

October 2021 Course report

Apologies for the lack of reports in recent months, our last report was in July. So much has happened since then. I will try and cover the most meaningful events here.

Greens

9th October, and I am happy with the health of the greens and our disease management strategy. The disease pressure has been high in recent weeks. We have had Anthracnose and a touch of Microdochium Patch (using the correct terminology here, we all know it as Fusarium or Fuzz!).

Fungal pathogens which cause the symptoms we see are always present. Our task is to try and keep the turf strong enough to defend itself. This involves a few interventions -

We have a calculated approach to nutrition, applying Nitrogen in different forms but to the end goal of giving the plant what it needs at the right time.

Accompanying the feeding programme is what the industry have branded an 'Integrated Turf Management' programme (ITM). Which basically means, we need to carefully monitor all factors which will cause a fungal pathogen attack and adjust our practices to suit.

- Height of cut
- Quality of cut
- Mowing frequency
- Rolling frequency
- Aeration
- Units of Nitrogen added
- Leaf moisture
- Use of growth regulators

And then a subcategory of "Bio-Stimulants" which may or may not work but companies are pushing them as many fungicide chemicals have been withdrawn, products which include –

- Seaweed
- Amino acids
- Fulvic acids
- Molasses
- Garlic (yes, garlic! –certified nematicide but also sold as a 'plant health' promoter)
- Phosphites
- Chitosan

To help aid all this there are a few fungicides available but are nowhere near the technology of old. These are mainly systemic and preventative, meaning we need to spray before we get disease. The plant needs to be growing so it can take the product up through its internal workings and stop an attack.

Inevitably, the putting surface suffers in high disease pressure times like we are seeing now. The height of cut is lifted to help the turf photosynthesise in lower light conditions. Fewer cuts in the week too to let the plant focus on strength rather than recovery.

6th green

There has been an underlying problem on the right-hand side of the 6th green for some time. The roots are shallow, and we have put this down to the neighbouring trees and poor irrigation coverage as the irrigation head opposite had sunk.

With the wet conditions this year the problem was masked with green growth, unfortunately the deep scarifier quickly reminded us that all was not well. The shallow rooting turf had no strength against the machine and quickly ripped.

We have seeded and dressed the damage but, as soil conditions are not great, this is taking time to heal.

There is also some fungus growing in the area. We did know of it but when we did not cut for a while, they presented themselves just above the surface. Here is a picture of the harvest.



The fungus produces some big fruiting bodies, like mushrooms. As we cut and roll continually the mushrooms seem to grow downwards and avoid detection. My guess was that they are of the 'puffball' type commonly seen on the course, mainly tees and fairways and are associated with fairy rings. I sent a sample of the rootzone to the Turf Disease Centre. I wanted to eliminate cyst nematodes which could also cause root damage. Fortunately, this was not the case.

The disease centre could not identify what the Fungus was, so put me in touch with Bob Taylor, a consultant ecologist. He identified them as 'Scleroderma Bovista', it is an 'Earthball', not a Puffball as I first thought. I have never heard of an Earthball! They are poisonous to humans (know your mushrooms before picking) and they themselves are saprophytic, meaning they live off dead and decaying organic matter.

Bob gave me some guidance on possible remedies but said it would be very difficult to fix. I will further my investigations and trial some ideas.

9th green

With hydraulic oil leaks, it is the heat that kills the grass. It is then difficult to get grass to grow in the area with the oil still present. We have a product which if applied quickly enough you can salvage the situation. We could not save the original grass, but there is growth from recently sown bent seed. Hopefully we can get some coverage before the temperature drops.

13th green

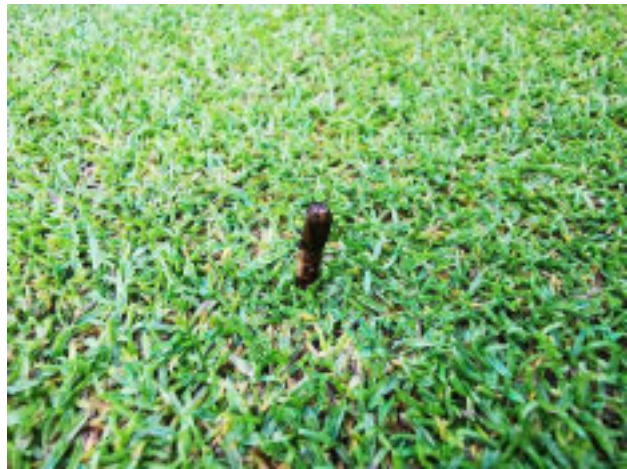
For some unexplained reason, the drainage to the back right of the green has stopped working efficiently enough to prevent puddling. The area was under water for so long during July and August, it became covered in black algae as it was robbed of oxygen. This has happened again after the recent heavy rain.

