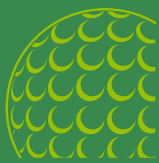




Once you start to get to excavators exceeding 5 tonnes capacity, it is more economic to call in a contractor using their own kit. A skilled operator will do more work than someone with less experience and do a better job too



# Hobbies

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

**Name:** Paul Black **Age:** 39

**Hobby:** Cyclist

**Occupation:** Student, studying HNC Sports Coaching at Moray College

**Previous Occupation:** Head Greenkeeper at Gogarburn GC (1990-2006)

### How and when did you get into cycling?

"I've been competing since 1991. I got into it by accident through a fellow greenkeeper. I used to bike to work each day on my mountain bike until my colleague gave me his old racing bike - I decided to look up what was involved. When I was out cycling I saw a race taking place, I found out the details and began racing for Edinburgh Road Club."



### What is it about cycle racing that appeals to you?

"Cycling used to be just a way of commuting to work but the more

I did it the more I enjoyed it. I find it peaceful, I love going fast, although I was never a boy racer, but when you're balancing on 23mm of rubber hitting speeds of 53mph it's thrilling.

"Through completing my studies I'm hoping to help other people improve upon their abilities and encourage children that it's a great way to get fit."

"I cycle about 1000 miles a month while training and racing."

### Which races have you competed in?

"The Club Time Trials riding for East of Scotland. I've competed at Scottish and National Level - 10, 25, 50 and 100 mile races. I've done Mass Road Races with 50-60 other riders travelling 95 miles with an average speed of 25-30 mph. I've got five Scottish Championship Medals and eight East of Scotland Gold Medals for various distances. I'm the Edinburgh Road Club Time Trial Champion, and have been undefeated for 10 years."

### How many bikes have you got?

"Seven in total. There are two main bikes that I use, one cost £2,500 and other cost nearer £4000. I have to prepare two bikes if I go away for weekend races."

HOBBIES

## All-Weather Tees



As chosen by St Andrews Links and The R&A



Tel: 01935 389358 Email: [info@thegreenapproach.com](mailto:info@thegreenapproach.com)

[www.thegreenapproach.com](http://www.thegreenapproach.com)



Askernish Adventurers

# A HEBRIDEAN TASK

*Scott MacCallum visits South Uist to see the work being carried out on Askernish and talks with Gordon Irvine about progress*

**Gordon Irvine MG is many things. He's a Master Greenkeeper; he's a Course Manager; an ex General Manager, and currently he's a Consultant to some of the finest courses in the country. But he is also something else. He's the Tony Robinson of Greenkeeping. Gordon might not be starring in Time Team but the work he and his team of volunteers are undertaking on the island of South Uist is just as exciting as any project Baldrick and his archeological colleagues have been up to.**

Gordon is currently fitting in regular visits to the Outer Hebrides where he is carrying out greenkeeping's answer to archeology – uncovering Askernish Golf course which was one of the last courses ever designed by Old Tom Morris back in 1892 and which fell into obscurity in the early part of the last century.

Askernish is not your conventional golf club. There is no sumptuous clubhouse complete with spike bar and locker rooms. In fact outside of a few tin sheds there is nothing to signify a golf club at all, but for a few flagsticks. It is very much golf as it used to be played – golf in the raw.

But once you tee off you are met by a host of excellent golfing challenges, albeit some of which in a stiff wind are a little too tough for all but the better quality players and some of the holes run alongside the beach and are as beautiful as any you would find anywhere in Scotland.

Gordon became caught up in the project a couple of years ago when on a fishing trip to the island and since then it has become something of an obsession seeing him using up much of his free time jumping on planes and heading to the little island off the north west coast of Scotland surrounded by the Atlantic Ocean.

"I'm pleased with the progress we've made so far. It has been slow but this project deserves to have time spent on it because it's so unique and special we wouldn't want to make any mistakes on it," explained Gordon.

