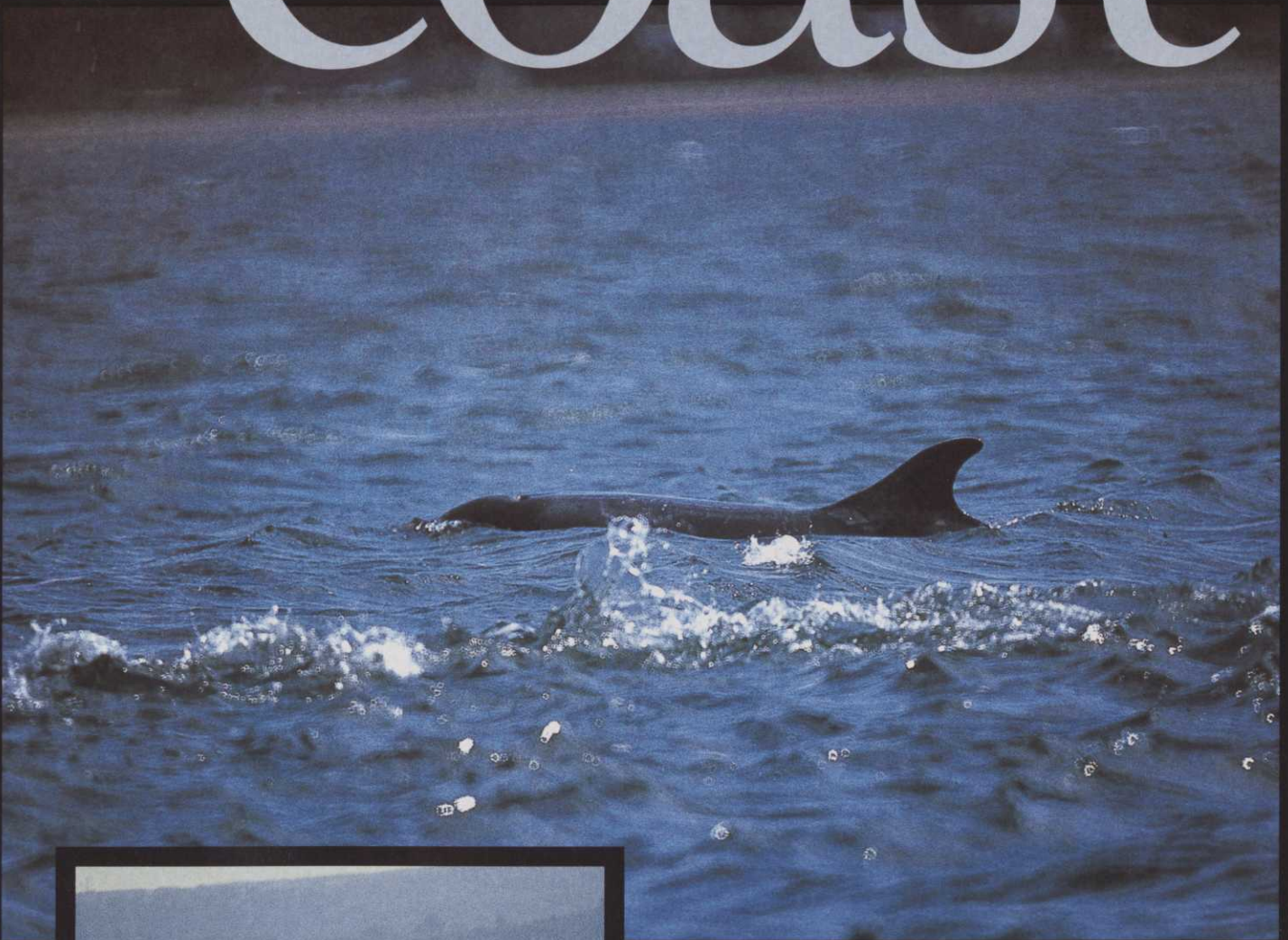


Scott MacCallum visits Fortrose & Rosemarkie, a golf course with water on three sides which also boasts some flippered friends...

