

A QUICK GUIDE TO...

EASING TRAFFIC AREAS

George Pitts, Course Manager at Yelverton GC, offers some practical advice to preserving the over worked parts of the course

These days, the expectation of the modern golfer and the culture of the game demands “year round” golf along with the use of heavy bags laden with all the latest gadgets.

It is unrealistic for most to expect zero damage and compaction from golfing traffic. The skill is to limit the amount of damage.

Trolley / Buggy Policy.

The majority of golfing traffic damage will be caused by trolleys, power trolleys and golf buggies. It is useful to have an agreed policy in place that gives the Course Manager the option of restricting the use of trolleys and buggies on the course. There are no hard and fast rules with implementing trolley bans, it is a balancing act of reducing traffic and subsequent wear/compaction against allowing and encouraging members and visitors to play the course in order to meet revenue targets.

Directing Traffic.

Inevitably, golfing traffic will need to be moved around the course to spread the wear, in the same way hole cups need to be changed and teeing boxes moved. This will include, signage, post and rope, hoops, t-strips and line-marker. All these methods can be used to direct traffic away from high wear areas. If post and rope is used, it is important to ensure there is a system of regularly moving its position and a strategy of moving post and rope forward in increments will ensure that the wear is spread. Signage will need to be clean, tidy, easy to read and prominently positioned.

Paths.

Where “bottle-necks” and concentrated areas of wear cannot be avoided through directing traffic, paths may need to be installed. Construction and materials used will depend on budget, site, design and aesthetics. When installing paths, the position, shape and colour must always be sympathetic to and never compromise the overall aesthetics and design of the course.



Grass Species.

A more recent trend has been to trial and use grass species that have been specifically bred to withstand high wear pressures. Perennial Ryegrass and more recently Rhizomatous tall fescue and Tufted tall fescue all have very high wear tolerance capabilities. It is important to ensure that these species are compatible with the site they are intended as colour, leaf size and tolerances to heights of cut may vary dramatically to the indigenous species. In many cases, these grass species are being used to substitute paths to avoid compromising the design and the aesthetics of the course. It is important to note that these species often require higher levels of nutrient and irrigation.

Improved drainage.

The effects of concentrated areas of wear and compaction, especially in wet areas, can be greatly reduced through improved surface drainage. Drainage, regular aeration and soil exchange with compatible, sandy free draining materials will all help to direct water away from the surface and thus alleviate compaction and wear issues.

Anti-erosion / compaction products.

There are many products on the market that have been designed to improve the grass plants resistance to heavy wear. Turf reinforcement mesh and rubber-matting, if

properly installed, can provide compaction and erosion relief on areas such as path ends and steps, where traffic is at its most intense. Other innovative products include winter trolley wheels that are designed to limit damage by evenly distributing the load over a smaller surface contact area. It is important to always extensively trial any new products.

Course Design.

The psychology of a human being (this includes golfers!) is to take the shortest route, a straight line to the next destination. There will often be random movement from tee to green, as the golf ball dictates the players movements, but, from green to tee there maybe limited exit points to often only one destination. If exit points are restricted by hazards, traffic routes will be limited and wear further concentrated. Exit points can be greatly increased by removing some trees or repositioning a bunker.

Communication.

The key to all the above is to ensure that there is always a healthy line of communication to members and visitors of the golf course. Policies can be communicated through websites, notice boards, newsletters and presentations to the members. Communicating to the golfing public alongside sound, innovative and professional management practices should ensure that a balance is met between accessibility and commonsense.