

TALKING

Six of the country's top men give their views on how they cope with the winter weather

Coping with winter

Compiled by Malcolm Huntington MBE



Name: Sandy Bulloch
Course: Fereneze GC, Barrhead, Glasgow
Region: Scotland
Course Type: Heathland
Staff: Course Manager plus three



Name: Graham Chambers
Course: Longhirst Hall GC, Morpeth, Northumberland
Region: Northern
Course Type: Parkland (27 holes)
Staff: Course Manager plus seven, plus mechanic



Name: Gavin Robson
Course: Lingdale GC, Woodhouse, Leicestershire
Region: Midland
Course Type: Parkland
Staff: Head Greenkeeper plus five.



Name: Adrian Archer
Course: Broadstone GC, Poole, Dorset
Region: South West and South Wales
Course Type: Heathland
Staff: Course Manager plus six



Name: Ray Day
Course: Sundridge Park, Bromley, Kent
Region: South East
Course Type: Parkland (36 holes)
Staff: Course Manager plus ten, plus one mechanic



Name: Allison Sloan
Course: Ballymena GC, Northern Ireland
Region: Northern Ireland
Course Type: Parkland
Staff: Head GK plus three, plus one apprentice

1

Following the worst winter in most people's memories what particular difficulties have you encountered preparing your course for the new season?

Our winter hasn't been too bad so we have had no real difficulties. However, it has been cold in March and April so the growth is a bit behind. We haven't had much rain at all.

It has held back the fertilising programme and we are a month behind schedule. Because we are well drained we have had a lot of visitors in winter and therefore we have compaction to deal with.

We have had problems just getting out on the course to cut. Fertilising is ok but spraying is behind schedule and greens growth is six weeks behind.

We haven't been able to get out on the course to do many jobs and with competitions and societies using the course we have had to work round them. We are about a month behind with most things and need to do more aeration on the fairways as we have a build up of thatch.

Just getting on to the ground. We have hilly courses and have discovered new springs coming out of the hillside which leads to flooding so we need to work on the drainage.

It's been very cold and wet so the growing season has been delayed considerably. Cutting hasn't started as we speak on May 1. I would say we are a month behind schedule.

HEADS

2
How has your membership reacted to longer and more frequent course closure the weather has caused?

We have been closed for only four or five days and every closure has been due to snow rather than flooding so the members have been far happier than the majority in other parts of Britain where the weather has clearly been a lot worse.

We have never closed for rain and only six or seven times due to snow. We have been border line once or twice though.

It's been a frustrating time as we have been closed for 67 days. I would think 99% of our members, many of them five-day, are sympathetic but the weekend golfers don't always understand and get frustrated. It's the usual story of 400 good greenkeepers among the membership!

We have only been closed for about 15 days plus a few half days. Members have been understanding but then some have got a bit frustrated, which is understandable, as they haven't been able to get out and play their golf.

Very positively. The members have been very understanding about the problems and we have tried to open the course whenever possible.

Our course hasn't been too bad though we have been on temporary greens. We have been closed for about 20 days and the reaction of members has been 50-50 from a frustration point of view.

3
What policies have you put in place to protect your course during such a difficult time - trolley bans, temporary tees and greens etc.

We have been on temporary greens and tees a few times, but have used them as little as possible. There hasn't been a ban on trolleys, but we rope off or white line certain areas where, for example, we have re-turfed.

We are on winter greens on every hole and all 27 are USGA specification. This comes into operation on November 1 each year. No trolley ban, but we rest some walking areas and ask golfers to stay on the tarmac paths we have all round the course.

We have 18 temporary greens, 18 winter mats and winter teeing areas. Walkways are roped off and there has been a trolley ban for the first time. On some days we open half the course which is a lot drier than the other half, but still no trolleys.

We haven't had any trolley bans and this is part of or policy because we use ropes and this forces players to walk the way we want them to go, rather than walking across a green to get to the next tee.

Mats are used in winter along with temporary greens on the aprons which are maintained all the year round so that there is always a reasonable surface. We have had total trolley bans and also occasional trolley bans apart from medical reasons.

We have had temporary greens on every hole and trolley control with roped off areas, but we have not banned trolleys as the membership is quite old and they rely on trolleys.

4
What long term implications on the course has the bad weather had?

Hardly any. We are doing some drainage work, but that is normal and we haven't done any extra work.

I can't think of any long term implications as we are so well drained and have had no problems.

A thatch build-up on greens is one problem and we are spending £27,000 on draining the fairways in September. We have built four USGA greens and start on the other 14 in September.

It will mean that we have to spend a lot of money on drainage. Many of our old fairway drains are shallow and can be damaged by verti-draining. We have discovered springs and have a fair amount of clay content in the soil.

We have had flooding in areas never before experienced so we are working on new drainage as its been difficult to move water off the course. We have a programme for new drains on greens and fairways.

We will do more spiking and hollow tining on fairways getting down 12 inches when possible. We have also used a drill and fill machine.

5
What, if anything, will you be doing to be better prepared for a repeat in future winters?

We will aerate more and also slit and verti-drain to give more aeration to prepare for any bad winter we may have. I can recall far worse winters than the one we have just had. We will also gradually change all our greens to a USGA specification at the rate of two or three a year.

We will verti-cut more often, moving from two or three times a year to four on the fairways. We micro-tine greens once a month which should be sufficient.

A big drainage problem and we will be verti-draining the fairways. The new greens will be solid tined once a month. Having spent £57,000 on the front nine drainage we should be a lot better off.

The increased drainage programme we are putting in place with drains a metre deep, when we can get down that far, should be very helpful. In the last three years we have been working on drainage and now this will be done on a much bigger scale.

A complete drainage programme will help and we will also be verti-draining a lot more often rather than once very two or three years on the fairways. It will be more like greens three times a year and once a year on fairways.

I would say we will do considerably more aeration work before the wet weather starts.