



# Helping Mother Nature

One wonders, with such a hullabaloo round the starters box, what Old Tom Morris would have made of it? Every 10 minutes, from 7am 'til twilight, gaggles of golfers practice their swings, proposition their caddies, pose for snapshots, even make a stab at composure while trying to make light of the awesome occasion.

With a phalanx of players hovering, plus the ever-present gallery of local critics, this is as mind-racking an experience as teeing it up in The Open. So, pray for a cracker off the tee - please Lord, let this one be down the middle! But this is not Open week, simply a routine summer day at The Old Course, St Andrews. Come sunset, the sacred sward will have endured another 280 rounds, eight sets of marching feet per game; an army pounding with niblicks unfurled and divots a flying.

Anyway you tally it, that's giving the course a lot of stick. St Andrews, of course, has always been golf's

Mecca; imbibing 600 years of golfing history considered a must, yet it's magnetism serves merely to increase the enthusiasm of Head Greenkeeper Eddie Adams and his crew, their avowed aim being always to present the old lady in her best guise, whatever the season.

This feature is about The Old Course in summer, though in future issues and leading up to the Millennium Open, Greenkeeper International, as part of "The Learning Experience", will cast an expert eye more than occasionally at the goings-on around St Andrews, looking afresh at the New, the Eden, the Jubilee, plus the new kid on the block; Donald Steel's Strathtyrum. Ask Ian Forbes, Links Manager for the St Andrews Links Trust, how pace of play is handled and he'll likely tell you an apocryphal tale. While The Old is not an invasive course - nothing crowded once away from the first - there are huge shared greens,

narrow fairways and an element of intimidation, especially for nervous tyros.

All these aspects, plus some daunting rough, can indeed slow play, yet Ian boasts the average at well under four hours, thanks to sterling work by links rangers... plus some mythical Scottish adders.

Apparently, they're the favoured ruse of caddies, who would rather not spend all day in fruitless searching. "Not a good idea to go in there, sir, got to be careful of the Scottish adders!"

This, so the story goes, results in rapid retreat. Eddie Adams, Head Greenkeeper of The Old since 1995, has only ever worked St Andrews links, proud of a pedigree that comes with having worked under David Dewar for the 1990 Open, plus as mentor par excellence his original boss and eternal friend, Walter Woods. When Walter retired after the '95 Open, each course was appointed its own Head Greenkeeper and Eddie now manages the plum - the high profile Old Course.

No adders need quicken Eddie, though, who explains that summer on The Old is, quite simply, cutting grass; with 26 hectares of fairways, three hectares of tees; the rest rough, in total some 59 hectares on The Old alone. How, then, do they work around the players? Eddie explains; "Well, we start early, 5am in the summer, with all the fairways cut before golf begins. The whole course is cut, end to end, within three hours - greens, tees and fairways - the far end of the course clear by 8am as the aim."

"We're blessed with all the latest Ransomes kit, the Fairway 300s were out at 6.30am, a pleasure to use and such a far cry from the old gang-mowing days, because it was hard then to cut without some scalping. In particular, I like the floating heads on the 300s and the grass collectors have always been a great benefit to us. We started boxing cuttings when we first used the 180, and it's certainly improved our turf, virtually no thatch build-up at all. We use the Ryan GA60s, in the winter for coring, more in the last few years than ever we did before. We do a lot of

All fairways cut by 8am, that's the target at St Andrews







Eddie Adams, Head Greenkeeper  
at St Andrews Old Course

deep aeration on the fairways as well, but not in the summer, though we still use the GA60 with solid tines on tees."

So, no spiking or hollow tining in the summer?

