



"At a lot of clubs developments tend to be ad hoc and this can cause problems when members are surprised, particularly on how much it costs. So what we've done, is look at all areas of the club and examine areas of potential development," explained John.

"For example, next year we are going to employ an architect to review the course and whatever recommendations he makes we'll budget for in the year 2008. We'd like to be able to add length for certain competitions - hopefully an Open qualifier one year - and look at reintroducing the many bunkers which were filled in during the '60s to save on maintenance costs.

"Between the architect's inspection and any work that he recommends we'd like to improve our practice facilities by adding a covered four bay driving range and practice greens, chipping areas and bunkers etc.

"My view is that if you don't keep developing you will fall behind," said John.

And falling behind is something that Burton Golf Club certainly isn't.

"We have become generally regarded as the best club in Derbyshire and our income from societies, competitions and green fees has doubled in a year."

The club hosted BIGGA's scratch match against the Combined Services last year so heroically won against the odds by our boys, and it will again welcome BIGGA members in October for the National Championship.

"Since January every job I've done on the course, I've found myself thinking that greenkeepers are going to be looking at this in a few months' time. Prepping a course for them is going to be fun," said Gavin, while always aware that Burton's members are going to be looking out for any special touches he adds for his own but doesn't for them!

"The club feels it is an honour for him to host his own Association's Championship but if he suddenly produces a course different to what we've seen I know I'll be asked questions by members," added John.

But Gavin does have a few tricks up his sleeve.

"Three or four of the lads from East Midlands Section are going to rake bunkers for me - a mini support team if you like and Burton's members will give me a divotting party. The pressure will be on and it will be a challenge," he smiled.

He will no doubt be more than happy to show any BIGGA members around his new facility during the Championship. It's just another example of the pride the staff and members have for their club.

**Anyone interested in playing in BIGGA's National Championship on October 2 & 3 should contact Sarah Norris at BIGGA HOUSE, Tel: 01347 833800 email: sarah@bigga.co.uk**

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# 600 Greenkeepers

John Haley pens his own thoughts on Burton Golf Club and his role as Chairman of Green



Just over three years ago I was appointed Chairman of Green at my Club, with a mandate to re-energise the Head Greenkeeper and his staff as the Course - one of the best in the County - was looking tired and below the standards our Members had come to expect. Unlike all my predecessors I made no pretence that I understood the finer art of Greenkeeping, I just thought I could use my motivational skills and the Greens team's expertise would do the rest.

How wrong I was! Within two months, one member of the greens staff had a serious accident on the course; one broke his ankle playing Cricket; his brother tore ligaments playing Soccer; the trainee disappeared; the Health and Safety Executive swarmed all over us; the Irrigation system finally conked out and we had an undetected leak that cost us half our water supply! In addition we had just had the driest winter/spring for many, many years.

There was also the small matter of 600 plus members, all experts in successful maintenance of Golf Courses (As there is little difference between a 20 square foot back lawn and a Golf Course Acreage!) wanting to know what I personally was going to do about it and why, despite all the aforementioned problems, the Course was not yet to the same levels as Augusta!

Well, to cut an ever lengthening story short, the Head Greenkeeper decided the time had come to move on (his Deputy having already left to take up a Head Greenkeeper's position) and the recruitment process started. We had a very good response to our advertisement and out of 35 applicants drew up a shortlist of six. I should say at this point that the recruitment process was left to myself and the Club President and our selection only needed the rubber stamping of the rest of the Club Board.

If I am honest, our eventual appointee was not top of the list before the interviews commenced but was clearly the best candidate at the end of the process. Now this is where I know you will all, particularly those from the Midland Region, be surprised, if not shocked, that this candidate was none other than Gavin Robson!

Moving the clock forward two years and our course is now considered not only a very good test of golf but in magnificent condition and considered the best in Derbyshire and up with the best in the Midlands (other clubs members views who have played the course, not only ours). How has this been achieved? By a lot of hard work; putting together a very professional and skilled team; motivating them; a hands on approach;

proper training of staff and a very professional knowledge and expertise of the art of Golf Course Management.

This is what Gavin has brought to the Club and although he has achieved this in a very short space of time, he and we, are not resting on our laurels but continuing to develop and give Gavin the resources to achieve this.

