

The BIGGA Delegation (from left to right): Derrick Johnstone, Richard Jenkinson, Asa English, Bruce Hicks, Daniel Norworthy, Paul Handy, Lee Brady, Tim Johnson, James Parker, Robert Clare

“It truly was the most unforgettable experience I have ever had in my career”

Richard Jenkinson

– Deputy Course Manager, G West

“It truly was the most unforgettable experience I have ever had in my career to date. To have the opportunity to attend and be part of such a friendly group is really very difficult to explain.

“I can safely say that I learned plenty of things I can apply to my current place of employment and I made new friends for life.

“It’s impossible to pick out one outstanding highlight as I enjoyed every single moment of the trip and can’t quite believe that it all went so quickly! However one of the obvious highlights were our tours around Torrey Pines and La Costa. One of the fascinating things for me was the difference between them even though they are just ten minutes’ drive apart. The management style is similar but the terrain and the composition of the courses are completely different. Torrey Pines is on a cliff and La Costa is closer to the riverside meaning totally contrasting styles of course. I now have an understanding of what previous delegates were talking about when they said it is a very tough but life changing week.”

Richard Jenkinson – Deputy Course Manager, G West

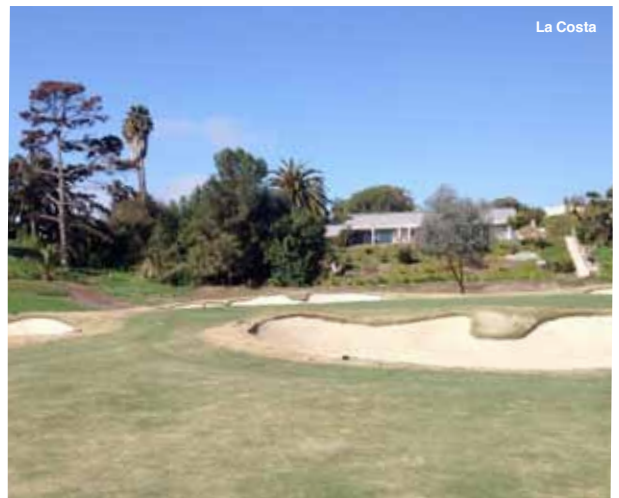
“All I can really say is thank you to Bernhard’s, BIGGA and the everyone who I went to San Diego with. I’ve made some very good friends for life, and you’ve made a normal greenkeeper who’s just starting out in the industry feel very welcome after one of the best weeks of my life!”

Tim Johnson – Assistant Greenkeeper, The Wilmslow Golf Club

“I would just like to thank Bernhard and BIGGA for the fantastic trip to GIS in San Diego. All those that attended had a career changing experience.

The way things are put together and run is a credit to both teams. The delegation successfully gave the best impression of our association. Thanks again to everyone involved. If you have not yet been part of the delegation give it some serious thought next year. This is a mind blowing opportunity. If you have applied before and missed out keep applying one day your time will come!”

James Parker – Deputy Head Greenkeeper, Close House Golf & Country Club



“Torrey Pines was just world-class, I got so much out of it.

“You dream about working somewhere like that and to get the chance to bounce ideas off some of the guys over there was terrific.

“The whole trip was fantastic, San Diego was such a vibrant city, and we all got on really well.

“We’ve swapped email addresses and phone numbers so if we have a greenkeeping related issue, we can share it with each other. I’ve already urged the guys at Wentworth to go for next year’s trip because it’s unmissable.

Derrick Johnstone – Deputy Head Greenkeeper, The Wentworth Club

From the ashes

Steve Castle spoke to David Jeffrey, Head Greenkeeper at Machrie Bay Golf Club on the Isle of Arran, who recently experienced every greenkeeper's worst nightmare



Just five days into 2013, the two maintenance facilities at Machrie Bay were destroyed by a ferocious fire. David lost almost all of his equipment plus personal effects – including diaries he had kept detailing work on the course during his 13-year tenure at the picturesque course on the island off the west coast of Scotland.

