

# “Hard work, learning new skills and great reward – it’s par for the course on the Ohio programme”

Intern, Joe Buckley, will be working at Pebble Beach during the US Open this month. Here he talks through his time in America and what he has learned while there

**Having served my apprenticeship at Woodsome Hall Golf Club in Huddersfield, I progressed to the position of First Assistant. Coupled with my development at Woodsome, I completed my NVQ Level 3 at Askham Bryan College. It was then that I looked for a further career move.**

I spoke with lecturers from the College, who told me about opportunities in States on the Ohio State Programme and I attended a presentation from Mike O’Keeffe, the Programme Manager.

I was instantly impressed with Mike’s approach and enthusiasm. It was impressed upon us that the programme was challenging, but that the rewards would be significant.

I began to exchange emails with Mike and was required to gather references and fill in various forms. I prepared a personal statement

and met with Mike during Harrogate Week. He told me that I would spend my first nine months at Oak Hill Country Club in Rochester, NY along with a fellow student – Steve Paul, from The Castle Course, at St. Andrews. The Superintendent was Jeff Corcoran.

Soon after the placement had been confirmed I handed in my notice at Woodsome Hall.

I arrived in Ohio late into a March night. Steve had already arrived and rested up for the orientation the next day, where we completed the necessary paperwork, before being shown round the campus, the football stadium and the Jack Nicklaus Museum.

Two days later we arrived in Rochester. I was met at the airport by the East/West Course Supervisor, Mike Lopresti, Mike took us straight to the course to meet Jeff who told us what we would be carrying out at Oak Hill

and asked us what we would like to achieve during our time there. We were then taken to our home for the next nine months - a two bedroom apartment in a town called Fairport, about 10 minutes from Oak Hill.

The first few weeks involved mostly clean up jobs, bringing the course back to some sort of normality after the winter snows.

The following weeks were admittedly tough; it was something of a shock to the system and set a challenging precedent for the months ahead. The greens were aerified, gradened, toppedressed and then the dryject was used. Tees and fairways on both courses were aerified and greens compounds on the East Course were also aerified.

Aerifying greens compounds was one of the toughest jobs I had ever carried out; by the time we had finished all 18 holes I was aching all over. The process involves three



pedestrian aerifiers and six people; three to operate the aerifiers and three to hold the ropes that kept them from falling in the bunkers! Put simply, we had to run around the inside of the bunkers, steering the aerifiers round the contours while pushing the aerifier up; the ropes were attached to a bar at the front of the aerifiers and the individuals holding them would stand on the flat and pull the ropes tight to help keep them from falling in the bunker.

Throughout the Summer I was involved in boom, hawk and knapsack spraying, topdressing applications, handwatering all playing surfaces including greens, took part

in fertiliser applications, carried out irrigation repairs, as well as a lot of hand mowing when it was too wet to take out the ride ons.

Once we had proven ourselves at our current courses Mike O'Keefe started trying to place us on a second course. Pebble Beach has been my favourite course since I saw the 2000 US Open, where Tiger ran away with it. With the 2010 US Open, and the chance to benefit from real tournament experience, I asked if I could be placed there. No promises were made but Mike was happy to assist.

As there was no tournament at Oak Hill, Jeff sent all turf employees to various courses to assist during tournament weeks. I was placed at Liberty National for The Barclays Open. It was the first tournament that I had worked on and I thoroughly enjoyed it; seeing what is required, the organisation that is needed to have a successful week and meeting people from the industry.

My morning assignment was mowing greens; we were in pairs and, depending on the stimp reading, the greens would either be mowed once or double cut. My afternoon job was

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**about the author**

Joe Buckley, 23, is currently taking part in the Ohio State Intern Programme, and is hoping to get a placement in New Zealand, before returning to the UK

For further information on the Ohio State Intern programme link to: [www.ohioprogram.org](http://www.ohioprogram.org)

much the same, with us shadowing the PGA agronomist around and mowing the greens that were not stimping at the required pace.

In October, Steve and I made the trip to The Sea Pines Resort, Hilton Head, South Carolina, for the annual short course for the interns that year.

The course started off with a tour round Harbor Town Golf Links where we were given a guided tour by Superintendent, Jon Wright. At the end of the tour Jon brought out some clubs, a bucket of balls and let us have a shot on the par 3 17th. Out of 43 turf grass students Steve was the only one to hit the green, probably the first par 3 he'd hit all summer!



It was then that I found out that Mike had secured me an internship at Pebble Beach meaning I would be working The AT&T, US Open and The First Tee Open.

Looking back at the Oak Hill placement, I realise that Jeff invested a significant amount of time with all of the interns, setting out questions and giving mini projects such as putting together a spray programme. If, on the rare occasion, disease was spotted he would let the interns know and make a "burrito bet" - if we could find the disease he would buy us a burrito; if we couldn't, we had to buy the management team burritos! The disease was usually something trivial, such as brown patch on a fairway, but it kept us thinking and ensured we were vigilant at all times - we were usually the ones paying up, though.

Getting in so early to groom the greens that you need to wear waterproofs because the irrigation system was still running, carrying out drill and fill by hand using power drills to drill the holes and watering cans full of sand to fill the holes, calibrating fertiliser applications to the oz (which involved using a microm-

eter to set the spreader instead of just going off the letters), holding "tarps" down over the 2 pass and rough so the Kentucky Bluegrass did not get damaged from the Embark spray are examples of what we did at Oak Hill. All these things may seem over the top - they did to me when I first started - but, after being on the course, it is these things which set the course apart from others.

