

# Golden Oldie



**Tenby is the oldest golf club in Wales and it revels in being as energetic as any in the country as Scott MacCallum found out.**

**Q**uestion: What do Royal Blackheath, Royal Burgess and Tenby Golf Clubs have in common? Answer: They are widely regarded as the oldest clubs in respectively England, Scotland and Wales.

Of the three the odd one out is Tenby. Not only is it the only one not to have the Royal prefix but it is also the only links course of the three.

Being the Principality's "Elder Statesmen" however has not prevented Tenby from being one of the most go-ahead golf clubs and a visit to the holiday town course on the south west coast reveals some forward-thinking and no little investment.

Everywhere you turn the club born in 1888 is active with a new clubhouse development well under way, three new holes edging their way to readiness and a maintenance unit boasting some of the newest and finest turf maintenance equipment – the club recently took delivery of the UK's first Kubota Super B Series compact tractor, supplied

by AM Garden Services of Caerfyrddin.

It is the fact that the club has such a positive philosophy that leaves you confident that the erosion problems which Tenby shares which most of the UK's links courses will be overcome.

"The erosion is in two areas – coastal and soil," explained Head Greenkeeper, Chris Jenkins, who has been at the club since the early 70s.

"It is a very tight golf course, you'll not find a tighter golf course in Wales," he said, and the point was made when a look at the construction work outside the clubhouse revealed sand foundations topped by no more than an inch of top soil.

"The fairways lack a depth of moisture and nutrient retaining top soil, a problem which can only be properly addressed by levelling them and adding good quality top soil to encourage a good sward of grass," said Chris.

The coastal erosion perhaps is the more pressing and no more is it apparent than on the magnificent stretch of land earmarked for one of the three new holes.

"Since 1993 we have had a coastal erosion committee and the club has been trying to act as a catalyst to get other concerned members of the community involved," explained Peter

**Chris Jenkins, left, on the beach at a point where the erosion is particularly bad. Top picture – taken from the tee on one of the new holes – shows how the sea has eaten into the course**



**Geoff Pearson, Tenby secretary, left; Chris Jenkins and Peter Williams, chairman of green**



Williams, the club's Greens Chairman. "We don't want to lose part of the golf course."

Consultants were brought in and produced a report to show how the erosion was becoming an increasing problem. Over the last 70 years at least 50 yards, including an entire bank of sand dunes, has been lost to the sea.

"There is already water encroachment on the golf course when there is a storm and it is hoped that a topological study can be carried out to establish where the flood channels are should the sea water break through.

"The problem is that erosion doesn't happen at half a metre a year. When you have a major storm you might lose a lot all at once," explained Peter.

"We know we are going to be in for a third of the bill for the work which has to be done but there should be European and Welsh Office money to help," explained Club Secretary, Geoff Pearson.

"The golf club is a major attraction in Tenby with many people visiting the town to play here," explained Geoff, who noticed a fall off in green fees on the strength of the major oil spill last year which, although thankfully missing the golf course, left an odour which hung over the area for quite some time.

The problem faced is that the erosion is constantly changing and that another series of reports may be required to up-date the position.

"Hopefully they will execute some sort of emergency measure, perhaps by dumping rocks at a place where the erosion is at its worst," said Peter.

Like so many other courses Tenby also has a rabbit problem and Chris has recently introduced a rabbit control policy with two people going out in the evenings to shoot them.

"It is not unusual for them to shoot as many as 60 in a night. Until recently there wasn't a cull and the rabbits were so tame they would come right up to the golfers," explained Chris.

If everything goes according to plan Tenby could be one of the very few 21 hole golf courses in the world.

The current layout involves 15

traditional links holes and three, on the other side of a railway line, are more semi links.

"The Welsh Golfing Union put it into our minds because, although we already hold events up to a certain level including the ladies Amateur and the Welsh Open Stroke-play, they would very much welcome seeing the new holes turn the course into a full links course before we can attract events like the Home Internationals," explained Geoff.

Unusually it would not mean 18 holes plus three practice holes but something much more than that.

"The course consists of many loops of three so we will be able to close three for maintenance in the winter and still carry on with a full 18," explained Chris.

"The main course will consist of the full 18 links holes, though," he added.

Looking at the land which has already been roughly laid out for the new holes it is easy to see why they are so keen to complete the job. Ironically the one hole which is most at risk from the erosion is one which would make any golfer lick his lips. A dogleg right, from the back tee it involves a drive almost over the magnificent beach to a tight landing area before a middle iron to a green cut out of a dune.

"We will ask the club's management team for its comments on tees, fairways and type of green etc and it would be our recommendation that we should hire an architect to liaise with the greens committee and come up with the initial drawings and costings. Then it is up to the members whether they want to invest the

money to go beyond that," said Peter.

"A large part of the land is under the Nature Conservancy Council and we would have to get approval for our plans from them and once we have them we would apply to the R&A for a grant. The R&A encourages the development of new links type holes, the stipulations being that they are properly costed and architect induced."

The club used its VAT windfall to buy a third of the course so that they now own two thirds of it – the remaining third belonging to the MOD which uses it as a firing range, and is currently using Sports Council money for the new £200,000 clubhouse development.

The excellent financial planning which goes into the club extends to the club's machinery.

"Over a five year period we are up-dating all our machinery," explained Geoff.

"In the past if something went wrong with a machine we were suddenly faced with a huge bill to replace it and had to wait for the committee to decide whether to replace it or not. It was all done out of whatever cash was available. Now we have a properly costed plan of machinery capital investment."

It is that type of thinking which has seen Chris have some excellent new equipment to use on the course.

"The new Kubota Super B tractor is superb," enthused Chris. "It is extremely powerful but also light weight which helps with regard to the erosion problems and also means we can take it onto the greens, although I

wouldn't advocate it for everyone's greens. It also has a strengthened rear section so a lot of our equipment can go on the back"

The Super B boasts an environmentally friendly engine which has passed the California State Emissions regulations regarded as among the toughest around.

Tenby may be the oldest golf course in Wales but its energetic forward-looking approach and the way in which it tackles problems is a model for many of its younger colleagues.

## EQUIPMENT INVENTORY

- One Toro Greenmaster 3000D with groomers
- One Toro Greenmaster 300 Petrol
- Three Toro Verti-Cut Units
- One Toro Reel Master 216D
- One Ford 2120 Tractor
- Two Tipping Trailers
- One Kubota L3300 Tractor with Front Loader
- One Kubota B2400 Tractor
- One Kubota T1600 HSY Rough Cutter
- One Ransomes Hydraulic 5 Gang Mowers
- One Gravely 5200 Rough Cutter
- One Gravely 5640 Rough Cutter
- One Huxley Slitter 6" x 9" Blades
- One Sisis Top Dresser
- One Coremaster Tining Machine
- One Hardi 300 Ltr Sprayer
- One Cyclone Spreader
- One Toro 21" Recycler
- One Victa 21" 2 Stroke
- One Allen Rotary Mower
- One Strimmer