

Leamington & County Golf Club green staff have been busy over the winter months as Scott MacCallum found out...

Cold comfort



There was once a perception among some golf club members that as soon as the final putt was downed by the final threeball in the final summer medal of the year that the greens staff went into hibernation. Not the conventional sort of hibernation we read about in nature books or which all of my generation can remember Blue Peter's tortoise enjoying.

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We thirtysomethings are bound to recall the world's first transsexual pet - Fred becoming Freda with nothing more than the simple addition of a non toxic painted vowel. No, apparently greenkeepers enjoyed a different type of hibernation. With grass growing, at worst, slowly and without the number of golfers braving the elements winter months were spent painting out-of-bounds and lateral water hazard markers, revarnishing benches, sending machinery out to be serviced, tidying the mess room, oh yes, and playing cards. Every so often, so rumour had it, they would look up from an unpromising hand of three card brag, gaze out of the window, and depending on the weather, decide to move the pins either off or on the temporary greens.

To some club members the greenkeeper's job appeared as seasonal as that of the lifeguard on Blackpool beach.

If that was what club members might have thought in the past there is certainly no excuse for thinking that fewer pints of blood, sweat and tears are spilt in the bleak mid winter than at any other time of the year. Certainly not if you were to visit Leamington & County Golf Club where so much has been achieved over the winter months the staff should, by rights, be tested for performance enhancing steroids.

Head Greenkeeper, Des Compton, and his five man team have been busy and when the fair weather members dust down their Calloways for their seasonal debuts later this month they will see some significant developments to their course.

Not only will they find a brand new 11th tee to go with a brand

new 11th green, they will be able to see the green from the clubhouse window for the first time in living memory due to the extensive scrub clearance which has been done. In addition, preparation work for the new greenkeeper maintenance facility has been completed while the team has had to keep on top of the additional winter mowing brought about by the unusually mild conditions.

"The first major job was the 11th green. It had deteriorated very quickly over the summer with the annual meadow grass dying off and we couldn't bring it back," explained Des, of the short tree lined par-3 which is one of the feature holes on the course.

Des works extremely closely with his Deputy, Robin Wilcox.

"Originally we had looked at redoing our two putting greens first as an experiment so as not to disturb the course and then, on the back of that, start of the course," explained Rob.

In the end the 11th's downturn made the decision for them but the fact that Leamington boasts 19 greens anyway meant that there was no disruption to play.

"Our proper 1st in the summer becomes the winter 11th and our spare green becomes the 1st. At the end of the summer we mow out a fairway to the practice green and move the fairway over.

"What it meant was that even if the 11th green hadn't gone it would have been the perfect one to have started with as it is out of commission in the winter anyway," explained Des.

Having taken the decision to go ahead last September the club com-



missioned John Greasley to build the new green and Andy Cole, of the STRI, to oversee the work.

"I met with them at the beginning of November when we did the ground work - assessing how the machinery was going to get in, the actual design and what trees we would have to remove. Andy Cole then went away and did a report on the agronomy. We were doing it to the USGA guidelines," said Des.

The green was completed the day before Christmas Eve, taking around four weeks in all, and Andy



Cole spent quite a bit of time on site testing all the materials before they were used at each stage.

The new green is 150 square metres bigger than its predecessor was, and on Andy's advice, washed turf supplied by Rolawn was used.

"We didn't consider seeding because we wanted to get the green in play as soon as we could and while it is more expensive initially to turf it is far cheaper in the long run," explained Rob.

While still considering the time factor Leamington's extra green

meant there was no real pressure from the club to force the green into action quickly.

"It will be a decision between Andy and myself and we both need to agree," said Des, who estimated that while it may be ready in June he would be happy to keep play off until July.

The benefits of the new green have already been witnessed. While the wettest spell in five years flooded many of the other greens, closing the course, the new 11th drained well.

By the beginning of February they had also mown the new green once and taken away ten boxes of clippings.

