

# Course Feature



Euan Grant

## History in the Making

Scott MacCallum meets Euan Grant, a man who fulfils an ambition at this year's Open Championship

It happens every five years and for many it really is THE Open when it does. I'm talking about a St Andrews Open Championship. Golf at the home of the game, an occasion which invariably provides moments in history that will be recalled for generations.

Doug Sanders' most famous missed putt of all time; Jack Nicklaus' two victories; Seve's joyous fist pumping when he birdied the last to confirm his win; Nick Faldo's domination; John "Wild Thing" Daly's play-off win after Costantino Rocca's amazing putt at the last forced a play off and Tiger Woods becoming the latest and the youngest man to complete the set of Majors. All command important notes in the annals of golfing history and all have occurred within the last 35 years. Of course, there are chapters on St Andrews going right back to Alan Robertson and Old Tom Morris.

"Luck!" is the one word answer, accompanied by a hearty laugh, which you get when you ask him how it turned out this way.

"I had no idea it would happen. It was pure circumstance, right place right time."

His arrival at the Old Course, less than 18 months before the Championship is all the more remarkable as he spent a period of time out of greenkeeping when he left Westerham.

"I'd loved greenkeeping since university and I knew that was what I wanted to do but I had an offer to work for the family civil engineering

company and I gave it a chance. But I missed greenkeeping big time and apparently I was miserable. I'd kept up my BIGGA membership and was reading the magazine avidly, going onto the website and talking to my pals about the weather and how particular grasses were doing," explained Euan, a former Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year.

"Eventually I spoke with Kenny Mackay, at Marriot Forest of Arden, and thankfully he had the confidence in his own ability to give me, a former Course Manager, a job as his Deputy. He saw it as a good opportunity to get someone in who could do a good job so it worked well and I learned a lot from Kenny, particularly about attention to detail, and worked on several European Tour events," although Euan readily

admits he'd have taken any job at that stage just to get back into the industry.

Euan had explained to Kenny that he would look for his own course and that came when another man took a chance on him, this time Gordon Moir, Links Supervisor at St Andrews Links, who appointed him Head Greenkeeper of The New Course.

"It's a great golf course, possibly my favourite, rated 36th best in the UK, and I rang Gordon on the deadline day for the job and asked him if he'd got their man and if not could we could have a chat. I've done that before and it seems to work, although it would backfire if they happened to be out that day."

While on The New he worked closely with Eddie Adams on The Old Course and he learned a lot from the man who he was ultimately to succeed.



The St. Andrews' Old Course greenkeeping team

What will happen this year to join them? You can be sure someone will step up to the mark.

One man who will enjoy every single moment of the 2005 Open Championship is Euan Grant who will be experiencing his first Open Championship as Head Greenkeeper.

I first met Euan nine years ago when he was Course Manager at Westerham Golf Club, in Kent. He said at that stage that his ambition was to be the headman at an Open venue. This time round we met in the superb Links Clubhouse in St Andrews as he was making final preparation for this year's Open.

Any thought that this was the culmination of a well planned drive towards a top position at the most famous golf course in the world is quickly dismissed by Euan, who is as unassuming and modest as he is talented, readily admitting that there are better greenkeepers than him working on the Links.





"Eddie is a phenomenal fescue greenkeeper. I don't think anyone can touch him on his knowledge of The Old Course and he was always free with his advice. In fact on my first day in the job he caught me on my hands and knees looking at one of his greens. I was always asking him to come over and take a look at things for me."

Euan revelled in his work on The New Course using it as an opportunity to try out different things. "We stressed the greens out, we overseeded, we ripped into them we even tried Short Cut. I had no idea that The Old Course would be my next step."

That opportunity arose when Eddie was lured away to the European Tour and the chance to work on golf courses all over the world and Euan grabbed his chance to step up to the Old Course.

"It was a baptism of fire as we had The Amateur Championship within six weeks and then the Dunhill Links Championship at the end of the season and, of course, the prospect of The Open the following year."

He sometimes has to pinch himself that things have turned out the way they have.

"Every morning, when I drive in across Granny Clarke's Wynd, I think how lucky I am. It's a wonderful honour and privilege to be custodian of The Old Course and while working closely with our committees and trustees means I don't have a free hand to do whatever I want, I wouldn't want to make too many changes anyway."

