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Effingham facing a spiky problem in winter

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the introduction of more and more soft spiked golf shoes onto our golf courses.

Here at Effingham Golf Club we have a policy that whenever the course is open, then the greens are always in play ie. no frost holes etc. This has never caused us any serious problems in the past yet during this and the previous winter, the spike damage that has been occurring around the hole cups has increased tremendously. This happens

especially during frosty conditions. The problem I have found, is that the frost/ice builds up on the soft plastic spikes more readily than the metal spikes, the plastic spikes resemble a 'football type' stud after only a short time of walking across frosty greens, then damage to the putting surfaces soon becomes apparent.

At Effingham we are now actively encouraging our members to return to using the traditional metal spikes during the winter months. Although this is causing a problem as now the vast majority

of new golf shoes are sold fitted with soft spikes.

I look forward to hearing from other Course Managers who have experienced similar problems or vice versa as I feel that the introduction of these soft spikes are now as much damage to the traditional British Golf Courses as the misuse of the electric trolleys has done so over the past decade

Peter Broadbent, Course Manager, Effingham Golf Club

A cautionary tale: Getting mobile got me in a real flap

Now that the "Twelve Days of Christmas" are well and truly behind us, I wondered if you could make use of the following cautionary tale although it has little to do with serious greenkeeping.

Several days ago I happened to be working near to the lake on our Avening Course when my attention was distracted by the sight of a magnificent white swan swooping low across the course. As I watched, spellbound, it made a majestic landing on the lake. I stood there in awe, thinking just how lucky I was to have witnessed this, and how glad I was not

to be cooped up in an office etc etc, when my reverie was broken by the jarring tones of my mobile phone. (Not a rhythmic Brr Brr, but more a sort of biddle-liddle beep, biddle-liddle beep.) Unfortunately this alien noise seemed to enrage the swan causing it come marauding from the water flapping its wings and hissing menacingly.

So there I am in full retreat trying to keep a respectable distance between us, and, for some reason, trying to field the phone call. On the other end of the phone is an even bigger menace — Sonia, from Alpha-Line Paints

(name changed). By the time I could get the receiver anywhere near my ear, Sonia, bless her, is well into her sale's spiel and I can hear disjointed phrases such as "another two boxes before Christmas" and "ten percent discount".

I managed to blurt into the phone, "I'm terribly sorry, I'm terribly sorry, I'm out on the course at the moment and I'm having a bit of trouble with a swan."

"A swan" she said — "oh no - what is it?"

"It's a stonking great white thing with a wing at each corner and at the

moment it's running across the grass towards me," I panted hoarsely hastily looking round for somewhere to hide.

"My God" said Sonia sounding quite concerned, "You want to be careful, they're strong enough to break your arm."

"I couldn't care less about my arm" I screamed, "It's certain other parts of my anatomy I'm more worried about at the moment".

And she hung up - Some people!

Paul Worster, Course Manager Minchenhampton GC, Glous

Elliott Small: National Chairman of BIGGA

I must congratulate Elliott Small in becoming our new Chairman for 2000, a great honour indeed. Unfortunately at the BTME Banquet it was made quite clear that Neil Thomas thought Elliott was the Scottish Chairman of BIGGA by asking all the Scottish contingent to be upstanding and welcome their new Chairman. I wonder if next year when Clive Osgood is Chairman you will ask

all the English to be upstanding to welcome their new Chairman.

The general feeling among the rest of the members is that Neil made an error of judgement on such a special occasion. I hope this matter can be rectified by Neil in our magazine.

Brian Turner, Course Manager Sunningdale Golf Club.

Neil Thomas replies: My intentions were merely to raise a real Scottish welcome for one of Scotland's sons in a relaxed social atmosphere. Elliott is essentially the National Chairman of BIGGA, heading a National Association. I thought at the time that my unrehearsed introduction was in keeping with the spirit of the occasion.

BTME tops

After just returning from an excellent three days at the BTME 2000 at Harrogate I would like, through the pages of the magazine, to thank everyone involved. I was one of the lucky winners of the Patrons' Awards in the Ayrshire Section. It being my first year at Harrogate I was made to feel so welcome by everyone.

I also made a lot of new friends through the social side of the exhibition.

To all I thank you very much.

Roland Blackburn, Southerness GC

A Yankee Doodle thank you for BTME

If you could afford me a little space in the magazine I would like to comment on my perspective of the BTME 2000.

