



“The golf course is built on the biggest land slip in Europe. The fact of the matter is that the sea erodes the blue lias clay, pulling it out as though it’s on ball bearings,”
Course Manager, David Everett

MAIN ABOVE: The 16th hole and the glorious scenery beyond.
INSET LEFT: The consequences of sea erosion.

Photography by Stuart Broom, winner of the 2009 Photographic Competition

The earth *moved*

Scott MacCallum headed to the edge of Dorset to visit Lyme Regis, a town whose golf club featured in the winning picture from last year's BIGGA Photographic Competition, sponsored by Syngenta

Picture the scene. You're in a buggy carrying out the regular early morning chores when you happen to raise your gaze and look over to a familiar corner of the course. Instead of seeing the hedge which borders the 16th hole there is nothing. A closer inspection uncovers a spectacular sight – 25 metres of the course, including fully grown trees, slowly sliding down the cliff.

Nine years on Lyme Regis Course Manager, David Everett, can still

recall vividly the memory of watching part of his golf course disappear down the cliff and he can point to the trees, which are still alive and growing, half way down.

Such an event didn't come as a shock to David, however, as the beautiful course, set 500 feet above sea level and looking down on the lovely seaside town of Lyme Regis, has a bit of a history.

"The golf course is built on the biggest land slip in Europe. The fact of the matter is that the sea erodes the blue lias clay, pulling it

out as though it's on ball bearings," explained David, who has been at the club since 1986.

"Just before I arrived there was a massive land slip and I did wonder what on earth I'd done taking on the course but the club said it was not unusual and you do get used to it. Throughout history they've had small land slips but also big ones as well," he said, in a matter of fact manner that demonstrates how he has come to view the situation.

That 2001 slip was particularly dramatic – the coast guard



ABOVE: Irrigation on the 9th green

scrambled helicopters to clear the beaches, the golf course was closed until it could be declared safe while television crews vied for the best pictures.

“As greenkeepers we’d been unaware of it when we came in on the morning and were out and about doing various duties when we happened to look out to sea and thought ‘Where’s the hedge line?’

“We went over to the cliff edge and in a couple of places as much as 25 metres had started to drop and over a period of 48 hours all that ground disappeared. We watched mature trees sliding down the cliff in situ and nine years on these trees are still growing halfway down the cliff. It was a remarkable sight,” recalled David.

But what of the day to day pressures of working on a golf course that might just fall away from beneath your feet? Well, it’s not quite like that.

“As greenkeepers we do see land beginning to fall away and slopes becoming a little more severe. Then, perhaps a couple of years

later, you start to see a couple of fissures appear – just very fine hair line cracks which you can see on the shorter turf. They eventually grow until they become as much as a metre wide, and the next stage is that they start to drop. It might be two or three inches to begin with, it might be a foot. You know then that the inevitable is going to happen and that the land will fall.

That said, it is anything but predictable.

Some areas that look like prime candidates to be the next to go still remain.

“Around 18 years ago the club took the decision to move away from one area of the cliff and relocate two holes onto the practice ground thinking that it was the most active part of the landslide. I thought it was the right decision but all that time on we could still be playing those holes. So you just never know.”

The club has spoken to eminent geologists and while they have given their best advice they have all said that you never quite know what is going to happen other than the fact

that the club is staring at the inevitable and that eventually, probably a number of decades down the line the course, in its current location will disappear.

With that in mind the club engaged Donald Steel who in addition to offering advice on some subtle changes to the course also looked at a more drastic rerouting plan should the speed of the landslide require it.

“We have the plans locked away but they involve rebuilding 11 of the greens so it would be quite a big hit for the golf club. We do have 120-130 acres wall to wall so there is room” explained David, who added that the R&A had previously given assistance in the shape of interest free loans to help fund erosion protection work.

The town is a magnet for both film buffs and fossil hunters. A hooded Meryl Streep, memorably stood on the narrow breakwater off the town’s beach in an iconic scene in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, while the discoveries of Mary Anning, a 19th century fossil



RIGHT: The greenkeeping team

INSET BELOW: Course Manager, David Everett

collector had already ensured that the town had another reason for people to visit. It also has World Heritage status

David has thoroughly enjoyed his time at Lyme Regis and has nothing but praise for the club's approach to progress since he joined from Chipping Sodbury Golf Club, as a 27-year old Head Greenkeeper.

"The club has been brilliant. When I came down here I was really quite ambitious and believed that I'd do five years at Lyme Regis and move on. But the club's attitude has always been progressive – in a small, affordable way – that I've been happy to stay."

David has always been a hands-on greenkeeper and that approach has gelled well with the club's desire to carry out projects cost effectively and in-house. That approach reaped real dividends when the new irrigation system was installed three years ago.