Some of the delay has revolved around local politics with crofters suspicious about the consequences and implications of a rediscovered golf course in their back yard.

"We had a seven month delay because of the need to make sure all the paper work was in order. We want to make sure that we are working with the local community so we have been spending a lot of time talking with different local bodies and making sure they were happy with the golf course being here and see the benefits it can bring."

In the early stages Gordon spent a lot of time with architect Martin Ebert walking the site, studying it and attempting to uncover the 18 original holes.

"We'll never be totally sure but we are as confident as we can be that we have picked up the bulk of the old course."

One area with which Gordon and Martin had to work around was the RAF airfield which was cut out of the course in the 1930s, flattening part of the existing course.

"We actually decided to stick to the policy of working only on the land Old Tom had used so we have actually incorporated the runway into the 6th fairway – we've made a feature of it. We thought that would be the fairest way to combine everything," explained Gordon.

Bunkering was another issue which had to be resolved.

"We've identified five areas which we considered to be bunkers, but they may have been places which sheep scraped out for shelter and which subsequently became bunkers. They might not be in the ideal area for the modern game but it fits into the ethos and we will maintain them as bunkers."

During last winter with the help of some greenkeeping friends including,

# SHARPEN MOWERS FOR GREENER GRASS



Sharpening mowers with  
**EXPRESS DUAL & ANGLEMASTER**  
produces a surgically sharp cut leading to  
superior turf and a lot of happy golfers.



SHARPER SOLUTIONS

01788 811600 • [www.bernhard.co.uk](http://www.bernhard.co.uk)

## Get smooth, fast acting relief – all season long



The SR54 is just one member from the Soil Reliever family of great value, deep tine aerators. Like the rest of the range the unique angled frame delivers more punching power right where you need it, over the tines. It also gives you instant, variable depth control right from the tractor seat, so you can use this aerator all season long, for deep renovation or just to let your turf breathe easier - without disrupting play.

With a factory backed 2-year warranty, local dealer network and wide choice of tines, check out the best pound for pound aerator in the business. You'll be relieved you did.



Lo-Call 0845 026 0064  
[www.jsmd.co.uk](http://www.jsmd.co.uk)



Euan Grant and Chris Haspell, Gordon spent three weeks on construction work – repairing rabbit damage on greens, building tees and attempting to reinstate a lot of the playing surfaces.

“Chris helped me in the early stages to stake out holes and Euan dropped in for a couple of days and built us two tees. But we’ve also had great help from many others including Alistair Beggs, of the STRI, on agronomic issues; Steve Isaac, of the R&A and Keith Duff, formerly the Chief Scientist of English Nature.

“Keith’s advice on the paper work side and making sure we had a sustainable policy was invaluable. He also advising that having an animal grazing on the course was to be encouraged and this also helped with the concerns of the crofters.”

The man charged with raising both funds and profile for Askernish is well known Temple Golf Club man, Malcolm Peake, whom Gordon knew well from their joint involvement with Royal Cinque Ports, in Deal.

Malcolm’s passion for traditional golf and general enthusiasm and drive made him the ideal man to take on the mammoth challenge of making Askernish a must visit golfing destination.

Thanks to Malcolm Ransomes Jacobsen got to hear of the project and so well did he sell the project that Managing Director, David Withers, offered some kit to assist with the maintenance of the course.

“We were absolutely overwhelmed by the help we got from Ransomes Jacobsen. We never expected them to do as much as they did for us,” said Gordon.

“They sent us a lightweight fairway mower so we now have fairways. If we’d stuck with the old trailed gangs it would taken us a long time to get to where we are now, and there would have been a lot more tractor damage. They also sent us a top dresser which has allowed us to get our top dressing down which otherwise would have been down by a barrow and shovel and they sent us a top of the range hand mower which has allowed us to tackle the delicate contours of the greens.”

