

An Incredible Journey Among Friends

By Dr. Kent Kurtz

This fall I had the privilege of representing STMA and Cal Poly on a trip to England and Scotland and the opportunity to participate in some very exciting events. I was accompanied on my journey by my 19 year old son, Todd. We had many fine experiences together as well as the opportunity to get to know our hosts with whom we lodged.

From the outset I knew we had some very good friends in the United Kingdom, but it soon became apparent that they were more like family with their warmth, kindness and concern for our comfort. We are very fortunate and thankful for these fine individuals, colleagues and friends who have done so much to help our association and the sports turf movement in our country.

We have established a solid foundation with one of the premier associations in the world, The Institute of Groundsmanship (IOG). We have opened the doors to a mutual exchange of information and ideas on the construction and management of sports turf of all kinds. STMA is very young and still struggling through its infancy compared to the IOG which celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 1984. To know that we are accepted by this professional group as the "Babes Across the Sea" is certainly a great feeling. It



Dr. Peter Hayes, director, Sports Turf Research Institute, Bingsley, England.

is comforting to know we can always confide in the "older brother" organization when we need encouragement or assistance. Thanks IOG for opening up your hearts and homes to us.

Call it fate or merely good fortune, but we spent six nights with a terrific gentleman who has done so much to promote groundsmanship throughout the world. Bob Corbin lives in a cottage surrounded by four acres of beautiful gardens in the village of Stoke Poges, near Windsor. Bob is a past president of the IOG, a retired director of the London Borough Parks, an internationally recognized horticulturist, an excellent photographer and the man responsible for the educational training programs provided by the IOG. He served admirably as our host, chauffeur, guide, and chef during our stay in the London area. Thanks Bob for a very memorable experience.

The day after arriving in London we traveled northward to the Sports Turf Research Institute in Bingley where our good friend, Dr. Peter Hayes is the director. Peter is a dynamic and very personable individual who has done a fantastic job. Recently, he was selected to serve on the USGA Research Advisory Committee as the first person outside of the United States to do so. Congratulations Peter.



Bob Corbin, our gracious host, in his garden next to his cottage at Stoke Poges.

The Sports Turf Research Institute (STRI) was organized in 1929 and is an independent, non-profit organization whose objectives are to carry out research and to provide advice and education in the sphere of sports turf. I was very impressed with the work Peter and his staff are currently doing. Many thanks to him for taking the time to show Todd and I the Bingley area and for allowing us to stay in his home.

From Bingley we drove further north, stopped briefly to photograph a golf course near Settle, where cows graze outside fenced putting greens. We crossed over the border where Hadrian's wall once stretched for miles and entered the land of heather, Scotland; the cradle of golf, old castles, and the home of a very special person, STMA's honorary member, John Souter.

We spent three days with John and his lovely wife, Christine, their children, and John's associates and colleagues. We saw a great deal, shared some wonderful moments and learned so much from this man who I consider the best sports turf consultant and contractor anywhere in the world. We had a glimpse of women's field hockey, and watched a rugby match in which young John



Left to right: John Souter, Christine Souter, and Eddie Connaughton, John's associate, visiting the Stirling Golf Club.



At Wembley Stadium, London. Left to right; Steve Tingley, head groundsman, Barry Pollen, events coordinator and Bill Mills, past editor for IOG Groundsman Magazine.



Left to right; Eddie Connaughton, Dr. Kent Kurtz, Jimmy Paterson, and John Souter, standing where the Queen observes Royal Polo Matches. Souter of Stirling contracts maintenance of turf.

and his school mates played. Then on to Glasgow to look at a beautiful soccer field and watch the Celtics play the team from Aberdeen. We also had the opportunity to visit Gleneagles, the hotel described as "the Scottish palace in the Glens" and its ancient golf course. The new Gleneagles Jackie Stewart Shooting School and the new Gleneagles, Mark Phillips Equestrian Centre, all show the mark or horticultural touch of John Souter. Before leaving Scotland, John's associate, the infamous Eddie Connaughton, the Irishman who graduated from Purdue, hosted us for lunch at the Stirling Golf Club where he is a member. I have yet to collect the money Eddie owes me for the Aberdeen victory over the Celtics, but we will catch up with him when he comes to Anaheim in February for the golf course show.

We returned to London and spent four days with Bob Corbin. I squeezed in a few little side trips to visit London area sports turf facilities. My friend, Bill Mills (retired groundsman and past editor of the Groundsman Magazine) drove me to Wembley Stadium to meet head groundskeeper, Steve Tingley. Then John Warner, Master Groundsman of the Year in 1986-87 and a

great friend of STMA, took me to Wimbledon to see the famous lawn tennis courts and to meet the head groundskeeper, Jim Thorn. After visiting Wimbledon, I had the pleasure of visiting John Warner's home and the school sports fields he maintains. His house is on the premises of the school in the Wimbledon area. Mrs. Warner, Margaret, a lovely woman, served us afternoon tea and cake and I was overwhelmed by the hospitality.

The Jockey Club of Great Britain sponsored their first maintenance seminar for grounds personnel from 59 racecourses. In contrast to the racetracks in the U.S. where the majority of races are staged on dirt courses, all horse racing in the U.K. is run on turfgrass surfaces. The seminar was held at the Ascot race course and friends John Warner, John Souter and others, along with myself, provided talks on construction and maintenance of turf race courses.

We reconnected with John Souter, who showed us the 10 Royal Polo fields he has contracted to upgrade and maintain (one polo field is equivalent in size to 6 soccer pitches and nearly 10 American football fields). Then we went on a quick jaunt to the estate of former King Edward VIII and his American wife, Wallis Simpson, known as Fort Belvedere. John is renovating a lawn tennis and

croquet court as well as constructing two polo fields for the current land owner, a Canadian businessman.

The last days in London were spent with the IOG and their staff at the Sports and Leisure World Trade Exposition. During the three days of this event, held at the Royal Windsor Racecourse, over 40,000 grounds personnel from the U.K., and many other countries, visited the exposition. By far, it is the most spectacular and largest trade show in the world with well over 400 firms represented. The IOG has sponsored this annual event for 43 years, utilizing volunteer members from throughout the U.K., assisted by the paid office staff of five delightful ladies. Every sports turf manager in the United States should make an attempt to see this trade exposition. The professionalism of these people is simply incredible. I served as an honorary judge of exhibits and was involved in the presentation reception in which the top exhibits were awarded certificates of merit.



Jim Thorn (left), head groundsman, Wimbledon, and John Warner at the All England Croquet and Lawn Tennis Club.



Institute of Groundsmanship-friends of STMA. Back row, left to right; Joy, Derek Walder, Diane, Bob Corbin, Sue, Raymond Johnson. Front row, left to right; Barbara, Eileen, John Warner.

Thanks to all of our friends at the IOG for a most memorable and outstanding experience. I arrived home thrilled, renewed and extremely grateful that I had this opportunity to be with so many wonderful people.