"We chose Ocmis, partly because they are a local company based just along the road and partly because they came out best in the tendering



“When I came here I was ambitious and believed that I'd do five years and move on. But the club's attitude has always been progressive – in a small, affordable way – that I've been happy to stay”
Course Manager, David Everett

process. Chris Aplin, the MD at the time, suggested as they were particularly busy the club could save some money if we did the reinstatement work and worked alongside the two Ocmis guys.

"I had a chat with our guys and they said they were keen. It meant 12 hour days all through the winter while the work was being done – arriving in the dark and leaving in the dark – but while it was very hard, it was also satisfying, work

and a big learning curve for us. We did the work to a very high standard and were delighted with the Ocmis guys who worked to a very high standard as well.

"We knew we were inheriting it so probably went over the top but the guys really excelled themselves and the club recognised this and paid them overtime rates and gave me a bonus.

"Chris Aplin said to me afterwards that it was a pity more clubs



“It’s not the longest course in the world but the greens are small and you have to play well to score well.”

Course Manager, David Everett

couldn’t adopt the approach we’d taken as it had saved us an absolute fortune.”

As previously mentioned Lyme Regis is famous for its Officer and a Gentleman connection and for being on the Dinosaur Coast, a Mecca for fossil hunters from all over the world.

The course has a bit of links, a bit of heathland and a bit of parkland

but David likes to describe it as a clifftop course.

“It’s not the longest in the world but the greens are small and you have to play well to score well. Donald Steel said that he looked at the yardage for our 9th which is a par-4 just over 250 yards and think it should be easy but it’s a small green and well guarded by bunkers and the wind factor makes it quite a challenge,” said David, who worked closely and well with Jim Arthur, when he was the club’s agronomist.

Such is the beauty of the spot it is easy to feel that Stuart Broom, winner of the 2009 BIGGA Photographic Competition, sponsored by Syngenta, had a head start over most of his fellow competitors and it is fair to say that Stuart’s winning picture was a very worthy winner.

“Stuart has done very well since he joined us a couple of years ago and we’re all very proud of him. He has thrown himself into the job and is interested in all aspects of the work and the golf course. He also takes an interest in BIGGA. He didn’t tell me he’d entered the competition but when he did and it won he was thrilled and we were all thrilled for him.”

David is delighted with his current team of five including himself.





Photography Competition

BIGGA's Photographic Competition, supported by Syngenta, is back...

syngenta

BIGGA Calendar 2010

Featuring the Top 12 Entries for the 2009 BIGGA Photographic Competition, sponsored by Syngenta

syngenta



"My Deputy, Peter Connett, and Simon Rattenbury have been here for 18 years and Stuart and Jamie Hughes, who arrived recently, took over from guys who had been here for over 20 years. So the club must be doing something right."

He does have concerns about expectation levels at some clubs.

"The job is getting ever more stressful. Golfers' expectations are getting more and more unrealistic, with the budgets that are around, and most clubs are running with a staff of four or five – six or seven at some clubs – and they are being asked to obtain the unobtainable.

"If clubs worked more closely with their greenkeepers I think it would improve things. I like to think that here we have a very close working relationship with the management committee. We don't have a Green Committee – the key staff are myself and my deputy, the Secretary/Manager, the Bar Manager and the Pro. The Chairman told me recently that the club pays us the correct money to do the job and that they are there to oversee and keep an eye on us. They don't pay lip service to that – they genuinely do."

Lyme Regis and its golf club is a very special part of the country, even though it seems to be disappearing bit by bit.

ABOVE: Irrigation on the 15th

Calling all budding photographers! Are you proud of your course? Do you catch yourself admiring it in a certain light?

The BIGGA Photographic Competition, supported by Syngenta and back for its fifth year, creates an opportunity for greenkeepers to display their artistic flair, while also earning some publicity for their club.

The winner will receive a full course profile in Greenkeeper International and a special prize, while the 12 best pictures will be selected for the 2011 BIGGA Calendar.

Photographs will be accepted in three forms. Prints, transparencies, or digitally.

Digital pictures need to be high resolution, at the largest size capable by the camera, as it may ultimately be scaled up to A3 print size (42cm wide x 29.7cm high).

Please try to avoid reducing the file size to fit on email as this

will reduce the quality of the image.

If the file size is too large to send, we recommend using a compression facility such as Stuffit (www.stuffit.com) or a website such as mailbigfile.com

Also please note, cropping may occur if photos are to appear in the magazine or calendar. Also ensure digital photos do not show the time/date display!

Anyone wishing to enter should email them to:

tom@bigga.co.uk, entering 'BIGGA PHOTO COMP 2010' as the email subject header.

Alternatively post to:
Tom Campbell, BIGGA HOUSE, Aldwark Manor, Alne, York, YO61 1UF.

All entries need to be received by July 31, 2010.

Only BIGGA members are eligible to enter. Please note Syngenta will have access to the winning pictures and will credit them when and if used.

So come on...strike a pose!