

With as much rain as we have endured over the latter half of last year it was perhaps fitting that a club named the Dyke won the BIGGA Environment Competition, in association with Amazone UK. But it was for its environmental excellence rather than its ability to hold back the tides which brought it its rewards...



It's only Natural

Persistence and a continuing progressive approach to environmental management paid off when The Dyke Golf Club, near Brighton, under the stewardship of Course Manager David Ansell won the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition, in association with Amazone.

The Dyke had consistently finished high up the standings in the competition but had lost out in the hunt for the main prize but such is the excellent work carried out by David and his team that the presentation of the trophy was merely being delayed. That was how it worked out and the much deserved award was presented

to Club Captain Gary Thompson.

The Dyke adds to an illustrious roll of honour going back to when the competition was run solely by Amazone - Purdis Heath and Ridding Park set the ball rolling before BIGGA took over the running of the competition and Hankley Common, Lindrick and Temple Golf Clubs were the winners in the previous three years.

The presentation, in the splendid Dyke clubhouse, was also a sad occasion in one regard as Rod Baker, Managing Director of Amazone and the inspiration behind the competition announced to the gathering that

he was stepping down as Managing Director and that his association with the competition would end.

"When we started the competition in 1994 who would have believed that it would have grown to what it is today. I am stepping down a week from today so I'd like to offer my congratulations to everyone who has been involved over the last six years.

"We are the third most populated country in the world after Bangladesh and Holland and oasis like golf courses are very important to us. After our three score and 10 we should leave the planet no worse than we found it," he told the gathering.

Bob Taylor and Jonathan Hart-Woods, two of the principal judges, report on The BIGGA Environment Competition sponsored by Amazone with support from the R&A

As the overall winner of the competition it is tradition that the winning club hosts the prize giving and to say that The Dyke rose to the occasion would not be overstating the case. The food and hospitality sampled by all those lucky enough to attend was outstanding.

The overall winners award was accepted by Gary Thompson, Captain of Dyke Golf Club and David Ansell the Course Manager.

"Today, environmental awareness and the concerns arising from environmental issues form part of our modern lives on an increasingly frequent basis," said Gary.

"No matter where we are, or what we are doing the environment, its protection and enhancement is of vital importance to us all. We at The Dyke recognised some years ago now that we must embrace such awareness and take an active, rather than passive role as custodians of a small part of an area of outstanding natural beauty (AONB).

"Our own awareness

of these issues, and how we could respond to them, was greatly influenced and driven by the quietly determined attitude of one man, our Course Manager, David Ansell.

"David not only understood, but managed to convince first the Committee and then the membership of the importance of an environmental programme and our responsibility in taking effective measures to ensure that such a programme was not only implemented but sustained. His work has been tireless. At times it has not been easy but David has always known what was needed, how to plan and record what was done and, most importantly, how to carry out effective environmental management.

"On behalf of the club David may I thank and congratulate you and your staff for all of the efforts that you have put in and for which this award is the pinnacle of your achievements to date," said Gary.

"David was given an additional spur by the BIGGA Competition, sponsored by Amazone and our thanks must go to both of these organisations for initiating and carrying through what has quickly become a prestigious award," he added.

David, himself, then thanked the



Above: Clive Osgood, Dyke Captain Gary Thompson, David Ansell and Rod Baker
Below: The victorious Dyke greenkeeping staff





Club Committee and membership for their support and also acknowledged the massive role his greens staff had played in achieving the course's environmental objectives to date.

Martin Gunn, Course Manager of Temple Golf Club, last year's winners, urged the Club to enjoy the next 12 months while using the publicity of the success to positive ends.

He revealed that other clubs were still contacting Temple in connection with winning the competition just days before handing the trophy over. He also stressed how much they had enjoyed receiving the accolade and how much interest both internally and externally at the club the award had generated.

It was then the turn of the judges to give a brief outline of how the competition had fared during 2000. They also took the opportunity to raise some broader issues. "Today's presentations are very timely given that the world's major environmental decision makers are, as we speak, discussing global scale environmental management in The Hague," said Bob Taylor, STRI Senior Ecologist.

