

Course Feature

BEAUTY AND THE BEASTS

Pennard Golf Club boasts one of the most beautiful settings in golf but, as Scott MacCallum found out, it also has more than its fair share of four legged friends.



Peter Lacey

When picturesque settings for golf courses were being handed out Pennard Golf Club, on the Gower peninsula, near Swansea, in south Wales, must have been very near the front of the queue. The Gower peninsula was the first location in the UK to be designated a site of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the 106 year-old cliff top links course is as excellent as it is beautiful.

The course overlooks three bays - Pobbles, Three Cliffs and Oxwich - all with idyllic beaches; while playing the 7th hole you aim between the 14th century castle, which gives the club its emblem and appears in a lot of golf magazines and a similarly aged church; furthermore the valley floor, also owned by the club, is a SSSI, with the looks of a film set.

Renowned American golf course architect, Tom Doak, rated Pennard as one of his all time favourites in his book "Confidential Guide to Golf Courses" while he also scored the course highly in the "Best finishing holes" and "Most hospitable golf club" categories.

But if you are already jealous of Head Greenkeeper, Peter Lacey, it must also be said that when the gun went to start the race for an easy life Peter must have been bending over to tie his shoe laces.

Why?

Well, while the course is owned by the club the deeds still contain commoners' rights to graze livestock and Pennard has always had around 30 horses roaming over the course. This has been a recognised feature of the course but since the Foot and Mouth

epidemic, however, farmers have been restocking and the golf course has had to entertain the overspill of cattle. This has resulted in 80 head of cattle roaming over the course and munching their way through whatever they can find and, of course, planting their size nine cloven hooves wherever it takes their fancy.

With 110 head of cattle and horse, calling the course home at any one time you don't have to be David Attenborough to work out what one of the main duties is each day for the greenkeeping staff.

"The first job every day is clearing the mess and presenting the course for play. I have to set aside a full day for two men to do it. If there is no damage it's a bonus and they can go on and do something else but it uses up two men just from an animal point of view," sighed Peter.

Each green has a small fence around it with an electrified 12 volt wire - switched off between 7am and 7pm - but, although the horses do take notice of the slight shock they might receive if they venture too close, the cattle are more inclined to treat it as a minor inconvenience on their way to marching over the green.



The Pennard Team

"Also, they eat everything in sight and this year it has been particularly bad because of the number of cattle we've got. We've got no rough and getting any definition of play has been an issue for us. And then of course there is the mess and the damage," explained Peter, with the air of a man who takes this abuse of his golf course in his stride.

"We had an alliance meeting this morning, with 90 golfers teeing off from 9am, and when we came in we discovered five greens damaged by animals and another vandalised. Today it wasn't too bad as it was basically animals walking on the greens and we just have to prise up the hoof prints and roll them and they don't generally interfere with the roll of the ball but if they break the surface and get into the soil we've got to top dress them out and spend a bit of time on them. Obviously it's a lot worse in wet conditions. If it's dry they can walk on the greens and you don't even know they've been there."

The other area of the course which does take a hammering, and which has resulted in a very pragmatic solution, is the bunkers.

"I believe our bunkers are unique. Whereas most links courses revet their bunkers and leave a grass face on them to hold them in place we have to strim off all grass cover and present them with a soil face because the animals were spotting the grass, climbing into the bunker, clambering up the face and nibbling the grass. They then caused even more damage clambering out," said Peter, who added that the downside was that the soil faces meant that the bunkers had

to be re-done more frequently.

"Damage always looks worse than it actually is. We had an instance last year when 30 areas on the 1st green were dug up and turned over. I don't know the reason but it was absolutely shocking to be confronted by it first thing in the morning. It looked terrible but within two or three hours we had it repaired to the extent that most of the golfers didn't even realise there had been a problem.

"You have just got to tolerate it and not let it get to you. Obviously we can't present to Augusta standards, that's impossible in the circumstances we're in, but it's all about making the best of the situation."

The delicate issue of the natural fertiliser, and where it is disposed of, draws a laugh from Peter.