Malcolm led a party of newly signed up Askernish Life Members, interested journalists, Keith Duff and David Withers to South Uist in September to play the course and experience island life.

Hosted by larger than life Club President, Ralph Thompson, the visitors were treated to some wonderful hospitality and an early chance to play the golf course – it won’t open officially until next August. They also met some of the volunteers who have taken the project to their hearts and worked with Gordon to improve the golf course.

“Two of them, Alan and Colin, are now working as full time greenkeepers which is fantastic because it shows that the golf course is contributing to the island.

“I visit the island every month and do a bit of on-site training before leaving the guys with a small programme to follow,” said Gordon, who delivered a passionate and informative presentation on the work at the course to the guests at the end of one of the dinners during their stay.

Leaving novice greenkeepers for a month is something which many Course Managers would have nightmares about but Gordon is delighted with the progress that has gone on during his times away from the project.

“They are all very mechanically minded, many of them having come from an agricultural background so they can turn their hands to what you ask them very quickly but the only thing I’ve really found is the need to explain to them how fragile a lot of the contours are and that those contours are what we are trying to keep.”



Keith Duff (right) with his wife and local volunteer, Colin McGregor



With that in mind Gordon is adamant that wherever possible he wants them working with hand tools even if it means the project working at a slower rate. It must be done this way to retain the character.”

Asked what has shocked or surprised him at Askernish Gordon comes up with two very interesting observations.

“It’s the strength of the Atlantic Ocean. It is absolutely unbelievable. I had two fairways coming along nicely and arrived back to discover them both under eight inches of sand, which had come in over the space of three days. It is staggering to consider the power needed to do that.” It also demonstrated just how hardy were the fescues which were swamped by the sand.

“Six weeks later without us moving the sand the fairways were playable again as the grass had absorbed the sand and worked its way through without any artificial aid. It was amazing to see.”

The other area that has surprised him was in the quality of some of the turf that he found.

“Some of the best quality grass was under some compaction from vehicles and tractors going up and down to the beach. It certainly opened my eyes and showed that by using moderate levels of compaction you can perhaps help prevent weed invasion. That’s been very interesting.”

Speaking with Gordon you sense that he has been well and truly won over by South Uist and Askernish and he admits that if he were to win the lottery he’d love to move over permanently and treat the course as a labour of love.

One of the biggest hurdles is the course’s inaccessibility given that there are only two flights from Glasgow each day and if the plane is full there is a possibility your clubs might have to join you on a later flight.



Two of the island volunteers



Gordon Irvine MG



The Ransomes Jacobsen Triple which has made such a difference

“At the end of the day if a course is worth playing people will make the effort. We’ve seen that at places like Machrihanish, Royal Dornoch and Skibo Castle. People will make an extra effort to experience something special and undoubtedly Askernish is special enough to attract people to come and play it. The big challenge is whether they have ever played anything as exposed, as it is as much a battle against the elements as it is against the course itself. It’s quite unique in that way,” said Gordon, whose dream for the island is ultimately to make it a dedicated links resort with perhaps a total of three or four links courses for people to experience.

The next stages are two fold. He is taking one of the full time greenkeepers under his wing who now sees greenkeeping as a career – having him shadow Gordon at some of his other courses in Ireland and at Cinque Ports to get a feel for greenkeeping as a whole while he has also signed up for Elmwood College – while his is putting together another team of volunteers for this winter’s work.

“We have more work to do on reinstating the greens and taking care of rabbit warrens and putting in some more forward tees – not the modern type but teeing platforms just to give golfers a level stance. We also have three of the holes at the end of the course which are further behind, because of the discussions with the crofters, which need to catch up. “The project will take time and deserves to. It has staggering potential but could be easily damaged and we are determined that we won’t make mistakes with it.”

If anyone wishes to volunteer to help at Askernish they should email Gordon at [ormegagi@hotmail.com](mailto:ormegagi@hotmail.com) Gordon has also promised keep anyone interested in the project up to date by sending out pictures.