Coast to COAST



Picture the scene. You arrive at the course early on a sunny morning with just a hint of breeze in the air. Half an hour later you're sitting aboard a triple, cutting a tee out at the far end of the course and something catches your eye. You look up and there, not 40 yards from you, is a dolphin splashing and diving about in the water.

Now such an experience is not exclusive to those greenkeepers who

ply their trade off the Florida Keys, the coast of Queensland or some other tropical paradise, it happens on a regular basis to Stuart Hogg and his team at Fortrose & Rosemarkie Golf Club, a few miles north of Inverness.

The dolphins, which are taking advantage of the Gulf Stream which passes right by the course, are not the only reason to mark Fortrose & Rosemarkie out from the ordinary. No, it is also one of the few, if not



Above: Stuart Hogg

Below: The Fortrose & Rosemarkie team



the only club, to claim an entire peninsula as its own. The 18 holes, designed by James Braid, have been fitted into the 90 acres available and is about 600 yards at its widest point and 160 at its narrowest.

"The dolphins are the icing on the cake," explained Stuart Hogg, 28, who has worked at the club for the past eight years and been Head Greenkeeper for five.

"To go out onto the course, see the sea, the sea views and then, all of a sudden, have a dolphin pop up makes it so special. It's nature and how lucky am I to experience it. When people come to see the course they always say they would love to work up here," said Stuart, who started his career much further south, working with

BIGGA Board of Management member Jim Paton at West Kilbride Golf Club on the west coast of Scotland.

Having the Gulf Stream dispels one of the myths about the North of Scotland - that the further north you head the colder it gets.

"One thing we are blessed with is good weather. We're in the Gulf Stream, which comes up the west coast and down the Moray Firth, so the water temperatures are warmer and it has an impact on the weather. I've seen it rain in Inverness, along the coast towards Nairn, even up the street, but it would be sunny on the golf course," he explained.

"We've already got a top dressing down and guys couldn't believe we were doing it. I was on the phone to a colleague in the west of Scotland who said he'd just got the frost coming out of the ground and I was telling him that we'd just cut our greens," said Stuart, as he spoke in the middle of February.

"We've cut our greens every week and tees every six weeks through the winter and even cut my fairways this year which we've never done before. There's been a big change in the climate," he said.

So, we've identified great scenery and dolphins, we've talked about the great weather. What's the down side of life at Fortrose & Rosemarkie?

Well, it goes without saying that the golf club is a little detached from huge population centres. Sure Inverness is only 20 minutes but most deliveries must come from Aberdeen and Glasgow, which are quite some distance away.



"Carriage is expensive," explained Stuart.

"I try to order all my needs at once to get a good deal and cut down on the delivery costs. For example I perhaps order a tonne of fertiliser because I know roughly what I'm going to need."

If such an approach is to be taken decent storage is essential and Fortrose & Rosemarkie's - the name comes because the public road which bisects the course down the middle is also the boundary of the two villages - maintenance facilities are second to none.

"The club used its VAT money on the sheds and they speak for themselves," said Stuart, as we sat in the mess room of the stone built, pine clad, building.

"We now hold our greens meetings in here and I'm quite proud of that



fact. I believe if you have tidy sheds it sets the tone.

"The club has done us proud and hopefully we can do them proud by producing a golf course that is up to standard," said Stuart, only the seventh Head Greenkeeper at the club since the early 1900s.

As well as the need to be well organised when it comes ordering materials the club's geography has led to other innovative thinking when it comes to cutting costs.

"We bought a Juno grinder in 1995 because ever time we sent away a cylinder it cost us £100 because it had to go Aberdeen and we could lose it for up to a week.

"We've got something like 24 cylinders which we do at least once a year so at £100 a cylinder it paid off within two years.

"We also take in other club's cylin-

ders and they lend us machinery in exchange. It's all about saving money as I don't have a big budget," said Stuart, who along with First Assistant, Chris Cumming, and Assistant, Kevin Fowler, are all qualified to use the grinder.

Having sharp blades is fundamental to Stuart's approach to greenkeeping.