So what have I brought to the "party"? Well I now know my Hollow tining from my verti draining but not much else. I see my role as the go between the Greens Committee and Gavin but do not allow any interference in how he manages his team or the work they do. Gavin and his team are the Professionals and should not have interference from the other 600 Greenkeepers in the club. As I said to one of our members who used to work in the coal industry, if the Head Greenkeeper at the local course came in and started telling him how to dig coal he would have told him what to do... Why do members of golf clubs think they are different when it comes to Course Management?

Of course I listen to what members say and any ideas they have are always discussed with Gavin and many have been acted on, but I believe the excellent relationship I have with Gavin is I let him get on with the job because that's what he's paid to do. I truly believe that if more clubs had the confidence to let their Head Greenkeepers/Course Managers get on with the job, with a minimum or no interference, most courses and clubs would be all the better for it. So come on all you Chairmen of Green stop interfering and see the results for yourself!

So finally, where is this course that's so good? Its Burton-On-Trent (which is actually just inside Derbyshire ) and many Greenkeepers/Course Managers, will get the chance to play it in October because the BIGGA National Championships are being held here this year. We look forward to seeing you then and with no pressure on Gavin seeing for yourself the quality we now have.

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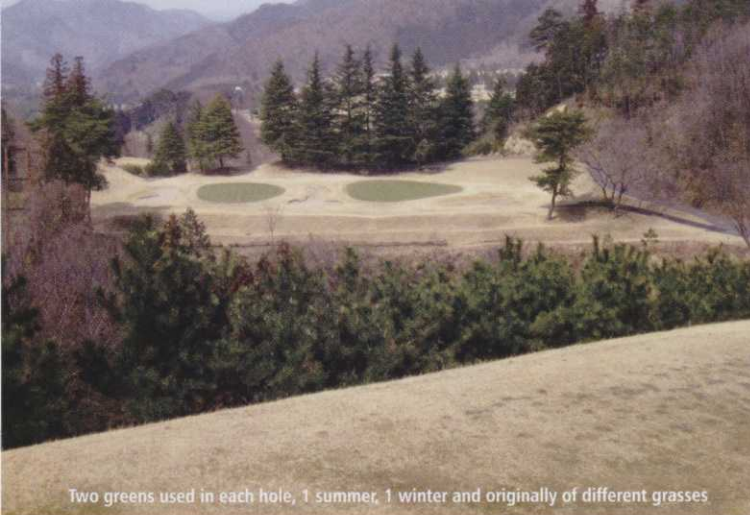
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Two greens used in each hole, 1 summer, 1 winter and originally of different grasses



A mowing challenge, to say the least

# Turning Japanese: Part 2

Laurence Pithie MG continues his insight into managing golf courses in Japan.

Following the 'bubble burst' in 1991/92, a number of foreign banks stepped into buying the assets and then forming golf management companies during the late 90s. Most courses in Japan are proprietary owned and only a handful remain as original private equity clubs. Two banks or investment companies in particular, currently own or operate around 200 courses, spread throughout the length of Japan. There are many smaller groups although the majority are of single ownership. Today, the majority are operationally sound, but cannot repay the debt, at least in the short term. It is a few of the golf courses operated by the management companies Pacific Golf Management (PGM) and Accordia Golf, that I had the opportunity and pleasure of visiting. Both companies have extensive office facilities in Tokyo, the former occupying the 33rd floor of Atago Green Hills Tower with magnificent views over the city. Just recently, PGM were floated on the Japanese Stock Market and their market value exceeded 'city' expectations as they continue to expand.

Most of Japan's courses are situated in central and western Honshu. Although the soil type varies, the main types are clay, shale and basaltic rock. Rainfall is plentiful and Japan has an abundance of fresh water, thanks also to its lakes and rivers. Drinking water is also of good quality. Irrigation is generally only a three month requirement from July to September, but recent summers have been hot and dry. The typhoon season with tropical storms is a late summer, early fall occurrence and considerable damage can occur. One course in Hokkaido lost 4,000 trees last year during one such storm.