# HARROGATE: AN ANNUAL HAVEN FOR THE GROUNDS CARE INDUSTRY

Exhibition: 22-24 January 2008 Education: 20-24 January 2008

**Harrogate Week has been established for 20 years and during that time has grown to become a must-see grounds care event for many satisfied visitors.**

Harrogate Week 2008 with its regular elements of BTME, incorporating ClubHouse; the world renowned Continue to Learn programme; a Careers Clinic, Job Shop, Internet Café, banquets, lunches and fringe events ensures that a well planned visit sets you up for the year ahead. And it's not just of benefit to turf professionals and BIGGA members. Many other golfing and sporting bodies are involved in the week with seminars by the R&A, EGU and GCMA and many other workshops that are particularly pertinent for turf professionals from other sporting arenas.



Inside the exhibition halls will be hundreds of eager industry professionals keen to explain their latest innovative product, whether it be chemical, mineral or manufactured from the finest steel.

All are designed to help make your life that little bit easier. Your job is to prioritise and rationalise so you only buy what is going to make a significant difference to you at a price that doesn't take up a disproportionate amount of your available funds. But the point is it's exciting. You can see what's out there and what is possible if not this year, in the not too distant future.

The BIGGA staff will be on hand throughout the exhibition to give advice and information on all Association matters. Visit the BIGGA Stand to renew your membership, purchase some BIGGA merchandise and the chance to meet the people you only ever talk to on the telephone.

From a training and development standpoint there isn't a workshop or seminar that doesn't include a nugget of information which might help some aspect of your professional life. Continue to Learn 2008, supported by the GTC and the John Deere Team Championship, boasts five new workshops including subjects such as Stress Awareness

and the Disturbance Theory. Also taking place at Harrogate are the following courses designed to provide you with the perfect opportunity to get your questions answered and to share your problems, as the seasons alter, our climate changes and you face an uphill struggle, dealing with drought one minute and flooding the next: Environmental Management; Current Environmental Legislation; Drought, Drainage & Conservation; Moving Toward Greater Sustainability; The Practical Guide to Growth Regulators; Golf & Turfgrass Management in the Future; Water Management - An American Perspective and Golf Green Fertilisation in our Changing Climate.

The programme also sees the return of several old favourites including An Introduction to Golf Course Design and Moving into Management.

BIGGA's discount scheme offers savings of up to 52% and is available to all delegates who pre-book Continue to Learn seminars.

### Continue to Learn Seminar Discounts

No. of Seminars	1	2	3	4	5	6
Full Price	£25	£50	£75	£100	£125	£150
You Pay	£25	£40	£55	£60	£65	£72
Discount %	0%	20%	27%	40%	48%	52%
Discount £	£0	£10	£20	£40	£60	£78

New to Harrogate Week 2008 is "Have We Got Views for You!" an unmissable event taking place in the Majestic Hotel on Monday 21 January. A panel, comprising Walter Woods BEM, former Links Supervisor at St Andrews; Jack McMillan MBE, former Head Greenkeeper at Sunningdale GC and now Course Consultant to the PGA European Tour; Andy Campbell MG, CGCS; Ken Siems MG, CGCS, Director of Agronomy for Loch Lomond and Stan Zontek, from the USGA, a certified Professional Agronomist; will be ably compèred by Television Producer and Presenter, Roger Greenwood. The panel will answer your questions and regale you with stories from the world of greenkeeping and beyond.



