

Andy Campbell shows Scott MacCallum round Carden Park, the venue for BIGGA's new golf Championship.

A walk in the *Park*



Course photos: Alan Birch

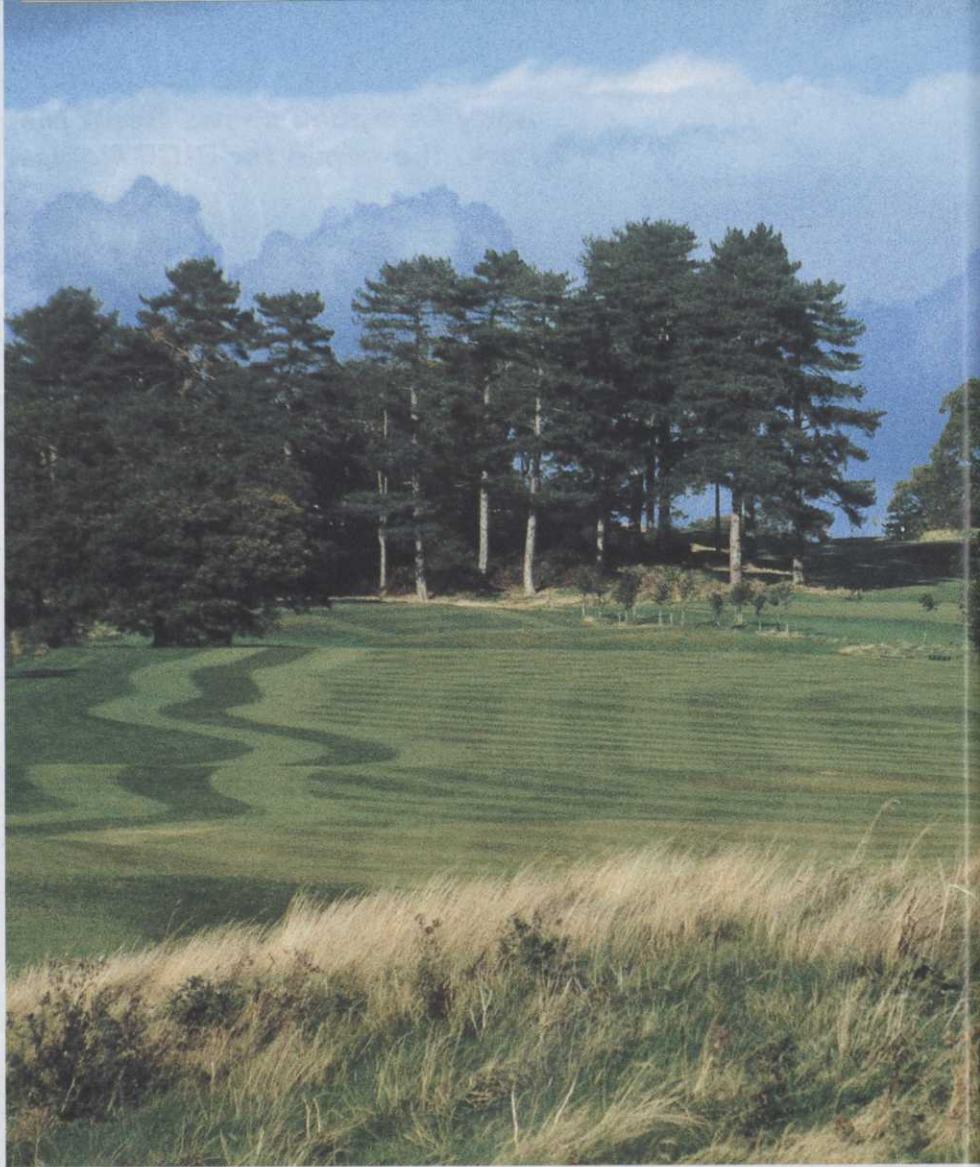
It's going to be great! That's the overriding feeling you get about the first Charterhouse/Scotts National Championship when you visit Carden Park, Golf Resort & Spa.

Being shown around by Courses Manager and Master Greenkeeper, Andy Campbell you can see why Carden Park is fast becoming one of the finest resort hotels in the country and to say that BIGGA is delighted to have secured the venue for the first three years of the new Championship would be understating the matter.