"Although at first this may seem far removed from this morning's celebration, the underlying message is clear. Environmental improvement starts at

home and that means good housekeeping. It is up to each and every one of us to take steps to do what we can to ensure environmental improvement. The BIGGA Environment Competition is instrumental in raising that awareness within the golfing industry. Through the continued progress of the competition we have been able to demonstrate the positive side of golf.

"However we must be aware that the golf industry is being faced with new legislation from Government and Europe and Clubs must be aware of these new pressures and remain alert to the sensitivities of the environment and act accordingly."

In summing up, Bob went on to say, "The competition is now over six years old and in that time has evolved to now encompass all aspects of environmental management ranging from the basic issues of nature conservation and habitat management to considering



issues such as pollution control and energy efficiency. Golf is a major land use, but it is one that has been criticised over the years for the way in which it has, as an industry undertaken this responsibility. The competition has been a very positive way in which we have been able to demonstrate the positive side of golf. The level of commitment to environmental management by golf clubs has largely

been unsurpassed."

Jonathan Hart-Woods, another STRI based Ecologist, who acts as a judge for the Environment Competition, outlined how the selection process had worked during the competition this year before Dr Keith Duff of English Nature summed up for the judges.

Keith expressed his admiration for the standard of entrants he had visited during the final judging and added

It's only Natural

Right: The Dukes Course: Extensive areas of natural looking water features

Below: Kilmacolm: A great example of a course that sits sympathetically in the surrounding landscape.

Bottom: Newmacher: Special initiatives award. The newly constructed island had swans nesting on it by early spring 2000

"These courses are making a real and practical contribution to the creation and maintenance of habitat continuity in the wider countryside."

He went on to stress the importance of corridors for wildlife that cross different land uses and identified golf courses as having a significant role to play in this capacity.

He pointed out the window at the course and said that it would not have changed significantly in 100 years whereas the surrounding land will have changed dramatically.

He reminded the gathering that we are a small over crowded island that needs to make the most of what little land we have wherever possible and responsible golf clubs were doing just that.

Though the day belonged largely to the Dyke and the regional winners, the announcement that Rod Baker, Managing Director of Amazone UK, was standing down from the competition after this year was met with genuine sadness from all those present.

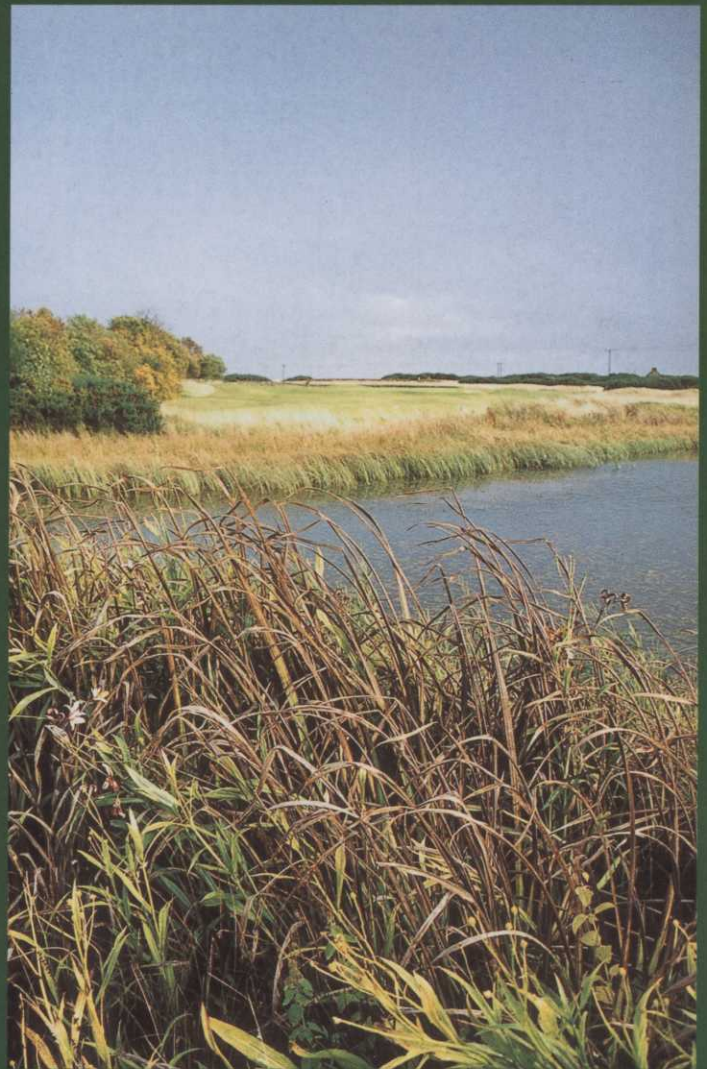
How the BIGGA Golf Environment competition works