Grass type is mainly the native Zoysia, a warm season grass that is the dominant species throughout most of Japan. Bermuda Grass is favoured in the more sub-tropical Okinawa, whereas Kentucky Blue (Smooth Stalk Meadow Grass) is grown in Hokkaido to the north, as the desired cool season grass. Virtually all courses now have bent grass greens - Penncross being by far the most prominent. Hollow coring is usually carried out once or twice per year and top dressing is carried out every few weeks except after the coring operation - this is largely for thatch control and to ensure ample root development. The two main types of Zoysia are the finer leaved Korai, used on tees, collars and fairways and the broader leaved Noshiha, used in the semi-roughs and surrounds, which is slightly more cold, tolerant. Zoysia is less aggressive than Bermuda and requires less nutrient and water. It has a lignin content within the leaf structure, therefore sharpness of cylinder reels is essential for maintaining a clean cut. Semi-roughs are mown at 35 to 40 mm and there are no deep rough areas, only woodland, bamboo and other forms of vegetation.

The topography of many Japanese courses is extremely undulating and mowing steep banks and slopes is a considerable challenge. Far more areas are mown in Japan than would be tolerated in the UK regarding Risk Assessment and safety. A ride-on rotary mower with a very low centre of gravity and produced in Japan called a Baroness GM1600, is an essential item of equipment on many courses. Having seen some of the slopes and banks regularly mown, the word 'kamikaze' springs to mind.



LP & some greenkeeping staff, finishing their shift at 4pm on a Saturday

The growing season is six months long, mainly May to October. For the remainder of the year, Zoysia lies dormant and the Bent has minimal growth. The high temperature and humidity during late summer is the stress period for both turf and the Course Manager known as the Greenkeeper or Keeper, pronounced 'kee-pah'. Fairways are mown on alternate days and semi-rough about every four days during peak season. Low grade agricultural fertiliser is locally produced and readily available in Japan and it is widely used on fairways, surrounds and roughs on the older courses. Newer courses and these operated by PGM and Accordia tend to favour the coated or controlled release products that are mainly imported from the USA. A mix of granular and foliar feed products are used on the greens, similar to that in Europe.

Chemicals are mostly produced in Japan with pre-emergent control of weeds being probably the chief requirement. Bugs such as beetles, cutworms and to a lesser degree mole crickets all require varying degrees of control. Fungal diseases such as Brown Patch, Pythium, Dollar Spot and Anthracnose are the most common but all can be controlled with the appropriate pesticide. A particular problem is the Pine Tree Nematode, which leads to the death of these trees. This is becoming more of a problem on many courses since mono stands of pine trees on golf courses are fairly common.

Top dressings are generally sand only and most of this is available in Japan although not always of high quality. Some is imported from China in barges but the cost can be quite high. In general, costs are much the same as in the UK in spite of transportation problems to many parts of the country.

Staffing levels are higher than in the UK but lower than pre 1992. A typical 18-hole course will have around 12 to 14 full time staff plus a couple of part time workers, often women to help with the mowing and general landscaping work. Prior to the downturn, it would not be uncommon for clubs to employ over 20 full time staff per course. Salary levels are similar to those in the UK although living costs are higher. As a result there is a shortage of labour since there is considerable competition from manufacturing, commerce and other areas of the service industry, all with greater financial rewards. Most, if not all staff, are salaried although one of the management companies had introduced hourly paid staff. There is no formal turfgrass education in Japan, other than that provided by the vendors or occasionally held seminars. Few have attended college in the US and there is only a limited sharing of knowledge and information. Agronomic skills are in short supply and there are no Greenkeepers Associations. Only a handful of outsiders or 'Gaijins' are employed, usually either American or Australian since language is a major challenge.

Overall, budget costs are much higher than in the UK and generally vary from £350,000 to £475,000 for labour and operational costs. This of course is a reduction on pre-1992 costs!

The maintenance buildings and compounds I visited were quite generous in size albeit getting old, but that would tie-in with the down-turn in 1992 and the limited investment since then. Equipment also tended to be old but in recent years the level of new equipment mirrored the growth in golf and the overcoming of past debt problems. Both Toro and Jacobsen have a significant presence in Japan although there was a lot of ride-on equipment and trucks that were produced locally. Environmental considerations were generally some years behind that of the UK and Europe and legislation tended to follow that of the US but many years later. A common sight was the amount of trash and junk lying around the compounds or drives and there seemed little control on the storage of fuel. With regards to irrigation, Rainbird and Toro appeared to have cornered the market.

