

# Reflections from over the Pond

20000 miles, 56 days, 14 flights, eight destinations, 250 hours of lectures temperatures of - 40°C to 27°C and life out of a suitcase.

Sound surreal? That's the opportunity of a lifetime that awaits the 2004 Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year. Well it certainly was for me as the 2003 winner.

From the moment that Ken Richardson reads out the name of the 2004 winner life will become surreal, if my experience is anything to go by. Although the trip doesn't begin until the January following the final at the end of September, the months in between are full of planning, activities and packing.

The real trip began at 3.30 am on the morning of January 4 2004 with a trip to Manchester Airport for the first of three flights that day. Prior to all of that was the worst part of the trip, having to sneak around the house and kiss goodbye to my wife and the boys.

As they were lying fast asleep it was hard to believe that it would be two months before I would see them again. The faces, fast asleep, were with me all the way to America and for the next eight weeks.

First up was the shuttle to Heathrow followed by a flight to Washington and finally a connecting flight to Hartford in Connecticut and a transfer to the Quality Inn in Hadley, Massachusetts.

The whole process took 23 hours and left me feeling disorientated and tired.

On landing in Hartford a cold wind whistled through me and I was greeted by icy rain. After panicking about the cab driver being on the 'wrong' side of the road I reached my new home for the next seven weeks, room 236 of the Quality Inn.

The university course started on the following day at 9.30am, so it was important to meet people who could give me a lift there or find out the bus times. Following the good advice from Murray Long, 2002 Toro winner, I hit the breakfast room early. In the room were at least 20 people that were all doing the winter school at UMASS; a lift was soon fixed up.

It is amazing at how greenkeepers, even from different continents, can mix together so easily with the golf course providing the level playing field. Naturally everyone become intrigued with the guy from England and a somewhat celebrity status is endowed upon you by the others, as I am a novelty.

When we arrived at UMASS the scale of the campus is unbelievable, we had a 25 minute walk from the parking lot to the first class room, which is not the far side of the campus. In the campus is a 20,000 all seated hockey stadium, a 20,000 open-air football field, 10,000-basketball area, a hotel, three churches and enough classroom space to accommodate the 28,000 students that attend the university. It resembles a town rather than a campus.

Classes ran Monday to Friday, starting at 8am and finishing a 5.30pm, with an hour break for lunch. Lectures on Monday start at 10am and Friday lectures finish at noon. Four lectures were given each day from a total of 11 different topics. The subjects were: -

Irrigation, Soil science, Turf grass management, Weed management, Arboriculture, Mathematics of turf grass management, Advanced topics in turf grass management, Personnel management, Architecture, Entomology and Pathology.

The vast majority of the teachers had doctorates in their specific fields.

As for the students a total of 56 attended the winter school at UMASS. The vast majority were from the Northeastern States, although other parts of the US were represented. There were also a number of international students present, including eight Canadians, one Australian woman, at Banff, Canada, one Brazilian, working in America, and an Englishman. Quite a cosmopolitan feel to the place.

There was a wide range of ages and backgrounds to the students. Ages went from 20 – 45, with people from a lifetime of turf management to relative new comers having two to three years experience.

There were some cultural aspects of being a Brit that took some explaining. We don't all work on links courses and the rules of cricket do take some explaining, as does the whereabouts of

Blackburn. Fortunately soccer is catching on in the US and numerous people had heard of the world famous Blackburn Rovers, although most, sadly, only knew of Manchester United.

The reason for the great popularity of the winter school course at UMASS is that it is one of the most respected turf courses in the whole of the US. Over the years it has help the careers of greenkeepers throughout the US, with many of them becoming superintendents at the top courses in America, such as Pine Valley, Pinehurst and the Congressional, to name but a few.

Through my conversations with Murray I had quite a few tips on how to get through all of the hours of study and lectures, however my expectations of the course were undefined before the start of the course.

Having completed the course I have to say that it was very similar to the HND Turf Science award that I took at Myerscough, but with an American twist to it all. It is great credit to the staff at Myerscough that I was able to keep pace with the work,

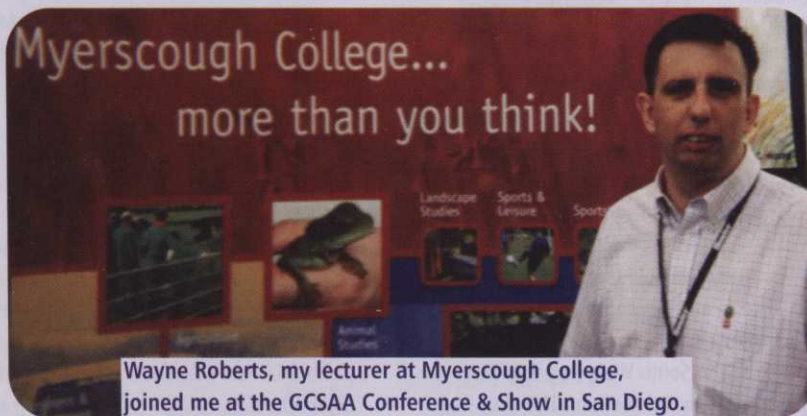
as there was very little time to spare in each class. It was very difficult to cram in subjects that usually get taught over a 16-week period into just seven weeks.