Attempts to rod the drainpipe were unsuccessful. My thoughts now turn to digging down to the drainage from the right-hand side and seeing if we can resolve the issue this way. We will report back our findings.

Leather Jackets

The big hatch is almost over. The crane fly has made their brief appearance, annoyingly bouncing over surfaces, and laying eggs.

You may have noticed that we have not aerated at all over the last 6-8 weeks. By not making holes we think there is less chance the eggs will survive. It has been suggested that rolling the greens will kill the eggs. With an aeration hole, full of sand you create the perfect environment for a leather jacket to live. The larvae migrate up and down the hole depending on its life cycle and weather conditions. The roots of the grass plant are attracted to these holes and unwittingly get eaten.



Hopefully by changing our practices we have made an impact on numbers. We managed to sheet several greens earlier in the year but not all of them. In the spring I will be monitoring the greens and seeing if there is a significant difference.

14th hole improvements

By coincidence, exactly 2 years ago to the day I took a photo of the 14th hole, here it is –



And below, taken on the 15th of September 2021.



For me, the improvements have been above and beyond expectations. The course architects, Howard and William Swan of SwanDesign must be given credit. The initial vision and followed with the fine detailed finishing, make this hole a golfing hole to be proud of.

The contractors M J Abbott LTD have to be mentioned as well, to execute all of this exceptional work in 10 working days is incredible. This, in my opinion, is why it is worth getting professionals in to do a professional job.

There are a small number of people who regard the non playing rough in front of the hole as not what they were expecting.

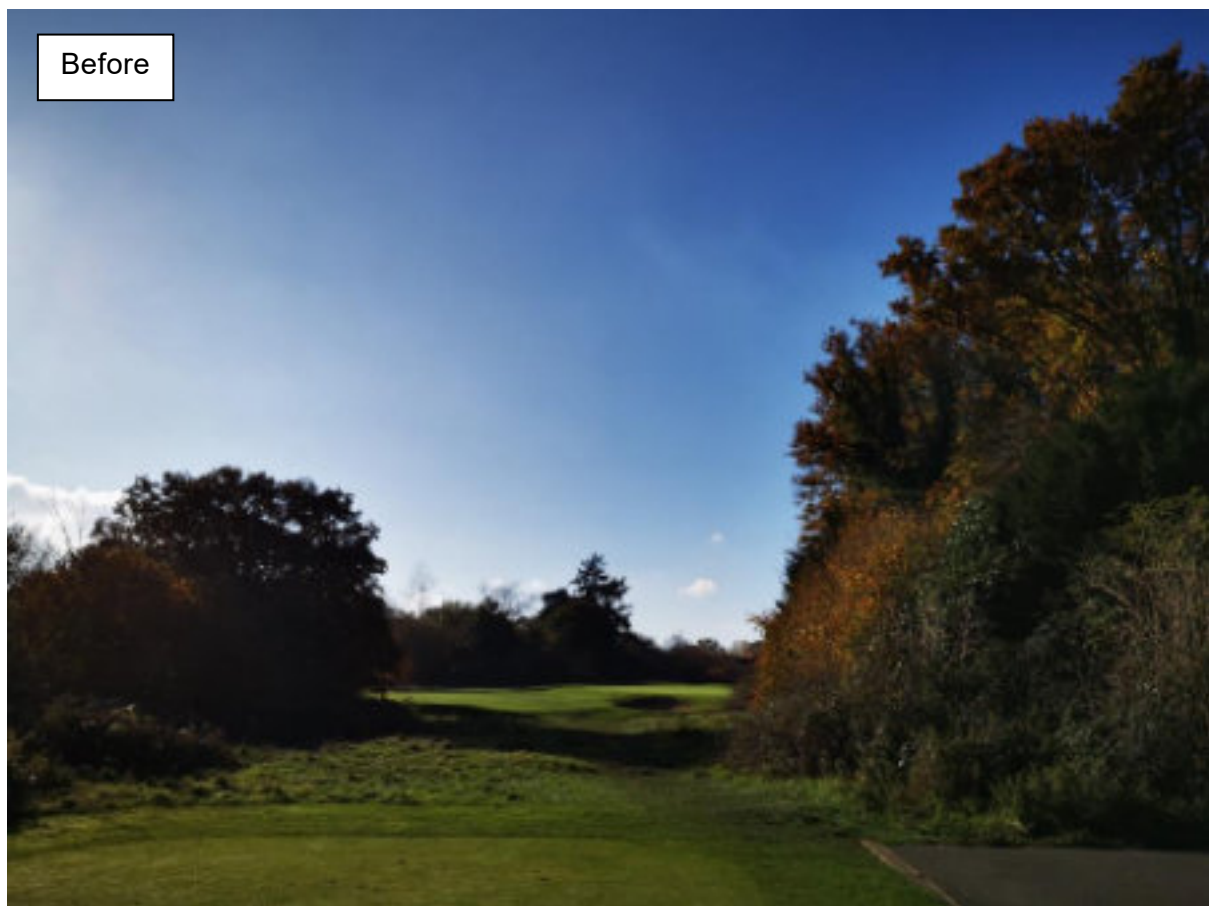
I have included (below) a photo from the tee reminding us of what was there before. We had to navigate a wall of trees and scrub. To the center was a well trodden path, with stone breaking the surface. Left of that was long, non playing rough which was not managed.