But David, who has just one other member of staff, has kept the nine-hole course open thanks to sheer determination – and the terrific help he's received from a neighbouring club.

I met David for the first time at BTME 2013 – and he visibly winced as he described the worst moment of his working life.

It was 8.45am on the morning of Saturday 5 January when his wife received a frantic phone call from the Club Secretary of Shiskine Golf

Club, around four miles away from his course.

He recalls: "My wife told me the Secretary had seen smoke coming from the direction of our two sheds and they were both gone. The first thing I had to do was inform my employer of the fire, a terrible thing to have to do. I then got in my car and drove to the course which is about six miles from my house.

"When I got there I could see it was just utter devastation, it was absolutely catastrophic. The sheds were in ruins and I realised I'd basically lost 13 years of work. Everything I'd built up over that time and was proud of had all been reduced to rubble.

"I lost almost everything machinery wise. I had two John Deere machines that were away for servicing so luckily they escaped, but everything else went. It's the small things that you fine tune over the years that are the worst things

to lose. For example I'd set up the scarifier so it was almost perfect for the course.

"The intensity of the fire was incredible, it even bent my stimp-meter and pinch bar."

But the biggest blow was the loss of his collection of paper diaries. Since his arrival at the club in October 1999, he painstakingly kept notes of all work completed on the course – no matter how small – along with information on weather conditions. He updated this twice a day meaning he had created a unique record of life at Machrie Bay.

"If someone asked when we had done some particular work on the course I would be able to pinpoint what we had done almost to the hour, and why we'd done it. It was such an important resource, meant a lot to me and that can never be replaced.

"We've had to hire tractors and borrow everything else from my

“When I got there I could see it was just utter devastation. The sheds were in ruins and I realised I’d lost 13 years of work. Everything had been reduced to rubble”



David Jeffrey with the Kinloch Cup (fortunately not stored in the shed!) courtesy of Hamish Bannatyne

friend Stewart Fotheringham at Shiskine Golf Club. He has let me use all sorts of equipment from a greens mower to waterproofs.”

Stewart’s assistance is a fine example of how neighbouring golf clubs can really help each other out in difficult times. He’s been at Shiskine for 30 years and said: “David would have helped me out if I was in the same situation, and it’s a really close island community here. I saw the aftermath of the fire and it was just total devastation, but I’m here to help out any way I could.”

“Obviously he needed machines quickly and I was happy to lend him whatever he needed. Pretty much everything went in the fire, so he even needed small things like waterproofs. It’s just been a terrible time for everyone but David will pull through.”

Remarkably Machrie Bay has remained fully open throughout, and this was extremely important as it hosts competitions on an almost weekly basis throughout the year as well as attracting thousands of visitors. David’s entire green staff consists of himself and a young apprentice who was on holiday at the time of the blaze.

Police investigations are ongoing into the fire and it’s being treated as ‘suspicious’. David added: “We’re waiting on the insurance. You have to make an inventory of everything you had for the loss adjuster, and

for weeks I was waking up in the middle of the night remembering something else which I’d lost.

“It’s also going to be a frustrating wait to get the new sheds in place. The council insist we need full planning permission for a new shed which will take eight weeks, then it’s three weeks to get them here.”

David urges greenkeepers who have personal possessions on site to insure them – he was unfortunate in that he was storing items such as his motorbike on site because he was in the process of building a domestic shed at home.

“I have had to come to terms with the fact that certain things will never be replaced – of course, the diaries are the main thing.

“But we have 340 members, and we’re very busy all year round, particularly in summer where we have so many visitors to the island who want to come and play the course. There’s no way people should have to stop enjoying golf here because of what’s happened, and we were determined no rounds would be lost. It’s a beautiful setting, we call it God’s country up here and we weren’t going to let the fire wreck things.”

It’s been a terrible few months for David and the owners of the Course – Dougarie Estate - but he remains hopeful that Machrie Bay will emerge stronger from this calamitous start to the New Year.



