

North Cornwall is some distance from Fife but a visit to Bude and North Cornwall Golf Club still made Scott MacCallum a little home sick.

Beautiful Bude



Arriving at Bude and North Cornwall Golf Club I couldn't help feeling that I'd been there before. I knew I hadn't but looking out from the clubhouse at some of the pretty houses that bordered the course it all looked very familiar.

Then it clicked. It is almost the double for some of the courses of the East Neuk of Fife, just around the coast from St Andrews.

Yes, Bude would fit nicely alongside the likes of Elie, Crail and Anstruther while, having its clubhouse and several holes right in the middle of town, it is a distinction it shares with St Andrews itself.

Yet, Bude is about 500 miles from Fife, and there is little else in the surrounding countryside to suggest any Scottish influences. The answer may be in the man who extended the

course from its original nine holes to 18 in 1893. Tom Dunn was a Scottish professional who would undoubtedly have taken the Fife influence on board when he saw the land he had been commissioned to mould into a golf course.

It certainly gives Bude a feeling of golf as it was intended to be played and Richard Whyman, the Head Greenkeeper, is a man suited to ensuring the best interests of the great game are preserved, even when modern day pressures are brought to bear.

These have involved course amendments when the growth of the town has rendered some of the holes dangerous as well as dealing with the intermittent bouts of mindless vandalism.

"We are on an extremely small site, only about 100 acres, and our safety margins are very narrow," explained Richard.

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"The only safe way is to play to the middle the whole time but when you get a big gust of wind the balls fly," he added, and a hour later when walking the course you discover that wind is not in short supply.

But like many courses of an earlier vintage - it celebrated its centenary in 1991 - it doesn't rely on length to protect its dignity.

"There are plenty of blind shots. The 14th comes to mind with a blind tee shot and a blind second and it's only 320 yards. The greens can be tough as well with sever slopes which means you've got to take care to get the ball on the right side of the hole."

The increased need to consider safety has affected the course however and one hole that suffered from the need to play within the margins

was the 18th, a superb finishing hole of 540 yards, which got the juices running when a good card was all but in and signed.

"You really had to get the tee shot over the burn and then you'd be home and dry but houses came into play and balls would drift over," explained Richard, who has been at Bude for 14 years.

As a result the hole was altered as was another, a short driveable par-4 which offered up dreams of birdies and eagles but nightmares of 8s if the tee shot landed on the road.

"We had to close it because we couldn't get insurance cover for the hole. You'd hit a tee shot when it was clear but by the time the ball came down there would be cars going along the road and in danger."

The other problem brought about by the growth of the popular surfing centre has been the vandalism.

"It comes in phases. We can have a period without any, and then a spate when we'll have a problem.

They usually start ripping up the greens around the hole because it's a weak area," revealed Richard, who prior to arriving at Bude worked at Saunton - a course, he still regards very highly, and Lee-on-the-Solent, where he played golf with a 14 year-old Steven Richardson

"They just dig away with the flag and there is obviously a lot of effort involved. They also dig out the cup and chuck it away. Another of their favourite tricks is to get hold of the top of the flag stick and bend it down as far as it will go which will force the bottom of the cup up through the surface."

The club get through at least a set of flag pins a year and it has meant Richard and his two full time and one part-time staff showing ingenuity when it comes to cutting costs.

"We make our own tee markers as we get through about 72 of them a year. We use down pipe, filled with concrete, put nails in and paint them.

Below: Richard with the rest of the team



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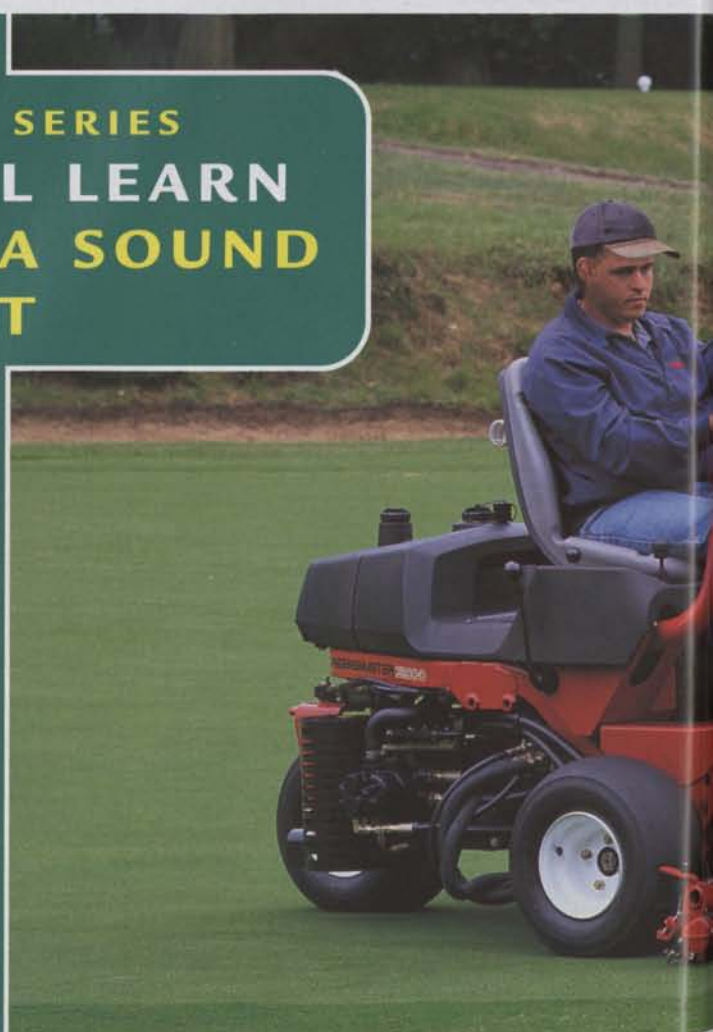
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"If we didn't get vandalised we would certainly look to improve the quality of our course furniture but it's really not worth it."

