

# Course Feature

## BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

Scott MacCallum ventured west and came across an excellent, and very different golf course, with a very enlightened management philosophy



▲  
Clive Moore (left)  
with Steve Jones

If you haven't been to the west coast of Wales you have actually missed out on one of the more attractive areas the British Isles has to offer. And if you find yourself in the resort of Pwllheli on the Llyn Peninsula you will find a place, which has a great deal to offer on so many different fronts. For example, it boasts a bay, which is reputed to provide the best training area for yachtsmen anywhere in the world. Yes, I know. I was a bit surprised as well.

In addition there is a golf club which probably boasts the clubhouse closest to the sea in the entire country. Look out of one window and you can smell the sea and, if the window happens to be open, feel the spray, but if you look out of another window you will be equally impressed. On one side you will see a fine example of a beautifully manicured parkland course, but turn 45 degrees and you will be confronted by a typical links layout complete with fast running fairways, heather and revetted bunkers.

Now this isn't some fancy 36 hole club, which is fortunate enough to offer its members two distinct styles of golf under the same roof. This is a regular members' 18 hole course, which just happens to be made up of completely different styles.

The man who has the task of producing, what may be the most diverse, management regime in UK golf for 18 holes is 39 year old Steven Jones, a man whose enthusiasm for the job is matched only by his enthusiasm for the area in which he is fortunate to live and work.

"Pwllheli is a top quality resort with a superb marina and some of the best sailing to be found in the world. The peninsula boasts many fine courses and relies heavily on the tourist industry to support the local economy. With improved road networks the Club has extended its membership and attracts a large number of country members who value quality golf for a sensible cost," enthused Steve.

Those who have taken the opportunity to become associated with Pwllheli Golf Club find a unique course, and go-ahead club, which on both fronts offers other golf clubs a fine example to perhaps follow. The club's pedigree is extremely strong with the links side, the first laid down, being designed by Tom Morris and the parkland side having been created by another legendary figure in the history of the game, James Braid.

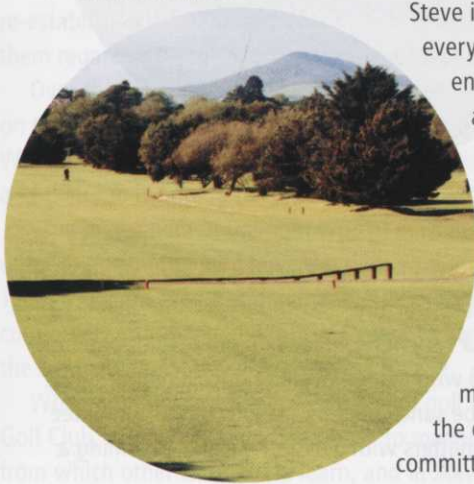
The Clubhouse was opened in 1981 by Welsh Ryder Cup star, Brian Huggett, and is represented on a professional front by the Pilkington family. The Club boasts two qualified PGA professionals John and his younger son Stuart, whilst John's eldest son Mark is competing successfully as a touring professional on the European Tour.

In 1998 in a survey for Golf Monthly magazine by a group of independent panellists, Pwllheli was listed as only one of seven Welsh Clubs to appear on the "Top 200 courses to play in Britain".

Steven, second from right, with his team



1st tee looking towards the green



Steve is provided with everything he needs to ensure that his Chalk and Cheese - Parkland and Links - course can be maintained to the highest possible standard while the entire structure of the club has been modernised to remove the conventional committee system and replace it with that of a more

professional and flexible management team.

"The first eight holes are all parkland on a clay sub base with the grasses tending to be bents and annual meadow grass while the remaining ten holes are everything you would expect of a links course and built on traditional sand through to a silt base with more fescues," explained Steve, who gives every impression of a man who relishes the challenge presented by his split personality course.

"The parkland side is low lying, and because of it's composition, slow to drain whilst the links part with its sand sub base drains freely. This provides us with two extremes both requiring differing weather conditions. This also makes planning and undertaking routine work difficult, especially during wet periods on the parkland side of the course" explained Steve, who was promoted to Head Greenkeeper two years ago.

On a more day-to-day basis the team has to differentiate the applications that are given to the course to quite a detailed degree.

"With soil conditioners, the links side will get seaweed while the parkland side will be given something like Energise."

Another complication is trying to make sure that green speeds are more or less similar under completely different conditions.

"We sometimes double up on the verticutting on the parkland side while just do it once on the other side depending upon growth levels and climate," he explained.

The bunkers are also maintained and presented in a completely different manner with the links side revetted and the parkland more shaped and contoured.

Steve is also very much the exception rather than the rule when the old truism about the existence of two types of greenkeeper is considered - a links man and parkland man, rarely do the two cross sides.

"I don't really feel that I have more empathy with one over the other. I'm very much in the middle and manage what is in front of me," he explained.

To that end he is supported by an experienced team in Alwyn Jones, Dylan Hughes, Iwan Williams, and Alwyn

Jones, while at the time of writing the team

was about to be joined by Tomos Tate, who at 16, was joining on a youth training scheme. During the

interview Iwan popped his head round the door to ask if it were possible through the article for him to pass on his thanks to Geraint Thomas of Coed-y-Mwstwr Golf Club Bridgend, for introducing him to greenkeeping. No problem Iwan.

