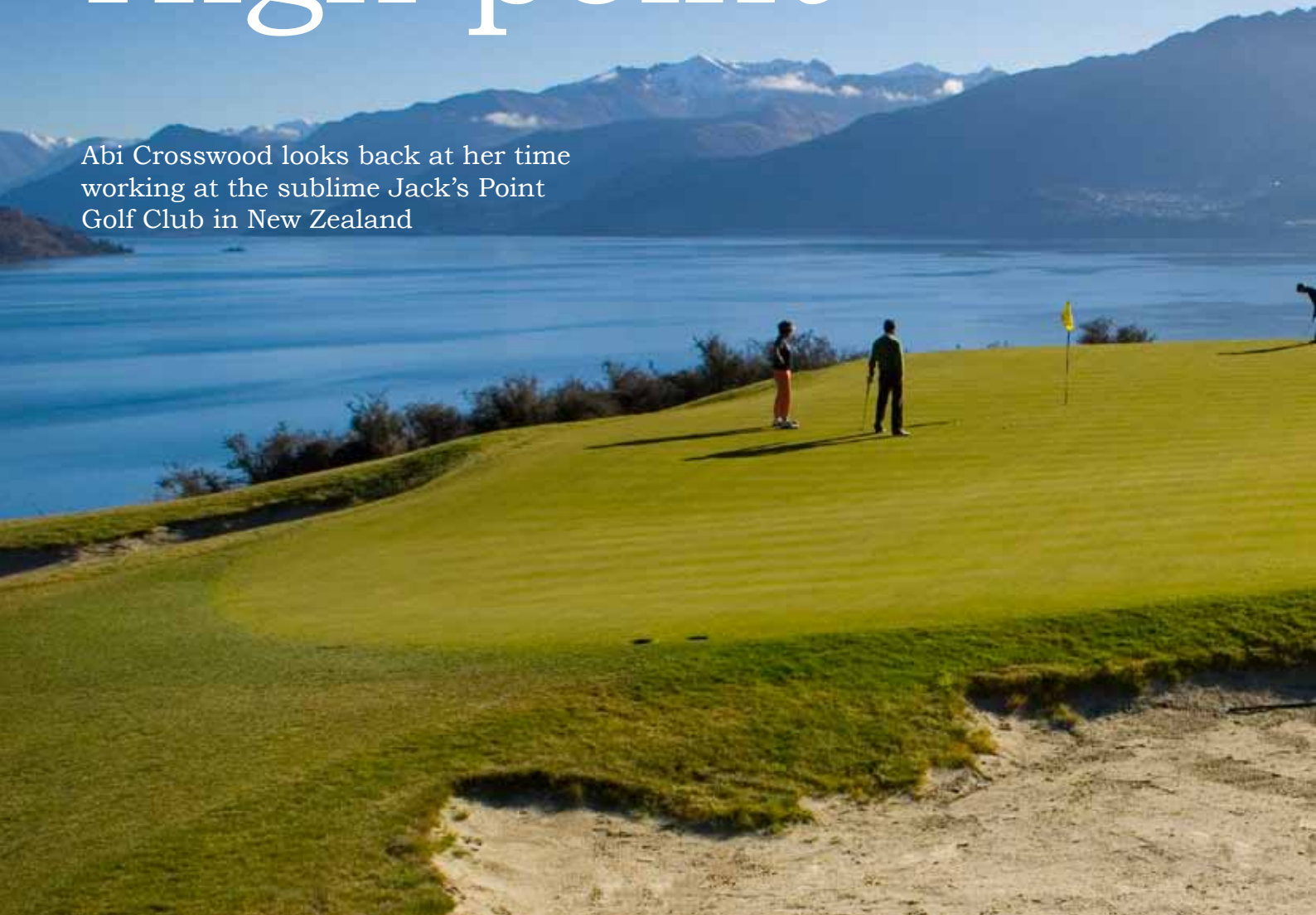


High point

Abi Crosswood looks back at her time working at the sublime Jack's Point Golf Club in New Zealand



When I got placed at the Augusta National Golf Course last year I thought it was one of the most amazing experiences I could have ever imagined. But then I was lucky enough to have the opportunity of a sabbatical at the beautiful Jack's Point Golf Course in Queenstown, New Zealand.

This was only made possible because of the kind consideration of my employers at the Newquay Golf Club, and the opportunity that some key people in the golf course industry, from two different parts of the world, gave me.

