



Some of the Felixstowe team with Captain Mick Dabbs second from the right and John Houston extreme right

from Norway, were put in place,” said John, who added that in 1953 over 100 people drowned in Felixstowe when the area was flooded.

With the new holes proving a great success, John felt there was one small area which still needed a little refinement and Martin was brought back in to take a look.

“Looking down the course I thought a new mound might just help define the 14th hole a little better but I would never have gone ahead without consulting with the professional architect first. Martin came in, agreed, and the mound was added a few weeks ago.”

Another more recent refinement was to deepen the three fairway bunkers on the 15th so that they could be seen from the tee. The work on these brought a little excitement to the club earlier last month for John and Deputy Course Manager, Glenn Rayfield.

“Glenn was using the digger on the second bunker up on the right when he dug up what looked suspiciously like a landmine. It came up in the bucket and placed in the trailer having come from about three metres down.”

It was a genuine “Don’t panic!” moment but Glenn was more impressed than worried as his ambition always had been to find one, while John, having convinced himself that it was indeed a mine, phoned Club Manager, Richard Tibbs, who called in the police.

“They arrived within five minutes and one of them, who

knew about such things, told us not to go too close to it. A bomb disposal team then arrived and after we had cleared the course of golfers the team moved the mine onto the beach and there they blew it up. It made one hell of a bang,” recalled John.

An interesting recent innovation is a monthly 7.30am informal greens committee meeting, in addition to the regular meetings, which enables a much more hands-on approach to the role and, being a morning, allows the committee to meet on the course itself if necessary.

The whole course is a nature lover’s idea of heaven and bird watchers can often be seen spying on the rare species which drop in on the course on their migratory paths.

“It has been recorded that we have 11 different species of butterfly and 147 species of bird, including the skylark which are generally declining in numbers, while we also have otters, water voles, slow worms and lizards. We have a SSSI site at the bottom of the course, wild orchids at the back of the 9th hole the Kingsfeet course as well as Giant Hogweed and we work extremely closely with Peter Ling, of the Suffolk Wildlife Trust to ensure this is maintained and protected.

Among the projects, the Trust and the Club - which won best Newcomer in the 2004 BIGGA Golf Environment Competition - have worked on cutting back some of the long lank grass which bordered the road which cuts through the course, back to three inches to reduced its fertility.

"We collected the clippings and scarify and once we'd done that two or three times it came back looking nice and wispy just as the Trust would want it and exactly what we would want for a links course. It shows that golf is compatible with wildlife and wildlife is compatible with golf," said John, who added that it was an expensive process but that they received funding from the Trust.

John was a member of the 2006 BIGGA Delegation, sponsored by Bernhard's, which attended the GCSAA Show, in Atlanta, and the trip left a lasting impression on him having visited some of the finest courses America has to offer.

"I'd like to thank BIGGA and Bernhards for the trip. We visited East Lakes and the Atlanta Athletic Club and since I've become friendly with Ken Magnum, the Atlanta Athletic Club Superintendent. Ken played Felixstowe Ferry in a Ransomes tournament many years ago and is keen to play next time he visits the UK. He was also kind enough recently to send me a flag signed by David Toms, from when he won the USPGA Championship at Atlanta Athletic Club a few years ago."

If East Lakes and Atlanta Athletic Club both have impeccable golfing pedigrees, through their connection with Bobby Jones, Felixstowe Ferry has its own claim to fame. Willie Fernie was the Club Professional when he won the 1883 Open Championship, while another Club Professional, Bob Martin was also an Open Champion. The Rt Honourable A.J. Balfour was Captain of the Club in 1889 before taking on the job of Prime Minister in 1902, while that doyen of Golf Writers, Bernard Darwin, was made an Honorary Member in 1957.

Over 10 years ago the greenkeeping staff built a new nine holes which now operates as a successful and lucrative pay-and-play course.

"It was funded for by the VAT money and was the club's way of giving something to the community," said Glenn, who'd joined the club just before the work began.