"Just some localised hollow tining in perceived weak areas," explains Eddie, "then overseeding, plus microtines on the greens if we're seeing a bit of dry patch." The exceptionally wet start, hasn't that been a problem? "Well, last year was quite wet also. We don't use wetting agents on the course; we tried, but never really saw the benefit. We've had dry patch on a couple of greens, but we find that just spiking, followed by hand watering, once we get the water infiltrating it's fine. We can live with doing just that. But it's beneficial to get a drying period too, because that'll keep the poa from advancing. We've not used the irrigation at all this year, it's been a beneficial time, with irrigation reserved strictly for excessively stressful periods." Eddie's thinking on chemicals is refreshing: "I'm the chemical salesman's worst customer," he claims, "I'm trying to eliminate spraying, next to nothing at all, bent on establishing a pesticide-free golf course." Pressed further, Eddie explains; "I'm trying to anticipate the future, knowing the controls already imposed in other countries, I'm looking ahead so that when I'm told, say, in 2003 that in 12 months I'm to be user free, I'll be ahead of the game." But not yet a full stop, surely?

"Effectively a gentle withdrawal, the last few years down to a bare minimum, used only as a last resort. We've left the rough and most fairways, we practice IPM (Integrated Pest Management), never blanket coverage. Greens were a problem at first, and still are, because with the nature of the turf we're going to have small problems and areas of compaction, it's the way of The Old. We're doing a lot of hand weeding though, trying a lot of other things, verticutting and the like; getting back to a more culturally based programme."

So, what's the score on disease? "Never really had any," he chuckles,

"haven't used a fungicide in eight years and I don't think Walter used one prior to that." So, no fusarium patch? "A small area on first green, very small. It's a damp, damp area, but it's never severe. We didn't fertilise any greens last year, because of the wet weather, though I did put some ammonia down last week, just to add a bit of fire, also to help the grass fight the good fight against weeds." By eliminating chemical cocktails Eddie believes he's got it cracked. The Old's turf is fescue dominated with some bent and a little poa, probably less than five percent. "Without setting out to destroy the poa," he continued, "our entire management programme is aimed at encouraging indigenous seaside grasses. Because we do that, poa has a stressful time."

"When Walter first started in the mid '70s very few aeration tools were available, though since then, with the Vertidrain, Ryan GA 30s and 60s and all the deep aeration spikers, these have helped dramatically. Aeration tools would always be first priority on our list."

Seeing a formation line of Ransomes Greens Supers, the next, inevitable question concerned hand mowing. "For tournaments, we always cut by hand, though we've a big acreage of green out there. You know, we've just renewed our agreement with Ransomes, 'til way after the Millennium, so thankfully these machines are going to be around for a long time to come."

"With the quality of cut achieved with our three Greensplex mowers, we're so pleased we've gone to the extent of using them for verticutting on fairways. What I'm trying to achieve is greens quality turf on the fairways - with a higher cut, obviously - but with the ultimate goal for the 2000 Open to have fairways that are fiery, fast and hard. But looking out of the window just now, it's mid-summer and with all the rain we've had, if it's like this in 2000 we're going to have a green course, no two ways about it. It's all down to Mother nature; the one thing we can't calculate is how much rain will fall."

Still working on your 3 year  
Thatch reduction program?

Get nature to work for you and  
let someone else do the work!

# THATCHLESS LIQUID BENEFICIAL MICROBES

Complete program costs only

# £585

per hectare

Visible results in just 30 days  
Thatch reduction, the natural way  
Easy to apply liquid



STAND  
H70-72

TEL: 01782 373878 FAX: 01782 373763

Green Release Europe, 102a Longton Road, Barlaston, Staffs, England ST12 9AU

CONTACT YOUR EXCLUSIVE UK DISTRIBUTOR NOW:

Midlands, North and Scotland  
RICHARD AITKEN LTD  
Glasgow depot: 0141 4400033  
Yorkshire depot: 01977 681155

South, London and South West  
AVONCROP AMENITY PRODUCTS  
Bracknell depot: 01344 428800  
Bristol depot: 01934 820868

The US leader in liquid beneficial microbial products

E-mail: [microbes@green-release.com](mailto:microbes@green-release.com)