IMAGES OF FIRE DAMAGE, courtesy of Dougarie Estate :
 TOP: remains of a tractor
 MIDDLE: two rotary mowers
 LEFT: Remains of a sprayer, rotary mower and fertiliser spreader





IMAGES ON THIS PAGE OF
MACHARIE BAY: The splendid
first 1st green (above) , 1st tee
(far left) and the 8th hole (left)
Courtesy of Hamish Bannatyne

American

How did TPC Scottsdale prepare for the biggest spectator golf event in the world last month? BIGGA member Jason Brooks sent off his CV and found himself on the support team for the Phoenix Open in Arizona – here he describes a fascinating few months on both a personal and professional level



dream

I've been Assistant Head Greenkeeper at Torquay Golf Club for eight years, and through BIGGA I have met great friends from across the UK and overseas who share my passion for the profession.

I've been on the support teams at The Open Championship and the PGA Championship - and these occasions left me wanting more, to experience an extended period of tournament preparation somewhere special. I decided I was going to make a real effort to secure a position somewhere that would add to my professional skills and open new doors for me in my career.

The Dream Begins

My Greens Chairman was very supportive, so I sent my CV to a host of people including Carl Roth, Senior Vice President of Agronomy for the PGA Tour. He got me in touch with Jeff Plotts, Director of Golf Course Maintenance at TPC Scottsdale. We had a great chat, he confirmed he would like me to spend five months of the winter there and the dream of joining the team at the Waste Management Phoenix Open was becoming reality.

Due to visa difficulties I contacted Mike O'Keeffe who told me all about the Ohio State University (OSU) programme, and me joining this world-famous programme would allow him to complete my move to Scottsdale as an intern. Besides helping me out with the highly complex visa application process, he explained other aspects such as salary and taxes.

Good Morning Scottsdale

There are two courses at TPC Scottsdale, the Stadium course (which has held the Phoenix Open since 1987) and the Champions course. Both have an incredible 45,000 rounds played annually. The summer temperatures are brutal, with average highs of over 40C.

The entire course is Bermuda grass until the start of October when the huge overseeding process begins to turn the course from warm season grasses to cool season grasses for the milder winter. It is a huge undertaking - the course is closed for two weeks during which the Bermuda will be verticut, scalped then the debris collected before the overseeding can begin. Apart from the greens a perennial rye grass/fine fescue 80/20 mix is used for all the other areas. The

greens mix is velvet bent, chewings fescue and poa trivialis.

This two week window is pretty small when you consider that the golfers will be out playing on the newly germinated grass, the same grass that has to be tournament standard just over 12 weeks later. The grass seed alone costs over £130,000. Factor in extra hours for staff, no playing revenue for a fortnight, a £350,000 per year irrigation water cost and numerous fertiliser applications and it's a massive outlay – but it should ensure top quality playing conditions all year round.

They use reclaimed water to irrigate both courses, this has a high sodium content so they apply calcite calcium regularly prior to irrigating to flush the build up of the sodium content out of the soil. The greens, tees and approaches are all handmowed. Topdressing is applied by pedestrian fertiliser spreaders as well as more overseeding on the greens on a weekly basis through December to help firm up and improve the surfaces.

The Bermuda grass areas not overseeded are sprayed with Diquat, a contact herbicide, this helps suppress any further growth and gives it a striking colour contrast against the dark green rye grass. All the tee and bunker surrounds are dormant Bermuda which stands out so well on television.

It is a difficult facility to manage as essentially each year there are two grow-in periods, and new grass is immediately in play following each transition. Add in the largest spectator golf event in the world held at the coldest point in the year when growth has slowed dramatically - it's enough to give the superintendents nightmares. Most golf facilities will have a down time at some point of the year but not TPC Scottsdale.

Winter weather is generally good - dry and warm during the day - however as it is a desert region temperatures plummet at night and frosts are very common. Strangely, in the morning the course can be free of any frost but as the sun starts to rise the warm air pushes the cold air down to create a frost. It happened a few times and we would have to stop mowing and wait until the sun burned it off.