To register, book education or find accommodation, visit [www.harrogateweek.org.uk](http://www.harrogateweek.org.uk)





Back row (L to R): Neil Plenderleith, Stuart Ross, Greg Knight, Jamie Duncan and Richard Oakley. Front row (L to R): Simon Lambert, Avon Bridges and Lewis Birch



# SCHOOL'S OUT!

*Once again the level of entrants for this year's Toro Student of the Year have surpassed all expectations. Melissa Toombs witnessed a fierce final at BIGGA HOUSE*

**The combination of studying and socialising doesn't always work well together! However, when living life as a studious type, you discover your strengths and weaknesses, not only as a student, but also as an individual.**

No-one, ideally, wants to still be working on their imminently due assignment at 4am, realising the course work they've been working on hasn't turned out quite as they'd expected, resigning themselves to the fact that this isn't their best work and realising that perhaps they should have managed their time a little better.

Every student needs a kick up the bum now and again, to be given encouragement and pointed in the right direction but, if you really want the qualification, it's up to you to find the time and put the effort in. Having to juggle both work and study, hard work and dedication was required by this year's Toro Student of the Year Finalists and they are a prime example of what time and effort can achieve.

Eight anxious finalists visited BIGGA HOUSE on September 17 to be quizzed and probed within an inch of their lives and given the task of completing a survey of Aldwark Manor GC (evaluating nine of the holes). On the judging panel this year were: John Pemberton, Chief Executive of BIGGA; Jeff Mills, from the BIGGA Board of Management; Peter Mansfield from Lely; and Bruce Jamieson and Andy Brown, from Toro.

After an exhausting, nail-biting wait, finalists: Neil Plenderleith, Jamie Duncan, Lewis Birch, Stuart Ross, Richard Oakley, Avon Bridges, Simon Lambert and Greg Knight, were put out of their misery as, now retired, BIGGA Education and Training Manager, Ken Richardson, announced

this year's winners for the last time in his role.

Runners-up were: Lewis Birch (23), from Abbeydale Golf Club, in Sheffield, and Simon Lambert (25), from Seaford Head Golf Club, East Sussex.

Lewis achieved PA1, PA2, NVQ Sports Turf Level 2 and the Technical Certificate in Sports Turf at Askham Bryan College in York. He is currently working towards his NVQ Sports Turf Level 3. "I enjoy working outdoors and with the great variety that a greenkeeping role brings, I felt no other position would keep me as happy," said Lewis.

Simon has worked at Seaford Head for seven year and since working as a greenkeeper, has learnt, achieved and given a great deal. "All of my training will working at the course and attending Plumpton College, has enabled me to work more confidently and efficiently in the everyday running of the golf course," said Simon.

Lewis and Simon both win a trip to Harrogate Week 2007, where they will be invited to attend the Continue to Learn seminars and workshops as well as the evening banquet.

Overall winner and Toro Student of the Year 2007 was Avon Bridges (27) from Luton Hoo Park Golf Club, Bedfordshire.

Avon's amazing prize involves an eight-week trip to the USA, where, for six weeks, the University of Massachusetts will be home, as he completes a residential turf management study course. The trip also includes visits to the Toro Headquarters in Minneapolis, the Toro Irrigation Division and to the GCSAA Golf Industry Show in Anaheim next February.





Simon Lambert, Avon Bridges and Lewis Birch

# AND THE WINNER IS...

*2007 Toro Student of the Year winner, Avon Bridges, is over the moon about his achievement, as Melissa Toombs found out*

**As the competition reached its 18th year, the standard of Toro Student of the Year applicants seemed to have risen once again. It was up to the judges to make some tough decisions at this year's final and all competitors were commended for their hard work.**

When I asked this year's winner what it was about greenkeeping that he loved, he replied, "I couldn't put my finger on exactly what it is about greenkeeping that appeals to me, I just know I love it and I'm good at it. It's one of the very few things that I'm very good at it. I just enjoy everyday. I like the variety of work that we do. Greenkeeping is a career that changes with the seasons, you never get bored of it."

I think that response is one with which every greenkeeper can identify - variety is the key!

Avon fell into greenkeeping. "I was rubbish at school, he said, "I left when I was 17 and when looking for a job I came across greenkeeping. My father was a greenkeeper so I knew roughly what the job entailed from spending time with him as a kid."

