

The Back Nine

A new column for writers and members to air and share their views on golf greenkeeping topics

Bjarni Hannesson tells us how his trips to BTME triggered the formation of the Icelandic Greenkeeping Association

When one thinks of Iceland, a few things pop into mind; Björk and weird swan dresses, the world's worst bankers and that ash-spewing-airplane-grounding-holiday-ruining volcano that no one can pronounce the name of. But did anyone say golf? Surely not.

But Iceland holds the record for the highest number of golf courses per person in the world! That's right - the country is golf mad despite a population of only 320,000 and 70 golf courses. This is the same population as Hull, and the last time I counted, they didn't have 70 golf courses and even 50,000 golfers there!

The number of courses has led to a growing greenkeeping industry in the country. But the industry is young. In the 80s greenkeeping wasn't much of a profession. School teachers were usually hired as head greenkeepers for three to four months of the year. Machinery was very basic and the standards relatively poor. The 90s saw a change, where keen young guys were hungry for some greenkeeping education so they could raise the standards of Icelandic golf. The first thing they did was look for trade shows and colleges.

The BTME show in Harrogate was an ideal stop. It's safe to say the show has had a major impact on the Icelandic Greenkeeping Industry. The Icelandic Greenkeeping Association was founded soon after, and its main role at the time was to organise trips to BTME every other year.

What the BTME show did was connect Icelandic greenkeepers to colleges which has now led to about 50 Icelanders having gained educa-



“The show has had a major impact on the Icelandic Greenkeeping Industry”

PHOTOGRAPH: An image from Bjarni's former employers, Grindavik Golf Club

about the author



Bjarni Thor Hannesson is currently the Golf Course Superintendent at Kellir Golf Club, Iceland's top rated golf course. He has an M.Sc. Sport Surface Technology from Cranfield University, and HND Golf Course Management from Elmwood College.

Bjarni has worked in both the UK and US, including Sunningdale, The Old Course at St. Andrews and Nashawtuc Country Club, and is vice chairman of the Icelandic Green and Groundskeeper Association.

tion through UK Colleges. The show also made important connections with industry leaders possible. The Icelandic associations then used these connections to import speakers for their own industry shows, to bring the education home. Without shows like BTME, this would have been quite a bit harder.

Fast forward to 2012. The Icelandic Greenkeeping Association is now the Icelandic Green and Groundskeeper Association. It hosts big industry gatherings with respected international speakers, and a number of smaller events all focused on furthering members' education.

With the crash of the banking sector in Iceland in 2008, any budget for trade shows was wiped out in a blink of an eye. Machinery replacements ground to a halt. Domestic dealerships couldn't afford to stock machines, as they were struggling to stay alive. This means that there was no chance to get any machines in for demonstrations. You simply had to read the booklet and make an educated guess... if you get to buy any machines in the first place.

The return to Harrogate in 2012 was thus very important. The Association organised a trip with 30 greenkeepers, keen to see all the machinery up close, meet up with old friends and make some new contacts.

Some had printed out a well thought out plan to make sure no important seminars were missed. Others had scheduled a meeting with companies, to make sure they got the most of the trip. Others had a solid meeting schedule at the bar with old friends.

The week was certainly a big hit for the Icelanders. It showed again how important the show is for the Association. Connections have been made, and plans are in the making for the next group of international speakers that we want to attend our own domestic show.

Machinery has been purchased that was demoed on the trip, and other machines have made an appearance on some of the wish lists, that weren't on the list prior to the show. All in all, a very good trip once again to Harrogate for the Icelanders. Even though we don't attend every year now, since our economy hasn't quite rebounded yet (has anyone's economy rebounded yet?), we will be there every other year to keep up with what's going on in the industry. The show has been, and still is, very important for us.

The views expressed within this column are not necessarily those of Greenkeeper International