

# COURSE





# CLOSED



The economic cost reaches far beyond the slaughter of Britain's livestock.

Golf, as a recreational business and tourist attraction, has suffered a major blow.

This countrywide investigation by John Lelean uncovers how the industry is coping...

Two years after serving King and Country and for the first time legally entitled to vote I was given what I thought at the time was some pretty sound advice.

"Listen to what they all have to say, take your pick and no matter which party you vote for it won't make a scrap of difference. Politicians don't run the country - it's the Civil Service."

They may have done so reasonably efficiently in the early 1950s, but having researched this report on the affects of 'foot and mouth' on the game of golf, I have come to the conclusion that the State machine has grown into such a gargantuan bureaucratic autocracy, the country is no longer run, it is being strangled!

Without hopefully being too political, it would appear that the Prime Minister did eventually recognise the problem, which is why he moved the centre of operations away from Whitehall into Downing Street and gave the Army a significant role as the only organisation capable of cutting through the 'red-tape'.

The spread of the virus infection caught most in the know by surprise, not least the civil servants at the Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries & Food. Though it was their policies involving the closure of local abattoirs and the encouragement of nationwide livestock dealing that transmitted the disease from Northumberland to Essex, Cumbria and Devon overnight.

There are many tales to tell, some golf related others worth an airing in print, all point to one of the most serious economic crises since the middle-eastern sheikhs shocked the world by jacking up the oil prices in the 1970s.

One lady in the office of a golf club secretary in Devon was almost in

tears as she related the affects of the disease in her village. Every aspect of business and the social life of the community had come to a stop. The shops and pubs were empty, darts matches cancelled, all the guesthouses and hotels reported cancellations, even the Women's Institute meetings were postponed indefinitely.

"It is just like a ghost-town, people have been laid off, there is no money to spend and no end in sight".

Devon has been hit very hard, with Westward Ho, Torrington and Yelverton forced to close before the end of February. Not because there has been an outbreak of foot and mouth on their land or near it, purely because both are on common land with footpaths crossing the course.

Head Greenkeeper Mark Evans at Royal North Devon has 120 sheep on his course that the local graziers refuse to move. They could if they applied for a licence, but by mid-April refused to act. This has led to the Torridge District Council who own the land banning access.

Mark, who normally operates with five staff, has been forced to lay-off two and cut the working hours of those still employed. To add insult to injury a council official has ordered that no maintenance work can take place, apart from cutting the greens once every ten days. Even the grass cuttings cannot be removed, they have to be deposited in a designated storage area.

"It is very frustrating, added Mark. "If we could only carry out our normal daily work schedules, the course would be in first class condition when play is resumed. We have painted just about everything that doesn't move. There is disinfectant in the club car park and we all go through the procedures on entering the course and leaving it."



At Torrington, a 9-hole course with 400 members, Tony Gouch is also on common land, but in contrast to Royal North Devon there are no sheep or cattle on the course, but that has not influenced the decision of the 16 strong committee of Torrington Conservators. They banned golf and closed the whole of the 400 acres of Torrington Common.

Tony has also had to lay-off his three part-time staff and is naturally worried about his own job.

"If there is no income coming into the club, how long can the staff expect to be paid a salary?"

"The inconsistency in the ground rules made by official bodies is hard to understand," added Tony.

"Our members, deprived of play at their own club, are going elsewhere in Devon. A party went to Oakhampton, which is much nearer the heart of the epidemic."

At Oakhampton the Club Secretary, Clive Yeo, said that MAFF were quite happy with their precautions. All cars go through a vehicle dip and the golfers disinfect shoes and trolleys before teeing off at the 1st and again after playing the 18th. At only one place does the course abut farmland and no-one can retrieve a ball from the field or the hedge.

They have also offered a temporary membership facility to the members of Tavistock and Yelverton who are both closed.

It is these two clubs in the Dartmoor National Park who have suffered most. Within three days of the first reported case in Devon, the park closed and that also included the golf courses, where sheep and ponies graze freely.

Shaun Getson, Head Greenkeeper at Tavistock, is permitted to carry out essential maintenance, cutting the greens and maintaining the three new holes recently constructed. He runs the course with only two assistants, but the club have said there is no question at present of laying anyone off. They are fortunate to have a strong social membership to keep the club staff in business, but the only golf being played is on an enclosed putting and chipping green.