Steve began his working life as a groundsman working for the local council looking after sports pitches.

"After a while I began to realise that as a result of privatisation, the Council was suffering and I noticed an advert for a job at Pwllheli Golf Club. I liked the look of it because it mentioned that training would be provided and I hadn't been trained by the council."

14th green looking back up the fairway!





◀ 11th tee and Cardigan Bay



Steve joined as an Assistant and soon took advantage of the chance to get himself educated. He threw himself into his training by attending the Welsh College of Horticulture in Northop, 80 miles away, on block release, and ten years on he has achieved NVQ Level 4 and his D32 and D33 assessor qualifications as well as earning a host of other certificates.

The rest of the team are following his lead with two working towards Level 3 and another towards level 2.

"The club benefits from having people with the knowledge and the ability to do their job better and the staff benefit because the club scale their pay awards based on qualifications gained," explained Steve.

With the course maintenance in safe hands the club took the giant step towards a more modern management system by jettisoning the old style committee system at a specially convened EGM in favour of a management board of five with an individual assigned to each main area of responsibility - finance, house course etc.

"The feeling was that the old system wasn't working as efficiently as it could have been and that it perhaps was a little unwieldy," said Steve.

Steve now works closely with Clive Moore, a local architect and Member of the Management Board on all matters pertaining to the course.

"Clive is passionately supportive of what we are doing, and we have an excellent working relationship. The club actively encourage the staff to take advantage of all training opportunities and ensure that our BIGGA membership is paid," said Steve.

"Communication and general administration has become much

easier following the reorganisation." Clive is also well aware of the benefits of the new club structure.

"We used to have a very hefty Greens Committee (at one time totalling 22 members) who met on average once a month. Most proposals could only be sanctioned by the Executive Committee which often delayed matters with decision making becoming a fairly lengthy matter.

Now with only five members to consult, and with the sole authority granted to them to action matters, matters can be dealt with the minimum of delay, with sometimes decisions being made over the phone."

Clive stressed however that it was important to maintain communication with officials and members and the need to keep them informed and involved in political and policy matters affecting the course.

"The Club has taken a very progressive path, especially for a small club in a fairly rural part of Wales, and we hope that it will be of benefit and that others will be encouraged to follow our example," he added.

"Steven is allowed to get on with his work with a minimum of interference, and is allowed to do what he wants on the course within reason. It is about trusting and respecting people and getting the right people to do the job, and I feel that we can already see the benefits of doing it this way.

"As long as the course is playing well, is in good condition and he is spending within budget he is allowed to get on with his job," he added, in a common sense manner... which unfortunately isn't as common as it might be.

A policy document is being prepared which will hopefully outline the future plans for the course and its management.



# Course Feature

Included in the possible future plans will be the improving of the drainage to lower holes, renewal of greens and upgrading and extending the irrigation system. After a brief absence the Club has re-established its association with the STRI and will consult with them regarding course maintenance and general improvements.

Over the last five years the Club has progressed with improving on their standard of machinery with a planned renewal programme. With the odd exception no item of machinery is over five years old and the Club is hoping to continue with the programme.

"The investment in the right type of machinery is important in order to ensure the men have the right equipment to do the job. Today's golfers expect and demand quality conditions, machinery is continually improving and it is important to keep up to date with the best and latest developments" said Clive.

While admittedly not located in one of golf's hot beds, Pwllheli Golf Club, and its go-ahead approach to management, offers much from which other clubs could learn, and in Steven and his staff they have a team keen to make the most of their abilities. It is a fine combination.

## Machinery Inventory

In 1995 following an assessment of the machinery it was decided to embark on a capital expenditure and replacement programme. In preparing a programme certain parameters were set which would enable the club to achieve the objective of replacing our major items of machinery at a maximum five year interval. Available funds were limited and initially an allowance of £25000 per annum was set aside for machinery purchases. This enabled us to achieve the objectives, and by the year 2000 the five-year programme came to an end. In 2001 the programme continued

with the replacement of a rough triplex which was purchased in 1996. The improvement in the value of the machinery has enabled the annual commitment to be reduced to £20000 at which level it is hoped we will be able to maintain a similar programme for the next five years.

The investment in equipment has resulted in a general improvement in the quality of the course together with reduced maintenance costs and improved productivity.

- John Deere 2653 Rough Triplex
- Toro Reelmaster 2300D Tees Triplex
- John Deere 2500D Greens Triplex
- John Deere 3235A Fairway Triplex
- Toro GM 3000 Greens Triplex
- John Deere 4500 Compact Tractor
- Lewis Backacter Attachment
- Kubota ST30
- Massey 135
- Kawasaki Mule
- 2 Pro 435 Brush Cutters
- Honda 50mm Water pump
- Honda Turf Cutter
- Haraid Man Boom Sprayer
- FM 1501 Fairway Scarifier
- Richard Long Top Dresser
- Vertidrainer
- Greenscare Coremaster
- Dowdswell Roller Mower
- Proseed Overseeder
- Thatchaway Verticutting Units

