijo.

He has developed his own ice crushing attachment for a tractor.

■ Pictured left, Veijo with the ice breaker; below, the 17th with Russia in the background.





The course - complete with ski jump on the horizon

**Katinkulta**

**Head Greenkeeper - Jarmo Saajanne**

Biggest holiday resort in all Scandinavia with time share apartments, ten pin bowling, badminton, indoor golf, badminton, squash, a gym, restaurants, beauty salon and the best sports shop in Finland!

An all season resort with skiing in the winter while Katinkulta is a major ski jump centre plus all the indoor activities.

Jarmo has a staff of seven, including himself, and he works repairing bicycles in the winter and so is employed full time while three others work on the ski slopes in the winter.

The course spends five months under one metre of snow. "It is good for the course and if we spray chemicals before the snow arrives we won't get diseases or ice burn," explained Jarmo.

He showed one green where they had been unable to spray because of a baby in a nearby apartment and it was the worst green on the course.

"We do get snow mould which destroys grass and three or four times in the winter I will dig a hole in the snow and take a look at the grass and check that there is no ice."

Played golf at 1am with more than enough light to make it a worthwhile game.



Head Greenkeeper Jarmo Saajanne

**Amer Golf**

**Head Greenkeeper - Elise Jarvinen**

Nine hole course which belongs to Amer Group Ltd, the parent company of Wilson Sporting Goods Ltd and for the personal use of Wilson Directors and their guests.

Magnificent, yet tough, course on the edge of the sea - there is a private sauna which sticks out into the sea giving participants the opportunity to cool down with a quick dip. 2,500 rounds a year.

Wildlife on the course and greens the equal of anything you would see anywhere.

Greenkeeping team of five including a mechanic and several students many of whom return year after year and this year including one studying to be an economist and another who is studying to be a geneticist.

Another course which has under soil heating but Elise doesn't feel it is particularly useful.



Head Greenkeeper Elise Jarvinen is also Chairman of the FGA

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