

# Best of Both Worlds

Scott MacCallum experienced two countries at the same time when he travelled to meet Allen Lewis at Llanmynech Golf Club.









**You often hear the comment regarding big hitters that they can, "Hit it into the next county". Well, at a golf club near Oswestry every member can justifiably say that they can, "Hit it into the next country".**

Now that's not to say that Llanmynech Golf Club is awash with John Daly or Laura Davies clones – the mind boggles at the very prospect – but that it is the only golf club in the world to straddle two countries, boasting three holes in England and 15 in Wales.

The course sits on Llanmynech Hill and has stunning views deep

along with his elder brother and their mum and dad, who were both Captains of the Golf Club, while his younger brother, Gareth, is now Course Manager at Oswestry Golf Club. Allen actually was a guest at Ian's *This Is Your Life* programme.

Woosie also grew up, and played, with Allen Lewis, the Course Manager, who has been at the club, man and boy, since 1972, when the course had only just grown from nine to 18 holes, but was still shared with sheep who enjoyed grazing rights on the Hill.

As we sat in his excellent maintenance facility, which sits close to the clubhouse but set down



into north Wales in one direction and Shropshire in the other while the area is so renowned for its beauty that it was chosen as the location for the 1995 Hugh Grant film, "The Englishman Who Went Up A Hill but Came Down a Mountain".

But let's not get carried away with the thought that Llanmynech's main claim to fame is its looks and not its substance. The course is certainly testing, testimony of which has been the number of high quality golfers who have come out of the club.

The current pro, Andy Griffiths, came through the junior ranks while there are a number of Welsh Senior team members currently playing out of the club.

Oh yes, it was also where a certain Ian Woosnam learned his golf. That's Ian Woosnam, the former Masters Champion, World Number One and European Ryder Cup Captain - not many clubs in world golf can boast of setting someone on the road to that calibre of greatness!

Ian grew up on Llanmynech

out of sight, Allen displays enormous affection for the club as he describes the progress and pitfalls that he has witnessed over the last 37 years.

"I left school at 15 with thoughts of perhaps joining the police force or entering the construction industry, but they had just stopped taking on apprentices, and jobs were rare.

"A job came up here and I met the Greens Chairman, who was working on the 12th green at the time, and I was offered the job. There was only two of us and 200 sheep at the time," recalled Allen, an Englishman with a Welsh accent.

A significant moment came when the club purchased the grazing rights in 1978 and the sheep were evicted, leaving the club to continue to develop and improve.

In 1979 an automatic watering system was installed, thanks in part to a grant from the Welsh Develop-



ment Board – the club, although registered under the Shropshire Union, has always been very good at attracting money from both sides of the border!

"The club raised the majority of the money for the irrigation system by offering a five year fixed membership fee at £250, limited to the first 50 members who took advantage of it. It meant that with

INSET ABOVE: Allen, third from the right, with a young Ian Woosnam fourth from the right (Courtesy of Llanmynech Golf Club, 75th Anniversary 1933-2008 publication)

INSET LEFT: Allen Lewis, Course Manager, sits on the tee of a unique hole.





membership fees rising over the period that they got the equivalent of a year's free golf and the club got the money to install the system," explained Allen.

Water to a limited number of tees was introduced around four years ago.

Perhaps the biggest project the club has undertaken came around the turn of the millennium when all 18 greens were rebuilt over three winter programme years.

"We had thick heavy clay under the greens and they didn't drain very well at all while inevitably we got a build up of thatch. We decided to renew four of the worst greens to begin with and did the majority of the work ourselves.

"We hired a JCB and a driver while we cut the turf, we drove the dumpers, put in 220 tonnes of root zone and 200 tonnes of stone then relaid the turf.

"It has paid off because whereas before if it rained for a few hours I knew we'd be brushing water off the back of the 12th or 1st greens now

we can have a thunderstorm and it's drained in 15 minutes."

The work did coincide with the worst day of Allen's working life, the eighth anniversary of which fell the day after my visit.

