



# BIGGA ESSAY COMPETITION

Over the next three months we shall be publishing the winning entries in the BIGGA Essay Competition which has been relaunched after a break of at least several decades. As you will see when you read the work of Kerran Daley (Course Manager), Simon O'Hara (Over 25) and, this month, William Bowden (Under 25) the standards are high and the three winners fully deserve their reward of £500. They have set the levels expected from this year's entrants.

The main judge for the 1999 BIGGA Essay Competition could not have been better qualified for the task. Donald Steel is a rare man. He reached the top in the field of golf writing, as one of the top journalists in the country before turning his attention to golf course architecture where again he rose to the top of the tree. Having assessed the leading entries he made the following comments on the competition and greenkeeping in general.

Sherlock Holmes may no longer be the modern standard bearer among detectives. Poirot, Taggart and Perry Mason have fought for his crown but it was Sherlock Holmes who, on being complimented that he was a wizard for seeing everything, replied, "I see no more than you but I have trained myself to notice what I see."

If I were allowed one word to highlight the most necessary qualification for a good greenkeeper, my choice would be for him to be observant. Powers of observation

(allied to correct deduction) are an invaluable part of everyday lives and what better way to express those observations than through an Essay Competition?

It is easy to understand the natural diffidence of some at bursting into print. Taking the plunge can be as difficult as giving a first lecture at a seminar but belief and confidence are other crucial attributes of a successful greenkeeper. As a result, it is the facts that you accumulate that matter. Allowance will be made if ideas are not presented as well as they might be, either in print or out loud, but, as with cutting greens, you will find you will get better the more you attempt.

Whether they are made public or not, records or diaries are another means of storing knowledge although commitment to print may have been anathema to former generations of greenkeeper. They preferred to store everything in their heads. However, unless you are one of the few, you will soon find that memory plays tricks and, in any event, records can be handed down to a successor but writing essays or articles is a wonderful way of pooling information and airing hobby horses. I have enjoyed greatly reading the winning entries and congratulate the authors for having given of their time to set an example for others to follow. Make sure you start off the new century with a bumper bundle.

Donald Steel

## AN ENVIRONMENTAL APPROACH TO GOLF GREENKEEPING William Bowden

### Winner of the Under 25's Section of the BIGGA Essay Competition

Today more than ever, sport and recreation occupy much of our leisure time. It is therefore important to ensure that the pressures involved in terms of associated land-use, resource consumption, and pollution are continually minimised, not least within the golf industry where harmony with the natural surroundings is a fundamental element of the games heritage and enjoyment.

To this end, the future must involve the wise use of natural resources, and this should be the goal of every 'responsible' greenkeeper.

As we move into the next millennium, more than ever there is the potential for our industry to serve as a 'role model' for good environmental practice, this potential must be fulfilled. And while there are aspects from the past we can learn from, equally there are mistakes that we cannot afford to repeat.

Since the publication of the "Demand for Golf" produced by the Royal & Ancient in 1989, (in which it predicted that between 1989 and the year 2000, as many as 700 new golf courses were required just to keep pace with the growth of the game), then the emphasis has been on the appropriate and responsible care of both these new developments and established courses. The importance of such responsible

management can be put into context if one considers that within Britain alone, a total land area in excess of 102,950 ha is occupied by golf courses, a figure that highlights their significance within our landscape.

Further statistics show that nearly 36,000 ha of this total constitute 'rough areas', which in practical terms would equate to 1,800 potential wildlife sites, each measuring 5-50 ha in size. Furthermore it is estimated that a mean area of 58 ha is taken up by golf courses, while in comparison an area of just 40 ha is occupied by County wildlife reserves!

The concept of 'Environmental Management' is not a new one, for decades greenkeepers have been managing sensitive areas of their golf courses successfully. Particularly since the early 1970's at which time the general awareness regarding ecological issues increased. The public began to scrutinise both themselves and industry with regards to: Chemical use, and the health of the ecosystem. Borne from this awareness, many recreational industries (not least golf), had to come to terms with the tightening of legislation, and the increased interest regarding their effect on the environment.