In the 'after' picture, the area left of the trodden path has not been touched, due to the summer being one of warm and wet days, the grass has grown tall and thick.

The trodden path surface was broken up with a digger to allow seed into the surface. It was a mix of grass seed and wild flowers. The flower seed did much better than the fine grasses.

This is still work in progress. Our finished expectations is one of fine grasses and wild flower. The height of which will depend on the conditions, but as you can see in the 'before' photo, the grass barely comes above knee height after a 'normal' summer.

With our planned applications of Graminicide, we will reduce the amount of coarse grasses. There is no plan of topping up with top soil as this will just encourage lush, thick growth. We need to keep the area as barren as possible to favour the finer species. The growth is thick closer to the path on the right where the soil is rich with organic matter. This is way off the golfing line, and will act as a barrier for trolleys and buggies.





Long rough

We have started the process of cutting and clearing the long rough. It is imperative that we remove the grass, so it does not break down and feed the sward, favouring the coarse species.

This is proving to be difficult this year as the rough is thicker than normal. Last year as pictured, we could easily use our flail and cut and remove in one pass.



This year the machine is struggling. It may have to be cut and collected by hand.

We have plans to treat the areas with a Graminicide which targets coarse grasses and leaves the finer ones.

As a warning, the dying grasses will not look attractive, but the hope is the fine species will dominate the sward. We will apply again in spring when growth starts again.

Another weapon in our armoury is a flower called *Rhinanthus Minor*, or 'yellow rattle'. We will trial this in the long rough too. The semi parasitic plant is being used in golf courses across the country with great results. It attaches to the roots of grasses and gains some nutrients from them. The resulting long rough has the same characteristics and framing qualities, but is thinner and we can find those wayward balls faster.

One good thing to come out of the lack of summer –grass coverage is at an all-time high. We would like to protect this as much as possible, so traffic management hoops will be out to stop wear.

Worm casts

It is with great annoyance, that I report the return of worm casts.

Let us forget any possibility of any chemical coming to market which will inhibit worm populations. Our golf market is tiny, so spend the tens of millions of pounds it takes to bring a product to market is not financially viable.

We used to use a product with an active ingredient called Carbendazim. This was originally used as a fungicide and to my knowledge, it was banned because of its harm to the environment (which is a good thing). At half the rate it was found to reduce worm casts. It did not directly kill worms; it made their food inedible. If they could not find a food source close by, they would starve.



What we can do –

- Use brushes to disperse the casts, new technologies are becoming available.
- Apply growth regulators so cutting is minimised, therefore damage to units and smearing is minimised
- Collect grass clippings as best we can
- Communicate
- Having realistic expectations

It was thought that reducing the PH level, or top dressing with coarse sand would deter worms. All trials have been unsuccessful.