Some of the stranger aspects of Japanese courses include the use of two greens. This dates back to the earlier days when summer greens were composed of Korai and winter greens of Bent. Both greens would be of equal size, about 350 sq m and each with standard bunkering. Since the knowledge of maintaining Bent grass greens through the hot and humid summers improved, there was no need for this practice to continue. All newer courses have one green as normal. Another peculiar aspect is that some courses have lights mounted on 40 foot high poles, thus allowing play to continue on the closing holes during darkness. Moving daylight hours as in Europe may be a cheaper option but this is Japan. Another course visited had a magnetic cart track whereby the golf cart could be remotely controlled. It was a strange sight to see a small cart with four bags of clubs being controlled by a female caddy holding a remote control unit some 20 meters away. All the caddies were also covered up from head to toe to prevent the risk of sunburn. Their job was also to repair divot marks and hand out and clean clubs to each of the four players during the round. Playing 18 holes at a private club is also different in Japan. It is



Excessive and steep faced bunkering with labour and cost implications

quite common to play nine holes then come in for lunch before tackling the back nine, although early bird and twilight play is on the increase with uninterrupted stops. At many of the more private clubs, a shower then communal bath would be the norm before ending the day with dinner and sake.



Light tower on a closing hole to guide the golfers home

Any significant new constructions such as additional holes or a cart barn for example, would require the land to be blessed by two Shinto priests in an hour long ceremony. Sake would be poured over piles of sand placed on each corner of the site to be constructed and representatives of the contractors and clients would attend this ritual. Japan after all is a mix of commercialism and spiritualism.

The main challenges facing the Greenkeepers in Japan, are probably managing the Bent Grass greens through the summer stress period. Mowing can be a challenge on some courses but a common problem appeared to be with tree management. There appeared to be too many closely planted pine trees that restricted air movement and caused various shade problems. Spending around 15k on this and landscaping work around the clubhouses was common on the courses visited. The Japanese have a love of trees and most courses I visited had a mix of flowering cherries, red acers and the

inevitable azaleas, which are a native species. Like many US designed courses, bunker maintenance and upkeep was another considerable challenge and would certainly require a large labour input to maintain sand on some steep bunker faces. Within the golf industry there is a resistance to change and productivity levels are probably lower than those in the UK. Honouring traditions and employment loyalty have mixed benefits and overall there is probably a suspicion of change. Japan was a country closed off to the rest of the world during the Shogun empire for over 250 years. In summary, the courses I visited were of a standard between those in the UK and in the US albeit, with at least double the staffing levels and budgets to match. However, the costs of most products are somewhat higher and with many being imported.

It is a fascinating country to visit and the hospitality that my wife and I received throughout our visit was second to none. Golf is played worldwide and it is interesting to see how others manage their golf courses and overcome the challenges faced. My visit to eight courses and these subsequent articles would not be possible without the assistance of Mike Heacock, Simon Doyle and Scott Kusumoto. Their help and information was greatly appreciated. Sayo-nara.

# Who'd be a Greenkeeper?

by Paul Cook

Okay, I admit it. Deciding to drive to Neil's stag weekend was probably not the best decision I'd ever made! Driving there was a relaxed two and a half hours, driving back was something else altogether. It's late, very late and I'm suffering that kind of exhaustion only alcohol and sleep deprivation can bring. The prospect of a couple of hours sleep, tops, raises the question "Why? Why do I carry on being a Greenkeeper? Why not get myself something more civilised, a job that allows me to sleep until seven or eight?," oh how my body aches for sleep. My mates will all be sleeping on the plane home and they don't have to be at work until half eight, nine even. Who in their right mind wants to get up at four in the morning. Note to self "Must get another job."



New South Wales GC, Sydney Australia.  
Paul (left) with Course Superintendent,  
Gary Dempsey

Snippets of conversations over the weekend begin percolating my thoughts, I remember my feelings as I'd listened to the others talk about their jobs. Difficult to describe but it had been a feeling of satisfaction, almost of smugness and I don't mean that in an unkind way. Perhaps snugness might be better, a sense of belonging, belonging in the work I do.

They'd all done better than I had at school. Don't get me wrong, I'd enjoyed my school days with these same friends, having great fun, getting up to no-good - you know, the usual stuff young lads do. But I hadn't enjoyed studying - I'm not the academic type. The only thing I'd been interested in and achieved any success at, was sport - I left school with only one GCSE to my name... in PE! And now, I'm passionately interested in Greenkeeping and I'm achieving... hmmm, perhaps there's a link there don't you think?

Most of my mates had gone off to college or university and while they hadn't necessarily known what they wanted to do they did seem to have some sense of direction.