A record of 58 clubs entered the BIGGA Environment Competition this year. That is good news for the competition and shows that every year the competition is just getting bigger and bigger (no pun intended). By late July from the original 58 entries received, Bob Taylor, STRI Senior Ecologist and myself had highlighted 25 clubs from all over Britain that we felt were worthy of further investigation through a visit to the Clubs themselves.

It is worth saying from the outset that not only was there a record number of entries this year, that the quality of the entries received was even higher than those from the previous year. That is great news and very encouraging but it also makes the judges' de-selection process extremely difficult and sometimes very painful. It also meant that some very good clubs just missed out on a site visit by the narrowest of margins.

With 25 clubs to visit Bob and I split the country into five sections, Scotland, Northern England, Wales, south-east England and south-west England. Visits are then allocated on our personal knowledge of the clubs to some degree. If Bob has been to a club that I have not visited I would visit that one and vice versa, that way we have a good idea of how we compare when it comes to the final judging when we meet up later to discuss our findings.

To get a site visit has its advantages too even if the club does-



n't go beyond this stage. As Bob and I work as Golf Course Ecologists we are happy to discuss any aspects of ecological management during the site visit. The main object of the visit is to assess the golf clubs environmental credentials for the competition but we are both happy to offer constructive advice and answer any queries. It is our hope therefore that by acting on the advice and encouragement offered during these sessions the club may progress further in the competition next year. So even if you feel your club is at an early stage of development when it comes to environmental management you could still benefit from entering the BIGGA 2001 Environmental Competition.

A number of the 25 clubs that narrowly missed out at this stage but were of a very good standard indeed received a highly commended certificate and this year the clubs were in no particular order, Luffenham Heath, Parkstone, Wilmslow, Oulton Park, Southerndown, Royal Portheawl, Theydon Bois, Berkhamstead, Bradley Park, Teeside Golf Club and Arcot Hall. Anyone familiar with any of these clubs will quickly appreciate the very high standard the competition is addressing.

From the 25 site visits made we finally agreed on eight clubs from which to select the five regional winners and one overall winner. With Bob and myself at loggerheads and September giving way to October it is of great benefit that we can call at this stage on the services of Dr Keith Duff, Chief Scientist with English Nature. It is Keith's job to arbi-

trate between Bob and myself and to visit each of the eight clubs selected with either of us to determine the five regional winners.

This year the final eight were Thorpeness Hotel and Golf Club, Llanymynech, Kilmacolm, Broadstone, the Dyke, Kenwick Park, The Duke's and Merrist Wood. It is fair to say that there was very little separating these Clubs, but there has to be regional winners and in the end Kilmacolm, Scotland; Llanymynech, Wales; Kenwick Park, North; Broadstone, South-West, and Thorpeness, South-East, won through. Each of the regional winners received £250 and a wooden plaque. Newmacher Golf Club near Aberdeen won the special initiatives award in its first year, for the success of their pond island building scheme.

The overall competition winner deservedly went to the Dyke Golf Club and they received a cheque for £5,000 and a plaque. The award ceremony was held at the Dyke Golf Club on the 23 November 2000. We would like to congratulate all the clubs that took part this year and the Dyke in particular and hope they enjoy the next 12 months.

Keith, Bob and myself can relax now for a few months until the competition launches early in 2001. Lets hope it attracts even more entries this year. If you are thinking of entering give it a shot there is nothing to lose and plenty to gain.

Jonathan Hart-Woods