

Czech This Out!

**Ex-Pat, Graham Shiel, gives you
a flavour of life working on a golf
course in the **Czech Republic****







Golf Park Plzen (Pilsen) is an 18 hole, par 71 5597 metre, course. It is five years old, work having started on it in 2003 and it opened in August, 2004.

The Architect was German, Christopher Stadler, and the construction work was carried out by the German-based company Sommerfeld A.G.

The course differs from others in the Czech Republic in that most of the 18 holes are laid out in a line - following the river Klabava up stream to the beautiful large Ejpvovice lake where we have our famous par 3 11th hole - an island green.

The course is set in a forest of birch and alder trees along the river, giving it a feel of a much more mature course than its four and half years imply. We have 40 golf carts for hire with tarmac cart paths around the course.

Golf Park Plzen was voted Golf Course of the Year 2008 in the Czech Republic, by the readers of Golf Digest, and also the Best Individual Hole of the Year in 2008, for our 11th, which also won this award in 2006 and 2007. In 2007 we were placed fourth as Course of the Year - with our 16th coming in 4th and 6th in 2008 in the individual hole category. There were only two golf clubs that had more than one hole in the top ten. In all other categories in 2008 we were in 2nd place: Best Service; Best Restaurant, Best Pro-Shop and Best Value for Money. So 2008 was a good year for us.

The problem now is trying to stay in the top group, as the team and I have set the standard, we must keep there or even improve in the years to come.

Without my greenkeeping team it would not have been possible to

achieve the results we have, so a big thank you must go to them all, with a special mention to my First Assistant, Jan Csizmar, who also acts as my interpreter until I learn Czech!

I have five full time staff and myself, plus one part time lad, but in the summer there can be anywhere up to 10 people working on the golf course .

I came to G.P. Plzen as Course Manager at the start of 2007 after working in Germany as a Head Greenkeeper and Course Manager for 15 years. The golf course was not in too bad a condition, mainly being in need of a tidy up; sorting out some staff problems and re-training the greenkeeping team in the ways that we should work and present the golf course - not so easy when you don't speak the lingo! (I really should speak some Czech as my wife is Czech, but we speak German to one another).

As golf is only just starting to take off here in the Czech Republic there is a problem getting workers with any knowledge of greenkeeping or golf. It has reached the point where I will have a new man, and ask him to go out and rake the bunkers, and he will reply, "What's a bunker?"

It sounds easy - just some tidying up to do, but there was a lot of work to do in the attention to detail and teaching the staff to look at the job in hand and not be, "That's ok. It will do". I have worked hard to give them an idea of the standards that are required, and then get to the stage where they take some pride in what they have done.

In the time I have been here we have built three new bunkers, two tees and several new fairway drains.



We are always looking at ways to improve the course and, with one eye on environment, the golf club is planning to re-open a old long unused hydro-electric site near the 7th, to supply the golf club/hotel and restaurant's power needs. How green is that?!

Also, this year, we will be implementing a more organic based fertiliser programme for the Greens and Tees. We have a more traditional greens grass mix using *Agrostis capillaries*, *Festuca rubra commutata* and *Festuca rubra trichophylla*, with a low feed and watering programme. Mowing heights for the Greens are normal: 5mm down 4.5mm and with this we get a good speed on the greens.

The golf club is privately owned by four men so we have no committees. Thankfully this means more stable and consistent decision making at the top.

Golf Park Plzen is also known for its four live crocodiles, which live in the clubhouse, but we will be getting an outside pen soon for summer use. I did suggest that they be named Miroslav, Petr, Jan and Ivan after the four owners...and I've still got my job!

INSET ABOVE: the greenkeeping team. Back row (from left to right): Ondrej Batik, Vasil Orsah, Graham Shiel and Jan Csizmar.

MAIN RIGHT: Aerial shot of the picturesque countryside surrounding the 3rd and 5th Greens



about the author

I started greenkeeping in 1980 at Bolton Old Links Golf Club, and worked at golf clubs in the north west until I moved to Germany in 1991 and then on to Czech Republic. I have been a member of BIGGA from the start, and before that a member of EIGGA.