ABOVE: Beautiful panoramic shot of the 7th hole at Jack's Point

There are more golf courses in New Zealand per head of the population than anywhere in the world. Over 400 courses comprising one six-hole course; 183 nine-hole courses; 211 18-hole courses and five 18+-hole courses. The golf industry itself is constantly developing and this generates a lot of competition amongst the clubs to be the best.

I really enjoyed working at Jack's Point under Golf Course Superintendent, Simon Forshaw. I learned that although they may well be some of our distant cousins they do have a laid back attitude about most things that they do (as long

as you don't mention the All Blacks then things change pretty quickly!).

Of course, the great summer outdoor living goes a long way to making them the people they are, but, in saying that, their expectations of turf and golf course quality are as high as anywhere. They are not always inclined to use machinery all the time to do the job and often do things by hand in order to get the best results. That includes walk behind greens and tees cutting; walk behind spraying equipment and hand raking/brushing of bunkers, even though there are 74 of them and they have two 5200 Toro Sandpros!



Legislations are similar but different. The resource consent at Jack's Point took up to five years to get approval. For a golf course and housing development, you need to obtain an Approved Handlers' Certificate in order to use most agrichemicals and, of course, some of the staff have to be trained through St Johns for health and safety purposes. However, when it comes to things like attention to detail and standards there are always very high expectations. Close enough is never good enough.

I particularly liked the way that the whole team got to be involved and that there was real feeling of a

team environment, much like being a crew member on a ship. You knew what was going on and your position and place.

There were regular meetings so that the team would know the up-and-coming plans and the standards that were expected. Following this weekly briefing every member of staff was encouraged to do their best as each person was genuinely valued. This approach certainly had the effect of making all team members even more attentive to every detail.

Jack's Point was designed by John Darby, with assistance from Brett Thomson, from Darby Part-

ners, who have also designed The Hills GC, home of the last three New Zealand Opens, Clearwater Resort, host of the New Zealand PGA and a few more. It is regarded as a very special course in New Zealand as it was the first of its kind to be designed as hybrid California/USGA greens construction as opposed to the standard USGA.

This design was by Dr Richard Gibbs and selected to minimise costs of importation of sand and to reduce moisture loss, since the sand has some large particle sizes. Dune sand from Dunedin is imported for the use of dusting/topdressing and coring as the

Tarras sand is too hard on cutting equipment and takes too long to brake down into the turf canopy.

Queenstown on average only receives around 700-800mm of rainfall a year. By way of comparison 400mm rainfall is considered to be desert conditions!

Although I was not present at Jack's Point for the construction it was still really interesting learning how it was done from the numerous pictures. Amazingly, the only material imported was the Tarras sand, not only used for the greens but also the tees and the bunkers. The rest of the course construction was done by scraping off the topsoil and then screening it while the sub-grade soil was being shaped to make the contours. Drainage and ring main irrigation were installed and later once the top-soil was reinstated, irrigation lines at three per hole were introduced, using a mole plough attachment. Drenching would have been impossible due to the nature of the glacier rock involved.

The designer wanted to keep the course very natural, and roughly only 225,000 cubic metres of earth was moved, which was mainly from the three bottom holes (1st, 17th and 18th) - as a man-made lake had to be made due to resource consent.

The lake and the Golf Course is named Tewa, after Maori Jack Tewa.

This is because in the mid to late 1800s, Jack saved the life of a man who was drowning in the main Lake Wakatupi, after his boat tipped over. Also, he was the first to discover gold in the shot over river around the 1860s, so it is only fitting that this wonderful place be named after such a legend!

The glacier rock was also used as features on the course to build walls etc. and dynamite was used to break up natural rock. A lot of the tee walls were constructed using this rock as well as the dry stone dykes. In some circumstances it was too difficult to move some of the natural rock, therefore it was simply incorporated into the design and it has made interesting features in some fairways and surrounds.

Browntop is the native grass to the area in which Jack's Point is located. Ever since some of the first settlers from the United Kingdom and Europe come over in the sailing ships, along with the browntop they also brought sweet ferns, crested dog tail and timothy.

The architects, and Simon, as he was the grow-in Superintendent, at the time decided to sow the greens



MAIN RIGHT (BOTH IMAGES) and NBELOW: the 15th hole looking splendid with its glorious surroundings



and tees with Egmont browntop as they know how well this turf type has done before in the climate, and liked the idea of the low inputs.

The Bent is more resilient than some other types of fine turf and at one point, during my time at Jack's Point, the tees were cut at 3.8mm and coped well with the low height. Visitors often commented on how the tees were better than their home course's greens!

