



The first GCSGA delegation to attend Harrogate Week

# EXPERIENCE GREENKEEPING US-STYLE

**If you've ever dreamt of visiting America to see how superintendents over the pond solve problems on their courses, now is your opportunity to make the dream a reality. How? – By applying to be one of the 10 greenkeepers who will jet off to Orlando in February as part of the BIGGA Delegation 2008.**

Previous delegate Chris Sealey, Course Manager at Chippenham Golf Club, said: "If you want to get ahead this trip is a must. I learnt so much from the experience."

Sponsored by Bernhard and Company, during the trip you will have the chance to visit the high-profile GCSAA Golf Industry Show in Orlando for free, where new ground-breaking machinery introductions and ideas

are launched. You will also have the opportunity to attend Education Conferences and visit major golf clubs in the area, gaining an insight into golf management practices US-style.

The Delegation is open to all BIGGA greenkeeping members, and all you have to do to enter is complete the wrap-around in last month's Greenkeeper International or phone BIGGA HOUSE on: 01347 833800 to request an application form. Once you have completed your application, send it back to BIGGA House and you will be automatically entered into the second stage of the competition.

Grasp this opportunity for a really life-changing experience and to see first-hand how superintendents address agronomic issues.

## CUTS BOTH WAYS

**Ten US superintendents travelled to Harrogate and were blown away by their experiences of greenkeeping in the UK. Here they describe their momentous inaugural visit.**

Certainly ranked as a major logistical challenge, ten superintendents from all over the US safely arrived at the same time at Manchester Airport, they then made their way to the 'quaint' town of Harrogate.

Somewhat confused with the UK road system Ken Williams said: "With steering wheels on the right and the direction of travel on the left and the numerous mazes of roundabouts I never felt completely sure where cars were coming from for the entire week. But what a welcome!"

Williams, Golf Course Superintendent at Stanford University Golf Club, recounts his heady days in Harrogate as part of the BIGGA delegation, sponsored by Bernhard and Company.

"Our exploration of the town included a visit to a couple of pubs where I was introduced to the tumultuous excitement of watching an English Premier League Football Match between Manchester United and Arsenal. At dinner we met three European greenkeepers, who became our unofficial guides for the week. They had been part of the BIGGA delegation to San Diego in 2004. Sid Arrowsmith, Master Greenkeeper runs a 54-hole complex in England, Richard McGlynn was building a course in Russia and Steven Tierney has the luck of running a course in Switzerland.

"The following day we travelled to see the major turfgrass research projects carried out by the Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) in Bingley. We observed their research on golf turf, as well as other amenity applications such as football, rugby and cricket pitches. I now know that in England a field is somewhere you graze livestock, and a pitch is somewhere you play sport. Touring test plots with resident chemists and pathologists we learnt that Fusarium patch (*Microdochium nivale*)

is the number one disease problem in the UK, with crane fly larvae one of the biggest insect problems. Birds have been known to tear up entire fairways foraging for the numerous grubs.

“Next on the agenda was a trip to Alwoodley Golf Club in Leeds, the first course to be designed by Dr Alister MacKenzie. Our host was Nick Leaf, Club Historian and former Chairman of the Green. He shared his deep knowledge of both the renowned architect and the course. While walking all 18 holes, Nick explained the architectural principles inherent to the design. One of the most remarkable features of the course was the medieval farming furrows left in place across the fairways. These numerous rounded ridges of approximately one foot in height ran across many of the fairways, ensuring no two fairway lies were the same. What is regarded in the UK as adding interest to the game, is something we in the US would consider completely unfair!

“BTME opened its doors the following day with around 250 attending the Opening Session. Seeing different types of equipment used abroad and their differing applications was an experience. We would never need a flail strong enough to handle gorse. Educational seminars provided an insight into UK management strategies but the information related universally. One highlight for me was realising how very focused Europeans are on sustainable practices and low input methods. Initially practiced for economic reasons, this has proven sound for both environmental protection and the fight against annual meadow grass (*Poa annua*). Most of the clubs seek greens made up of the finer grasses, the fescues and bents. In that pursuit, one British greenkeeper insisted he only applied six grammes of actual nitrogen per square metre to his greens last year. Awesome.

“Harrogate Week is similar to the GCSAA event, with evenings filled with great opportunities to meet new colleagues, network and just talk turf. We had the opportunity to meet the 10 BIGGA delegates who were set to visit Anaheim this year and we made plans for us all to re-connect there.

“At dinner I had the honour of sitting across from Sir Michael Bonallack, former Secretary of the R&A, who, when persuaded, talked about his duties with the R&A, his British Amateur titles (5) and Walker Cups (9).

“The BIGGA Banquet was the climax of the show, held at the historic Majestic Hotel - it proved a great, unexpected moment of my trip. I introduced myself to an older greenkeeper I had sat next to in one of the seminars earlier in the day and, low and behold, I found out it was Walter Woods. Talk about a legend of the profession. That guy has probably forgotten more than I will ever know.”

The next day, our trip culminated in a visit to a great old links course, The Ganton Golf Club. Both Harry Vardon and Ted Ray were former professionals here and the club hosted the Walker Cup Matches in 2003. Their Course Manager, Phillip Baldock, took us around for a no-nonsense look at the links. Previously he had overseen 36 holes at Royal Portrush in Northern Ireland. The course was prepared for golf alone – no signs, no yardage markers, no flowers, no fancy monuments, no beverage carts – practice green markers were made of a simple short hook of steel. Bunkers contained the native sandy soil, which included many seashells, and weeds were not a problem as long as they did not affect play. It was a truly refreshing way of seeing a course prepared by a crew of six. Phillip said he would probably be disciplined if he ever burned in the stripes on the fairways like we do in the US. When asked how steep they construct the walls of the riveted bunker faces, he said:

“We use a very technological method, on greenside bunkers we place each piece of sod one finger back of the last piece and on fairway bunkers we use two fingers.”

Frequent greens topdressing consisted of a 70/30 mix of sand and soil.



Ken Williams at Ganton

Iron sulphate was used regularly to control moss. When asked at what rate he applied this Baldock said: “Black does not bother me, it only lasts a few days and does a world of good.”

How empowering to hear such a practical approach to golf course maintenance.

This is a week in my career I will never forget and which truly inspired me. I am now passionate in promoting BIGGA's BTME as something every Golf Superintendent must do at least once in their career and I encourage my UK counterparts to visit the US. We have a lot to learn from each other!”

Roger Stewart, Golf Course Superintendent at TPC Jasna Polana was equally enthusiastic and added: “Networking with BIGGA members and meeting people who manage courses all over Europe really opened my eyes to the differences in our management technique. Equally, there are tremendous similarities in many of the challenges we face. I must say I was impressed with both courses we visited when it comes to the conditions they produce.

“Our trip to STRI was really great because I had heard so much about their work for most of my career and was able to put much of that into perspective.

“And for the first time in my 30 plus years as a superintendent I got to see what gorse and heather really looked like. This may seem trivial to some, but it was a great experience for me.”

Dave Ward, of the Coyote Run Golf Course, feels British greenkeepers are way ahead of Americans on sustainability issues and working with restricted budgets. He said: “These two realities are now becoming vital issues at some facilities in the States, so it was great to see how they were being addressed in the UK.”

Harrogate Week 2008 takes place the third week in January – Exhibition: 22-24 January, Education: 20-24 January