Staff

Unfortunately, William Bray has left. He cited a need to put his health first as he found the work too physical. The timing could not have been worse. He left in the beginning of August, in the height of competitions. We put an advert on Facebook quickly for a temporary position. It was with great fortune that we managed to get the services of Brandon Cox. Brandon had worked with us before as a summer casual. He slotted in perfectly and got us through the competitions and maintenance week.

It was, after all a temporary agreement, and he did not want any more than that. It was a real shame as he fitted in well.

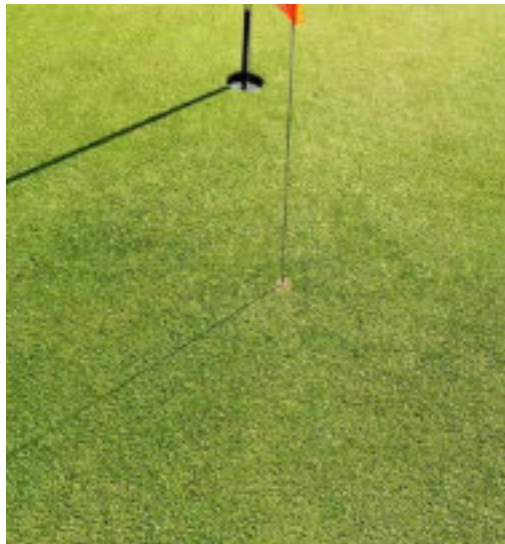
We are in the process of recruiting again.

Pitch Marks

I would like to thank everyone for properly repairing pitch marks. I see some people spend minutes repairing, these people deserve a special mention –you know who you are –and you are a champion of Rowland Castle Golf Club.

For those who have a go at repairing but fail to do it properly, I am afraid to say you are probably doing more harm than good. I have seen some suspect techniques; the latest being to hit the pitch mark with a putter until flat. I see the appeal as you do not need to bend down. However, an unrepaired pitch mark has a chance of being rescued by the following group or the greens staff the following morning. A poorly repaired pitch mark will scar for weeks on end.

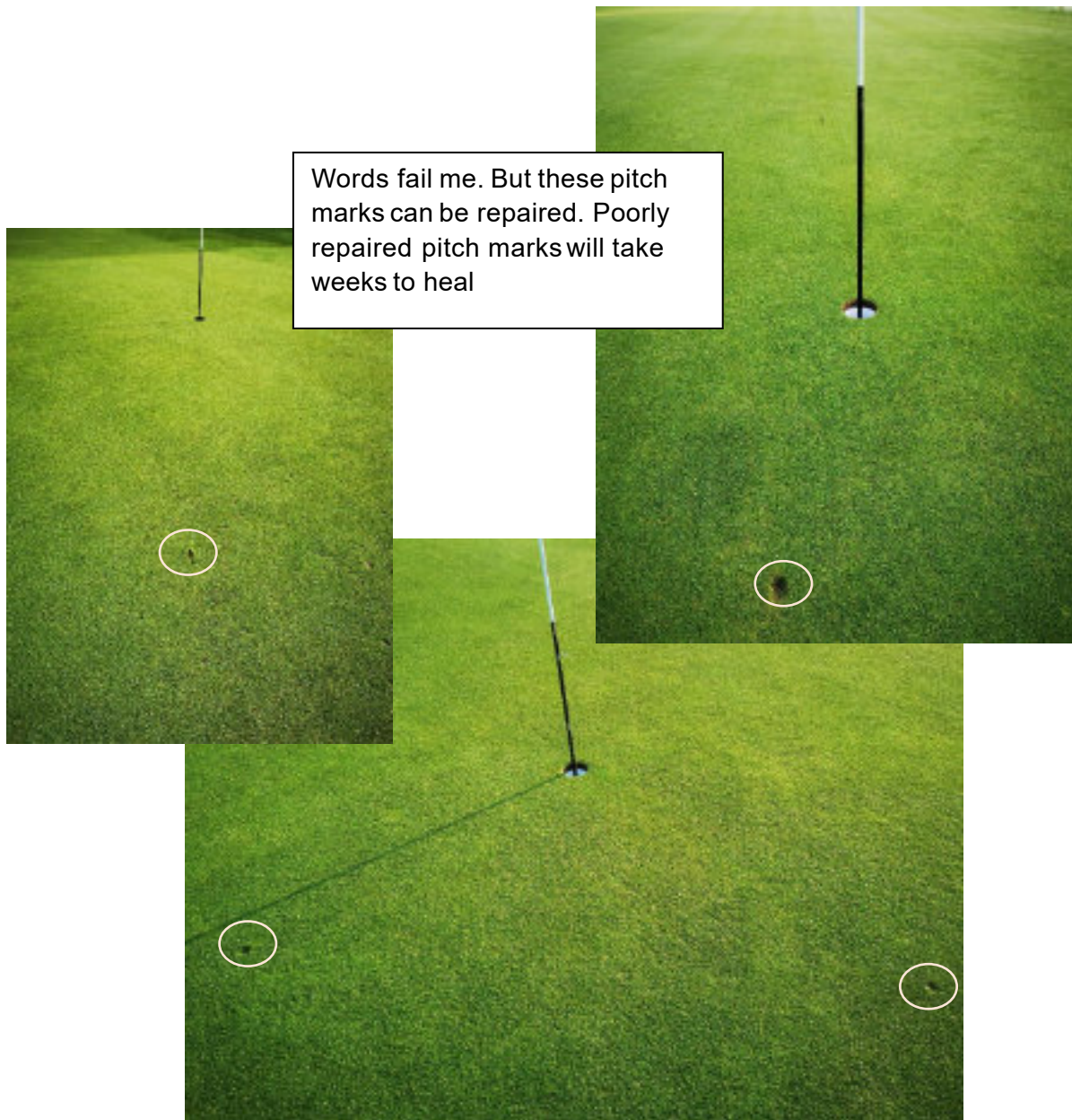
To illustrate this, when changing holes for the club championship, I placed a flag in every **poorly repaired pitch mark scar**. I had around 50 flags, but I ran out, there were so many more scars I could have flagged.