Jack's Point decided to use Chewing's Fescue and Creeping Red for the rest of the course. This is because it helps to maintain the link's characteristics, common to the Great Britain and Ireland. They like the idea about how they want their course to play, such as the bump and run shot; being able to play shots along the ground as well as through the air. They want to make sure that it would not be a target shot making course as so modern day design are. It involves a lot of the natural design features and uses the natural landscape as much as possible all things which you would of seen during the "Golden Age of Architecture".



Furthermore it is a fairly native species with it being discovered 100km from the site on Mr Chewing's farm, fescue works really well on the course, providing a natural look. However, in New Zealand the warmer temperatures are a major consideration. Extra caution has to be taken with machinery as it can bruise the fescue easily from the heat and it is then slow to recover. This is not often an aspect that British greenkeepers have to worry about.

There are two other courses in New Zealand also using fescue on their fairways and roughs, the newish Jack Nicklaus course, Kinloch, in Taupo, and the new course in Christchurch Pegasus, The Pegasus people were so impressed when they visited Jack's before the sow-out of their course that they actually used the same turf types as Jack's Point (that's got to be the highest form of praise)

Management mentioned that they have found that the fescue goes into dormancy before the bents but they recover far quicker coming out of winter, also they love

the idea of less irrigation requirements and lower fertility.

Real resourcefulness had to be demonstrated in continuing the rustic and natural characteristic. This was achieved by recycling driftwood from the bottom of the lake. Driftwood is used as a fence along the back drop of the classic par-3 7th hole, reminiscent of the drop hole 7th at Pebble Beach and around the course native wood is a visual feature and is used to make rakes, bins, fences, benches etc.

Their goal is to have everything on the golf course made from totally natural materials but as the Superintendent says that's pretty hard to do when your only choice is metal or plastic putting cups and nylon flags although he did mention he would love wooden flag poles if he could get them.

The irrigation on the course is sourced from the beautiful Lake Wakaputi and the water drawn is pumped into a man-made lake. This man-made lake feeds an irrigation pond which (unlike a huge tank) blends into the course unnoticed.

