



Landing at The Berkshire

Scott MacCallum touches down at the destination of this year's BIGGA National Championship, taking place on the 4th and 5th of October







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Sir Michael Bonallack,
OBE, *BIGGA*
President



This year's BIGGA National Championship, sponsored by Kubota and Charterhouse, is being played at one of the most iconic golf clubs in the country – The Berkshire, near Ascot.

But don't just take my word for it. Listen to what five time Amateur Champion and BIGGA President, Sir Michael Bonallack, OBE, says about the club.

“Any golfer who has not visited this marvellous club with its two magnificent courses, the Red and the Blue, has missed one of the great pleasures in golf.

“I have always loved both links and heathland golf, and the two Berkshire courses are the finest example of the latter. Sand based fairways and greens are set in a superb arena of pine trees and heather and the design and placement of the bunkers are a tribute to the skill of the golf course architect.

“In particular, the par three holes are as good as any to be found, with each having its own character and not like the 250 yard tests that are a feature of contemporary design. However they are just as hard and in some cases, even more punishing to a bad shot.

“All in all, there is no finer place to play golf.”

As testimonials go they don't come much better than that and those who tee up in this heartland of the Home Counties' stockbroker

belt at the beginning of October will be able to see whether Sir Michael was on the mark.

While there will be a full field competing over the two wonderful heathland courses one of the main instigators of BIGGA's visit will not be there, not in an official capacity, at any rate.

Chris Lomas MG, Courses Manager from 2003 left earlier this year to take up the position of Secretary at nearby Worplesdon Golf Club, his position taken over last month by Ian Morrison, who had been Course Manager at West Hill GC.

“It's been an amazing seven years and it is with an extremely heavy heart that I leave, but it is a career decision. It is where I want to go and it is what I've been working towards for a long time,” said Chris, as we sat in the committee room on the first floor of the splendid clubhouse, not long before he left.

“Becoming a Secretary has been a goal and ambition of mine for quite some time. I am a career orientated person and I feel very lucky to have been at a club as revered as The Berkshire. As a greenkeeper it would've been difficult to find anywhere as special to continue my career and I could see more doors opening for me as a Secretary.”

Not long after Chris began his time at The Berkshire, Greenkeeper International visited him and discussed his aims and aspirations.



“The goals were to continue improving the course and I was concerned about the woodland at the time. The headline of the article was ‘A Woodland Course with Heather’,” Chris recalled.

“A huge amount of woodland management has been carried out since. It's expensive to carry out and often seen as a luxury, but if you don't do it you lose heather and the fine grasses, while drainage can become blocked. Having done the work we have we have seen improvement in drainage and turf quality.

“The sward has improved for a number of reasons – the air that we have given it to breathe, an aeration programme and a new irrigation system which has allowed us a full growing season through the summer.”

The irrigation was another major advance for the club with the instal-





lation of a new £1.25 million irrigation system and reservoir.

“I am very proud to say that The Berkshire is now totally self-sufficient for water with all water that comes off the clubhouse and the course being collected in the reservoir, while we have our own bore hole for use in the summer months. We don’t rely on outside water at all and are saving approximately £40,000 a year by not having to use mains water. With the reservoir costing us in the region of £180,000 it doesn’t take long to get your money back and it means you are ticking all the right boxes for the environment.”

The vast majority of the woodland management work was carried out in-house and the legacy that has left the club is a group of staff who are trained and qualified in the use of chainsaws.

“It was something we could really

get on with at times like last winter when we couldn’t get on to the golf course.”

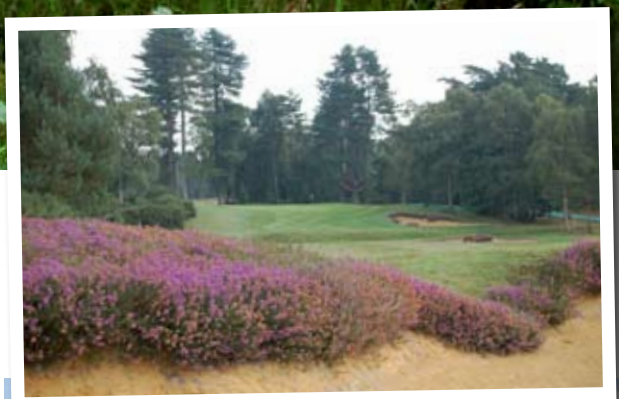
But don’t run away with the idea that Chris and his team spent so much time in the woods they were on first name terms with the nation’s picnicking bears.