At Yelverton, seven miles south of Tavistock, Steve Evans said the Dartmoor National Park Authority say it could be August or September before the course can reopen. Again only essential maintenance is being permitted by MAFF, cutting greens and repairing the normal damage caused by the grazing animals, which in effect amounts to about two hours a day.

He has four staff who have all been told their jobs are safe for the time being. However, the loyalty of the golfers will come into question this month, as the subscription renewal is due in May, putting considerable financial pressure on the club if a substantial number decide not to renew their membership.

As a holiday course, loss of casual green fee income, plus a down turn in the bar profit could add up to over £5,000 a month during the spring and summer.

Steve is following the MAFF guidelines strictly to the book, washing down all machinery every day and then spraying disinfectant on the equipment and themselves.

What he cannot understand is why MAFF have not taken any steps to prevent the sheep and ponies from roaming at will.

"I suppose there is a reason, but wherever you go on the roads around here, there are sheep. There is nothing to stop them wandering up to Princetown where there is already a reported outbreak."

Wrangaton, where nine holes are on moorland and nine on parkland, have been able to open half the course, but because the club car park abuts the moorland, members are now changing their shoes in a temporary park

almost two miles from the clubhouse and not using the bar and catering.

"Subscriptions became due on April 1," said Head Greenkeeper, Gerald Ayliffe, "and by the middle of the month barely half had renewed their membership. With the loss of bar revenue and green fees this has made income very tight."

"The club were considering putting the green staff on a four day week, but one member left to join another club and so far we are all working full-time."

On the 9 moorland holes, there are 300 sheep and MAFF have restricted maintenance to essential work only.

There is an entirely different situation at the Manor House Hotel course at Mortonhampstead. The proprietary club is fully operational, although it is within the Dartmoor National Park it is totally enclosed and on private land. The club have introduced a disinfectant system, but not because of MAFF instructions.

A former Devon farmer, Martin Petherick who owns the Waterbridge Golf Club at Crediton has been able to keep his course open and continues to welcome visiting golfers, though there is a rigid infection prevention procedure. He believes MAFF were far too slow to react after the scale of the outbreak became obvious in the first two weeks.

As someone who has a working knowledge of the disease, Martin is convinced the way it spreads is not fully understood. A farmer friend, two miles from his course and ten miles from the nearest outbreak took every possible precaution, but his livestock became infected. His flock of sheep had not left the land and the last animal he bought in was a ram, back in June last year.

In Cumbria, the centre of the highest concentration of the disease, a few courses are closed, but there are a number under pressure to shut up shop. Appleby, a 9-hole moorland course on common land bordering north Yorkshire was forced to close from the outset although there were no sheep grazing. When Head Greenkeeper, Steven Campbell, was contacted on his mobile as he was cutting the 17th green, he said nego-

**Foot-and-mouth could cost UK £7.6 billion**

The livestock epidemic is set to cost the tourist industry £5 billion in overseas and domestic earnings and £1bn in lost fares to British carriers - estimates of the cost to British agriculture range up to £1.6bn. Tourism employs 1.85m people and agriculture employs 440,000 - a total of 6.3% of the workforce

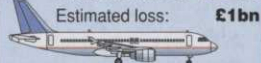
**Overseas visitors' spending (1999)**

Total: **£12.5bn**



**Fares to British carriers from overseas visitors: £3.2bn**

Estimated loss: **£1bn**



Tourism revenue:	<b>DOWN 10%</b>
Revenue in parts of Cumbria, Devon:	<b>DOWN 80%</b>
Revenue in Scotland:	<b>DOWN 21%</b>
Hotels affected - England:	<b>78%</b>
Scotland:	<b>91%</b>
Wales:	<b>95%</b>
Forward bookings	<b>DOWN 30%</b>
Additional cost of epidemic to farming industry:	<b>UP TO £1.6bn</b>



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**FMD**  
Can you believe this?

A Cumbrian farmer suspected foot and mouth disease when he started early morning milking and reported it to MAFF within two hours. A vet arrived next day and confirmed an outbreak. Two days later incineration material arrived, followed by seven slaughtermen the following day, accompanied by a health and safety official who stated that the cull couldn't begin because there were no toilet facilities for the workers. Portable loos arrived at 6pm, too late for the cull to begin. The infected herd was eventually culled five days after the infection was first reported.