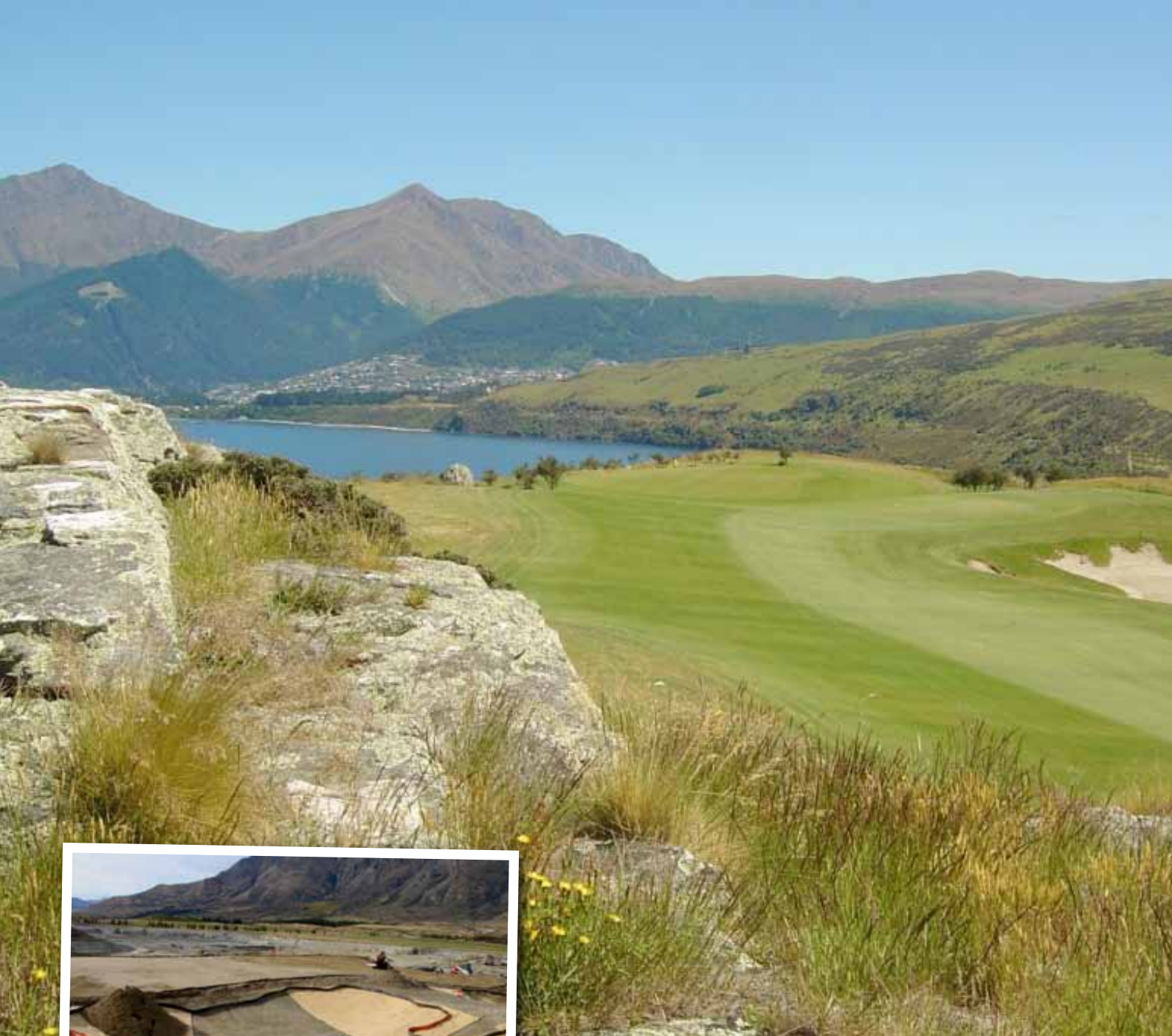


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Every consideration has been made with the design even the Maintenance Depot building is hidden from site with high mounding all around it, you can't see it hardly from anywhere when playing the course (a very nice touch).

My favourite aspect of the course was the bunkers. Although they looked very rustic and natural a

ABOVE: Superintendent, Simon Forshaw (right) with 1963 Open Champion, New Zealander, Bob Charles (left)



lot of maintenance hours had to be spent on them. The greenside bunkers and the fronts of the fairway bunkers which lead into the bunkers from the tees were all kept looking good by cutting them the same height as the fairways and the rest of them done by using fly mows. However, the rest of the bunkers were left to grow as wild sweeping fescue. They looked amazing!

Like the rest of the world New Zealand is also experiencing economical strains, with budgets constantly being reviewed. Jack's Point has around 15 members of staff during the summer season and then they cut down to a skeleton staff during the winter months, numbering around seven members of staff, which sees them taking most of their annual holidays

as the course can be covered in snow or has perma frost.

The larger Courses in New Zealand and in the South Island because of the seasonal changes have a lot of opportunities for seasonal workers to make up their team size during the growing season when more man-hours are required and this gives a great chance to experience another way of seeing how golf courses are maintained to the highest level down under.

New Zealand has some different opportunities to get Qualified in Turf Management

We are lucky in the UK that there is considerable help to finance greenkeeper education.

In New Zealand there are some different ways that you can get qualified such as:

- You can do an Apprenticeship through the New Zealand Sports



THIS PAGE: Luxurious scenery of Jack's Point Golf Club

INSET BOTTOM LEFT: 17th fairway bunkers looking towards 18th green

INSET SECOND BOTTOM LEFT: 18th green under development



Turf Institute along with your golf club/sporting club (Three years)

- A course through the Otago Polytechnic (Two years)
- At Universities
- Online Through Universities in North America
- After the standard Level 4 Apprenticeship you can do Level 6 and 7 through University which is something like our Masters programme

Like all courses Jack's Point is improving all the time. Although to me it is an amazing course - improvements have already been outlined for the future. This will include more drainage in key areas, how best to protect fine fescue getting damaged by the use of golfers on golf carts, how to maintain your growing turf as long as possible, best way to treat high traffic areas.

There are also plans to extend some par-3 tees. It is a work in

progress which is developing for the better all the time as like with everything the golf course is a living breathing identity changing and evolving all the time.

Nothing is perfect in the beginning and it is good that problem areas are highlighted so that improvements can be made, but the best thing apart from the people at Jack's Point is the experience you get when you are there.

It's like playing golf with all the views you get watching a Lord of the Rings movie. The only difference is that from time to time you might catch the view of deer running across the fairways as you are working.

Jack's Point is still very up and coming, already rated number one golf course in the South Island and ranked number five overall. I'm sure we will see great things from it in the future!

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RIGHT: Abi Crosswood