First and foremost "Thank You" seems like an understatement for all the hospitality that was extended to both myself and my wife by the entire BIGGA staff, the Chairman and each and every member I was fortunate to spend time with in Harrogate. For an American to feel so welcome and included in the activities at BTME leaves me at a loss for a way to express how much I value the friends I have made through my association with BIGGA.

The National Education Conference was excellently planned and carried out. The Trade Show was bigger and better than ever. The talks were superbly done in a variety of subjects and the banquet was the best I have ever attended in any country. My compliments to the Staff and all the speakers.

Prior to our departure from Harrogate, I told my wife that it seems more difficult each time to say goodbye to all the friends we have made over the years in our visits to the UK. I have experienced what few people here in the States would understand.

To have made friends from around the world and have such legends in the business as Walter Woods and Jack McMillan know you by name, makes one feel honoured and proud to be a member of BIGGA and part of BTME.

In closing I would like to thank Neil Thomas, the staff of BIGGA, the Chairman and all the attendees of BTME who made us feel so welcome at the Conference and gave us such wonderful memories to take home.

William P. Montague MG, CGCS USA. Via email

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Committed to Green and Valderrama Declaration

I was disappointed to see last month's articles by Neil Thomas and Gordon Child, which gave a very distorted picture of the Committed to Green programme and in particular the golf-environment summit held at Valderrama last November. The event had originally been planned as a joint meeting between the USGA Turfgrass and Environmental Research Committee and the ecology officers of the different national golf federations here in Europe, along with a number of other researchers and specialists. The main purpose was to review progress on both sides of the Atlantic in terms of environmental research and application programmes (such as Committed to Green and the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program), to discuss technical aspects of biodiversity conservation, watershed management and recognition systems, and to look at future initiatives.

As the summit programme came together we also found we had the opportunity to bring together the top officials from the golf authorities and from the major environmental bodies. This led to the idea of producing the Valderrama Declaration, a statement on golf, the environment and sustainability, which could be jointly signed by these key organisations.

On the day we had the Presidents of the USGA and EGA, the Secretary of the R&A along with the Director Generals of the World Wide Fund for Nature International and European Commission Environment Directorate. Supporting statements were sent by the International Olympic Committee

and United Nations Environment Programme. You do not often have the chance to get such a gathering in one place, and it was a unique opportunity not to be missed.

All parties shared a common platform, spoke of the importance of the golf-environment relationship and the need for a positive, collaborative way forward. The signing of the Declaration demonstrates that the golf authorities recognise the importance of environment in the development and management of golf, and likewise that the environmental authorities accept that golf is a serious player in the field of sustainability and environmental stewardship. That is a remarkable coalition of support for what we are doing and it represents a major step forward for golf and for all those working in this field.

We fully appreciated the need for greenkeeping organisations to be represented at the summit and we went to considerable effort to ensure that there were two FEGGA delegates in attendance, as there were also from the GCSAA. The next step was to invite other interested organisations to offer their support and endorsement of the Valderrama Declaration, to give it further weight and momentum.

The declaration makes five essential points: (i) golf is intimately associated with nature; (ii) the growth of the modern game has exposed golf to a wide range of environmental challenges, (iii) the popular appeal of golf gives it scope to be a major force for promoting environmental care; (iv) the golf authorities recognise the importance of environmental issues

and have already been doing much work in scientific research, education and conservation programmes; and (v) golf is committed to continuing its efforts in this field through specific, tangible programmes" i.e. Audubon and Committed to Green.

The Declaration places the traditional values of golf and respect for its natural heritage firmly to the fore. There is nothing here which I can see being objectionable to greenkeepers anywhere. It is certainly not American-biased, nor was the summit, and to suggest otherwise is a gross distortion.

This is doubly unfortunate as we risk taking our eye off the real ball, when we have so much in common. The new Committed to Green Foundation shares many of the goals of the greenkeeping profession and we are certainly keen to work more closely together. I ask FEGGA and its constituent organisations to look again at the Valderrama Declaration, to consider how we can cooperate on the Committed to Green programme, and to add their support to this positive and constructive initiative.

Despite these current problems and misunderstandings I am glad to note that Greenkeeper International wishes to open a running debate on Committed to Green and environmental issues generally. Together, I am sure we can work towards a more positive understanding and achieve mutual goals.

**David Stubbs, Executive Director
 Committed to Green Foundation**

Committed to Green: Lack of interest?