A 21-year-old woman from Dumfries has been charged with an assault on a police officer after she came home and found him standing over the dead body of her pet goat, slaughtered by order of MAFF officials because her family property bordered an infected farm.

Residents in a West Yorkshire town had five weeks accumulation of rubbish uncollected because they live on an unmade up road classed by the local authorities as a bridle way. The fact that it only links two main roads and the

surrounding farmland was fully built on over 40 years ago has made no difference to the official who slapped a prohibition notice at both ends.

Golfers throughout the country are under attack from ramblers and dog walkers who are incensed that they are banned from the public rights of way while the golfers continue playing. They cannot accept there is a difference between using footpaths on golf courses - many with continuations to farmland, compared to the golfers walking the same





Above: Tavistock GC greenstaff have to wear protective clothing. Even then, they can only carry out essential maintenance work.

tations were taking place to re-open, but that very morning adjacent farmers had opened their gates and let on two separate flocks and allowed them to intermingle.

His reaction was quite predictable. One can only wonder what advice MAFF gave or if they had been consulted.

At Penrith to the north, the course is open for the simple reason the danger of infection has ceased. All the livestock for miles around has been killed, either because they were infected or as part of the culling policy to stop the spread southwards.

Silloth-on-Solway, one of Britain's finest links, is still in play. John Hill, the club Secretary said the Committee were reviewing the situation daily, but only a small part of the course backed on to farmland where there was an outbreak. Access to the course was through the town, with the sea as the major boundary, so there was nothing to be gained by closure.

The majority of the members at Silloth are in the farming community and for them it must be very distressing to see their quality herds transformed overnight to rotting carcasses with no foreseeable end to the problem. They are being compensated, but it is working capital that is going into the bank without the means of re-investing back on the land.

With the main area of infection so far confined to the west side of the country from the Borders to Devon,

a confusing situation has arisen in Wales where the Welsh Golf Union web-site reports nine courses closed, mainly in north Wales, though the Vale of Glamorgan Council closed Southernness for five weeks. It reopened in time to stage the prestigious Duncan Putter with an international field after MAFF carried out a 'risk assessment', but said no golfers from infected areas could take part.

Course Manager, Garry Scott, has 500 free roaming sheep on the course and has instigated a fully operational washing down procedure for all machinery, plus the usual disinfected mats and beds of straw.

At Pennard, the Swansea Council closed the course and footpaths for three weeks because there were ponies on the fairways. With the nearest infection over 50 miles away, it was allowed to reopen on March 24 despite farmers putting on sheep and cattle, said club Secretary, Morley Howell, though they are hoping to have them removed.

No doubt as part of the pressure to counter the fear that Britain is in quarantine, the footpath ban at Pennard was lifted on April 10.

From this review of the country, Cumbria has lost the most livestock, Devon suffering the greatest financial setback as far as tourism and golf is concerned. The South West Region also lost its annual Westurf Show as a direct result of the outbreak.

distance on privately owned property. One Daily Telegraph reader wrote that he and other local residents had considered making a citizen's arrest, until they were advised, that, to get to the golfers would mean committing an offence by using the footpath.

We'd like to hear from any BIGGA member with similar stories to tell, perhaps in different parts of the country.

You can contact us by any of the following methods:

Post: BIGGA House, Aldwark, Alne, York, YO61 1UF

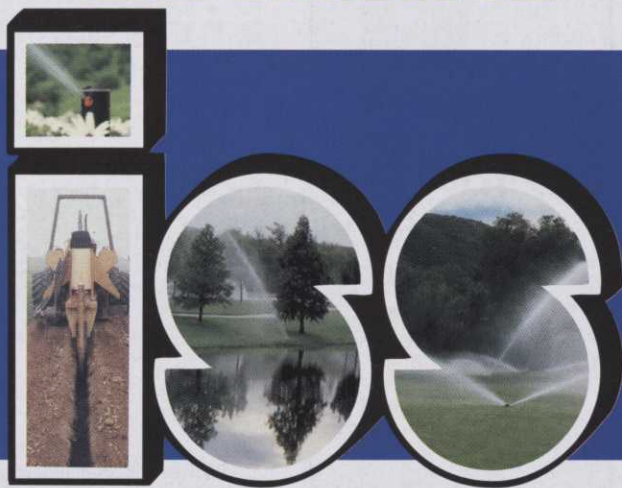
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