"It took us two and a half years to build but was great experience for the team and we all learned a lot."

It is all the more commendable for a club with such a history that in the 21st century it is so go-ahead.

Mick Dabbs became Club Captain at the end of March and he is keen to ensure the club moves forward and takes advantage of the quality course John and his team have produced.

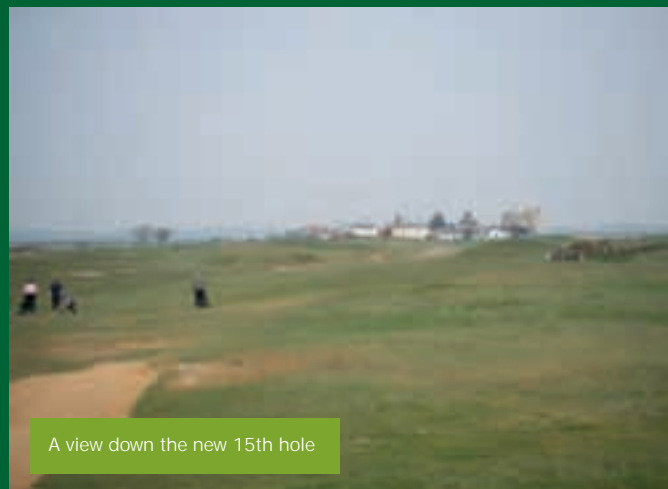
"We employed John four years ago and he asked for five years to get it right but within three and a half we have got one of the best courses in East Anglia. It is in fantastic condition," said Mick, who got some excellent publicity for the club by turning up at his "Driving in" ceremony with a 10 foot long driver, securing publicity in all the local papers.

"We have accommodation at the Club and it is important that we use the quality of the course to bring more people to Felixstowe Ferry and maximise our revenue. We're also working to attract people living further than 45 miles away to join us as a second club."

Mick explained that he was the third businessman in a row to become Club Captain and that the knowledge of health and safety, personnel, marketing and finance had been a huge benefit to the club.

"It's like running a £1 million company for a year. Courses need money to survive and there is a lot of competition."

There is a desire at Felixstowe to keep on improving and developing, and you can be sure that despite its age the best years are still ahead of it.



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One man went to mow!

By Peter Todd

How you mow your tees and surrounds depends on many factors: the terrain, the desired finish, obstructions, tournaments – the list is endless. And can the same mowers be used for both tasks? In this article Peter Todd, Golf Courses Manager at The London Golf Club, near Brands Hatch, Kent, talks about how he is using a range of mowers to cut both tees and surrounds on his two 18-hole courses and the factors involved.

Tees mowing is carried out here using both Toro Greensmaster 1000 pedestrian mowers and Greensmaster 3250-D, 8-blade ride-on triples. Use of triples in the growing season frees up valuable time that can be used on other essential tasks at a time of year when the advantages of using a triple tend to outweigh the disadvantages. Tees mowing of 18 holes takes approximately seven man-hours with a triple, or twice that with a pedestrian machine. The saving can be in the region of 600 hours a season on the 36 holes.

The use of walk-behind tees mowers is reserved for tournaments and out of season, when cutting conditions are more difficult. This minimises the stress and damage that can occur when using triples, particularly out of season, when thinner and slower growing swards are unlikely to recover quickly from tyre marking, for instance.

Steeper slopes where tees are shelved into hillsides and built up on mounds can also make triple cutting in adverse conditions difficult. The ease with which tight turns in restricted spaces using walk behind mowers can be achieved, makes this method more suitable and allows the operator to avoid the slope that triples would need as space to turn on.

Triples equipped with three-wheel drive are necessary on our steeply undulating site, improving traction particularly on slippery morning dew. The use of treaded turf tyres can also be used to improve traction as an alternative to slicks but operators need to

carry out turns with added care to avoid marking. Triples fitted with ROPS is also a must in our situation and is an important consideration before selecting equipment as not all manufacturers, like Toro, offer these as a CE certified option.