Such restrictions have made it the policy of every conscientious green-

keeper to appreciate how their regimes can adversely affect their surroundings.

Although this is the case for the majority of golf clubs, there has to be some form of standardizing and monitoring attitudes and progress within the industry, to ensure the continued move towards a realistic and sustainable future which will see a massive reduction in the range of chemicals available to the greenkeeper.

Since the mid 1980's there have been a range of initiatives launched, all of which have set out to increase both environmental awareness and activity. Of these perhaps most successful has been the recent "Committed to Green" initiative, introduced by the European Golf Association (EGA), in 1998.

The scheme lays down basic guidelines for greenkeepers to follow, on how best to instill a comprehensive and worthwhile management strategy for their golf course. The goal of any such campaign must be to promote a move away from the unsustainable developments witnessed so often in the past, with the influx of so many "American" style courses requiring an incomprehensible level of input both in terms of capital and resources to maintain to the desired level. This cannot be an endorsable path for future developments to follow.





# BIGGA ESSAY COMPETITION

## Progression

There are several areas that need to be addressed, to help ensure golf courses continue to form a valuable and integral part of our landscape well into the future, of these paramount must be:

- Increasing environmental awareness, within both the playing fraternity and greenkeeping.
- Encouraging and supporting any positive environmental activity, making available qualified advice and guidance wherever necessary.
- The development of education and providing easy access to all information regarding greenkeeping and the environment.

Although not mentioned above, another important issue that needs to be addressed is the improvement of communication lines within many of our golf clubs. This should include the breaking down of out-dated and archaic communication barriers, enabling members and greenstaff to work together towards what must be their common goal: A quality golf course, set among attractive surroundings that is both enjoyable and rewarding to play.

Upon addressing any environmental issues regarding the golf course, it must be remembered that although not a particularly rare or threatened species, the golfer has to be the most important fauna of any club. As without his/her co-operation even the very best plans will be thwarted! I would be surprised if many golf clubs do not have keen environmentalists within both their membership and staff, however without satisfactory communication such underlying enthusiasm is wasted and with this the potential for the golf course to become a valuable site for both wildlife and the golfer.

Only from 'within' can a compro-

mise be reached, for the good of the golfer and the countryside.

All too often we see articles in magazines, often based more on opinion than fact, that heap praise upon the lush, green 'Augusta type' courses many of which are American. Unfortunately this opinion leads to unrealistic demands being put upon the greenkeeper to embark upon a course of extreme management, instead of maintaining the course within less intensive, and more viable parameters. It appears very often that the consensus of opinion within the golfing fraternity is for a 'Picture postcard' golf course, and as a direct result their enthusiasm to support a move towards a more sensitive 'style' of management could be less forthcoming, as this may not result in the production of intensively manicured, lush green fairways that many regard as the way a golf course should look.

The following quote was taken from a recent golfing publication which was previewing the Augusta Masters, it epitomises the attitude among many of today's golfers, and how they perceive the perfect course to be presented.

How can this industry move towards a more environmental stand point, if golfing magazines continue to publish articles like this?

"Ladies and Gentlemen, we would like to introduce you to the most beautiful holes on the world. If they play golf in Heaven, then this is what the members are enjoying" - alongside a picture of a lush heavily striped Augusta National.

Unfortunately as long as golfers (however small the minority), view golf within such limited horizons, then what we can achieve from an environmental standpoint will be severely limited. You need only to talk to a cross section of any membership to realise how many still regard the extensive areas of rough found on our

more established courses, as nothing other than untidy. Such individuals require educating, so we can counteract this widespread desire for what amounts to little more than 'Theme Park' golf, and ensure more golfers appreciate how the game should be played; in natural settings wherever possible.