I write in response to the comments made with regard to the apparent lack of greenkeeping interest shown by the Committed to Green foundation in Greenkeeper International - January edition.

I am sure that everyone expressing an interest in golf will widely accept that the concept of Committed to Green, i.e. to provide a platform and standard for European Golf Clubs to demonstrate objectively their environmental performance, is to be commended.

The Committed to Green initiative, once fully operational, will provide a very positive way in which individual clubs and the golfing industry can show true environmental commitment. Given this, it is essential that we all work to the same end, this will involve a sharing of information, of problems, practical difficulties and solutions.

There is clearly a need for greater greenkeeper representation throughout the development stages of Committed to Green. To date greenkeeping interests have largely been covered by two European representatives on the Technical Working Panel, both have greenkeeping experience, and by myself and Jonathan Smith, who, when working closely with greenkeepers on a day-to-day basis do ensure that the greenkeeping interests are being considered. I did, prior to the Valderrama summit, stress to BIGGA that I would highlight the deficiencies and make the Panel aware of the need to give greater reference to the greenkeeping body. This I did and was applauded for it by Ron Dobson, of the USGA Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Programme. The Federation of European Golf Greenkeeping Associations (FEGGA)

were also represented at the summit part of their role must surely be to pass information back down to ground level.

Now that the foundation and infrastructure of Committed to Green have been put into place, it is time to consider practical issues and in particular practical solutions to a number of difficult problems. Grass clippings and grass waste disposal springs to mind and this was a case I made clear at the Valderrama summit. The newly formed Committed to Green Foundation will I hope offer a new opportunity to which greater greenkeeping representation can be built in and I do hope that personalities aside, we can all work together to promote what must be a very positive step forward for the European Golfing Industry.

**Robert S. Taylor, B.Sc. (Hons),
 MBPR, Senior Ecologist, STRI**

FEGGA's key role

Having recently received a copy of the January edition of Greenkeeper International, I must say how disappointed I was with the reporting of the recent Valderrama and FEGGA Conferences, and the implications of this on the future involvement of golf in environmental management.

The Scottish Golf Course Wildlife Group contributed to both Conferences which were equally constructive in different ways. The Valderrama Conference established Committed to Green as the most influential and important tool that golf in Europe has as a means of pulling together and disseminating its environmental concern.

At the FEGGA Conference there was a great deal of support for the principles of Committed to Green, and an endorsement of how it can be broken down to Clubs and made achievable through national projects such as our own. Indeed there was a more positive reaction to Committed to Green from the delegates than either of the articles suggested.

Obviously there are some issues to be ironed out, but I think this can be achieved if FEGGA get the correct representation on the new Committed to Green Foundation. FEGGA are a vital body in this because they can coordinate the communication with national Greenkeeping Associations and ultimately help unlock much interest and enthusiasm from greenkeepers. At present it is through FEGGA that the various national Greenkeeper Associations have their voice on the Committed to Green Foundation. FEGGA have been represented on the former European Golf Association Ecology Unit for some time. It is up to FEGGA to demonstrate that they have the ability to carry out their projected role of coordinator and disseminator of information to national Greenkeeper Associations.

I suppose there may well have been some opportunities missed in terms of maximising the effectiveness of debate with national Greenkeeper Associations, but these are things which can be discussed and put right. The key issue is that FEGGA have had representation. I question whether such strong terms as those used are the best way to progress, particularly when such strong terms could undermine the positive situation that many people,

including greenkeepers, have worked hard to establish.

These comments take us back to a period of suspicion and mistrust which distract us from the greenkeeping profession's substantial efforts to learn and adapt to environmental issues.

With regard to the current level of advice available within the golfing sector, golf is in a stronger position as a result of having its own, internal advisers, who without exception are finding a huge amount of enthusiasm from Clubs, Local Authorities and Greenkeepers. However, it should not be assumed that this limited resource is sufficient to allow golf to become inward looking in relation to the environment. One of the most important things golf can continue to do in the future is maintain discussion with environmental groups at European, National and Local level to ensure all good work receives recognition. Indeed, a key strength of our Scottish Initiative is that we have widespread support and contact from across the golfing and environmental sectors, including funding from the Scottish Golf Union, R&A, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Greenbelt Foundation. This is proving to be an excellent platform for constructive dialogue, which includes input from greenkeeping organisations and greenkeepers. Such positive debate is benefiting clubs when they approach environmental organisations locally.