The tees triple also doubles up as an approach mower with a cutting frequency of twice a week on both surfaces, maximising the use of the machine. Heights of cut range from 10 to 13mm, summer to winter. Tee sizes vary from small tournament tees of 45sq m to combined tees of 280sq m. Striping with the narrower width of a pedestrian mower scales much better with the small tees than a triple. In addition, there are more options on cutting directions due to their ease of turning. Overall presentation and definition is enhanced when using pedestrian mowers.

Course furniture is kept low profile and to a minimum to make maintenance operations more efficient and to avoid the cluttered look. The use of granite distance markers, set level in the grass with the tee surface, allows the mowers to cut straight over the top and requires little maintenance. Ball washers are generally placed on the edge of the long native grass areas adjacent to the mown tee surrounds. Golfers can easily access them and few need moving for mowing. For tournaments, the addition of advertising boards, and so on, placed very close to tees for TV, makes walk-behind mowing the only option, as well as for presentation reasons.

For us, surround cutting starts with one width of a Reelmaster 3100-D Sidewinder triple, cut as a ring around each tee at 30mm. This is mown in the opposite direction to the clean-up cut on the tee itself, giving greater definition to shapes. Apart from this ring, the rest of the tee surrounds on the two courses are mown and presented differently.

The Nicklaus Signature course has long, large carries that blend seamlessly into the tee surrounds. These areas are cut using a Toro Groundsmaster 4000-D bat wing rotary at 60 to 80mm. In contrast, Ron Kirby's International course which has tall native grass roughs, carries with grass pathways cut through from the tees. These, together with the tee surrounds, are cut using the Toro Sidewinder triple.

Striped cutting in alternating directions produces chequered-patterned tees with surrounds mown in one direction as a contrast. Triple-cut striped tees do not present as well as those mown with a pedestrian due to the limitations of cutting directions and the cut width only allowing a few number of stripes on small and narrow tees.

Cutting directions of clean-up cuts – ie clockwise or anti-clockwise – are displayed on work boards for the staff to follow and alternated on a regular basis to avoid washboarding. The nature of the tee design is predominantly flowing curved outlines with rounded and kidney shapes. Preserving the perimeter shape of tees is easier to achieve using pedestrian machines with much greater accuracy staying on line, achieved by operators than with the use of triples. In time this can easily lead to loss of tee shapes and their size. Periodically it's worth reviewing these to ensure tees are not allowed to creep in or out in this way and temporarily re-mark outlines to re-establish the perimeters.

We like to offer players two distinctly different golfing experiences on both our courses. The flexibility of our mowers allows us to do just that on all areas of the course, not just on tees and surrounds, to use the machinery which is most appropriate for the prevailing conditions and also the level of presentation required, such as for tournaments or club events.



Above: Golf Courses Manager at The London Golf Club, Peter Todd

Opposite page: The Reelmaster 3100-D Sidewinder is used to cut a single ring around each tee.

Below: A Greensmaster 3250-D is used to cut tees at the start of the season.





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Count on it.

Making Tracks

Scott MacCallum meets Architect, Jonathan Gaunt, to find out more about building buggy tracks.

Thirty years ago the golfing dream was to head off to Portugal, Spain, or if you were feeling flush, the Carolinas, for a week of golf with a difference. The main difference being the weather and the fact that you'd invariably be wearing shorts – matched, possibly, with long socks, you'd be playing from between palm trees and, of course, you'd be playing out of a buggy.

Invariably buggy golf was perceived to be the preserve of holiday making players, but since then more and more clubs in the UK have identified buggies as a potential lucrative money earner and installed fleets. The need for buggy tracks, therefore, has become much more pressing, not just for new golf developments, but also for existing clubs hoping to benefit from increased revenue.