Let's face it, where else could you luxuriate in a wonderful four star hotel, complete with every facility you could possibly dream about, then walk out and have the pick of two magnificent golf courses - the Cheshire, which has been chosen by the European Tour to host one of its pre-qualifying schools this year, and the brand new Jack Nicklaus-designed Nicklaus course.

Oh yes, and there's a state-of-the-art practice facility and a nine-hole par-3 course, ideal if you've ever left with an idle 45 minutes.

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Andy is certainly looking forward to October when 110 greenkeepers arrive and get the chance to inspect the work he has put in over the last six years or so.

"It will be good for the staff to have so many greenkeepers from other clubs here as we're always looking to push things forward and anything we can pick up from the guys playing in the Championship will be useful," said Andy.

"Also, I've made so many friends in the industry over the last few years that it will be good to welcome many of them here," smiling, as his mind wandered back to Harrogate's past.

"We've got just the same problems as everyone else just, with 750 acres to look after, more of it. Just like the colleges who come here, everyone will get to see us warts and all. We're only as good as Mother Nature will allow us."

It is that sort of phlegmatic down to earth attitude which has helped Andy through a period which might have brought a few strong men to their knees but in which he has flourished.

He had returned to greenkeeping at Carden Park after a seven year spell when he ran his own landscaping business.

"The differences in greenkeeping in the time I'd been away were immense. The standards were so much higher. When I came here I didn't know what a groomer was because when I'd left greenkeeping

there were no such things as groomers. It was steep learning curve," he admitted.

Then he hadn't been at Carden too long before the receivers were called in, heralding several months of uncertainty.

However this has subsequently proved a small price to pay for what has happened since, with a committed new owner armed with huge plans for the Cheshire complex and the wherewithal to make it happen.

St David's Hotels, owned by Steve Morgan, the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Redrow Building Company, brought Jack Nicklaus in to design the second course and has invested heavily in the hotel and related facilities.

So what did Andy feel like when he discovered that he'd be working with the Golden Bear, the man with the most impressive record in the history of golf?

"I'm not phased by people's reputations, but as I golfer I admired what he had done," he explained.

"He is also a very knowledgeable guy and knows as much about grasses as most greenkeepers. He visited the site three times but took a very close interest in it from afar and every change was made with his say so.

"What I didn't expect, and what was a nice surprise, was that he was as friendly and open when he visited."

Before starting the project, the first

in Britain he designed with his son, Steve, Nicklaus had been given a strict brief.

"We didn't want mogul type mounding and we didn't want a lot of white sand on show - we went for more of the Braid-style bunkering and have planted 80,000 indigenous trees, shrubs, gorse, broom, pine and birch."

One benefit Andy has derived from the arrival of the Nicklaus Course - which was opened officially in the week of the Royal Birkdale Open last year with a match between Nicklaus himself and Ian Woosnam - is that he has had the opportunity to manage and compare two different styles of golf course.

"But being a believer of the old values - a fescue bent man - when I was asked about what I felt about creeping bent for the Nicklaus Course I didn't respond with 100% enthusiasm. Having said that I was keen to do something different but never having grown that type of grass before I wasn't wholly convinced that it would work. Equally it was an opportunity to learn."

It brought him into contact with Jon Scott, the agronomist assigned to the project, who has subsequently become Director of Agronomy for the US Tour.

"He has since become a very, very good friend," said Andy.

"At our first meeting I freely admitted that I wasn't a scientific



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greenkeeper and wasn't a guy who was hooked up on soil or leaf tissue analysis and Jon accepted it."

The two men have since learned from each other which perhaps shows that, while there is a great deal to be learned from the US approach, the information flow has just as much relevance when going the other way as well.

"He couldn't believe the regimes that we'd followed on the Cheshire Course and the surfaces that we'd achieved. So he learned something about taking grass to the edge and running it along austere lines.

"And I've done lots of things that three years ago I wouldn't have believed I would have done and which would make my old boss's eyes water. But we've got creeping bent cover, little poa in the sward to start with, although I'm not saying it's not coming in, but we have to be fairly radical in the way in which we control it. But that is necessary for the time of course, design and construction it is.

With two different style golf courses - they certainly aren't Carden Carbon copies (I just wanted to get that line in) - and two different maintenance regimes you might be forgiven for thinking that Andy suffers from a split personality - by morning nice Mr Traditional and by afternoon the slick Dr Modern - but it is not something he perceives as a problem.

"I don't have any difficulty in walking on a creeping bent surface and knowing what it needs and five minutes later being on a fescue bent surface. One thing I don't ever do is think what might work on one might work on the other. That is where you need a bit of discipline.