What he has done is tweak some of the maintenance practices and let the rough grow a little.

"We are using greens triples on the fairways so we can use the groomer units and give a tighter cut while reducing the wear from dedicated fairway mowers" he said, adding that come July the fairways will be stimping at roughly the same as the greens.

"The fairways are running at seven and a half at the moment but given decent weather we will have them running at nine and a half or ten for The Open. Because of the 11th which is very exposed we can't have the greens over 10 and a half as we would be right on the edge, although we could get 13 or 14 out of some of the greens if we wanted."

He does believe that uniformity of speed shouldn't necessarily be a prerequisite for a golf course.

"I think practice rounds should allow players to determine the speed of various greens. Our 18th green is surrounded by buildings and on heavier soil that the 7th and 11th which are completely exposed and on pure sand, so to have them the same requires tweaking. That isn't a problem, but is that how golf should be played?" he questioned.

As for the rough, there is a little more on The Old Course than there has been in the past, but Euan is well aware that it is a course for the people and shouldn't be made too difficult to get round.

"I know in the back of my mind that people still talk about being able to putt their way round the golf course and in theory that is the case but allowing the grass to grow around banks and creating more habitats for wildlife is, I think, a change for the better."

People queue in the hope of a game from 3am - those who do will invariably be rewarded, even if it means waiting until 4pm - but it does cause Euan his greatest headache - divots.

"We still use mats from November to the end of March on The Old and alternate monthly on the other courses so the locals can always find a course to play off natural turf. What you do find is that everyone heads to the courses on the natural turf and the other courses are a lot quieter. Another annoyance is the golfer who takes two practice shots and two divots before lining up on the mat.

"We are trying to promote fescue grasses but they are slow growing grasses and slow to germinate, added to the fact that we don't feed or water," he said, adding that they had a team of dedicated sand patchers,"

They patch the entire course every Sunday, the only day when the course is closed, which affords the team the opportunity to do a lot of its maintenance work uninterrupted.

In the lead-up to The Open the regular team of 12 has been joined by one member of staff from each of the other 18 hole courses on the Links while their places on the other course are taken by seasonal workers, many of whom travel for all corners of the world to have the chance to work at St Andrews. They get the chance to work on the Old Course on Sundays.





During the week of The Open staff from all over the Links will be drafted in to help.

"It is a big team but we have huge double greens - the 5th/13th takes two guys 40 minutes to cut and to cut the greens six mowers will walk on average seven and a half miles each. We will also have six guys on bunkers every morning. As the course is out and in we have to be out early to avoid play."

Earlier in the year Euan met with the Championship Committee to determine pin positions and in the lead up to July they have kept well away from them, and changed holes every three days instead of the usual daily so that there would be fewer heads on the greens.

One of the final jobs Eddie Adams handled before leaving was to construct some new Championship tees adding length to the course.

"We are at our maximum now but strangely having the extra length should help the pace of play which is the R&A's biggest headache. There are several par-4s which would be driveable so the extra length means they don't have to wait on the tee, although the Championship Committee is considering having some call-on holes to speed things up."

Everyone pulls together on the Links teams and while each course has its own equipment they have to book out the specialist aeration or spraying equipment.

"The Old Course can't pull rank so you have to be organised and plan well ahead," said Euan.

All the Head Greenkeepers meet weekly with Gordon Moir to share information and discuss various ideas and issues to the benefit of all. Surely a Brains' Trust that would be the envy of many?

Euan is a fairly phlegmatic character, not a lot ruffles him, and he is sure that his team have the experience - his five senior greenkeepers have 19 Opens between them - and skill to meet any challenge that is thrown at them during the week. That just leaves the upside. What is he particularly looking forward to?

"I'm looking forward to seeing the golf course on the telly knowing it is going out to millions and that my staff had done their absolute best to produce it. It would also be nice to hear press conferences where the players are praising the course. I suppose that would be the ultimate."

So you can be sure that there will be some memorable exploits at St Andrews this year but Euan will be logging everything, even the most mundane, in his personal memory banks.





# Course Feature



David Cole

## Dreaming of Dry Land

As Scott MacCallum discovered Loch Lomond is working hard to ensure that its one weakness will no longer be an Achilles Heel.