Me? Well I'd had no idea what I wanted to do... minimum GCSE's equalled minimum options. I chose to go to college to study tourism and almost from day one I knew it wasn't for me. I stuck it for a year before dropping out, only to find myself right back where I'd started, except now another year older. Not good!

Time to do some serious thinking, I bought a smart suit and went to

work for my mother as a data-input clerk while I sorted out my life. Evenings and weekends I'd be on the golf course - golf was my passion, I wasn't half bad either. My folks encouraged me to seek out what I wanted to do and go for it rather than just do something because I could. They believed everything would work out in time.

When I first saw the advertisement for an apprentice Greenkeeper, something clicked. I recalled the British Masters at Collingtree where I'd done two weeks work experience in the Pro Shop prior to the tournament and had a brilliant time. I asked the Head Greenkeeper if he needed any help for the tournament and that's how I got my first taste of Greenkeeping - and I loved it. I loved everything about it, not just being in a golfing environment but prepping bunkers until they were perfect and most of all those early morning starts. The smell of grass, sunrises, early morning mist - magic! Reading the advertisement again something stirred in me, I applied, got the job and on day one knew I'd made the right decision - I just knew this was the job for me!

Now, seven years later and driving home, I realise that as I'd thought of that first day in my first job I'd no longer been aware of my aching body, my tiredness, my throbbing head... still have another hour's driving to get home but feeling good.

It feels good too to remember how my parents had got up early to take me to the golf course, we'd shared those early mornings, ferrying me backwards and forwards every day, weekdays and weekends alike.

Buckingham Golf Club is a very mature parkland course not far from Silverstone where we lived. My apprenticeship included day release to do the NVQ course at Moulton College, Northampton, and hey-ho what do you know, here learning and studying was somehow different, it wasn't a chore or difficult. I got on well, got my spraying certificate and my boss at work gave me good reports. So there I was doing a job I loved and experiencing real success for the first time in my life.

The course lasted two years and half way through the second, a guy who'd worked at Buckingham and had seen and liked my work, rang up and offered me a job - in Austria.

The college were really helpful and fast tracked me through the final part of my course to get NVQ level II and two months later I was off to the mountains.

Golf Club Adamstal has to be seen to be believed! This course is unique, built up a mountain with greens ranging from 500 to 900 metres above sea level. Stunningly beautiful and inspirational in the way mountains are.

A long way from home and all things familiar and with not a word of German to my name, my learning curve had suddenly gone vertical, as steep as the mountain itself. This is where I cut not only my Greenkeeping teeth but I almost had my foot cut off in a freak and rather gruesome accident involving a mower and a very narrow mountain path.

Four months later, after bone and plastic surgery, I was back at work, facing the task of visiting the site of the accident and overcoming any residual anxiety. Over the next three years I knuckled down to learn my craft, I also learned about a different culture, a different climate (six feet of snow covers the course during the winter months) I dedicated myself to being the best I could be, took pride in my work, set myself high standards and came to realise what a great profession I was in and that I loved this work. Always in beautiful surroundings, working with nature, working at dawn and dusk in the mountains, is an experience beyond description. Sights, sounds, smells, all combining into an experience that transcends thoughts and words - and all this is part of my job? What other job could possibly give me this experience? I smile to myself, remembering how this rambling had started with me asking myself why I did this work... Doh!

In the winters when the course was closed I'd take myself off to Kitzbuhel, one of Austria's most famous and vibrant ski resorts. Daytimes would find me on the ski slopes for a run or two or snowboarding and with a total lack of respect for my liver - working evenings and weekends in a bar. Female company had been scarce in the mountains, here in the bar it seemed barmen were a bit of an attraction (babe-magnets).

One winter I went to New York to do a one month course on Turf Grass management at Rutgers University - my first experience of intensive study. It required full concentration and although it was hard work I thoroughly enjoyed it and it whet my appetite for more. This year, I swapped snowboard and goggles in Austria for surfboard and shades in Australia.

Three months work at New South Wales Golf Course, only number 34 in the world's top courses! I wanted a different experience of Greenkeeping and a links course - in the southern hemisphere and suffering a drought was about as different from mountains, snow and ice as I could find. I left Austria at minus 10 degrees and arrived in drought stricken Sydney - a searing 30 degrees.

