

**The latest FEGGA Board Meeting was held in Iceland.
Neil Thomas reports from the distant North...**

A warm welcome

Iceland conjures up many images, most I suspect being those of snow, ice and cold. Well, the news is that, in fact, it is a green and pleasant land set among the lava plains formed from volcanic eruptions and featuring geysirs, waterfalls and the soothing hot springs of the Blue Lagoon. One does not automatically associate Iceland with golf. However golf is second only to soccer in Iceland and when the FEGGA Board descended on Reykjavik, the capital, for its autumn Board meeting the members were soon made aware that they were indeed in golfing territory.

Iceland has enjoyed a warm and dry summer but the arrival of FEGGA had produced a gale force wind with a chill factor not previously experienced by the newly arrived, inadequately clothed FEGGA Board members. Nevertheless, the welcome from the Chairman of the Icelandic Greenkeepers Association, Margeir Vilhjalmsson and the Vice Chairman/Treasurer Olafur Thor Agustsson, was warm and hospitable. The intrepid travellers set off on a tour of Keilir Golf Club, built in a lava field, and then thawed out in the clubhouse to which the planned barbecue had quickly been transferred. A visit to a Viking pub later in the evening was

highlighted by an induction ceremony whereby FEGGA Vice Chairman Per-Olof Ljung was made an Honorary Viking.

Next day FEGGA held a lengthy Board meeting which reflected the progress of FEGGA since its formation in 1996. Among many other matters, the Board finalised its plans for the second FEGGA Conference to be held this coming November. Later in the day the FEGGA Board had the opportunity to see some of scenic Iceland in the company of enthusiastic greenkeeper guides Bjorn Olason, Gudmundur Gunnarsson and Ellert Thorarinnsson. On the final day in Iceland, Dean Cleaver and myself were able to spend some time with Margeir visiting the Sudurnesja Golf Club and his own club, Reykjavik Golf Club, formerly the Golf Club of Iceland. It was at this club that golf had started in Iceland in 1934, having been introduced, in all probability, from Sweden.

Iceland has 57 golf courses including nine 18 hole courses with the rest 9 holes. The Icelandic Greenkeepers Association was formed in 1994 and is run by a committee of five. It has some 50 members. On average, a golf course will have one to two full time staff with the remainder seasonal. It was indicative of misconceptions of Iceland, to learn that to a large extent golf is played all year round using winter greens and tees, and that the most is made of the limited daylight hours in winter. Where there is snow it is concentrated in the north.

It is clear that greenkeepers in Iceland value their links with both BIGGA and FEGGA. These links arose originally through educational contacts, and it was Olafur who initiated contacts when he attended Elmwood College in 1992. He was followed by Margeir in 1993. Margeir went on to attend the School of Excellence at Gleneagles for 10 months in 1994 before taking up his position at Reykjavik Golf Club. He is currently studying for an HNC through distance learning. Margeir was joint runner-up in the Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year competition in 1994. Educational links were strengthened when Carol Borthwick from Elmwood College visited Iceland in 1994 and some 17

Icelandic greenkeepers have attended at Elmwood. Another visitor has been George Brown from Turnberry. While the FEGGA Board was in Iceland Howard Swan was undertaking a design school for 16 greenkeepers. The contacts with the United Kingdom are therefore ongoing and can only benefit the young, enthusiastic greenkeepers making their way in the profession in Iceland.

In commenting on the FEGGA visit Margeir said, "It is a great thing for Iceland. It is recognition of what we are doing and that we are going in the right direction. Our members are keen to be involved and they will get to feel more a part of FEGGA. The Association tries each year to come to Harrogate with a group to be part of the European scene. We have greatly enjoyed having FEGGA with us. We are a small Association trying to introduce the techniques of greenkeeping to greenkeepers on smaller golf courses. The full-time greenkeepers are the core for spreading knowledge and giving experience. Conditions may be different but the basics are the same as the rest of the world".

Margeir and Olafur are now looking forward to attending the second FEGGA Conference in Spain from 12th to the 15th November as their Association's representatives.

They see this as an opportunity to meet European colleagues and discuss greenkeeping. This year's theme, "Water Management", is of particular interest to them.

FEGGA Chairman Dean Cleaver commented that, "The visit was another step forward in FEGGA becoming closer to a member Association in a country with a lot of commitment to greenkeeping. We are seeing the benefits of that in the maintenance of their golf courses. We have been well received and strengthened relationships for the future. I am impressed with the enthusiasm shown towards us and look forward to ongoing close contacts".

If you get the chance to visit Iceland take it - you will receive a warm and friendly welcome. If you aim to play golf you will find some well-maintained and challenging courses. Look up the greenkeepers they will be pleased to see you.



Above: Margeir Vilhjalmsson, Chairman of the Icelandic Greenkeepers Association, and FEGGA Chairman, Dean Cleaver

Below: A spectacular par 3 at Sudurnesja Golf Club