But there is more to designing a buggy track than you might at first believe. For example you don't want to ruin your signature hole with a two metre wide strip of concrete slicing right through the middle of it, while you can't presume the buggy will be the motorised equivalent of a mountain goat and climb to the top of the club's infamous Cardiac Hill.

One man who has spent more time than most considering the issue of buggy tracks for golf clubs old and new, is renowned Golf Course Architect, Jonathan Gaunt, a man who is keen to ensure that a track doesn't dominate the golf course.

"The buggy track should be secondary to the design of the course but it is an opportunity to make money for a golf club and in that regard they are now a necessary evil," he explained, adding that it was important to do the job correctly to avoid spoiling the visual and playing experience for the golfer.

"A mistake which is so often made the world over is to have the buggy track so close to the fairway that it actually influences play. People will play a shot and find the ball bouncing off a concrete or a tarmac road and into real trouble," explained Jonathan, who now operates as Gaunt Golf Design Ltd from a superb studio in Bakewell, Derbyshire.

"As it is you've got to think carefully about the playability of the hole, the relationship with the buggy track and how it allows you to get people around the golf course without creating enormous



walks from the buggy track to where your ball lands."

Jonathan explained that he didn't think buggies worked as a concept without buggy paths.

"Many clubs have perhaps realised that there was money to be made from buggies and just got them without thinking of the need for a track, and that is wrong.

"The projects we are working on now are on courses that are expected to be in play 365 days a year and the only way you can achieve that is to put in a good drainage system, That is not conducive to buggies on the fairway causing compaction," he said, adding that it jarred with him to see tyre marks running down the middle of a fairway.

"The way we design a buggy track is to hide them in among fairway mounding, hollows or planting.

"It's a matter of standing on the tee and looking down the fairway and if you've designed the buggy track correctly you shouldn't be able to see it too obviously," said Jonathan, adding that while that was the ideal there were occasions where it was impossible to achieve that.

"Sometimes you've got no option. For example, if you've got a terraced fairway on the side of a mountain you have to put the track where you can."

As for occasions where there is no option but to cross the hole with the track there is a right way and a wrong way to do it.

"You don't want to have a crossing point too close to the front of the green. It is much better 100 yards back, but better still for it to be in the carry area closer to the tee."

The general rule of thumb for a golf course architect is that you attempt to design a course to play clockwise so the out of bounds



is generally to the left as more often than not a right handed golfer will slice. With that in mind, generally the buggy track should be on the right side of the fairway so golfers don't have too far to walk to their balls.

While the ideal way of providing buggy track facilities is to build them at the same time as building the golf course existing courses can add them at a later date as well. But again mistakes are made.

"I know of some clubs which have just employed a contractor with a digger and said, 'There's the 1st tee. Off you go.' That's never going to be a good idea. If you sent someone out with a digger you're probably adding 10%-20% more pathway than you would need if you'd designed it beforehand because you wouldn't be finding the most efficient route around the course. For example, you might discover later that the best route is 20 metres further away than you thought as by doing that you would be avoiding some high ground or you could make the path solve a drainage problem at the same time."



The answer, as with most things, is preparation and planning.

"Before you start you want to have a good survey of the course. You want to know what land is available. You want to know where the boundaries are. You need to know where the greens, tees, fairways, bunkers, rough, and, in particular, woodland are, so you can route your track through them and away from the playing area. How do you achieve that?

"Basically we design something on a computer which creates a 3D model of the golf course. It's like a video which allows you to look at every single hole and see how the buggy track is going to fit into the landscape. If it's a little too high in places you can find a way to drop it behind a mound or through a hollow." Another issue which a well planned survey will reveal is that of gradient.

"I was involved with a new course at Zagaleta, in Spain, an exclusive members club, which in places rose from 170 metres above sea level to 340 metres and we had to get from one end of the course to another in a buggy," said Jonathan, who designed the course with his former partner, Steve Marnoch.