Due in large part to the development of so many badly designed golf courses, a number of organisations have become concerned with the environmental impacts of golf, many of these groups condemn golf, claiming among other things that it is:

- Destroying natural habitats
- Suburbanising the Countryside
- Depleting water resources
- Over-using chemicals
- Restricting public access

Such is the enthusiasm of these individuals, that a group known as the "Global Anti-Golf Movement" operating out of Japan and Malaysia has begun a campaign focussing on the development of major golfing resorts. The organisation claims to monitor golf on a worldwide scale, and in 1993 they initiated "World No Golf Day".

Although an extreme group, it would be foolish for the golfing industry to ignore it. As history has shown repeatedly that yesterday's 'fringe' groups have often become today's mainstream! Unless we adopt a more active and visible environmental philosophy, at a practical level, then the claims of such 'Anti-golf' campaigners, (that the industry is endangering our environment), will become increasingly substantiated.

A positive aspect has to be the continued development of greenkeeping as a profession, with the improvement and greater accessibility of education, there will be an acceptance that good environmental



# PHOTOCAST TEE SIGNS



By  
**EAGLE PROMOTIONS**

Scorecards • Course Measurement • Yardage Books • Tee Signs • Event  
Boards • Leaderboards • Notice Boards • Bag Tags •  
Green Fee Tickets • Call Philip McNley on : 01883 344244

**Call Philip McNley on 01883 344244**

management should be an integral part of any regime. The present lack of environmental awareness is understandable if one considers that it was not until 1991 was the subject of golf course ecology fully acknowledged as part of greenkeeper training at SNVQ & NVQ level.

## Steps to Success

All management plans should be drawn up with the help of a qualified expert, the aim is to ensure that a viable and sustainable plan is put into action. The concept that such ventures bring with them a drain upon resources, and require a large investment of capital is unsubstantiated.

A worthwhile 'EMP' is not only relevant to multi-million pound resorts, on the contrary, such plans will often bring saving benefits e.g. The recommendation that 'Tiger' rough be cut just once or twice each year, would surely save on time and resources at many clubs, who continually chop down all areas of rough throughout the year, so members don't lose their balls!

Above all an effective plan should be realistic and achievable in relation to the circumstances of any given club. All too often greenkeepers have embarked on elaborate projects, with good intention, only to find that the level of input required to make these schemes successful is impossible to sustain. Often resulting in a messy scrub, or weed infested rough, worthless both from an environmental and golfing view point. The overall aim should be to maximise the potential of natural areas on the golf course, while avoiding any interference with regards to its playability.

When embarking upon a management plan it is important to maintain written records, including: initial policies, and the short and longterm goals. The following points highlight some important issues:

1. Define your objectives: What are your aims? How will they be achieved? Over what time scale?

2. Focus on specific areas for development, decide how these areas will be improved, i.e. the establishment of buffer zones, no spray zones, areas to be left unmown at certain times of the year etc.

3. Delegate individuals within the greenstaff, to be responsible for specific areas. Encourage the involvement of anyone who has enthusiasm and interest!

4. It is vital that any work carried out should be recorded and monitored, this will ensure initial targets are being met, and also highlight areas for review and improvement. Ideally a set period of time (ie two yrs), should be established at which point the success and/or failings of the plan can be assessed, and if required addressed.

Every management plan must be carefully thought out, and not undertaken lightly. With careful and thorough planning, not only will wildlife benefit, but also the playability and general appeal of the golf course.

In summing up, it must be said that environmental factors are among some of the most significant external influences on the future development of the Worlds golf courses. How golf is perceived from an environmental point of view, will have a direct effect on the future growth patterns of the industry! The major benefit of a more environmental approach will be the improvement of golf's image, both within and outside the industry.

An Environmental Approach to Golf  
Greenkeeping - William Bowden  
Winner of the under 25's section of the  
BIGGA Essay Competition

