

**Gleneagles Hotel is one of the top golf resorts in the world
and Scott MacCallum met up with the man who ensures
that excellence comes as standard...**



Pictures courtesy of Brian Morgan

Paradise found

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If you were to ask a golf lover to paint a picture in words of his idea of Paradise, there's a fair chance it might finish up as a description of a place which actually exists - Gleneagles.

With its five star hotel, three magnificent golf courses, innumerable other leisure pursuits and scenery, which has adorned every self respecting shortbread tin in the country, this particular Perthshire Paradise is at the top of the tree when it comes to catering for the wishes of golfers who demand all that is best in the game.

The man charged with ensuring that the King's, Queen's and Monarch's courses are maintained to a standard which befits their Royal name is someone who needs no introduction to those people who are familiar with the golfing scene north of the border. Indeed he is also known to a great many in the rest of the country... and much further afield as well.

Jimmy Kidd has been at Gleneagles Hotel since 1983 and seen the resort transformed from a hotel which was still closing down every winter as recently as 1981 to a place which has been voted Best Leisure Resort in Europe for seven out of the last eight years.



Jimmy Kidd

"When I first arrived there was one Head Greenkeeper in charge of four golf courses, the King's, Queen's, Prince's and Glendevon but I changed that so I had one Head Greenkeeper on each of the courses with me as Courses Manager," explained Jimmy, from his office in an idyllic lodge on the edge of the Gleneagles Estate.

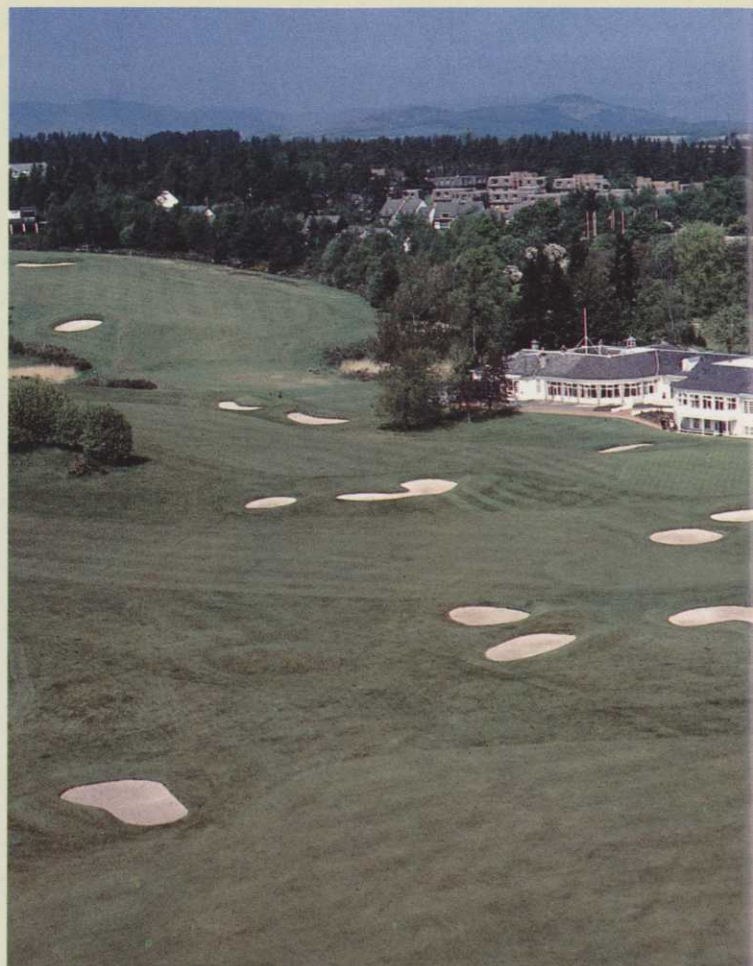
There can be little doubt that had the changes, which have taken place since the mid '80s, been known about at the time it would have boggled many a mind but Jimmy has adapted extraordinarily well.

"In 1989 the Princes and Glendevon courses were scrapped to make way for the new 250 acre Jack Nicklaus designed Monarch's course," explained Jimmy, who by this time was Estates and Golf Courses Manager, with additional responsibility for the development and design of Gleneagles' Mark Phillips Equestrian and Jackie Stewart Shooting Centres.

However, it is, and always will be, golf which is the biggest draw at Gleneagles - to the tune of £4.2 million last year alone and it is still the element to which Jimmy devotes most time. It is an enormous operation with 35 full time staff rising to 52 during the summer looking after 70% of the 830 acre estate.

With the advent of the Monarch's Course, for which incidentally there are high hopes of attracting a Ryder Cup in the early part of the new millennium, it meant another major change for the staff at Gleneagles.

"We examined the structure and decided that we had two very distinct types of maintenance here - the exact science of managing a USGA specification course and the old traditional maintenance of the King's and the Queen's. Obviously it was very difficult to give precise training in both of these aspects so we decided to create specialists in USGA maintenance as well as tra-



ditional push-up greens maintenance."