There can be few places on earth which provide a more attractive environment in which to play golf than Loch Lomond Golf Club. A superb Tom Weiskopf and Jay Morrish created course, a magnificent clubhouse and scenery to make every chocolate box tin designer salivate, and it ranks highly on all counts.

Each July, the week before The Open, the cream of world golf descend on the course for The Barclay's Scottish Open and Peter Alliss gives full rein to his imagination and descriptive powers as camera lenses pick out luxurious motor cruisers on the loch, some interesting wildlife and young children in the gallery who have taken advantage of annual access to a very exclusive club.

But for many years the idyllic setting of Loch Lomond has hidden a secret. Not a secret which would find its way into any Harry Potter book, but one which would certainly have greenkeepers breaking out in a cold sweat, sizing themselves up for a strait jacket or even applying for the next series of Big Brother.

You see, everything at Loch Lomond is perfection itself, apart from that is, what is under the manicured turf. The green staff have performed heroics to mask the unpalatable truth that while everything above ground at Loch Lomond is state-of-the-art everything underground isn't.

Ken Siems, who was long time Superintendent at the Club and is now Director of Agronomy covering both Loch Lomond and recently purchased sister club, Dundonald, and David Cole, who has been Superintendent for the last couple of years, along with his Assistants, Sue Rothwell and Peter Haggarty, have battled long and hard to improve the situation, but the sponge-like subsoil, coupled with the fact that Loch Lomond has - at 80 inches a year - one of the highest rainfall averages in the country, has meant that preventing soggy Footjoys and damp lies has taken a disproportionate amount of time and effort.

But hopefully that will all be a thing of the past as a recent move within the club has been the catalyst for some pretty serious drainage work. In fact, once the drainage programme has been completed there could be as much as 80,000 metres of pipe underground - that's over 50 miles!

Last year the club moved to a £55,000 deposit based membership, which increased the expectation levels in all areas, including the quality to the golf course.

"We'd always done a lot of drainage work on the course, mainly remedial work on trouble spots, but the recent membership conversion upped the ante and we agreed with the owners that we needed to implement a major drainage programme to make the course drier and improve the quality of the turf for our members," explained David, who has been at the club for 10 years.



The Loch Lomond Greenkeeping Squad

Ken and David explained the options and their implications, which ranged from sand capping the entire course to more conventional, but still radical, schemes.

"Sand capping the entire course to a depth of around six inches is expensive but it is almost 100% proof and it produces a firmer surface and subsequently maintenance is easier because you can hollow core safe in the knowledge that you won't be hitting rock," explained David, who has carried out some targeted sand capping on specific areas, approximately 10 Hectares in total.

If it wasn't for the fact that it would have involved closing the course for a year it may have carried the day but the need to keep the course open for the members meant it was never a serious option and the next best plan was given the green light - a complete, intensive drainage programme covering the entire course with the work being carried out in phases over the close season. Loch Lomond is closed from November 1 to April 1 every year.





A magnificent clubhouse and scenery to make every chocolate box tin designer salivate

"We commissioned drainage consultants Turf Trax, who had done some work for us at Dundonald, to GPS the entire site and worked extremely closely with Tim Colclough on the project.

"The GPS results, once they were put onto drawings, meant that we had a perfect picture of changes and movements underground and we could see where our main links should be. What it meant was that we could find an angle even on what appeared to be a flat area. Even if there was a one or two percent fall it was enough and it helped us go in and say we wanted a main line here and this is the lateral positions we want," said David, who added that the first fairway they did, the 12th, has laterals going in all different directions.

Previous drainage work had led David and Ken to appreciate that sand and not gravel was the best material to use as ochre can migrate easily when the drains are gravel filled, resulting in blocked pipes over time.

"We find that sand keeps things cleaner and when you think about it it's similar to a green construction. If you have a trench and you fill it with sand at the right depths it will work the same as how a green works and move water while retaining moisture."

There was a down side however and a series of meetings and much deliberation later saw the team looking at, and finally fabricating equipment to carry out the task.

"We knew we were putting wet sand into narrow trenches and that it wouldn't flow very well and had to come up with procedures to cope, particularly as we would be doing it over the winter months."