We will never lose this problem, but with the many people who do repair using the correct technique, we can achieve a better putting surface for everyone.

Here is a short video explaining everything

<https://youtu.be/GuYXMn4tA10>



A brief catch up –



July - When this moss first appeared in April I was not concerned, thinking it will soon disappear in the baking heat of the forthcoming summer! I was wrong. This is me attempting to halt the spread by painting on a strong mix of Iron. I will not do that again! Sorry about that.



July 12th - The worst rain event I have ever witnessed at RCGC.

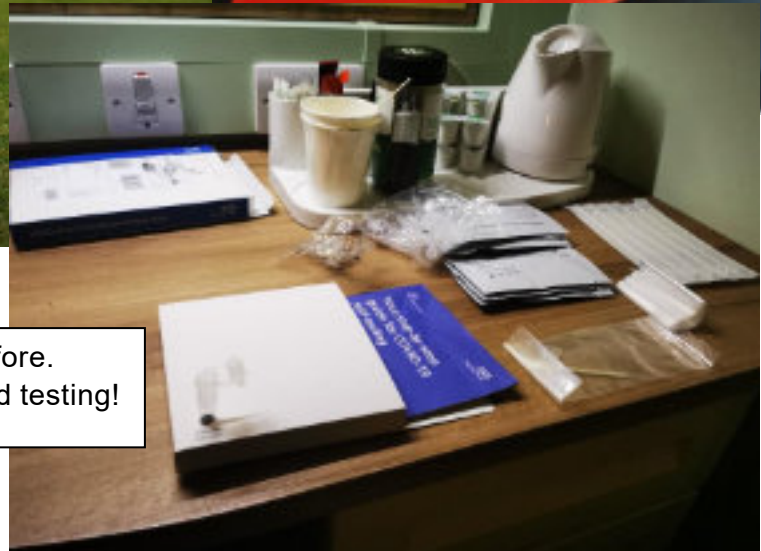


The resulting damage cost us heavily in labour. There was another downpour like this later in the month with the same consequences. We never did catch up. The effects would show later when we could not achieve the presentation detail we planned for the Dupree and Pro-Am events.