"I have always told the boys that if the blades aren't sharp to get them done because it makes such a difference. Cut yourself with a Stanley knife and you get a clean cut but use a bread knife you get a hellish cut. That's the way I look at it and I believe it has a bearing on the fact that we don't get much disease here."

The team use a four stage plan to keep their blades sharp.

"We will go out with sharp units and regularly recheck and reset the

height and check if they can cut a single piece of paper. If they can't, they are back lapped, if they still can't, a front edge will be put on the sole plate and if then they still can't they are put in the grinder."

Working to a budget means that it has taken about 10 years to build up the machinery stock and replacement of key kit must fit into the club's financial constraints.

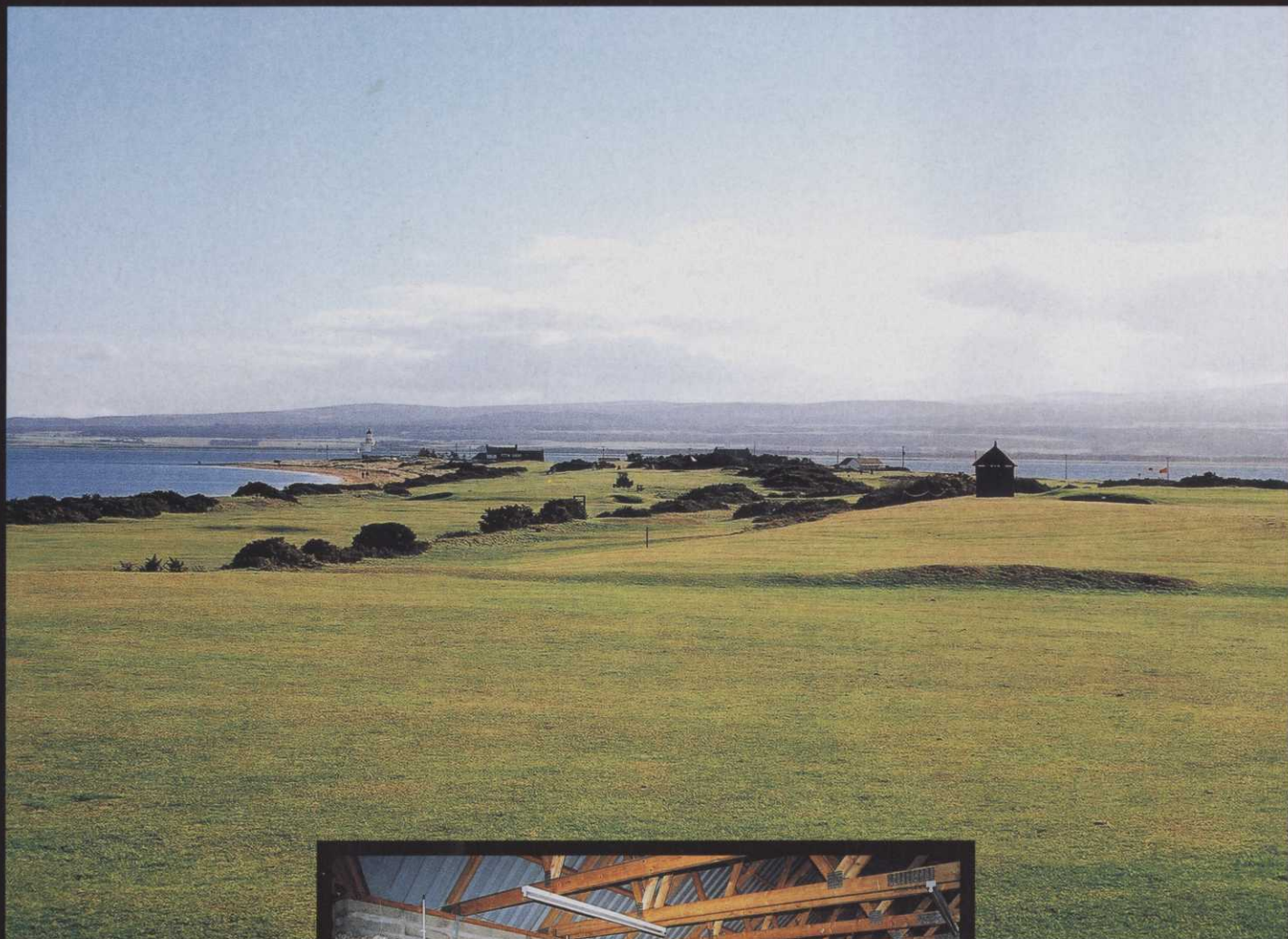
The servicing is also done by Stuart who, topping up a longstanding interest in cars and engines, attended a Toro course on greens mower maintenance.

