



A one in a million trip

Toro Student Greenkeeper of the year, Rhys Norville, made the most of his prize – an eight week study trip to the United States

Firstly, I would like to start this article by thanking everybody who made this trip possible. Peter Mansfield and his Secretary, Christine, from Lely, have been very patient with all my questions and queries and helped to make the trip run very smoothly.



Also, the support from the staff and members of Newport Golf Club has been second to none, especially from my Head Greenkeeper, Paul Handy, the Club Secretary, Russell Thomas, and all of team I work with.

As I sat in Heathrow airport early on Monday, January 4, it was all finally starting to come true, so much planning had gone into

the trip and the time had arrived. The extensive security checks did increase the nerves but as I boarded the plane I was nothing but excited.

After a long day of travelling I checked in at the Comfort Inn ready to attend the University the following day, and I didn't really know what I should expect. Classes started at 8am and I didn't have the slightest clue about how I was going to get to the University. Luckily for me I managed to get a ride from a fellow student who was staying at the same hotel. Arriving at class we were greeted by Dr Pat Vittum, the organiser of the Winter School course at the University of Massachusetts, as well as teaching

the Entomology course. She gave us our timetable for the week and, to all the students' delight, we had eight hours of lectures a day, five days a week, I was expecting a lot of hard work but this proved to be a lot of information to take on board.

The course was divided up into ten sections which included; Turf Grass Physiology, Turf Grass Management, Turf Grass Disease, Weeds, Entomology, Turf Grass ID, Calculations, Water Management, Golf Course Design & Irrigation and Arboriculture, for all of which we had to take exams, and for some we had to complete mini projects. These projects included growing a plot of grass from seed and conducting an ID stating what you believed the

grass species to be. Also, we had to conduct a project on a selective herbicide, listing its uses, where it could be used and where it could not and, most importantly, what it actually controlled.

My favourite topic was Turf Grass Physiology. I found this most informative as we learnt the process the plant goes through when it experiences photosynthesis and respire, so when factors reduce the plants production what can we do to continue to get the quality growth which we strive towards. It was also fun to learn about things such as the Rubisco enzyme and its role during the Calvin Cycle and how to identify disease pathogens through a microscope, so, not only could we identify the disease, but we could notice how it was spreading and how the best way was to control it.

We were also taught how to identify grubs and insects by looking at their anal slits through a microscope, which wasn't for the faint hearted. In the three years that I have been a greenkeeper I have learnt so much, but this course helped me to take my knowledge to another level as lectures went into a lot more detail.

We also received a lot of talks from various Superintendents, the highlights were definitely a talk from Bill Spence, who is the Superintendent from the Brookline Country Club, which held the 1999 Ryder Cup (the one where the Americans ran all over Olazabal's line of putt!) He stressed how important planning and communication is, not only through the staff but to members as well and how important it is to use your budget wisely. Might I add that his budget is only \$2 million. We also had an insightful talk from John Garcia, Superintendent at the Patterson County Club. He gave us a step by step account of how he went about a \$4 million revamp of his course which included 18 new tees, the conversion of his greens from push up clay to USGA spec and the removal of over 4000 trees.

The students who attended the winter school program were not all just from America. Also on the course was Wade Williams, the Australian award winner, (who had never seen snow before this trip) a Canadian, and four other Europeans. Both inside and outside of the class room we Europeans has some interesting debates about Turf Grass Management, as all the American seem to know how to do is water, feed, cut and spray. It was incredible to hear about some of the budgets from the students' home



Students enjoy a rare break

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golf courses, many of them spent more on fertilisers in a year than our whole budget at Newport.

I also learnt a lot from my other peers about how they go about tasks, it was very interesting to talk to Marek Zubert and Dorota Cwil who have been working in Ireland. They had some fascinating stories about working at the Irish Open. You can learn so much for what others have experienced. I also had the pleasure of visiting James Ricci. He is the second biggest individual lawn mower collector in the world, he showed me equipment from as long ago as the 1870's. I discovered so much about the history of the industry and it helped me to understand how we got to the equipment that we use on the golf courses today.

The novelty of staying in a hotel room for eight weeks soon wore off and I ended up following a lot of the American sport. The University of Massachusetts has its own arena which seats nearly 10,000 people for its college basketball and ice hockey teams, that is more than

my home town rugby stadium can seat! The atmosphere at the games was amazing, and it's not just the students who attend the games, fans come from all over which really surprised me, I didn't realise college sport was so big.

While I was in America the Super Bowl was taking place and it seemed as if the whole of America shuts down for Super Bowl Sunday. I was invited to stay with one of the students over the Super Bowl weekend as he was having a Super Bowl party in his basement, which had been converted into his own sports bar with memorabilia lining every single wall.

I also managed to get to Boston for a weekend where the view from the Prudential Tower was magnificent. I even had a pint in America's oldest tavern. Boston is full of some great history which I didn't really appreciate before and I also managed to sneak a tour of the Red Sox's baseball ground, Fenway Park.

My trip was split into three parts; the majority of it was spent studying at the University of Massachusetts but I also attending The Golf Industry in San Diego and the last leg of my trip was spent in Minneapolis at the Toro Headquarters. When I got to San Diego it was nice to see some familiar faces in that of Sami and John from BIGGA. Also attending the show was Richard Jenkinson who I had met at the National



about the author

Rhys Norville, Toro Student Greenkeeper of the Year in 2009, proudly displays his award (above). Rhys is an assistant Newport Golf Club.

Finals of the award so I was nice to have some British company. I was amazed at how many British people I actually met up with and managed to speak to considering it is an American show but the show was so very extraordinary.

I was overwhelmed by the size of the show which was probably four times the size of Harrogate and some of the stands were very impressive. Richard and I also managed to sneak off and visit San Diego Zoo which was striking. The Americans certainly know how to do things right.

In my final week, Wade and I travelled to Minneapolis to visit the Toro Headquarters and the factories, where we met up with Cameron Kusiek, who was the Canadian Award Winner. We arrived on the Friday night and had the weekend to ourselves. The three of us spent most of our time in the Mall of America, which is the second biggest Mall in the world. In the middle of the Mall there is a theme park with a loop the loop rollercoaster, a water ride and many other attractions. Also, in the basement is an Aquarium, which was so gigantic I didn't think anything like it could ever exist. We also managed to get downtown to watch an NBA game, which was a brilliant experience.



We were shown around the Toro Headquarters, where machinery is designed and prototypes are built and tested. The procedures which the engineers go through was remarkable and we were even able to see some of the stress test experiments which were being conducted at the time. We were also taken to the Shakopee site, where the parts and reels are produced. Again, it was extraordinary to see how things are turned from a sheet of metal and made into parts for the machines. Finally, we visited the Tomah factory where the machinery is assembled and packaged

ready from distribution. We were able to walk the lines as machines were being assembled. The staff were very friendly in answering any questions we had. It was incredible to see how the machines which we use on a daily basis are constructed from start to finish.

The whole trip has been a one in a million chance for me where I have seen so much, learnt a great deal and met some wonderful people. I am very grateful to everybody who made it happen for me and to my girlfriend, Becky, all my friends and family who supported me all the way.



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