

# Pitched battle?



The issue of pitchmarks is always contentious. Here Ben Dollery (left), a BIGGA member and Senior Greenkeeper at West Chilmington Golf Club, discusses the topic and promotes 'National Repair Your Pitchmark Day'

**It's time to help greenkeepers win the battle against pitchmarks. Here are the often reported statistics about them:**

"A pitchmark repaired within 10 minutes of being created will fully recover within three days. A poorly repaired pitchmark or one left for a day before being repaired will take over a week to heal.

"On average the number of ball marks made on greens by a golfer per round is eight. Assuming only 130 rounds are played daily on your course, your greens receive 1040 impressions daily, 31,000 per month or more than 374,400 per year."

In recent years the issue of pitchmarks – always prominent in the turf management industry - has become and even hotter topic. Social media now has a big part to play as many greenkeepers use it to show off their courses or gain advice from fellow turf experts as well as keeping members and golfers informed. Recently a growing number of greenkeepers and golf clubs have been tweeting pictures of unrepaired pitchmarks on their greens and venting the frustration that goes with them.

Some golfers must wonder why pitchmarks are so frustrating. Greenkeepers strive to provide fast and true greens and unrepaired pitchmarks make the greens bumpy and patchy as well as taking up valuable time repairing.

My interest in the topic was heightened after seeing a Twitter conversation last year between Dave Collins (@greenkeeperdave) and Julie Vesely (@golfclubnbeds). They were discussing pitchmarks when they came up with promoting the idea of 'National Repair Your Pitchmark Day' and set a date for 14 August 2013. The day was a great success, many golf clubs got involved as well as a few celebrities - South African cricketer and keen golfer AB de Villiers and Bradford City FC. Hundreds of other social media users retweeted the event.

So what did the day involve? Apart from the massive campaign on Twitter, and at their golf courses, some greenkeepers gave out pitchmark repairers at their clubs and explained the importance of these to golfers going out that day. Another day is planned for 14 August this year to hopefully raise even more awareness. Here at West Chiltington, which is a parkland course in West Sussex, we will be putting up posters around the club and will be maximising exposure on Twitter, Facebook and our website

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

### How to repair a pitchmark poster

Have you found your fold-out poster with this month's GI? We recognise there is ignorance amongst some golfers about pitchmarks. So, pin this poster up in your clubhouse and educate your members and visitors.

#### HOW TO REPAIR A PITCHMARK



GI GREENKEEPER INTERNATIONAL

Take your ball mark repair tool and insert the prongs into the turf at the edge of the depression. Do NOT insert the prongs into the depression itself, but at the rim of the depression.

Then push the edge of the ball mark toward the centre, using your ball mark repair tool in a gentle twisting motion.



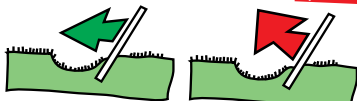
This is where golfers who try to repair ball marks usually mess up. Many golfers believe the way to fix a ball mark is to insert the tool at an angle, so the prongs are beneath the centre of the crater, and then to use the tool as a lever to push the bottom of the ball mark back up even with the surface. Do not do this!

Pushing the bottom of the depression upward only tears the roots, and kills the grass.

**Right:** Using the prongs to push grass at the edge of the depression toward the centre



**Wrong:** Using the prongs as levers to push up the bottom of the depression



Keep 14 August in mind and follow @greenkeeperdave @golfclubnbeds @clearing on Twitter for details.

to get people talking about it.

'National Repair Your Pitchmark Day' is all about raising awareness. It is about reinstating etiquette back into golf in an educational and fun way, rather than being patronising. Last year's event helped by getting people talking about the issue, and if only a handful of golfers improve their etiquette it's a start. They should hopefully pass this on to their playing partners and any new golfers to give them some ownership of the courses they play.

We need to get golfers thinking about the care of the course as part of their game. For some it is in-built but for others it simply isn't, though most would tell you they tend and repair greens incessantly if you asked them!

This was certainly confirmed when we asked the members at West Chiltington, to fill out a short, anonymous questionnaire featuring just three questions based on pitchmarks. 188 members replied...

**1 Do you repair your Pitchmarks?** Unsurprisingly, 99% said yes!

**2 Would you repair a pitchmark made by someone else?** Again, unsurprisingly, 94% said yes

**3 How often do you repair Pitchmarks?** 56% said they repaired pitchmarks 80-100% of the time, with 36% claiming they repaired them every time. Just 10% said they repaired them 0-10% of the time.

The aim is to get golfers in the frame of mind where repairing pitchmarks is as important to them as holing out or filling in their scorecard after every hole. It is an old line trotted out by greenkeepers, but one of the things we try to impress upon our members and visitors is that we are not the only stewards of the course and that we all play a part in its presentation and standards.

Often this is a difficult message to convey especially to our more cynical customers.

If we can all teach one new golfer how to repair a pitchmark then that's hundreds of golfers who will help us out in the future.

A good way to get golfers on board is to provide free repairers or stock some of the huge variety carrying a logo, ones that members can display with pride.

A close relationship between golfers and greenkeepers is vital for understanding the problem and working together to improve the course.

Getting captains on board will help to get the message across if

they mention it in their regular speeches, and after recent meetings we have arranged pitchmark repair social events.

At West Chiltington we are constantly encouraged to speak with members to improve relationships and understanding both ways. We regularly meet with the different sections and speak at their AGMs as well as answering questions they have about our latest project whilst out on the course. Not everyone reads the latest newsletter on the website so face to face communication with golfers is still very important, in fact in my opinion it can't be beaten.

We have our own Twitter account @westchiltgreens to keep members informed of daily work we carry out and to publish pictures of the course as well as information on pitchmarks, bunker raking and all types of course management. We hope that by involving the members and through giving them a sense of ownership, pitchmark repairs and other small acts will become a regular part of their game.



ABOVE: Pitch mark with repairer tool and LEFT: double pitchmark shot in winter (both at West Chiltington Golf Club)

