

# FROM PARIS WITH LOVE...

**In the last issue of GI Tony Martin offered advice for greenkeepers thinking of working in Europe. Well last summer Ben Kebby left his role as Deputy Head Greenkeeper at Gatton Manor Golf Club to move to Golf de Joyenval – one of the top courses in France. This was despite not being able to speak any French... here's his story.**

I studied the BSc (Hons) Turfgrass Science at Myerscough College and worked at various clubs including Royal Melbourne until I applied for the role of Assistant Golf Course Superintendent at this course, which is west of Paris. It was the biggest decision of my life, but the lure of an exclusive Championship 36 hole complex, the challenge, and the opportunity to learn and develop under Steve Okula (who holds both the GCSA and MG certificates) proved too much. So, after long discussions with friends inside and outside the industry and most importantly my partner Francesca, I decided to accept the offer and start learning French!

Golf de Joyenval was designed by R.T. Jones Sr., and opened in 1992. The greens on both courses are sand-based with predominantly Poa/Creeping Bent based sward, whilst the tees are pure Creeping Bent. Both courses are situated on heavy clay throughout, and although the course boasts full fairway and tee drainage, the inherent drainage problems still persist after heavy rains.

Agronomically the course and maintenance practices are very similar to those in the UK, with an emphasis on fortnightly verti-cutting and topdressing alongside core aeration in both early spring and late summer. The main climatic difference to the UK is the disease pressure between the months of October and May.

Fortnightly and even weekly fungicide applications are absolutely essential in



keeping a clean surface, which, alongside the factor of green speed and the finer details, is the most important aspect of the clubs mission statement.

If I were to say the relocation abroad has been easy then I would be lying. Problems with banks, car insurance and pet passports added costs and stress. I took to learning French via audio CDs for a number of weeks prior to the move, but in no way did this prepare me!

This was a complete shock to the system for the initial weeks, with the language barrier and the differences in greenkeeping culture being the most difficult. Unfortunately there is little or no career progression or educational path to follow within France for the trainee greenkeeper and apprenticeships are extremely rare. Most disappointing however, is the attitude towards the position of a greenkeeper, for most it is seen as a last resort.

The UK is extremely privileged to have such a supportive body in BIGGA alongside the various education establishments who offer turf related educational pathways.

Nevertheless, after a few months, I was able to understand and most importantly, be understood. A year on, although far from fluent, I am much more confident with the language,

allowing me to manage the 20-strong team.

By far the hardest issue was leaving friends and family and most importantly for the first three months, Francesca. It was a lonely time, but luckily I was able to immerse myself into the new role alongside the online degree which I am currently studying.

The initial problems aside, the relocation has been fantastic and one that I would recommend to all. On top of everything, it's been a superb opportunity to network and make new friendships.

I feel extremely fortunate to experience and embrace changes that have occurred and do not regret for a moment taking the leap and choosing to relocate abroad.

I'd particularly like to thank Dave Edmondson at The Island Club, Jon White at Morfontaine and of course Steve Okula who has been a fantastic support from the beginning, and of course my incredibly supportive girlfriend.

It is rare to work within an industry that, if you allow it, can take you around the world. Make the most of it.