This course was in a different league to those I had so far experienced and served to confirm my intention of eventually having a job on one of the world's top courses. By the ocean and with a rustic charm, this is a superb course with facilities second to none - shortly before I arrived the 18 strong Greenkeeping team had moved into a purpose built state of the art complex.

There's something about doing a job really well, where standards and expectations are high, that I find appealing, I really do believe in that old maxim "if something's worth doing it's worth doing well". And you know what, here I was just another pair of hands, I didn't have the responsibilities of being First Assistant as I had back in Austria and it didn't matter... here I was, on the other side of the world, raking bunkers, mowing greens, being obsessive about achieving the highest standards of work and getting that same feeling, that moment of just being there doing my work as well as I know how, learning my craft, perfect!

It's seven years since I began my apprenticeship and today as Assistant Head Greenkeeper at Fohrenwald Golf Club, home of the Austrian Ladies Open, I have my foot set firmly on the management ladder.

I'm almost home now in more than one sense. Just a few more miles to go and I'll be in bed to snatch those few precious hours of sleep before the alarm calls. Just a few more weeks to go and I'll be back in the UK, going to university. I'm going to get myself a degree - Turf grass science.

Pulling up outside my flat, turning off the engine, I'm relaxed and content. I don't want any other kind of job, I know that no matter how bad I might feel in the morning, no matter how much I don't want to wake up, no matter how much I want to roll over and go back to sleep, I know that as soon as I get to work breathe in the air - whether its frosty, misty, raining or sunny - look around, pick up my golf cart and head for the golf course. I know there'll be that moment when I'll get that feeling, you know the one, the one I had on that first day, in that first job, that feeling that is beyond words, that feeling that lets me know this is the life and the job for me - the best job in the world, I wouldn't change it for anything.



The fifth hole at Adamstal GC, Austria

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# Lateral Thinking

Rob Donald makes a case for the installation of drainage at a time when standing water seems like a luxury item!

It is difficult to imagine the need for drainage during the balmy summer months and indeed among reports of the driest winters on record, diminishing aquifers and countrywide hosepipe bans. Despite the logical opinion to the contrary, there is no better time to consider drainage installations than in the middle of a dry summer. Cast your mind back to how your fairways looked last time there was some 'proper' wet weather, try and recall the grumbling golfers, the migrating members and the inactive course staff and then consider the benefits that drainage could offer your club.

The principals of drainage remain constant whatever the season. Drainage is installed with the objective of removing surplus water from a designated area and discharging it to a positive outfall, a collecting area or an area of low value. A drainage installation should have physical properties that enable water to be collected and then conveyed through a network to a point of ultimate discharge. Good drainage of a golf course is now becoming a requisite as the expectations of the modern golfer often require year round access and playability.

Drainage can, of course, be entirely natural, free draining soils (often sandy) allowing rapid permeation into similarly free draining sub-strata; this however is not often the case. Large areas of the United Kingdom are covered with slow draining clay deposits, a legacy from the last ice age. These deposits are often found to extremes, in areas of very high population density, for example the Thames Valley. In this instance drainage does not occur naturally, intervention is required in the form of an installation.

The requirements of a golf course in terms of drainage are not as extreme as the requirement of, say, a winter sports pitch (rugby, football), the golfer is less inclined to tee off at 3pm on a wet Saturday afternoon when the referee is blowing his whistle to commence a football match. The installation however should be constantly functioning, removing excess soil water efficiently.

A golf course drainage system should effectively remove surplus water from the fairway, green, tees and bunkers, allowing the benefit of year round access and, equally as important, the management of turf culture. A golf course that is inadequately drained will limit the sward development:

- Reduction in soil temperature is caused because the water in the soil pores has a higher heat capacity than the air with which it replaces. This results in a reduced sward growth and effectively a shorter growing season.





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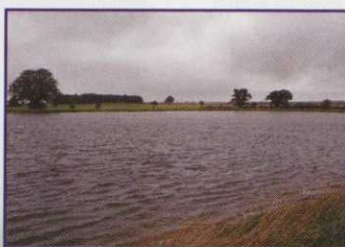
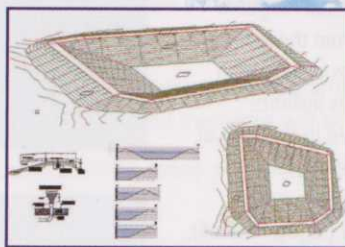
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