

The Back Nine

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

Sean Sullivan, Golf Course Superintendent at The Briarwood Golf Course in Montana, USA, marked his Open Support Team debut last year by having the tournament's logo tattooed on his arm! Here he tells us how the bulletin boards and BIGGA members' superb hospitality set him up for Muirfield

For me, my Open experience begins before I even apply for the Support Team. This year our annual members' meeting was the same week I was told I had been selected, so I had the opportunity to explain to the membership the honour, for me, and the benefits for them, and also ensure my time in the UK would not clash with any tournaments at Briarwood.

From March to July I was on the course working every day just to have the privilege of working the Open. I wanted to experience Scotland so booked a flight for Friday 12 July – nearly a week before the tournament started properly. I was “shooting from the hip” – other than the team's official accommodation in Edinburgh I had not booked any hotels. But through a thread I started on BIGGA bulletin boards, several greenkeepers had made very kind offers of accommodation. This shows again what a great industry we are involved in.

Once in Edinburgh I got on a train and headed for Dunblane. I called Chris Pearson, Course Manager of Dunblane New GC, to let him know I was in town. Chris took me on a tour of the golf course, which was in great shape. As it was too hot for a round of golf, he gathered up his family and we went for a drive to St Andrews. You can never go wrong with a trip to St Andrews! We walked the Old Course watching the golfers and helping to locate errant shots while his family enjoyed the beach.

I then headed to Dundee, but because of poor planning

on my part, I missed out on another course tour and decided to head towards Inverness. While changing trains in Perth, I actually ran into someone I knew - Lee Strutt was on his way to Inverness, to help Chris Haspell at Castle Stuart for the Scottish Open. It was good to catch up with him and enjoy the journey through the Scottish countryside, and he gave me tips on places to stay that night.

The next day I met Iain Macleod, from Tain Golf Club, and I played my first round of golf in the UK at Tain. I'm going to claim a lack of course knowledge, jet lag, and borrowed clubs for the poor display of golf that Iain had to witness but I had a great time, despite the high score. Iain was kind enough to put me up at his house for the night and the next day we were off to Castle Stuart for the last day of the Scottish Open.

While walking around the course, we happened upon several greenkeepers, who I had only known from the BIGGA forum. It was great to meet them in person and put a face to the names. Thanks to Andy Campbell and Jacobsen for providing me with a ticket, to see the venue and have lunch with other greenkeepers. These types of opportunities are unbelievable considering the distance between Montana and Scotland.

Later that day I met Andy again and headed back to St Andrews, and he and his family were generous enough to offer me a place to stay at their house. Although a busy man, as were the others who took me around,



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about the author



Sean Sullivan is Golf Course Superintendent at the Briarwood Golf Course in Montana in Western USA. It is an 18-hole Championship course with hills, creeks and open rangeland, and is particularly notable for its coal slag black bunkers.

Sean has added many personal touches such as painting the flags of the nations in the UK on the club's ball washers, and has now twice been a member of BIGGA's Open Support Team.

he made sure I visited The Duke's Course Golf Club, with Derek Robson, and Carnoustie, where we ran into Craig Boath. Two more names that I was able to put faces to. I was dropped off at the Leuchars train station and headed back to Edinburgh to meet the whole Open Support Team.

Next month

Will Sean's Muirfield experience be memorable enough to justify another tattoo?

Will he be able to cram all his souvenirs into his case? And how will he cope with 48 hours without sleep during his marathon journey home? Find out in GI September...

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