No doubt the outgoing Chairman of BIGGA wanted to leave an impression and stimulate thought, but it is perhaps unfortunate that in so doing he has partly undermined BIGGA's, a large number of greenkeeper's and many others excellent work relating to the environment. I only hope that greenkeepers throughout the country appreciate that their efforts are well valued, and increasingly recognised by the environmental sector, and that the best thing they can do is to continue to seek advice, learn about the environment, increase their understanding, plan their ideas and then take action. This will ensure that golf continues to command respect as one of the UK's most enlightened and environmentally sound land-uses.

Jonathan Smith
Senior Golf Course Adviser
Scottish Golf Course Wildlife Group

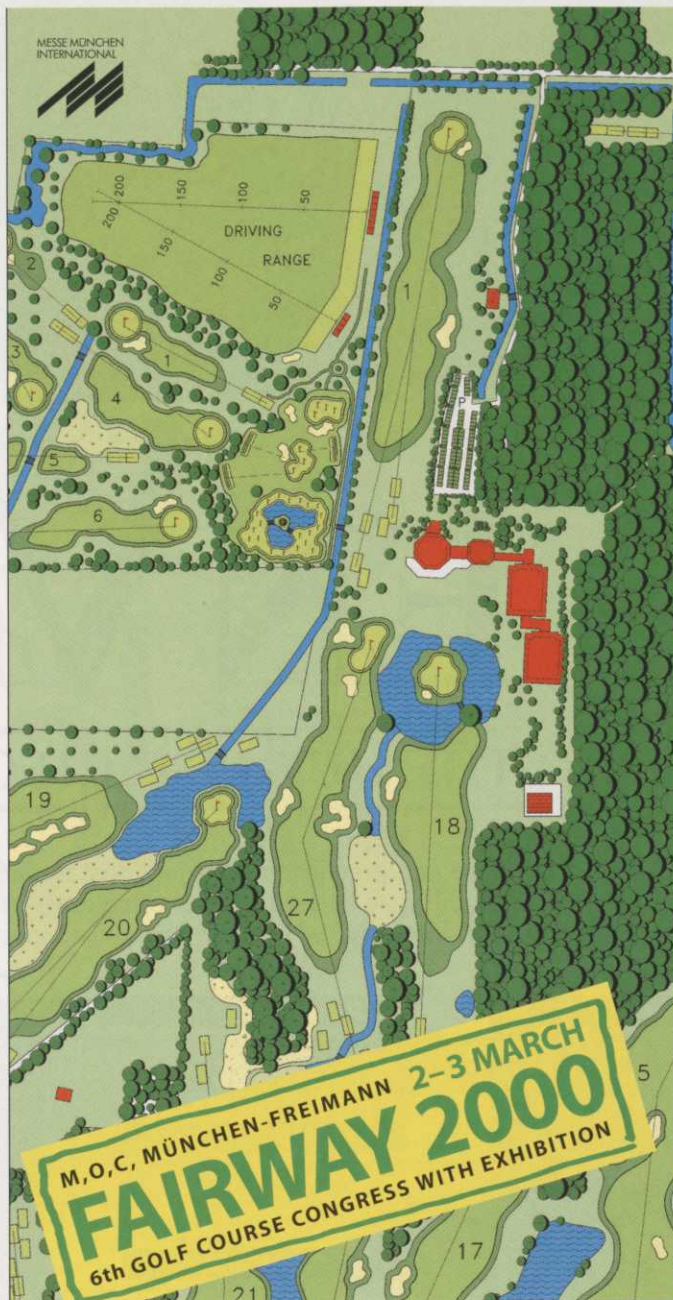
Praise for BTME2000

May I take this opportunity to thank everyone who was involved in making my week at both the education conference and BTME such a memorable one. With the invaluable sponsorship from Textron and the hard work from both the BIGGA staff and the speakers it is easy to see how the week seems to get better and better every year, long may it continue! On a personal note may I thank Frank Newberry and Brin Bendon for a superb two day workshop and an excellent careers clinic. Anyone

who has not attended any of Frank and Brin's workshops have missed out on a great opportunity to develop themselves into modern managers. It is easy to see why Frank and Brin are leaders in their field as their enthusiasm in moulding us into modern managers made the workshop an unforgettable two days.

Once again many thanks, here's to 2001.
Alex McCombie, Deputy Course Manager, Parkstone Golf Club

Via email



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