They agreed upon a matrix of a four inch main carrier pipe and then two inch pipes which would be the collectors or cut offs on slopes every four, or sometimes two, metre centres depending on contour slopes, on every fairway and as much rough and semi rough as we could get.

Estimates on how long the project would take varied. The contractor who carried out the initial work estimated 400 metres a day but David and Ken believed that with the peculiar nature of the Loch Lomond substructure and weather conditions 200 metres may have been more realistic. It is the in-house team which has since taken over the job and the 200 estimate proved the more accurate.

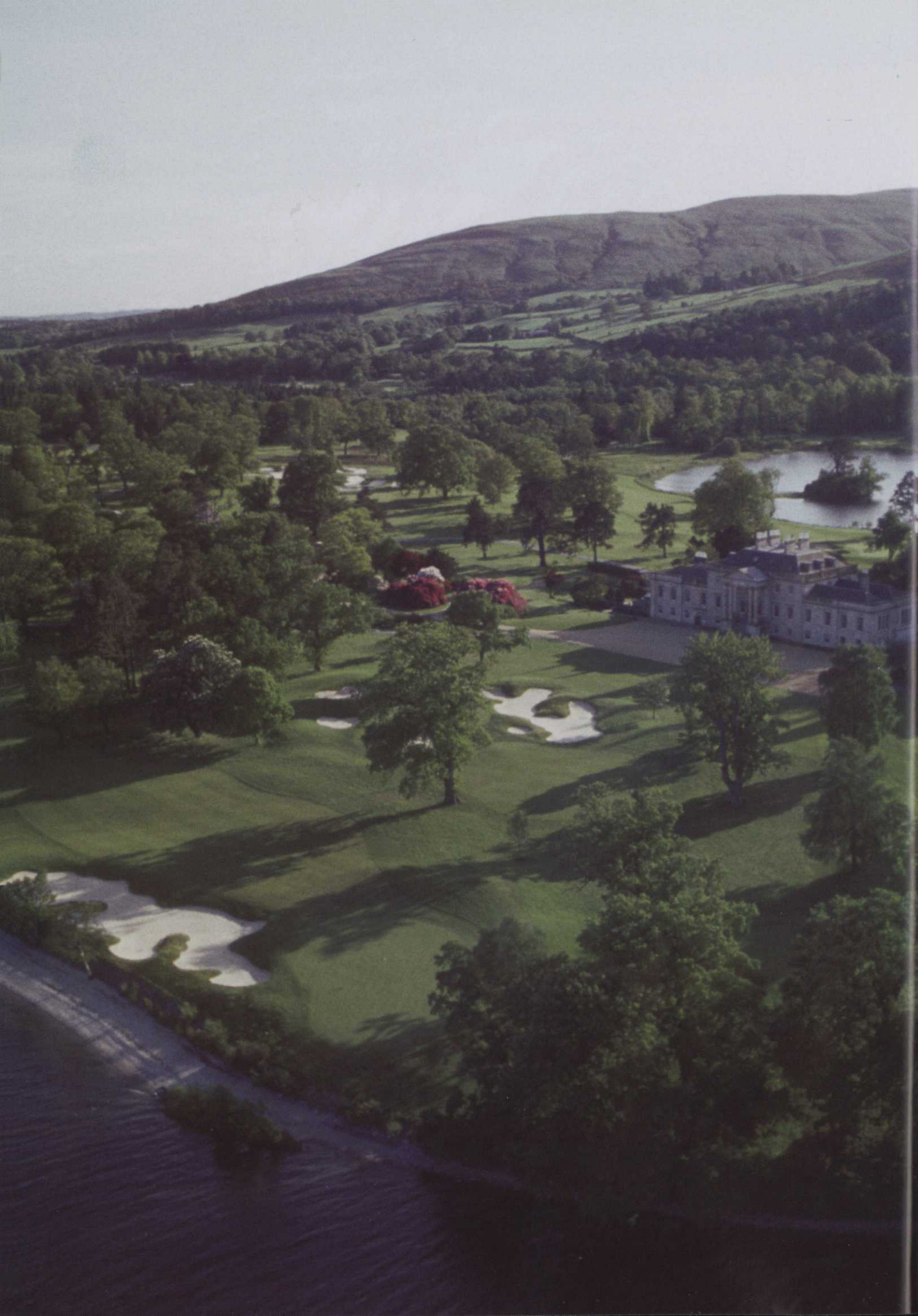
"It is more cost effective working out at about £2 per metre for us to buy pipe, joints, sand and parts for the trencher - our labour costs are fixed."

