

Ganning: No tricks in redesign getting Belfry ready for Ryder

By TREVOR LEDGER

SUTTON COLDFIELD, England— In 1981, the Ryder Cup was to be staged here at The Belfry. But the five-year-old course hadn't matured. Enter course manager Derek Ganning with the charge of developing the Dave Thomas-designed course to the required standard. Twelve years later, Ganning is still here with two Ryder Cups behind him and a third looming Sept. 24-26.

Ganning has plenty of day-to-day responsibility in tending to the Belfry's two courses — the Derby and Brabazon, the latter being the Ryder Cup venue. To have 24 of the world's finest golfers playing the course is a wonderful added bonus. But it is just that — a bonus.

"I work for a progressive company [De Vere Hotels]," Ganning explained. "The Ryder Cup will come and go in September and the 10-year project plan will continue. The investment will continue."

The investment has certainly been there up to now. Between autumn 1990 and spring 1992, Ganning oversaw approximately \$1.2 million worth of rede-

sign. Much of this was spent bringing in 40,000 cubic meters of soil to build spectator mounds and hummocks on eight of the Brabazon holes. Coupled with a number of new tees and bunker locations, this work has cost more than the original 36-hole layout.

"We've tried to lay out a golf course that is fair to both sides," Ganning said. "We have no tricks up our sleeves."

Unlike Kiawah's Ocean Course, site of the '91 Ryder Cup, the water fauna at The Belfry is all harmless. But Ganning did take part in a publicity stunt involving a couple of crocodiles from Drayton Manor Zoo.

"I was photographed holding one of them. I held on tight!"

The British climate ultimately spoiled this attempt to rival Kiawah's alligators. What a shame to have lost the headline: "The Belfry Bites Back!"

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Like many successful Brits, the 53-year-old Ganning has his roots in the military, serving with the Northumberland Fusiliers and 22nd Airborne. This is where he received the spark which

SUPER FOCUS



Derek Ganning, above right, at The Belfry, site of the Ryder Cup this month.

illuminated his career path.

Part of his duties in countries such as Borneo and Hong Kong was to prepare sports fields — including golf courses — for the officers. Basic Army groundsmanship training equipped Ganning to become greenkeeper (not superintendent, and certainly not greenskeeper) at a little nine-hole course called Dartmouth in the Black Country of England's West Midlands. The initial spark soon became a flame.

Academic qualifications from King's Heath College followed short courses in financial and project management from Aston University. From there Ganning teamed with Fred Autrey in developing, designing and building a course for the city of Birmingham. The success of this project did not go unnoticed by those who developed another Midlands course, The Belfry — immature and in need of whipping into shape.

Ganning is now course manager and heads a team of 16 ground staff, all with key areas of responsibility — responsible in its strictest sense.

"There is no room in this industry for prima donnas," he said. "All departments negotiate their own budgets with me and are financially responsible thereafter."

The crew at The Belfry is more fortunate than most in the U.K. Ganning believes in education and all new trainees follow a two-year, day-release course with the option of going on to earn a Higher National Diploma at Rees Heath College. Offering such opportunities is not necessarily pure altruism, just progressive common sense.

"Golf courses today should be training people so that, on a 36-hole complex like this one, you have two head greenkeepers and three in reserve for the future development of the course," he said. "Promotion from within is essential. That way you know what sort of person you're getting."

Or losing. Ganning has watched some talented people get snatched up by other courses. Is this a case of a highly skilled teacher and motivator being hoisted by his own petard? Not a bit of it.

"One of the things I love about this job is helping people to better themselves," said Ganning. "John O'Brien left me to run Banff Springs in Canada; Chris Curly is now at a course in Vienna; and Richard Hitchcock has started his own construction company. That's just this year."

Ganning, for one, has no plans for departure. Twelve years ago he made an immediate impact at The Belfry by planting 30,000 trees.

"I know I'm getting old because the trees are getting big now," he said. "As to the future, who can say what they'll be doing in a further 12 years. I'll not be able to finish the job I started here. Greenkeeping is like a landscape painting — it's never finished."

Killer bees are here

Continued from page 11

a tree or moving debris.

- Wearing long-sleeve shirts, trousers, light-colored clothing, and especially white socks, because bees are known to sting ankles covered with black socks.
- Avoiding wearing shiny jewelry and leather.
- Using perfumes and other odorous products sparingly, because the bees are sensitive to odors.
- Being aware of insect flights from a central point.
- Being aware of escape routes.

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