"It is a problem because we take it into the non-playing areas and the heavy rough and spread it but it is having a detrimental affect as a lot of these areas contain natural fescues, marram or heather which all like infertile conditions and we are literally fertilising them by spreading the manure. You can see the heather thinning and grass coming between it because it doesn't like it. It is going to have a huge impact in years to come," said Peter, who has been at the club for 20 years and followed his father, Colin, as Head Greenkeeper.

"My whole regime has had to be a lot more flexible in the last 18 months," he said, with a degree of understatement.

"We tend to maintain the course in a lean manner anyway in terms



The bunkers are revetted normally then the faces are strimmed to prevent animals clambering to eat the grass

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of modern greenkeeping practices and we are traditional. I've got men tied up in aeration all the time, one on a vertidrain and one on an aerator doing tees and greens basically flat out but because of the animals it has had a knock on effect.

One of the most striking features of Pennard are the rolling fairways but, while they are challenging to play and attractive to look at, from a greenkeeping perspective they do cause more problems.

"Unlike many links courses where the landing areas tend to be flattish our undulations are right the way through and we can go from eight feet above level to eight feet below level in the space of 20 yards.

"We had to cut our fairways with a Toro 206 which is a surround mower because it can cope with the undulations although we have recently upgraded to a Toro Sidewinder which again is known as a surrounds and aprons mower. It's a great tool but it does mean it takes us twice as long as if we were able to use a conventional fairway mower," said Peter, who added that they demoed all the fairway mowers a couple of years ago but none of them could cope with the demands.

Because of the undulations the hollows do tend to suffer from wear - golfers are naturally more inclined to use a hollow rather than a hump to get from A to B and also balls naturally collect there - particularly when you consider that there are 1000 members most of whom are regular golfers.

"We also tend to be busier in the winter than in the summer as we have partner clubs in the area and as we are fairly free draining we are open when others are closed."

With that in mind there is a programme of taking away some of the mounding, which also reduces some of the blind shots, always with the proviso that the overall natural look of the course is not adversely affected.

Taking into account the heavy workload imposed on the Pennard greenkeeping staff it would be fair to assume that there is the odd extra body employed to ensure everything gets done. Not true, as Peter has a staff of five, including himself plus a full time part timer who is employed to maintain the bunkers and collect litter.

"It's a case of having to prioritise. Top of my list is aeration but if we've got animal damage that comes first and the aeration has to



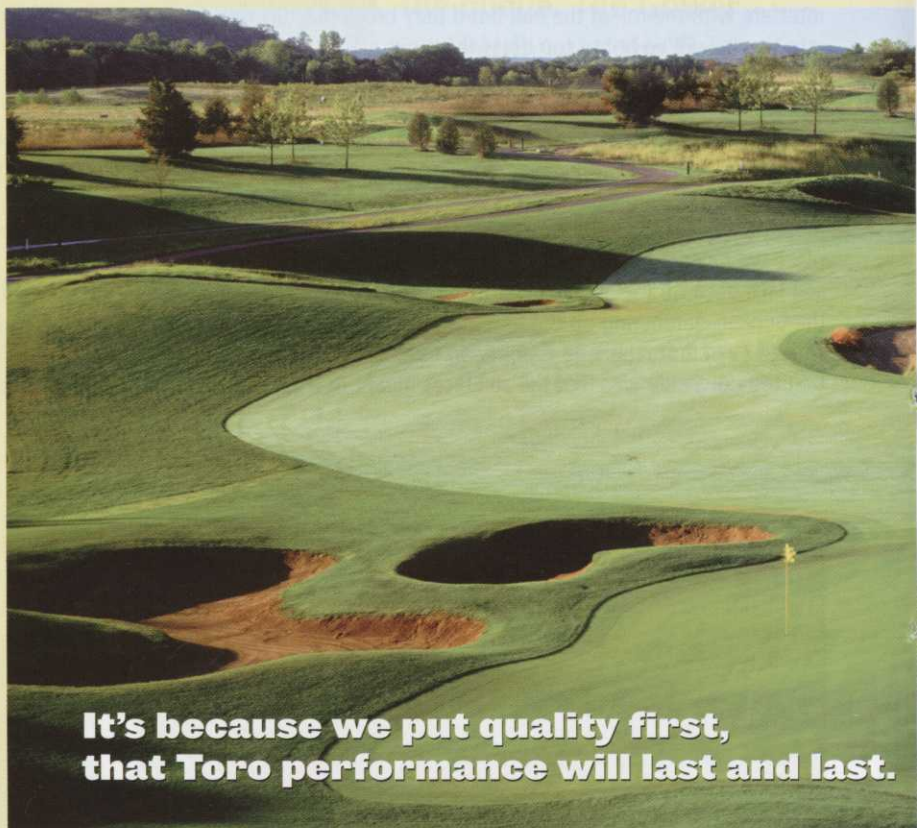
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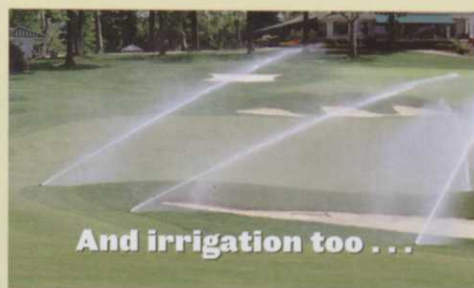
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take second place and that approach runs right the way through the programme. We can also pull our bunker guy off and have him divot for a couple of days."