"We appointed two Golf Maintenance Co-ordinators at the beginning of 1997 - Stuart Stenhouse, who had been Head Greenkeeper on the Monarch's for the previous three years with Robert Heath as Head Greenkeeper to look after the daily running of the course, the Golf Academy and the Pitch and Putt course which are also built to USGA guidelines. Scott Fenwick, who was Head Greenkeeper for three Bell's Scottish Opens as well as two McDonald WPGA Championships, became the Golf Maintenance Co-ordinator for the two James Braid courses," said Jimmy.

"So when a young man comes for an interview we ask him where he'd like to be in the future. Do you want to be working on a USGA spec course or a traditional or both? Then we set up a career model which gives him that opportunity."

If all this change was not enough for the man who had previously worked solely on 18 hole courses - at Killermont in Glasgow and Kilmacoll - he then took the plunge into possibly the biggest change of all.

The Hotel's General Manager, Peter Lederer, showed why he's a regular winner of the Best Hotelier of the Year in Europe when he hit upon an idea which had the dual purpose of saving money and spreading the good name of

Gleneagles Hotel across the world.

"He decided to set up Gleneagles Golf Developments to become a fee based service company working on a worldwide stage as well as managing all the golf at Gleneagles. So, in other words, whatever the costs incurred in salaries and expenses to run Gleneagles Golf Developments they had to be covered by external fees," explained Jimmy.

The company provides services in design, management consultancy, project management and construction and publishing - they did all the publishing for last year's Ryder Cup.

"It might frighten a few people if they had to go out and find consultancies to cover their salaries and expenses, plus run a successful operation," said Jimmy, while admitting that it was made easier having the Gleneagles name to open doors.

Gleneagles Golf Developments was launched at a time which coincided with a major world recession but the parent company was shrewd enough not to expect an immediate return and be securing contracts straight away.

"It takes time to build relationships, trust and credibility and it was a couple of years before we were able to stand up for ourselves, start winning contracts and become successful," said Jimmy, who added that these were being won in the face of competition from the likes of Nicklaus, Palmer, Player and Fazio.

Having this dual focus is some-



thing which Jimmy handles well and uses to mutual benefit.

"We call Gleneagles our shop window. If we enter into a management contract we generally invite the client here and let them stay for a couple of days at our expense to view our operation. It helps them make up their minds and it sells itself," said Jimmy, who still describes the high point of his career as the moment the final putt was sunk by Ian Woosnam in their first Bell's Scottish Open in '87.

"That is the moment which has given me most satisfaction as I was so pleased for the team and so pleased that we'd returned the course to conditions which had been missing for 15 years or more."

Another task which has recently been completed and which will give lasting benefit is the computerisation of the entire management plans for the organisation.

"We felt it was time to create a historical record in relation to the maintenance of the golf courses here so we would not be lost if any greenkeeper were to walk away from us. It protects the asset."

"We have comparisons year on year for the last seven years on water tracks, root zone profiles, thatch profiles and all the fertilizer records. It will become a model which can, with no more than a tweak, be taken around the world

to the ventures in which Gleneagles Golf Developments are involved."

The logistical problems inherent in running such a huge operation were eased when Gleneagles entered into sole supplier arrangements with Ransomes and RiteFeed.

"We had been dealing with over 120 different suppliers and phoning round for the best price was taking endless amounts of time. Today we are down to no more than 30 suppliers including our two sole supplier arrangements."

"They don't tie us down completely but if RiteFeed has a material which is ideally suited to us we will use it. If our guys think that there is a better option they will come and discuss it and we may use it or we will give RiteFeed the opportunity to manufacture a product or assist us by finding one," explained Jimmy, who will play host to over 50 greenkeepers at the final of the inaugural RiteFeed Classic National final to be played over the Monarch's Course in October.

"The agreement with Ransomes was to purchase all of our grass cutting and personnel carriers from them but if we thought that a piece of equipment was not satisfactory for Gleneagles we reserved the right to go into the market place and buy an alternative... although



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that hasn't happened as yet."

Gleneagles also gets used in the research and development of new Ransomes machines and prototypes are tested over the courses. RiteFeed's computerised soil analysis programme was also devised at Gleneagles.

Jimmy now spends around half the year advising on ventures all over the world and fulfilling his other role within the company, that of Associate Designer.

"I have the great privilege of working closely with the company's own golf course architect, my own son David, who has been with us for around six years.

"I was the Clerk of Works for four years during the building of the Monarch's Course and on about nine separate occasions for two days a time walked the golf course with Jack Nicklaus during the design and construction phase. I also worked closely with his senior designer, Rod Kirby," said Jimmy, to explain from where his design experience had been drawn. "You pick up a lot as you go along."

As well as that such rare and invaluable experience Jimmy believes he has a natural flare for design.

"I'm very lucky that I have a creative mind. I'm a Taurian, which gives me an artistic background. I've also got 37 years in

the industry which gives me the knowledge of the areas of design which create incredible problems for the maintenance people."

Asked if he ever yearns to get out on to the vast 18th green of the King's Course with a hand mower Jimmy's answer is an emphatic, "No. I don't."