"In order to make the buggy path work, the buggy track was over 10,000 metres long to cover the 6,000 metre course," said Jonathan

"It was like one of those Italian or French Riviera roads with long sweeping curves, but that was the only safe way to do it. It was a massive engineering job."

Jonathan and his team operate to a prescribed safety margin for gradient of no steeper than one metre rise or fall in eight. Buggies can be extremely dangerous if they are allowed to pick up too much speed an accidents on golf courses which have gradients steeper than one in eight are all too common place.

Drainage and the collection of water is an ever more important issue at golf clubs and buggy tracks can actually help in this regard.

"We design drainage systems where we collect every single drop of water that falls on the site and flow it back into a reservoir to supply the irrigation system. The buggy track can work to our benefit because if we direct our drainage trenches or our pipe work along the buggy track they become collection opportunities in the same way as a roof or a car park," he explained, adding that they were doing just that on a four hole extension they are carrying out at Westerwood Golf Club, near Cumbernauld, in Scotland.

Despite being an expert in the provision of buggy tracks, Jonathan is not a huge advocate of buggy golf.

"If I'm honest I'm a traditionalist and much prefer to carry my bag than use a buggy. You don't really get warmed up, or into a rhythm when sitting in the cab of a buggy and you don't get to experience a course as the designer intended if you play from a buggy and that's quite sad really," explained Jonathan, who also sees the financial benefits which an investment in a quality track



could bring.

"A buggy track will pay for itself extremely quickly. Some clubs build the hire of a buggy into their green fee and with clubs charging £15 to £25 for buggy hire it will pay for itself quickly even if a complete track can cost anything from £50,000 to £350,000, dependant on site conditions."

However there is inevitably a conflict whenever buggy golf and the need for paths is involved – you don't want golfers to finish up too far away from their ball while at the same time you don't want a path to be too close to playing areas.

There are other benefits to a track not least allowing the greenkeeping staff quick and easy access without disturbing the playing areas.

"That's particularly important on a new course at grow-in stage. A track can come within 10 metres of a green and the greenkeeper can drive to it on a soil covered site without causing any damage.

"Also a track on a new course means that the developer can drive potential members round the course and show them the stand out holes, without causing damage to the course or visitors' clothing!"

Cutting corners is also to be avoided.

"Tracks should be complete wherever possible, as non tarmac or concrete areas create extremely heavy wear at the funnel points where the buggies join or leave the track and this usual tends to be near the green."

The advice is therefore, on a new build, to think about the track as part of the overall design of the golf course, while on existing courses always commission a survey to ensure that the most efficient, least obtrusive route is adopted.



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HOBBIES

Here's something you didn't know about me...



Name: Tony Lashmar
Club: Highgate Golf Club
Age: 32
Hobbies: Marathon running

Tony came to work at Highgate GC as an Assistant Greenkeeper from a local scheme in Highgate Village called the Harington Scheme, in January 1995. The scheme was set up to provide

training to students with severe learning or physical disabilities. Tony is now employed four days a week at the club - part funded by Remploy.

Tony has run 20 marathons in total including Paris, Berlin, New York and London.

In the year 2000 he ran the Paris marathon as a late entrant and one week later ran the London marathon (52 miles in total.)

Last November he ran in the New York marathon and ran his quickest ever time of 2hrs 38mins placing him in 109th position out of over 30,000 entrants. He was running on behalf of the British Airways Team and received a medal from them at a presentation held in New York as the fastest team member.

His slowest time ever was 3hrs 51mins. When training for marathons he will run approximately one hundred miles a week and it is not unusual for him to run into work from his home in the Isle of Dogs which is 13 miles away, and still be on time.

He entered this year's London marathon which took place on Sunday, April 22 and finished in the top 90, with a time of 2hrs 36mins and 53secs to be exact!

He has run many times for charities to raise money for local churches, the Harington Scheme and for a school for disabled children in London.

He is a member of, and represents Victoria Park Harriers which is based in Hackney, London.

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