

TALKING

Six of the country's top men give their views on the changing weather trends

Weather trends

Compiled by Malcolm Huntington MBE



Name: Jim Paton.
Course: West Kilbride Golf Club, Ayrshire
Region: Scotland
Course Type: Links
Staff: Course Manager plus five



Name: Ian Buckley
Course: De Vere Northop Country Park Club
Region: Northern
Course Type: Parkland
Staff: Head Greenkeeper, plus three groundsmen and one mechanic (250 acres to look after)



Name: Barry Holt
Course: Burford Golf Club, Oxfordshire
Region: Midland
Course Type: Parkland
Staff: Head Greenkeeper plus four



Name: Raymond Day
Course: Saunton Golf Club, Devon
Region: South West and South Wales
Course Type: Links (36 holes)
Staff: Course Manager, plus ten, plus a mechanic



Name: Robert Lucas
Course: Royal Blackheath Golf Club, Eltham, London
Region: South East
Course Type: Parkland
Staff: Course Manager plus seven



Name: Ken Moore
Course: Scrabo Golf Club
Region: Northern Ireland
Course Type: Heathland
Staff: Course Manager plus four

1

1. In your experience what changes to the regular weather patterns have you notice over the last 10-15 years?

The winters are definitely a lot warmer and wetter. We get very little snow in this area because of the gulf stream

Winters are a lot wetter, but we have also had a lot of rain in summer in recent years. We used to have three to four days of snow at a time, but now it's much milder

There have been very definite changes in the last four or five years in particular. We don't seem to get winter now, although there is some frost and a little snow and there is a lot more rain. I have never known a winter like this for floods in the area.

In this part of the world we tend to get colder springs and now warmer winters up until Christmas. There are cooler temperatures in April these days

We have lost our traditional seasons and we now have warmer summers and winters.

Winters are wetter and warmer. We used to get a lot of hard frosts in Northern Ireland, but we don't seem to get them now. We get a bit of snow after Christmas usually.

HEADS

2. How has this affected your cutting and feeding regimes?

We are cutting for far longer periods now. We hardly touched it in winter for years but I remember a couple of years ago the staff were off from Christmas to New Year and when we came back it was only just possible to out the grass with mowers because there was so much growth.

We try to keep our greens (USGA) fed as the water goes straight through. I use high potassium content as a pick-me-up. Cutting was once a month in winter, but nowadays we struggle to get on the greens as it has been so wet. To give an example of the changes, I can recall seeding in January some years back and getting good results.

Milder means you have more cutting to do. I have cut greens almost weekly this winter, whereas before we could go weeks without cutting when it was very cold. I don't use feeds in winter, apart from sulphate of iron and perhaps a bit of seaweed to harden off the greens.

The early feeding has been affected and now we put a bit of iron on, partly for cosmetic purposes to keep people happy. Cutting in early spring is a bit less and the height of cut remains up for a bit longer.

Cutting regimes are now lasting 10 months whereas before it was more like eight. In November end March we originally cut once a month, now it is more like two or three times.

Basically we have stopped cutting earlier because of increased rain. The grass doesn't grow much after September. We didn't fertilise the greens until May 2 last year and the fairways were not done until May 17. East winds are the reason, keeping the temperatures down and resulting in a lack of growth.

3. Has the type, or severity, of turf disease affecting the course changed over the past few years?

We are very lucky because we are not bothered too much by disease but we had some Fusarium in November and December, quite a bit more than in years gone by.

Fusarium has certainly got worse over the years. Years ago we didn't really see any in winter.

Certainly. As it is so mild we got more disease, mainly Fusarium. There's no change of type but disease is more severe.

We have altered the feeding programme on greens in the last couple of years and we have reduced disease by more aeration and putting on a bit of feed. It's a question of trying to get a balance.

Anthraxnose has reared its ugly head in the last four years, but Fusarium hasn't really altered because we get more chance to aerate in the warmer winters. There is no major problem at the moment but maybe there will be in time because of the changes.

Things haven't really changed at all. We get a spot of anthracnose and some Fusarium, but there is really no major problem.

4. What other work have you done to protect your course in terms of new drainage or irrigation for example?

We have worked on the drainage a lot. The drains that were in were very old and they were also covered by ash, which had gone solid, making it difficult for water to drain away as it wasn't reaching the pipes.

The course was built six and a half years ago and since then we have been putting more and more drains in. The builders of the course didn't leave any drainage plans so we have almost had to start again. Irrigation has been updated for similar reasons. I think some of the old irrigation is four feet deep.

We have upgraded the irrigation system around the greens and introduced a watering system on the tees. We have also put in a few more laterals on the greens and done some deep aeration, also using a drill and fill machine.

In the last five years we have redone the main drain through the course and improved the drainage at the top end of the course, known as the gull pit. We have added irrigation to high wear areas.

We have put in new irrigation, including the fairways, in the last 12 months and this will help to counteract the warmer summer periods. Drainage work has increased over the last year as well.

A year ago we finished irrigation on the course. Previously we had only six holes with sprinklers. Drainage is not good, but we are planning improvements and money will be put into the budget for this.

5. If changing weather patterns continue what long term affect do you think it will have on your golf course?

The warmer winters mean that there is a lot more play now and the season is extended to 12 months. Many come to play on our course from the Glasgow area when their courses are closed. Global warming has also seen a big difference in tides and we spent £100,000 on shoring up the edge of the course because of coastal erosion, using armoured rock, some of them three and five tonne pieces.

When the course dries out - we have been closed a lot - we will be doing a great deal of aeration. If winters remain mild we expect to have more players on the course and so more compaction — another problem.

There is going to be a lot more wear because milder winters are encouraging golfers to play more. It has often rained overnight and then been fine during the day so there is more traffic damage. We have also more damage from rooks pecking for leatherjackets and chafer grubs in the mild winter.

We have no control of English nature. You might say nature does what it wants and that stops us from doing what we might want to do. Because we are a links course we may suffer from even more traffic in winter as our course is often open when others are closed because of the wet conditions.

Our membership is ageing and so the change in weather pattern will see more golf in winter. This has resulted in us considering a change to USGA greens from the traditional method to give a 12 month service rather than 10.

Basically it will result in a lot more winter golf and with that in mind we are changing to a 50-50 soil sand mix from 100% soil on the greens