"We discovered that five of our greens had been covered with weedkiller. We sought advice and tried to hose the greens off and while we initially thought we'd saved them a week later they turned brown, yellow black and muddy.

"Tests showed that the rootzone was infected down to eight inches and we had to dig up the greens and rebuild them – three of which had already been done under the rebuilding programme.

"We searched for any signs of empty weedkiller bags and whoever did it knew to walk backwards to prevent it getting on their shoes, but the police could never find who was responsible and we could never find any motive for the attack.

"We had to buy more turf and rootzone and it took about three



ABOVE: The Greenkeeping Team at Llanmynech Golf Club

years for the greens to return to where I would want them to be."

Llanmynech is a SSSI site and Allen has two work closely with CADW – Conservation and Development of Wales – on anything he wishes to carry out on the golf course.

"I can't put so much as a spade into the ground without getting permission from CADW first and it can take up to three months to get a decision from them," explained Allen.





The willow trees were planted in mounded earth to avoid digging any holes

“In fact, they have spot inspections and during one I was asked how the 150 markers were attached.”

He has built up a close working relationship with the Agency over the period and knows that any attempt to bypass the system would result in a breakdown of that relationship and no permission for any work in the future.

“It does mean we have to plan everything well in advance and can’t have a Green Committee one evening and go about actioning what has been decided the next morning.”

CADW does have an appreciation of the benefits golf has brought to an area which otherwise would be inaccessible to many, but the right side of the second fairway is an example of what sometimes needs to be done.

“We had problems with balls going into a garden and it was decided that we need to plant some willows to stop it from happening.

“Because we put holes into the ground we had to build a four foot high mound of soil and plant the trees into that,” he said, adding that he works closely with his Chairman of Green, Brian Suckley, who is also Chairman of Finance.

Another issue arose while they were erecting the JSRs for the new

Maintenance Facility.

“We need permissions for that and they had someone on site to watch the work being carried out. While we were digging the footings they found an ancient skull which stopped the work for three months. The skull was dated back to 780BC and was regarded as a significant find and is now in a museum in Cardiff but the club had to pay for the archaeological fees while the dig was carried out on the site and that cost us an additional £4000.”

The club brought recognition to the area when it won the Welsh Award in the BIGGA Golf Environment Competition in the year 2000.

Allen is no mean golfer himself having played on the same County Team as Woosie, Sandy Lyle, Peter Baker and others and against the likes of Paul Broadhurst and David Gilford- Ryder Cup players all, and he is particularly proud of breaking Woosie’s Llanmynech course record at the Captain’s Day of 2007 with a six under-par 64. He is quick to add that it came just 10 days after hollowcoring and top dressing the greens – “A great advert for doing the work in August,” he is quick to add.

“Gareth Woosnam texted his brother with the news and I got a very nice letter from Ian, on Ryder

Cup headed paper, congratulating me and saying he’d be back at some stage to claim it back from me.”

The green staff is currently four strong with Allen, Allen Evans, who has been at the club for six years; Matt Lewis (Allen’s son) who has been at the club for four and a half years; and James Hampson who has been at Llanmynech for 18 months. Allen and Matt have both achieved their Level IIIs and James is currently under training all through Reaseheath College.

The club is in the process of building a short Academy Course, cut out of a former forested area of the club, and aimed at local school children, but offering members the chance of honing their shots games.

“It has been funded through Visit Wales and their Ryder Cup initiative. The Academy is in the Welsh part of the course – otherwise we wouldn’t have got money for it – and we’ve put in several artificial greens as it is another area for us to maintain and we wanted to limit the amount of additional work it would give us.

The club is hoping that Woosie will open the new Academy next year.

Perhaps he might take that opportunity to reclaim the course record from his old friend.

**GREEN HEIGHT OF CUT**  
Summer: 3.5 mil – 4 mil  
Winter: 5-6 mil

**FERTILISER PROGRAMME**  
Winter: Lawnsand containing Iron

Spring: 12-3-6 plus scarifying and top dressing.

Hollowtining in August