

An American dream

After being selected for the National Final of the Toro/PGA Student Greenkeeper of the Year, it was a great honour to be awarded the title of 1995/96.

Three months after my weekend at Aldwark Manor it has still not sunk in that I was actually going to America to study Turfgrass Management, visit Toro Machinery and Irrigation Headquarters and Manufacturing Plants along with the GCSAA Show in Orlando.

The nine week trip became reality when I stepped onto the aeroplane at Heathrow. When we arrived at Boston International Airport USA the weather had taken a turn for the worse. I had flown into what the US media called "The Blizzard of 96". My flight was the last flight allowed into Boston and I later found out that the airport was to be closed for three days. This meant that my flight to Bradley International airport was cancelled. I was told to book a room in "Downtown Boston" but decided to catch a bus, which were still running. I eventually caught three buses in total to Amherst where I ended up flagging down a Police car as there was no public transport running due to heavy snow falls. The Policeman very kindly gave me a ride to my destination. Stuck in the back of an American Police car behind a grill was not a great prospect on my first day in the USA but I was very grateful and now see the funny side of the experience.

After settling into my accommodation I found out that the University where I was to study for the next seven weeks, the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, "UMASS" for short was closed for the opening day for the first time in 13 years due to three feet of snow which had accumulated over two days.

On arrival at the University it became apparent that the seven weeks of studying was to be on a greater scale than I was used to. In some ways it was, but my education at Askham Bryan College was found to be invaluable later on. I found it gave me a great advantage especially in soil and weed plant management.

The course consisted of eleven subjects including Weed Management, Soil and Fertiliser Science, Turf Management, Entomology Diseases of Fine Turf, Physiology of Turfgrass, Golf Course Design and Construction, Calculations, Arboriculture, Organisational Management and Equipment Shop/Irrigation Class.

All the classes were lectures given by Professors and Lecturers very highly qualified in their subject.

The class consisted of 59 pupils. Contrary to what Euan Grant wrote in his report from last year, there were no ladies present on this year's

course. The majority of the students were employees of golf courses. Approximately half of the 59 students were employed as Superintendents or Assistant Superintendents and there were also a few Landscape Gardeners.

The studying was very in depth and some of it was probably too deep but I found it very interesting and beneficial.

We had seven exams and also had to prepare two large assignments along with

today some Greenstaff are not given the chance to work on complex machinery as certain staff on the greens team are selected to do certain jobs and stay with those jobs allocated to them.

Greenkeeping is becoming a greater attraction to school leavers and people who have career changes as it now offers a prosperous career path with a great deal of qualifications to offer to the career minded individual with ambition to move forward and onto greater things.

My visit to Minneapolis to Toro Machinery Headquarters was an experience that I will never forget and must give a great big thank you to the Toro Company for sponsoring the entire trip across the United States along with the great opportunity to increase my knowledge of Greenkeeping.

The tour of the Machinery Factories was very impressive along with the strict and intense testing of all parts made. Looking at the actual designs of new machinery on computer and all the modern technology that is used to design new products to be used on Golf Courses and many other types of recreational areas and grounds.

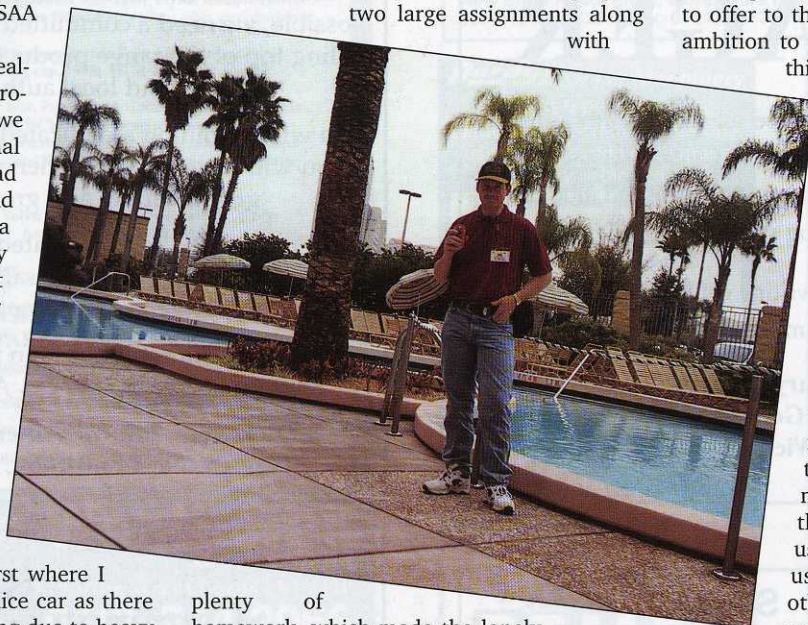
The visit to the Irrigation Headquarters in Riverside California was also very interesting looking at different types of irrigation heads and controllers, how they were designed and how they were put together by very complicated pieces of machinery.

In between the Toro visits and University, I also had a chance to visit the GCSAA in Orlando for two days. The conference centre where the Seminars and Show was held was very large and it took a great deal of time to walk around and look at the many different products on display.

The Gala meal on the Saturday night must have been attended by many Golf Course Superintendents from all over the USA and many different countries from all around the world. This was televised and put out on the GCSAA's own television show called PAR FOR THE COURSE.

On a final note I made a great deal of friends in the USA and hope to visit a few when a chance to return to the USA with my family is possible. The education was fantastic and has really shown me another side to Turfgrass Management and I hope I will benefit from this in the future.

Studying at UMASS was a great advantage and I would recommend it to anyone who has the chance to do so and take full advantage of the opportunity to extend their knowledge in Turfgrass Management along with the different way of life in the USA.



plenty of homework, which made the lonely weekends fly by... assisted by a few bottles of Budweiser at the local bar.

Some of the work needed a great deal of time spending on it which turned into many long hours of study, of which I am glad to say paid off in the long term.

I found that Soil Science, Entomology and Fine Turf Diseases were very in depth, having labs using microscopes to identify Hypher runners (Mycelium) on roots of turfgrass Sclerotia (spore pods) and different types of fungal diseases, different types of bugs and how to take soil samples etc.

The majority of the studies were very relevant to our climates as we were taught about cool season grass species with Massachusetts being in the North East of the USA, above the Transition Zone. The main grass cultivars were Pencross and Providence creeping bent.

Talking to fellow student I became aware of the great difference in Greenkeeping between the two countries. One student told me that on their 27 hole course, during the summer there are 50 staff.

With only a few being actually qualified the education system for Greenkeeping in America is very in depth in certain areas but does not offer actual practical training as does our S/NVQ system.

In my estimation this part of the British Education system is very important, as it actually gives the student hands on experience rather than just reading and writing about it. Still