Full time students have to cope with four to five modules per annum, we get all 11. All of the subjects that are taught have to be completed in the 250 hours that is allocated to the delivery of the winter school.

My day started at 6am, due to a combination of jet lag that woke me up at 3am every day, and the fact that I had to revise for a test almost every



My home for seven weeks – the Quality Inn.



Wayne Roberts, my lecturer at Myerscough College, joined me at the GCSAA Conference & Show in San Diego.



# by 2003 Winner Keith Scruton



Me in Boston – what a view!

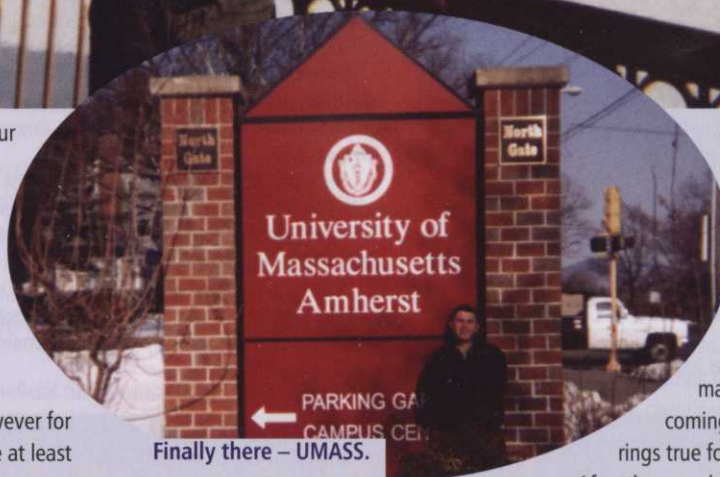
day. The 6am start allowed me an hour of study prior to breakfast. For breakfast the Quality Inn was taken over by up to 30 greenkeepers chewing the fat over the day to come.

Dependant upon the particular topics that were allocated for that day's tests could either be for every subject or even none for the day, however for the 17 weekly sessions expect to take at least seven to 10 tests.

There was a sporadic nature to the testing, some subjects had no tests at all while other had tests for every session, which could mean three to four on the same subject per week. The manner of tests varied too, apart from the session tests there were mid term test, end term tests, home work assignments or a combination of all of them.

As the end of the seven weeks drew closer, the intensity of testing increased, as did the homework assignments. This began to put a strain on everyone as we all began to dream of home, wherever home was, I had to keep reminding myself of the fact that I had an additional week flying around America before I could go home.

The final week brought the final tests, exams and thankfully the results of our endeavours. To my relief and surprise I had acquitted myself well and all but one of the graded subjects I managed to get into the 90% and above range, soils was 85%.



Finally there – UMASS.

more of them, but its very much of a muchness. One of the prominent themes of the show appeared to be the environmental stewardship of golf course management.

There were numerous examples, throughout the two days that I was present, to illustrate the responsible management of the environment that is coming from American greenkeepers, this rings true for the UK.

After the completion of the university course, as others departed for home, my trip was far from over. I had a further four flights to take before I could think of the three flights home.

My first destination was to Minneapolis in Minnesota, via Chicago. This is the home of Toro machinery, where every machine was designed, manufactured, built, tested and then shipped all over the world. For this and the subsequent leg of the trip I was the special guest of Toro, and Toro certain know how to entertain.

I was to be shown around with the Canadian winner of the Toro Future Superintendents Award, Kendall Costain. Kendall was also staying at the Radisson. It was a pleasure to meet up with Kendall to exchange views on the trips we had, Kendall's trip was to Scotland, where he studied at Elmwood College and worked at Kingsbarn golf course and on the Old Course at St Andrews.



The rest of the world team – three Canadians, an Australian girl and me the solo Brit.

The next day was the final leg to Riverside, California, to be given an insight into the design, production and manufacturer of Toro's irrigation line. After a successful and informative seven weeks I flew back to the UK.

Now the dust has settled on an amazing trip I would like to take this opportunity to thank Peter Mansfield and Lely UK, Andy Brown of Toro, and all at BIGGA for helping to make this dream come true.

A special thanks to all those people that were kind enough to look after the English man abroad, to the people of UMASS, Toro in Minneapolis and Toro in California for looking after me so well and giving me remarkable stories to tell for years to come.

■ A full version of Keith's diary can be found on the BIGGA website.

## THE TORO TRIPS

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy", or so the saying goes. Apart from the academic side to the prize, Toro gives an invaluable insight into the workings of the American greenkeeper movement and the work of the Toro Company.

Toro arranged a total of three trips for me to attend, the first being the USGAA Golf Show in San Diego, California.

It is surprising how similar BTME is to the USGAA show, there are the vast amount of exhibitors carrying the same message, of course there are