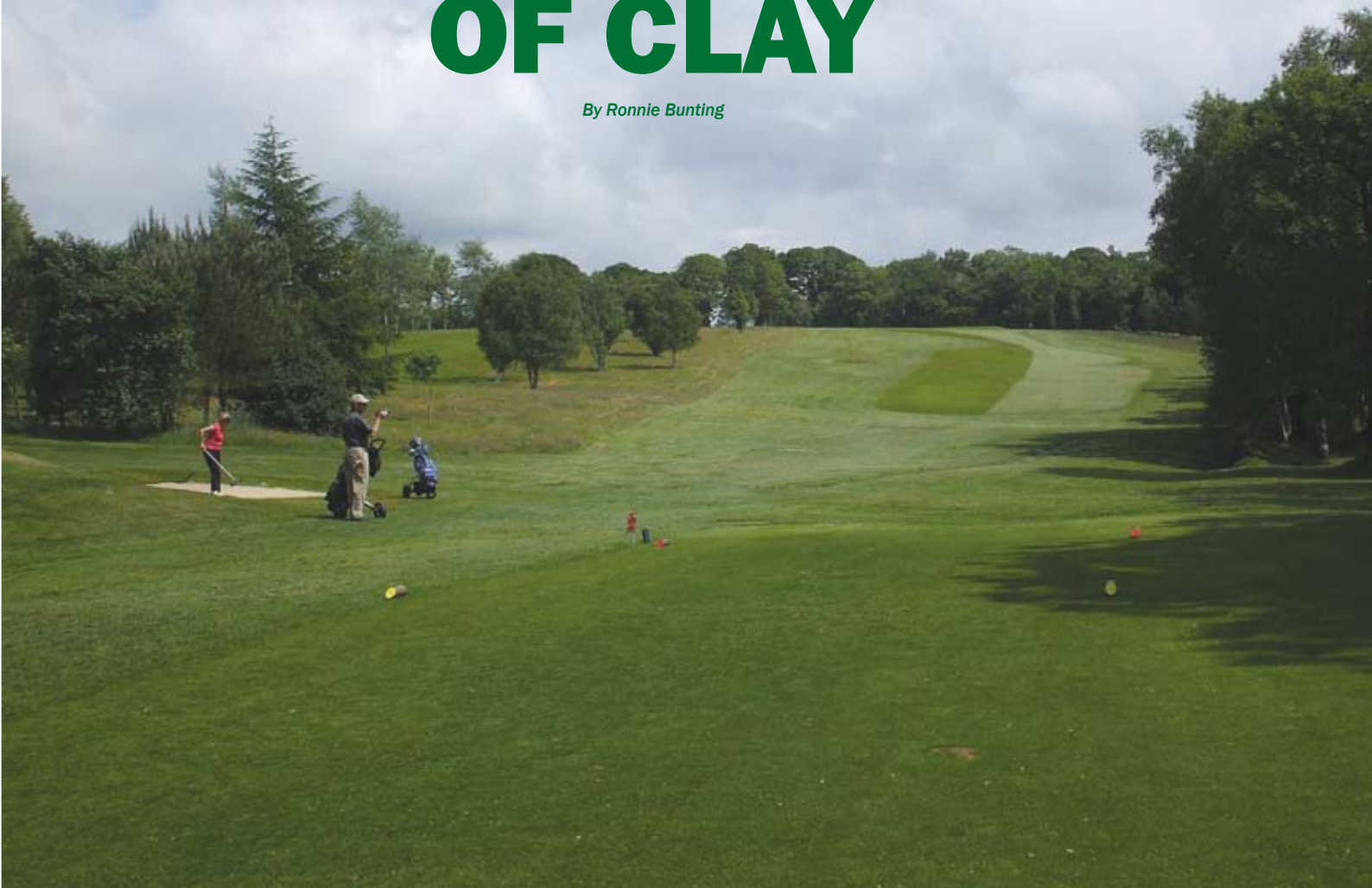


THE DELIGHTS OF CLAY

By Ronnie Bunting



At Ballochmyle Golf Club in wettest Ayrshire, I manage a 75-year-old parkland course with the heaviest clay structure imaginable for nearly four years. Field drains of clay horseshoe type tiles installed during the middle of the 19th century, four to five foot deep backfilled with the clay that was dug out to put them in. Trees have been planted with the intention of separating holes but have actually succeeded in blocking almost every drain on the course, I'm sure you get the picture.

Having said that, we have a tight pleasant atmospheric course to enjoy when the golfing Gods are with us.

The definition created by the uncut rough, but sparse enough to allow a ball to bounce therefore, is more easily found but still clearly not where you want to be.

I have endeavoured to define various holes by leaving areas of uncut rough that, when the seed heads and flowers appear, creates a visual hazard, improves the degree of difficulty and doesn't

slow the game down excessively. To achieve this we hire a flail cutter collector and remove large volumes of clippings every September, not an easy task given the shorter daylight hours and constant precipitation keeping all things wet. All the while continuing the necessary course work of regular cutting, aeration, top dressing not to mention holidays, illness etc.

By starving these areas we are thinning the sward of undesirable species, Yorkshire fog and other soft rank grass types, to leave the finer fescues and wild flowers. In doing so we are creating environmental habitat areas that act as wildlife corridors and a sward thin enough for players to see their ball bounce from the wayward shot.

We now have areas that both enhance the scenic values of the course and define clearly where a player doesn't want his ball to be. This makes the entire golf experience much more rewarding or should I say frustrating?

As referred to earlier, the logistics behind this management can be daunting but I have come up with an idea that helps! I want to thin out these

areas even further than I achieve by the starvation theory described earlier. I now fit my Gammibetti 300lt boom sprayer with Hardi Quintastream nozzles (used in agriculture for fertilising) the boom height set at 75cm and the sprayer set to operate at two bar at the nozzle, this pressure is sufficient to stop any drift "most important" as I then add 1.5lt glyosphate (total herbicide) and spray the rough. Needless to say timing should be before the grass reaches the seed head stage, as the seed heads are important for definition and spraying must be done in straight lines.

I spray at right angles to the direction in which the hole is played therefore the discolouration isn't obvious from a distance. It may seem drastic to some who don't appreciate the circumstances but over the last two years the golfers and I are very pleased with the results.

It also means we improve the drying potential letting air into the base of the plant (very important when it comes to cutting) and reducing the quantity of the grass removed lessening traffic damage when cutting and golfers don't get quite as wet when searching for their ball.