Avon started his career in greenkeeping at Finchley Golf Club in 1997.

"Within two to three years the club had sent me to college and I discovered that I actually really enjoyed learning more about greenkeeping and it was something I was good at it."

Having completed his studies at Oaklands College, Avon speaks very highly of his Tutor, Andy Wight, "He was one of those rare tutors that doesn't just stand there telling you what you need to know, he always managed to teach you without you realising you were learning. It's been a privilege working with Andy; he's been immensely supportive,

particularly during my NVQ 2 and 3. I've never had a tutor or teacher that's more like a friend than a tutor. He is one of the best tutors in the country as far as I'm concerned," continued Avon.

You could say golf is in Avon's blood, as every family member involved in the sport seems to have fallen in to it. "My grandfather was a professional golfer and my father a greenkeeper but neither of them by intention," continued Avon.

Starting off as a Trainee at Finchley, Avon worked his way up through the ranks, and within nine years, went from knowing next to nothing to taking the position of Head Greenkeeper at Luton Hoo Golf Club, an 18 hole golf course with breathtaking parkland views in Bedfordshire, just over a year ago.

"Finchley have always been eager to get people into college, the team have always been very supportive and the now Head Greenkeeper (Craig Newton), has always encouraged me to learn." Avon recalls when he was offered his post at Luton Hoo, a luxury five-star hotel with an 18 hole golf course, and more than 1,000 acres of parkland and gardens, and how he worried that Craig would be upset that he was leaving,

"I had quite an important part to play in our team, I did most of the spraying and key jobs. I thought Craig would say he really didn't want to lose me but actually he was really pleased to have one of his team, he had trained from the age of 17, to be moving on to become a Head Greenkeeper. He was extremely supportive and I still speak to him regularly. He gives me a lot of advice, although we have actually reached the point where we now give each other advice," laughed Avon.

Clearly holding Finchley GC in high regard, Avon mentioned how the club had built up friendships with other golf clubs in their locality, visiting

each other's courses and sharing equipment.

"Within the next year or so I'd like to achieve that where I am now," said an enthusiastic Avon, who admits he, "doesn't play golf very well."

Barbara, Avon's wife, is expecting their first child this December.

"Having a baby reinforces to me why I'm doing what I'm doing. By becoming a Head Greenkeeper I am getting rewards for my 10 years of hard work in the trade. Barbara says I'm more alive now than I have been for years, because my mind is active all the time."

The past year has been hard work for Avon but he seems to thrive on the challenges that being a Head Greenkeeper presents.

"It took me a good six months to get used to the pressure of being a Head Greenkeeper and it's taken me 11 months to get used to the position."

The role of HG is not an easy one, Avon has had the added pressure of getting a team together and a new course construction.

"Stress and pressure are sometimes a good thing as they stop you from just getting on and doing the same old thing each day," said Avon.

Aged just 27, Avon is quite a young Head Greenkeeper.

"Most people walk up to my Deputy, who is in his thirties, and shake his hand as Head Greenkeeper which I quite enjoy - I like surprising people!"

Over the moon at being crowned Toro Student of the Year 2007, Avon can't wait to go to America,

"Having only worked at two golf clubs, I haven't experienced much variety in greenkeeping. I'm looking forward to being shown different ideas, how to look at things differently, and studying within a different college culture. I'm grateful to Finchley for all they have shown me but I do need to expand on my knowledge. I think this country is moving over to the American way of thinking about greenkeeping so it will be good to get a head start!"

Looking to the future, Avon has his hands full at Luton Hoo for the next few years, building up its reputation and working with local golf clubs to ensure they compliment each other rather than compete.

"Our Course Designer, Mike Smith, has gone beyond his call of duty and acted a mentor to me during my steep learning curve at Luton Hoo," said Avon, with a positive outlook for the years ahead.