Having an empty golf course is obviously an advantage to Loch Lomond for such intensive work but it certainly didn't mean an easy time for the drainage team.

"We are doing it at the wrong time of year with it pouring with rain for weeks on end and it can be very dark. When it's wet it adds on a third more labour and the size of the team can go up from eight to 11 - Loch Lomond has a full time staff of 18. Cleaning the trench can become a two man job instead of one and you've got to have people laying boards for traffic and then continually moving them. It's not pleasant working when rain is running down your neck and the trench is filling with water, however the team still strive to give 100% in these circumstances said David, who explained it can be very frustrating when you start the day dry, then rain moves in and you have to stop the project. This can happen three to four days out the week.











The squad is around 40% through the drainage project



The scarring has to heal before the start of the playing season in April

They also have the additional complication of ensuring that everything is restored to perfection for April 1st each year and that any other maintenance practice being carried out is completed in advance of their tournament.

"We invested a lot in trackway which makes it easier to work off and we certainly benefited from the additional time we spent doing finishing work. Once the drainage work is complete on the fairway, there is a separate team who do the finishing work, re-turfing and doing repair works to any damaged areas. We almost treat it like a new grow-in fairway and feed it a little bit more and give it a little more height initially, until it is back to 100%.

The peculiarities of the site include the fact that the course is cut out of a peat bog, the fact that the site was used as a dumping ground for the main road that was built along side the loch shortly before the course was build and as a result lumps of concrete slab are regularly recovered, and caused the teeth of the trencher to be replaced every 200-300 metres. Oh yes, and during construction a dozer, which was left overnight on the 13th fairway, sunk, never to be seen again. Nothing could safely be sent in to rescue it.

The greens were rebuilt about five years ago again to solve a chronic drainage problem.

"The new greens were built to USGA Guidelines and now drain at between 300 and 450 mils an hour. The old greens didn't quite meet those standards - they drained at between one and 2.5 mils an hour," he revealed.

The drainage work is approximately 40% completed but already the benefits are there to be seen.

"We have completed seven fairways and the turf quality has improved dramatically because the water gets away quicker and not saturating the root system. In the past for example, if we got seven mil of rain overnight we would not be able to cut the fairways but now we can come in on the morning and cut the new drained holes while the other holes would be to wet to mow.

"Since these holes have been completed we are seeing a much healthier and tighter surface and the nutrients respond much better, while we have more opportunities to do punching or top dressing," said David, adding that as a result of their work they will also be able to reduce the amount of rye grass in the rough.

"Rye was the right choice at the time because it was very easy to get out there and it didn't need a lot of soil contact while we have the resources to cope with the additional mowing implications, but once we get the roughs drier and firmer we are going to introduce more fescues which will in turn reduce a lot of our maintenance as it is now.

"Hopefully we shall be finished by the summer of 2007 with another two winters of hard work."

Loch Lomond has never been afraid to experiment with new ideas and they are currently the first club on this side of the Atlantic to trial the new

American-produced Advance Air system which pumps air into greens and includes sensors to monitor moisture and soil temperature levels.

"We're putting one on the 11th, our most shaded green, and we shall see what sort of results we get but it gives us the option of drying the surface quicker by pushing air in or pulling water out of the profile. If it is successful we may look to put it into other greens."

Once the drainage programme has been completed the crew will look at tackling Loch Lomond's 75 bunkers - digging them out and installing new drainage and new sand.

"It will be like a lead weight being taken off us and we'll have time to look at so many more things on the course," said David, genuinely enthused by the prospect.

The drainage project once completed will open a whole new chapter on Loch Lomond and the work will have been worth it but you can't help thinking that such has been the extent of the work another option could have been to find a nice new sandy site, dig a huge loch and use the fill to create some mountains. It might have been easier in the long run!



This ditch shows the quality of Loch Lomond's sub-structure



The Loch Lomond soil profile



The Advance Air system prior to installation