After flying home for Christmas I arrived at Pebble Beach just before New Year. I was picked up from the airport and taken to my new home. I would be sharing the house with Tyler McMurtrey and Bubba Wright, both of whom I would work with at Pebble.

The next day I had my drug test at Pebble Beach's Health and Wellness Center, by Pebble Beach First Assistant, Billy Hausch. Once I had been given the all clear I was taken to meet Pebble Beach Superintendent, Chris Dalhamer, and had a tour around Pebble Beach for the first time - it didn't disappoint!

Pebble Beach is the jewel in the crown of The Pebble Beach Company.



Owned by a consortium of businessmen led by Peter Ueberroth, Richard Ferris, Arnold Palmer and Clint Eastwood, it consists of four golf courses, three hotels, numerous bars and restaurants, a spa, and currently employs 1600 people.

At \$500 a round, and with each guest required to stay in one of the hotels, playing Pebble doesn't come cheap, but Pebble still takes 70,000 rounds per year.

Chris told me that I would be

starting off doing “sections”, which includes mowing greens, raking bunkers, fixing ball marks, spot watering; in its simplest form maintaining five greens compounds. My section holes were the putting green, 3, 7, 11 and 16. Mowing the 7th green for the first time was an awesome experience, it has been my screensaver for the past few years and mowing the green as the sun came up and the waves came crashing in is something I will never forget.

Shortly after I arrived, the preparations for the AT&T began; tents and stands went up, woodchip went down to form paths for player and spectators, and throughout all this the storms hit hard. Throughout January we had eight inches of rain; this meant rebanking bunkers on a daily basis, and a lot of hand mowing! At one point the storms were so intense that the waves were hitting the sea wall, crashing up in the air and then being blown by the 50mph winds onto the 17th and 18th. In order to flush the saltwater the heads

been added on the 3rd, 4th and 6th. New tees have been added on the 3rd, 5th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 13th to increase the yardage from 6828yds to 7040yds. Over 20 acres of Kikuyu grass has been removed from in play areas and replaced with rye grass.

This was done by hand by a team of four picking small spots on greens and tee compounds and outside contractors excavating larger rough areas. A programme has also been implemented to turn the rough into predominately rye so we can achieve the thick 3-5 inch rough that the USGA prefer.

In addition, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 15th (one green per year) have been rebuilt to USGA specification with sub air systems and the greenside bunkers have been altered where necessary.

Rebuilding one green per year means that those which are USGA specification dry out a lot faster than the push up greens on the course, but closing down the course isn't a

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were run on the 18th fairway and we were out with hoses on the 17th green, 18th tee and 18th green

Fortunately, though, the weather was pleasant during the week prior to the AT&T, allowing the course to dry out and be in great condition for the time of year. During the AT&T my morning job was to mow greens and rake bunkers on the back nine. After morning assignments there was breakfast for the staff and volunteers back at the shop - it was so good Bill Murray came by to grab a bite. Throughout the day, we did minor jobs and watched some golf, before returning for another meal after this we were out on the evening assignment. These were generally just minor detail works undertaking such tasks as bombing divots and fixing ball marks. Everything went well with the course looking great for the cameras and the weather held off for Dustin Johnson to retain his title with a 16 under par total.

In the years running up to the 2010 US Open all bunkers have been rebuilt to include stalok; drainage and new sand. As well as this, bunker compounds have

viable option. The knock on effect to the hotels, shops and other revenue streams would have been too much for the company to bear.

In the run up to the US Open, I familiarised myself with many different aspects of the golf course. This includes the calibration and application of fertilisers, cultivation techniques such as aerification and topdressing, handwatering, and mini projects like installing all new tee yardage markers.

Seeing what goes into a tournament as big as The US Open has been a real eye opener, if the AT&T ranked as a 7 on tournament prep The US Open is a 15.

Tents and stands started to go up around 12 weeks before the tournament, including the merchandise tent on the Par 3 course that was bulldozed flat, greens included, and will be rebuilt after the US Open. The scale of the detail that is gone into is extremely impressive; for example, the different heights of cut for the rough on different holes so they play easier or harder, cleggometer tests to make sure each section of every green and approach is the



same firmness. The tests showed that the 5th and 15th approaches were softer than the rest, these were graded and topdressed to firm them up and get them up to the levels of the others. Rough is fluffed back up every time someone drives over it with a machine so there are no tyre tracks.

The course has been watched on a night by security guards from May. Tags have been placed on trees around the course and the guards have to clock in at various check



points every hour to make sure they're not sleeping on the job.

Fortunately there's a lot of experience on the staff, none more so than Jack Holt having worked three US Opens at Pebble before, he knows what the deal is and having someone with experience has been invaluable.

Working at Pebble has been a completely different experience to Oak Hill, as you would expect from a public and private course, but one that I have thoroughly enjoyed.

Despite their differences they share the same dedication to training young greenkeepers. Both Jeff and Chris always make time - sometimes sacrificing their own time - to sit down with their interns and answer any questions, and both have created a great learning environment.

Through the Ohio State Programme I have gained invaluable career and life experience and would definitely recommend it to any young greenkeeper back home.

If you are eager to learn and are willing to put in the effort, the rewards can be great. I started at a decent, smart course in Huddersfield, but had the ambition and the drive to do more.

I've learned and experienced more than I ever thought I would and through hard work and dedication I've been given the opportunity to work at one of the greatest sporting tournaments in the world, the prestigious US Open a memory, along with others, that I'll never forget.

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