Over half a million spectators pour through the gates during the tournament, and 20,000 each day of these will be at the famous 16th hole. It definitely beats setting up your course for the monthly stableford!



The entire course is Bermuda grass until the start of October when the huge overseeding process begins to turn the course from warm season grasses to cool season grasses for the milder winter

Wet Wet Wet

As the tournament loomed the height of cuts were gradually lowered apart from the rough which remained at three inches. The large desert areas had to be edged and more decomposed granite used where needed.

The pruning of bushes, shrubs and trees were carried out and player walkways were renovated and defined. I was part of a team checking bunker depths were consistent with four inches in the base and two inches on the slopes. It's a couple of weeks' work as there are 79 bunkers.

We gave the 16th special attention as it has so much media focus on it during the week. A local landscaping team was brought in to assist in renovating all the desert area between the tees and the green, adding new cacti and desert shrubs where needed.

Unfortunately we then saw record low temperatures and several frosts which really held back any growth. Then we had some of the hottest temperatures on record which meant hand watering was needed on fairways to treat hot spots, it was a balancing act due to the fact that Brandon Reese – the Course Superintendent - wanted the course to play firm and fast. As little water as possible was used as well as heavy rolling with a road roller to firm up the fairways, approaches and greens.

All was progressing well until we had nearly three inches of rain in two days before the tournament,



which is a lot by anyone's standards especially considering the average rainfall for the year is eight inches. We spent a 12 hour day on the Sunday repairing damage from the rain, there was debris everywhere and water was needing to be pumped away from any low lying areas. It had to be in good shape for Monday for a Pro Am.

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The Action Begins

My jobs for the week were mowing greens in the morning then cutting fairways in the evenings. In total we had about 65 staff working during tournament week, in our pre-tournament meeting we were told it can get a little crazy during the week as there will be a large crowd and most will be drunk!

The course was ready for the Monday Pro Am although very wet, but the weather forecast for the big week was good. The height of cuts were greens 2.875mm, tees, approaches and fairways 10mm,

“The coliseum on the 16th is certainly different with unbelievable crowd noise and Mexican waves”

intermediate rough 1.25 inches and rough three inches. Due to the large numbers of spectators we received a police escort to the course in the afternoons from our compound which was surreal – spectators were filming us on their mobiles.

Another frost on Thursday meant start times were put back by an hour, and some rounds could not be completed as it was too dark. This delayed us getting out on the course for the evening jobs and meant more cutting in the dark. Spotters were posted at any hole that a player had marked their ball to make sure that the marker was replaced at the same spot should any mowing need to be done. Any more frost delays could have meant the tournament continuing into Monday which would have been a real headache for everyone.

Friday fortunately had no frost and play started on time with the remaining 1st rounds completed before the 2nd round started. A new

record Friday attendance was registered of 121,901. Fantastic weather and local favourite Phil Mickelson leading the tournament then swelled numbers to a new record Saturday attendance of 179,022. Cooler weather and a clash with the Superbowl on Sunday lowered crowd numbers to 58,791 giving a massive overall total of 525,821. Mickelson won despite a late challenge from Brandt Snedeker.

We did have one brief opportunity to sit in the coliseum on the 16th for the remainder of the day; it certainly is different with unbelievable crowd noise and Mexican waves!

The experience was amazing, I wish I had considered going through the OSU programme before. I really would recommend it to greenkeepers wanting to train at a top course and add important experience to their CV. If you're interested contact Mike O'Keeffe at okeeffe.1@osu.edu

I was also lucky enough to receive a scholarship from Syngenta which covered health insurance and other fees. This was a reward for my efforts, and I was very honoured to be one of the five selected for it.

I have to thank my family Anna, Callun and Katie, who let me sacrifice my time away from them in order to fulfil an ambition. Also thank you to Mik Wells, Eddie Adams, Cal Roth, Jeff Plotts, Mike O'Keeffe and Torquay Golf Club and to Brandon and his team for making me so welcome at TPC Scottsdale.

It truly was the experience of a lifetime, all arising from sending a few emails.



The stand at the 16th