Working with such a small team ensures that no job is too big or too small for any member and the Bude staff – of Jason Chidley, Andrew Pollard and part-timer Greg Pett – are a tightly knit unit who have been together for some time.

"All my planning and paper work is done at home in my own time because if I did it during the day we wouldn't get finished on the course. I do the same jobs as everyone else. Fly mowing, divot filling, the lot."

The course is relatively maintenance friendly and a lot of areas can be cut with ride-on machines and they try to keep the use of hand equipment down to a minimum.

"The biggest user of time is the stream at the bottom end of the course which runs from east to west right across the course. We maintain about half of it on a regular basis



strimming and fly mowing and that itself takes three people just under a day."

Richard holds great store in aeration and always makes sure the course gets regular doses.

"I'm a great fan of slitting and we slit tine about 10 times through the autumn and winter, and also vertidrain in the Autumn. We've just quadra-hollow cored the greens which we always do in mid-March."

Among the on-going projects are a

bunker revetting programme and up-grading the paths from tee to fairway.

"Fairy rings are the only real problem we have and we are hoping that microbes might be the answer."

In his time at the club Richard has seen a steady improvement in both the quality of working conditions and the machinery fleet.

"When I arrived we had a shed which was more like a broom cupboard for three or four of us. It

wasn't ideal but was much better than a lot at the time. We also had to keep the machinery outside.

"Now we have a small fleet which is kept inside in our purpose-built sheds for which we have a replacement plan. Depending on the machine and how heavily it is used. The worst thing that can happen being isolated in Bude is a breakdown. If it is not too specialised a problem we have an excellent local commercial company which helps





and we make sure every piece of kit has an MOT every year. We do the general maintenance checks ourselves."

Last year was a memorable one for Richard who was the South West and South Wales representative in the final of the Toro Excellence in Greenkeeping Award having been originally nominated by the Club Secretary.

"The support I had from the club was tremendous and they were really willing me on... I think the possibility of winning the mower had something to do with it," he laughed.

It had not been an easy passage through to the final for Richard and his team.

"The two course visits were tough because I had the BIGGA Chairman,

Gordon Child, first of all and then, having qualified for the final, I had Walter Woods. Two hard men to please, particularly in Walter's case because we were the only links course in the final. What it actually did was keep us on our toes longer because we knew it was coming up and we couldn't afford to lapse at all," recalled Richard.

"It was a real honour to represent a Region which has so many fine golf courses and I will enter again. I thoroughly enjoyed it but you always feel a bit gutted when the results are read out and you've not won, even if you don't expect to win it... you always hope.

"I'd now call the rest of the finalists friends and having spoken a lot with them during our time at the final I learned a lot."

It is a learning ethic which Richard holds dear. He completed Level 3 over a six month period at

Cannington College so he didn't have to be away from work too much and he is hopeful of starting Level 4 later this year.

"You've got to try to keep one step ahead in this game."

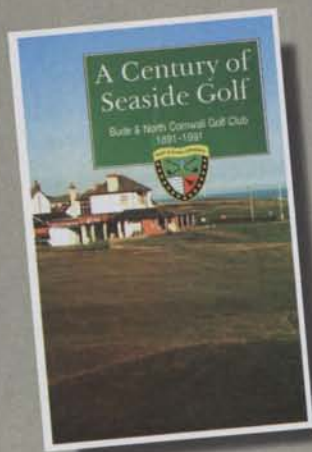
It is a philosophy which has served Richard Whyman and Bude and North Cornwall Golf Club well.

Machinery Inventory

- Toro GR 3100 x 2
- John Deere 2653A triple mower
- Cushman truck
- Cushman Topdresser
- Hardi 300l sprayer
- Huxley deep splitter
- Iseki 22hp tractor
- Coremaster
- Kubota L275 with front bucket
- Kubota L3600
- Amazone 135 rough cutter
- Trailer
- Various hand machines

Above: A newly revetted bunker

Below: An example of some of the damage vandals can cause



The club produced an excellent centenary book which details visits made by all three members of the Great Triumvirate, JH Taylor, James Braid and Harry Vardon and highlights Vardon's scorecard when he broke the course record with a 65 in 1909.

The Doyen of golf writers, Bernard Darwin, also visited the course and described it thus. "Bude is a place beloved by many summer visitors and the course is a good course if there are not too many of them upon it."

Written in 1910 some things never change!

However the real reason to look at the book is to read the section on "The amateur greenkeeper" which looks at some of the helpful hints written in the suggestion book over the years.

Included among the entries - which incidentally has a superb 1932 complaint about the

club's new hairbrushes only being suited to gigolos and that since the majority of members were getting thin on top the brushes acted as instruments of torture - is a most heartwarming put down by the Secretary of a over critical member in 1939.

The member had said that although a bad golfer he was able to distinguish between a good course and an extremely indifferent one. He grouped Bude in the latter category and listed a whole catalogue of complaints ending with..."In my humble opinion a cheap and bad greenkeeper is worse than none at all."

The secretary said that members of another club had visited recently and been full of praise and ended by saying, "Complaints about the staff should be made direct to the Secretary and not written in the suggestion book."

Hurrah!