Having the sea on three sides of the course does give ideal vantage points for dolphin spotting but it also has added course maintenance complications.

"We have a difficult golf course to manage because we have six sand

greens, six pure soil greens and six shingle, gravelly greens. The soil greens are there because they were rebuilt after the war - the course boasts some tank turrets along the left hand side as well as an underground concrete bunker - while the fact we are on what is essentially a raised beach means we've got one side of the course which is pure sand and the other shingle. It's down to the tidal effect," said Stuart, who added that at particularly windy times the peninsula grows by about 10 to 15 metres in length purely by sand and shingle being washed up by the tide.

"We've got to manage the greens in a sensitive manner to get the speed the same. I'm a firm believer that speed is not a necessity as long as you've got a consistency and a true putting surface. We get the wind here and its never up and down the course,



Above: Water on three sides. A view of the peninsula with the lighthouse at the far end.

Right: Maintenance facilities



Machinery Inventory

- 1 Allman 200 sprayer
- 1 Huxley Soil Retriever
- 1 John Deere Gator 4x2
- 1 Hydraulic 5
- 1 Kubota 2150 with cutting deck and front bucket
- 1 Sisis, Powaspread Topdresser
- 1 Royer 30 Powascreen
- 3 Super Certes 51cm
- 1 Juno Grinder
- 1 Ford 2120
- 1 GM 3100 Greens
- 1 GM 300 tees and aprons
- 1 GM 3 verticut
- 4 Flymos
- 2 Stimmers
- 1 Hedge Trimmer
- 1 Sisis Autorake
- 1 Amazone Groundkeeper 150
- Various spikers and tractor attachments

across every hole bar two, so that's tough enough."

As you would expect the course does suffer from spray burn and the risk of being so close to the sea never leaves.

"We could easily lose a couple of tees if we were to have a bad storm so to counter that some rock has been installed to act as defence."

Stuart attributes his greenkeeping style to the two Head Greenkeepers he has worked under in his career, Jim Paton at West Kilbride and George Paterson, who was his boss at Fortrose & Rosemarkie before going off to County Sligo Golf Club.

"I've taken a bit from Jim and a bit

from George to mould myself into a Head Greenkeeper."

He has obviously been a good student because last year was an excellent one for Stuart and the club with him representing Scotland in the National Final of the Toro Excellence in Greenkeeping Award and his work on the environment being recognised by the club being Highly Commended in the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition, in association with Amazone and Grass Roots.

"The entire team should be proud of what we achieved in the Toro award. I'm proud of them because without them my job would be ten

times harder," said Stuart, whose four man team is completed by apprentice, Greg Smith.

The award also led to some of the country's most respected greenkeepers making the trip north.

"We've had respected guys like Jimmy Nielson, Walter Woods, Cecil George and the late Harry Diamond up here and I've learned from them all while after Walter had judged the course for the final of the Toro Excellence Award he brought George Brown up for a weekend."

It is that sort of contact that ensures close touch isn't lost with the rest of the country, while Stuart and his team are keen BIGGA members.

"I was given the opportunity to organise the Bunker Support Team at the Walker Cup in Nairn last year using experience I gained from the Open Championship Support Team while I was at Harrogate as usual this year taking Chris Cumming with me for the first time."

Despite being an incomer to a close knit community Stuart and his family are well settled into the slow relaxed life in Fortrose and where else could you have Flipper as an early morning companion?