

More South Atlantic Travels

Ian Gower returns from another visit to the South Atlantic

I have just come back from my second visit to the South Atlantic (see GI November 2009).

This time I managed to speak to 'Shotty' Green, the Greenkeeper at Longwood Golf Course, on St Helena, who has maintained the course for the last six years since retiring as a truck driver. He has not had any formal training and contacts the Islands Agriculture Department if he has any problems.

There are around 100 members, with a joining fee of £6, plus £2 per month. Most of the members are retired and are a mixture of ex-pats and locals.

Machinery used includes a two year old Kubota and an old 18" ride-on greens mower with a roller under the seat.

During their winter, which is equivalent to our summer, the nine fairways are cut every other week, taking three days. In the summer, the fairways are cut once a month.

One of the main problems on the island is lack of rain and the nine greens each has irrigation, but it is only possible to use it if enough water is available in the storage tank. Greens take three hours to cut and are cut once a week all year round.

When asked about other pesticides used on the golf course, Shotty said he didn't get many weeds on the greens and any that do can easily be hand weeded. Disease does not seem to be an issue although there are many potential pests. Goats can be a problem if they escape from their tethers and sometimes rabbits and feral donkeys. Because the course is an open site people have access to all of the areas and children often ride bikes across the greens.

I asked about feeding the greens and Shotty replied that fertiliser is not available on the island.

After spending a couple of days on St Helena I travelled to Ascension Island to undertake some pesticides training.

Like St Helena, Ascension is a volcanic island and much of it is wasteland of lava flows and cinder cones.

While here I visited One Boat Golf Club, the only golf facility on Ascension Island and designed in 1964 by an American – Dr Bill.

The greens, 'browns' (see photograph) are constructed of a variable layer of sand bound with recycled oil that comes from establishments from all over the island. Oil is applied every couple of months to ensure a relatively stable playing surface. The landscape around most of the island is volcanic lava without a soil layer, hence the sand and oil playing surface. Traditionally the sand is replenished from one of the islands beaches every five years. Recently though the Island Government has said that this will need to be looked into as most of the beaches are used by turtles for nesting.

It is an 18 hole, par 67 course and visitors who are used to traditional grass courses find it more difficult.

I met their part time greenkeeper, Martin Cranfield, who works on the US airbase as his main job. At any one time there are only around 1000 people resident on the island, most of them like Martin from St Helena 900 miles, or three days ship journey, away. The previous greenkeeper was 'Ghostie' Charlie Crowie, who also holds the course record of 52!

Martin told me that nine holes are brushed on Friday, nine on Saturday.

On an average week up to 50 people will play a round of golf, mainly on Wednesdays, Fridays and Sundays. The 19th hole relies on honesty – a chitty is filled in for each drink and a bill is then presented at the end of the month.



New-look BIGGA Website Launched

The new site will be a valuable member benefit offering on-line payment facilities for membership and training fees and well as a range of easy to use features.

The Events section will display a range of National, Regional and Section events in a calendar style simple to view manner; there will be increased identity protection and password protection for those people using the Bulletin Boards, while Course Managers will have their own dedicated area on the site.

Classified Adverts will be placed on the site free of charge for an indefinite period which should help in increasing traffic.

The site is much more flexible than its predecessors and will be able to adapt to future demands placed upon it.

Take a look at www.bigga.org.uk





SCOTTISH EDUCATION CONFERENCE

The BIGGA Scottish Greenkeeping Conference was held at our customary venue, the Carnegie Conference Centre, Dunfermline.

This year the attendance was the highest ever with 180 delegates. Greenkeepers came from the far North of Scotland and delegates from as far south as Darlington.

After the usual welcome speeches we began with a presentation from Greg Evans, of Ealing Golf Club. This was Greg's first presentation in Scotland and his talk was warmly received and, importantly, initiated great debate during the Conference and lunch break.

Following Greg, we had the full weight of the STRI with Richard Windows, Jay

Dobson, Christian Spring and Henry Bechelet. The subjects from the diversity of speakers discussed the scientific approach and the new agronomy all of which was delivered in their own imitable style.

Prior to the afternoon session John Geddes, Scottish Chairman, had the very pleasant task of presenting the "The Harry Diamond Quaich" to the Student of the Year in Scotland in 2009 and the recipient this year was Richard Jenkinson, West Gleneagles. Congratulations to Richard on his well deserved award.

Then Gordon McKie, Course Manager, Old Course, St. Andrews Links, delivered a fine talk on the lead up to The Open and

the changes that are taking place for the event this year.

To finish we had Paul Kimber, Golf Course Architect, who along with Lee Strutt, Course Manager, West, Ochil Developments gave a joint presentation on the course under construction at West Gleneagles.

Paul spoke of the design and construction involved and Lee spoke about the heather regeneration and the work involved in such a project.

BIGGA Scottish Board thanks the speakers for taking the time out to present their talks and grateful thanks to the delegates who made it such a success.

Peter J. Boyd, RA, Scotland