"The creeping bent surfaces demand more intensive management and you have to be more on the ball. There is less forgiveness if they get hungry or dry and you have to react a lot quicker. In the past we have happily watched fescue bent swards go brown in the knowledge that it comes back clean and green. We couldn't go that route with creeping bent... partly because of golfers' expectations.

"In terms of agronomic difficulties our worst is the Take-All Patch on the Nicklaus Course with which we have had a real battle. We have chosen to go down the cultural control route.

"Initially where we had the Take-All we had no grass but now it is zooming through the area without any killing the grass. The rings are getting bigger and bigger. It's as though it is looking for a weak plant but there is now enough antagonistic bacteria in there to see it off," explained Andy, who added that he no longer got involved in the debate about which was the better way.

The courses are also run by two separate teams - the Cheshire has

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eight to nine staff and the Nicklaus 12-14 depending on the season - as well as an estate team. Each course has a Head Greenkeeper who is given an agronomic plan which they agree and with which they are familiar and comfortable.

"My job is to make sure they have the tools and resources to carry it out," said Andy

"Both courses are USGA spec, in the sense that the drainage parameters fall within those recommendations but probably the Nicklaus Course is the purer. It is a 80-20 sand/peat mix while the Cheshire is 70-30 sand/fen soil.

"The grass is where it really differs and the expectation that the golfer has from that grass. One is a foil for the other and we're not trying to turn the Cheshire Course into another Nicklaus course.

Both courses operate a spike ban which ties in nicely with the fact that the Championship is being supported by the Softspikes Company.

"It was something I pushed for at the beginning and it certainly makes a huge difference to the quality of the putting surfaces. Spikes are changed by the Caddie Master as part of his other duties," he explained.

"The nice thing is that we've had a lot of customers come and say they prefer the old way... but not as many as say they enjoy the Nicklaus Course."

The main differences are in presentation and in expectation.

"The expectation of the Nicklaus Course is that it is green. Both courses are striped, with the the Cheshire sometimes being black and tanned.

We hand cut tees and greens on both golf courses and hand cut approaches on both courses 90% of the time.

"To an extent we feed the fairways on both courses - the Cheshire tends to be the elemental things like sulphur and iron with a little bit of nitrogen while on the Nicklaus the regime is a little bit higher across the range. But even then we're not using an awful lot of phosphate."

In effect, Andy has gone from the equivalent of managing a corner shop to being in charge of one of the top department stores. How has he coped?

"My experiences before arriving at Carden helped and I've learned lessons as I've gone along, but I don't feel pressured or stressed out. It's an enjoyable job and it's easier to do a job when you're happy. Also my Master Greenkeeper status has helped my confidence and how I perceive myself and am perceived by others. It also helped to get my name and Carden's name better known."

It is also a realisation of an ambition for Andy as, from the early days, he always wanted 36 holes.

"The Jack McMillans of this world were my heroes and I used to upset my colleagues a little because they thought I was talking a little above my station... but they smile now."

With a round on each of the two fine courses what can the entrants and qualifiers for the Charterhouse/Scotts National Championship expect to find?

"You can fly the ball into the Nicklaus greens and it will hold but the greens are more undulating. Jack's design philosophy is that the ball is gathered into the green while on the Cheshire the ball gets repelled. It's a bit more like the Dornoch style. That's where the shots go on the Cheshire. It's a more penal course than the Nicklaus."

The Cheshire will have had some major changes before the Championship with several holes being re-designed to make them more amenable.

"For example there was a par=5 with a blind third shot which we've altered and although there are still some quirky elements we've taken away those which are totally unfair," said Andy, who has masterminded the changes which also included revetting all the bunkering, in-house.

"You've got to know the old Scottish game and keep the ball low and run the ball in. To that end there are no forced carries in terms of bunkering and water. There is always a route in.

"That is fairly true of the Nicklaus, although the way the greens are orientated for certain pin positions you have to fly the ball in. There is no real signature hole but the trade mark, if you like, are the double option holes, the 7th, 13th and 15th which give you a choice of routes."

Everything at Carden Park smacks of quality and it makes it the perfect venue for BIGGA's new golf Championship.

Are you going to Carden Park?



**SUNDAY, OCTOBER 3 TO
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 5, 1999**

For further details, please contact
Sarah Sowerby on 01347 833800