"My motivation today is completely different from what it was. When I arrived at Gleneagles my aim was getting the golf courses in first class condition and I was a totally autocratic greenkeeper. I wanted the job done and didn't mess about because I had a limited amount of time to prove myself and gain credibility.

"Nowadays I love to see young students come through and cut that green themselves, I enjoy sitting back, reading their projects

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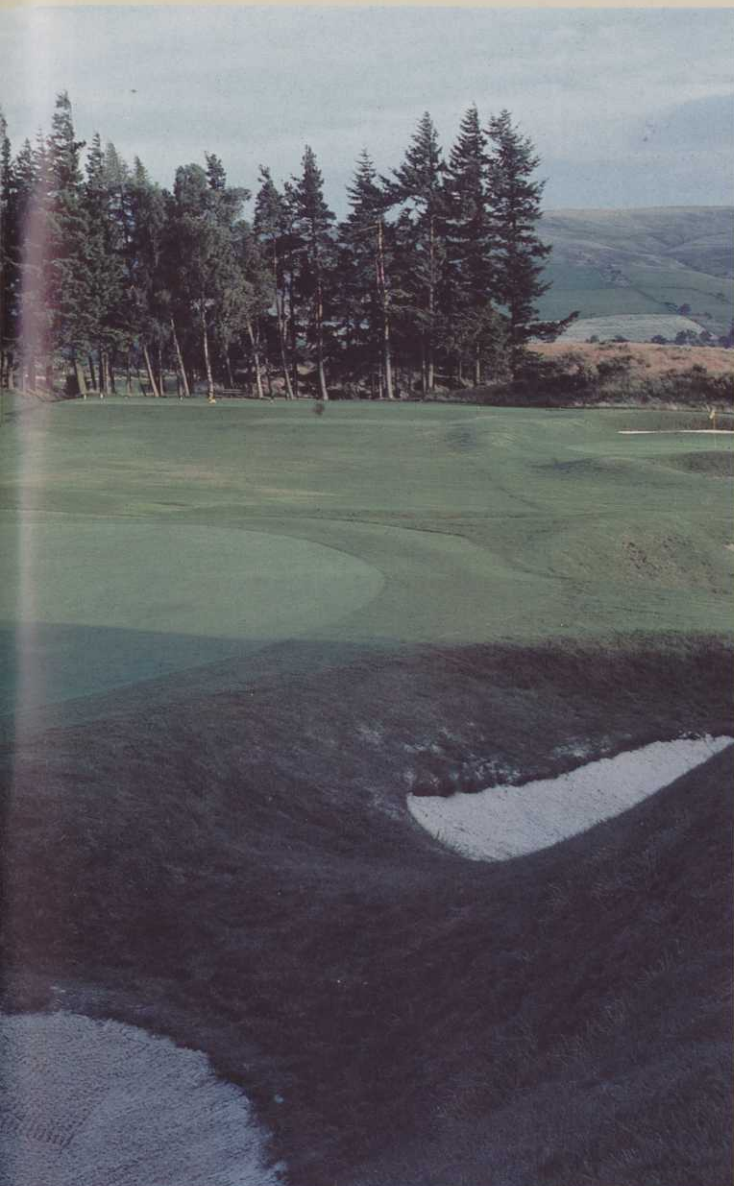
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Picture caption in here As well as that such rare and invaluable experience Jimmy believes he has a natural flare for design.

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and knowing that I've played a part in their future."

As confirmation of his aims for young aspiring greenkeepers Gleneagles Golf Developments runs the Gleneagles Excellence in Golf Scheme, sponsored by Ransomes and Scottish Grass Machinery.

"When we were setting up our sole supplier agreement for machinery it coincided with Peter Wilson's arrival as the new Chief Executive of Ransomes. I visited him in Ipswich and we spoke for around three hours about my proposals for an excellence in golf scheme. He just grasped the nettle and said that Ransomes would supply the annual bursary finance as well as provide £2000 to set up a library, which has since received a £500 top up every year.

"The idea was that we would be the catalyst between the colleges and industry and provide a solid year out for students from British colleges. Today we have eight students from eight colleges."

Once the year is over the students go back to finish their college courses but many return to Gleneagles and all have their careers followed.

"We've currently got one at Pebble Beach and another working for a contractor in Florida," revealed Jimmy.

"During the year we give USGA and traditional training and organise about 35 lectures for them."

"We have two fully blown training rooms, a computer training room and our library plus an internet link with Michigan State University."

"The scheme will be expanded and we would like to include colleges affiliated to the Federation of European Golf Greenkeeper Associations and America although we've already had four Americans training here."

"The idea was that we would provide quality Course Managers for our worldwide projects with Gleneagles Golf Developments as well as here at Gleneagles."

As he talked about his next trip to Bahrain the very next week it was easy to see that there can be few more demanding jobs. However, he must be one of the luckiest guys around as whenever he is having a bad day he can look out of his window, gaze at the view and reflect on life working in a Golfer's Paradise.

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