When it comes to divoting Peter can also call on an army of members to help.

"We have a fairly relaxed environment within the club and if we feel we have to get on top of it we put on divoting parties from the members and they'll perhaps come in on three consecutive Monday evenings. We put on a free buffet, the Captain will come along and buy them a drink and we thank them in the newsletter. We do things like that quite often."

Max Faulkner learned his golf at Pennard where his father, Gus, was the club's professional and 50 years to the day after winning The Open at Royal Portrush he opened the new clubhouse. The club also boasts among its membership, Vicki Thomas an eight times Curtis Cupper and Sarah Jones, who won her first Curtis Cup cap earlier this year.

If you felt that Peter had his hands full at Pennard also bear in mind that he has been the South Wales Section Secretary for the last 10 years and he has just received a Ransomes/Jacobsen Scholarship to part fund the HNC for which he has enrolled at Pen Coed College. He was also fortunate enough to be selected for the first Bernhard's Scholarship trip to Vancouver in 2001.

"The club is very go ahead and pay our BIGGA membership and put them through college. We've a fairly established team, I've been here 20 years, Dean has been here 13 years, David, 12 years, Bob, four and Richard, three, while David ("Dai Bunker" as he is known) has been here 18 years, but there is no chance of anyone stagnating, The nature of the course means they won't stagnate," said Peter.

Never a truer word could be uttered.

MACHINERY INVENTORY

John Deere 1070 Compact Tractor (with cab).

John Deere 1070 compact tractor (with cab & front loader).

Kubota ST 30 Compact Tractor (with front loader).

John Deere 455 compact tractor (with rear lift kit & mid mounted mower).

Toro Greensmaster 3 QOD ride on green mower (with variable speed kit).

Jacobsen Greensking V ride on green mower.

Toro Reelmaster 23 QOD ride on tees/aprons mower.

Toro Reelmaster Sidewinder 3 IOD ride on fairway/surrounds mower.

John Deere gator utility vehicle (fitted with electric tipper).

Kawasaki Mule 3010 utility vehicle.

Amazone GS 10 top-dresser (used on Kawasaki mule).

Sisis Technicore multi-tine aerator.

Charterhouse/Redexim verti-drain multi tine aerator.

Sisis 5ft Green slitter.

Ransomes TM 80 5ft fairway slitter.

Amazone 5ft fairway slitter.

Sisis 5ft shallow green slitter.

Sisis overseeder.

Sisis 10ft green brush.

Thatch-away scarifying units.

Agrex Vicon type fertiliser spreader.

Royer soil shredder.

Dowd swell 352 rotavator.

Ryan junior turf cutter.

Marshall 4 tonne tipping trailer.

Marshall 4 tonne tipping trailer.

Marston 2 tonne tipping trailer.

Ransomes back-lapper.

Bernhard & Co Rapid facer 1000.

Jet-Air compressor.

Huskvarna 50 chainsaw.

Twose flail mower.

Suzuki allen 218si Hover mower.

Suzuki Allen 218 si hover mower.

Komatsu Zenoah G4k strimmer

Mainline TH 43 strimmer.