They have also built a fantastic practice ground, importing half a million tonnes of soil.

“It was previously landfill and we made the club money from it as well as producing a wonderful facility and short game area.”

With Chris moving on his successor will be left to carry out the next project which is a bunker programme.

“We are assessing the bunkers with Thomson, Perrett and Lobb with the aim of getting greater consistency, design and playability. That’s the next big project and I’m





Win a car, courtesy of Rigby Taylor!



Rigby Taylor is sponsoring a fabulous prize at this year's BIGGA National Championship, sponsored by Kubota and Charterhouse, where entrants who achieve a hole-in-one on selected holes during the two days of the tournament will win the **new, 2010 BMW Mini Countryman worth £20,000!**

The holes selected during this year's tournament at The Berkshire are the par 3, 221 yard 16th on the Red Course and the par 3, 199 yard 10th on the Blue course. Any player who achieves a hole-in-one on these holes will win a car, an example of which will be on display during the tournament.



A former winner of the BIGGA National Championship, he clinched the crown at Cox Moor and Hollinwell in 2004

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very envious that I'm leaving my successor this as I really wanted to get stuck into it.”

As a former winner of the BIGGA National Championship, clinching the crown at Cox Moor and Hollinwell in 2004, Chris can talk passionately about the event.

“Hollinwell went straight to the top of my list of favourites after that and I hope the players who come here get a similar experience to the one I got at those two wonderful golf courses.

“It is difficult to say what October will bring weather wise – the Championship starts the day after the Ryder Cup finishes and everyone is expecting that to be a foggy dark affair but hopefully we will be reaping the benefit of a dry summer and should still be nice, firm and fast.”

The two courses carry very worthy reputations.

“The Red is unique in this country as it has six par-3s, six par-4s and six par-5s and I don't think you will find six finer par-3s anywhere. They are incredible,” said Chris, echoing the words of Sir Michael.

“The Blue is a sterner test of golf

and the better golfers prefer to play Medals around it as they know that the weaker golfer will struggle. If you score well around the Blue you should feel very satisfied while the Red is a little more comfortable and you can open up your shoulders a bit, especially on the par-5s... but beware of those par-3s.”

The two courses are regarded as equals, no-one at the club openly expresses a preference, and are both managed in exactly the same way.

It is with a tinge or regret that Chris will not be in position when BIGGA rolls into town.

“I was thoroughly looking forward to the prospect of 80 greenkeepers coming and playing the golf courses and experiencing that sort of examination but that will be done to the new Course Manager now. I had planned to peak the courses for the BIGGA National Championship and I would have loved to have had that challenge.

“The new guy can always shrug his shoulders and say it was all Chris Lomas' fault anyway...or take the acclaim as well. It doesn't really matter,” he laughed.

Chris will remain a Golden Key BIGGA member and will encourage the greenkeeping staff at Worplesdon to consider the Association if they do not already do so.

“I'd never force anyone to become a member but I'd like to think that they'd want to be BIGGA members as education is hugely important.”

The Berkshire's Secretary, John Hunt, is also a big supporter of BIGGA and encouraged Chris to go for Master Greenkeeper status, something he achieved in 2006.

“It is really down to John Hunt that the Championship is being played here. He really pushed for it and is looking forward to welcoming everyone.

“Being a Master Greenkeeper made me comfortable that I was doing things correctly and didn't have any glaring omissions from a greenkeeping sense,” added Chris.

He is not sure if he will make an appearance during the Championship but you can be sure that wherever he is at the time his thoughts will be with his old club and the greenkeepers who are tackling his two favourite courses.