"We are delighted with the results and with the work of the contractor who also put in a path for us to the left of the green which had we done it ourselves would have been a huge

job," added Des.

The success of the 11th should lead to inroads into the remaining greens which look likely to be done in batches.

"If we decided to do three or four a year we would also do the tees and the bunkers at the same time," revealed Des.

The new 11th tee was built by Rob and another member of the team, Mike Wyatt.

"We didn't want to change the shape or the distance of the hole to avoid the need for the card to be amended but what we wanted to do was level the tee, as they had tended to be quite uneven and we were losing teeing space," said Rob.

"We hired the surveying equipment, took levels from all over the tee and got an average. By working to that it meant we were not left with much excess soil and disrup-

tion was minimal," he explained and the small pile of soil to the right hand side of the tee borne testimony to their work.

Once the tee, which is 50 square metres larger than the original, was levelled the entire team got together and turfed it in half a day.

Alongside the construction work the scrub clearance was in full swing turning a wooded area of dense growth into something in which members would have a better than even chance of finding a ball.

"The membership can now sit in the clubhouse and see the new 11th green that they've paid for whereas before the view was blocked by the growth," said Des.

Another benefit of the work, which is on-going was highlighted by Rob.

"The wind comes from the west and will blow through and dry out the green. It will get much more light and air."

With the bulk of the winter work completed the green's team are looking forward to August when they can move into the new custom-built maintenance facility which will boast everything the modern team could possibly need as well as a much needed doubling in floor space to cope with the existing machinery as well as the new equipment which has been ordered but put on hold until the storage become available.

"We are having a disabled shower put in as, although we don't have any disabled staff at the moment, we don't know in the future," explained Des, who along with Rob, put forward their recommendations for the new facility.

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Staff

Head Greenkeeper
Des Compton
Deputy Head Greenkeeper
Robin Wilcox
Mechanic - Brian James
Assistants - Mike Wyatt,
Shane Wilton and Keith
Hawtin

Equipment Inventory

Cushmans plus Dresser,
Corer and Solid Tine
Spiker
Toro GM 3000D
Toro 216 Reelmaster
Jacobsen Handmower
Jacobsen Tri-King
Husqvana Ride-On
Massey Ferguson Tractor
Iseki Tractor plus Loader
Verti-drain
Huxley's Scarifier
Flymo
Allman Sprayer
Knapsack
John Deere Fairway
Gangs
Ransomes Semi-Rough
Gangs
Strimmers

Equipment on Order

Toro GM Mower
Set of B-Mows and
Litamizer
Massey Ferguson 4000
Series Tractor
Husqvana Ride-On Rotary
Mower



Above: Scrub clearance work continuing Below: Deputy Head Greenkeeper, Robin Wilcox

That forward thinking - admirable at a 90 year-old course which had the rare privilege of witnessing a match between two members of the Great Triumvirate, James Braid and Harry Vardon, to commemorate its opening - extended to last year Des having the cabling for the new TIL irrigation system being laid to the new site as well as the existing.

Des and Rob are fortunate that an excellent staff membership relationship exists at Leamington to the extent that members known as "Grey Nags" and Warwickshire senior players money for tree planting and also water the trees on the course in the summer months.

Des also operates a system whereby he leaves messages on his answer machine in the mornings giving information on the course.

"I give the date and say whether

the course is open, whether we have any winter greens and if we have a trolley ban in place. I also say if I am currently doing a course inspection."

The work which the Leamington & County staff shows that while they may not be the greatest card players in the world they certainly make full use of the winter period.

For the last year the Green Staff has been sponsoring the education of an 11-year-old girl from Ecuador named Mery.

"I heard about an organisation World Vision UK, which sponsors children's education all over the world and got in touch with them," explained Rob.

"I collect money from the staff every month and send off a cheque.



We also send small presents, pictures of us mowing and tell her about the golf course while we get letters and Christmas cards from her," explained Rob, who pointed out Mery's photograph which hangs in the office.

"She'll probably be Ecuador's first female greenkeeper," added Des. "We could even give her a job here!"