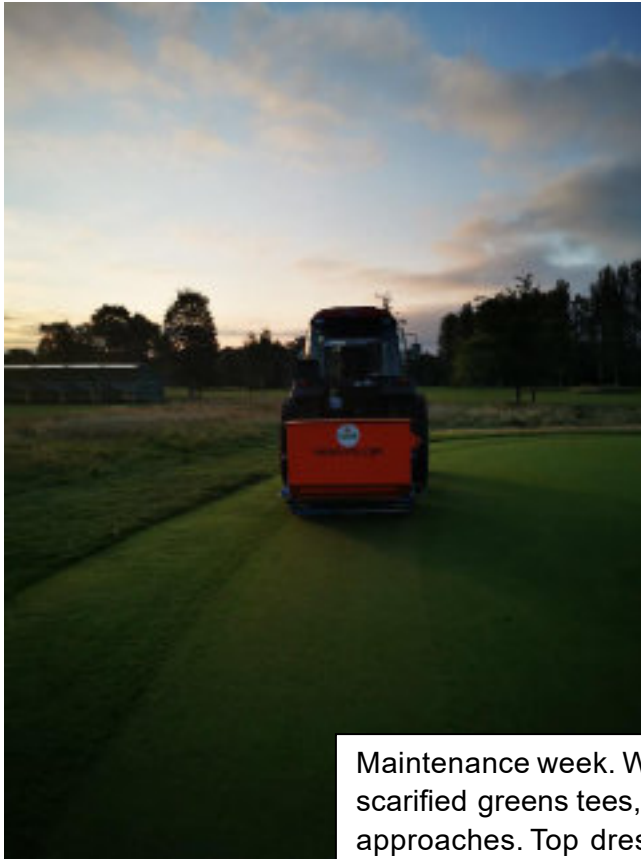




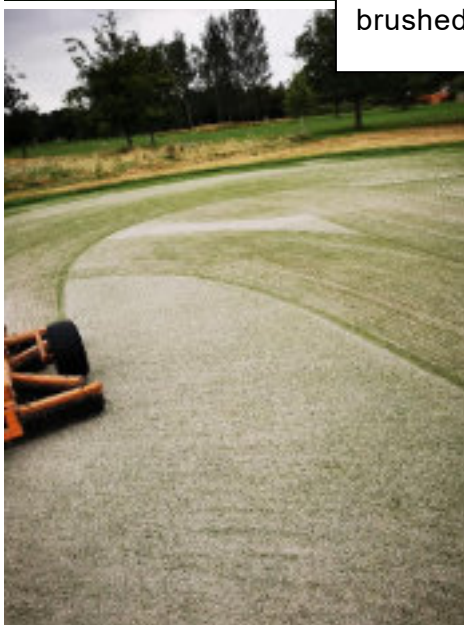
An Open unlike any before.
Bubbles and daily Covid testing!



Royal St George's Course Manager, Paul Larson with my team on the last day of The Open. And yes, he always wears the Converse trainers!

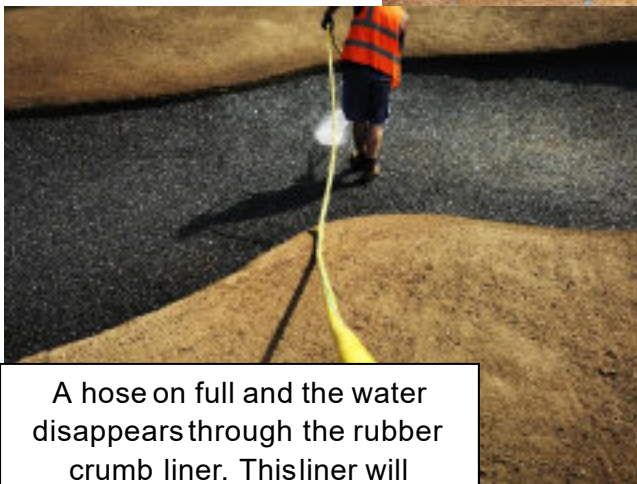


Maintenance week. We deep scarified greens tees, and approaches. Top dressing was brushed in





The 14th hole construction work.
Some stages you may have missed.



A hose on full and the water disappears through the rubber crumb liner. This liner will prevent stones and other material contaminating the sand.



The 3rd fairway - My favourite picture of the year so far. The other pictures just illustrating what we share our land with, both can live side by side with careful management.

