



PATHS

Dave Weston, former Secretary of Enmore Park GC, writes about the advantages of installing paths, for aesthetic and health & safety reasons, on the golf course.

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Ten years ago I held the view that the aesthetic qualities of a natural golf course were marred by the presence of the unsightly surfaces of artificial paths. I no longer hold that opinion. The pressure to play golf during our current wet winters is producing ugly consolidated muddy tracks on many courses. These are the result of buggy users and trolley-pullers using the same route from the rear of each green to the next tee. Access areas round the tee, if grassed, becomes badly worn by such traffic. These muddy areas and tracks I now find more visually offensive than a properly constructed artificial path, especially if there is a long natural recovery time and the unpleasant brown mess persists into the spring or early summer before the grass reappears.

There is the additional benefit of the improved health and safety factor of having a properly prepared surface rather than a potentially dangerous slippery track. This is especially true if the route is sloping and could be a "risk assessment" consideration for the course needing to be closed as a Safety precaution.

Those clubs currently observing the damage outlined above should consider the introduction of a Path Development Program to cover the routes from the rear of each green to, and past, the next tee. If there is similar damage, tee to fairway on Par 4 or 5s, or tee to green on Par 3s, proper planned paths leading away from the tee may also be considered.

This is the time of year to inspect the course and make a record of all the worn areas. It is unlikely that there will be a problem on every hole and by noting the ones that are, a set of priorities can be devised to deal with the worst of them, and gradually improve the rest over a planned period.

The starting point is to look precisely at where the tracks have developed and replace them with a well-constructed path. There is little point in devising an alternative route. Golfers are creatures of habit and will continue to go their usual way even if there is a new path provided only a few yards away. Paths should be neatly edged and wide enough to comfortably take a buggy, or for two trolley-pullers to walk side by side and converse. Access on and off the path must be level or properly graded or it will not be used. Bags have a habit of falling off trolleys if there are noticeable step-ups to negotiate from the paths back to the grass, and to avoid them, the players walk alongside the path!

There is always the problem of wear at the end of the path. Keen observers may have noticed the access solution on and off the bridges at The Open at Carnoustie last year, “D”-shaped areas had been constructed at each end, potentially to spread the wear.

By their nature paths seem to become watercourses in wet weather. If the path is on a slope, then any small loose constructional material such as wood-chip or shale gets washed down towards the bottom. Provision should be made, during construction, for the surface water to be piped into the course drainage system or to escape from the path at regular intervals. On nearly level ground, unless some form of drainage forms part of the path design, pooling may occur on the path, and then the golfers are not prepared to use it.

The most effective way of preventing the loose constructional material of the path from moving is to use one of the various designs of interlocking plastic moulding. This increases the cost of construction but it is better option than to have to continually carry out repairs after each period of heavy rain. If this method is too expensive then the path should be divided into small retaining segments to reduce surface movement. If visual aesthetics are an issue in a particular area, for example, the access path to the first tee, then artificial turf or a rubberised compound may be used.

It is in the vicinity of the teeing ground that most damage is done as buggies and trolleys are parked prior to the golfers playing. If the tee is rectangular, then provided it does not interfere with access for the staff to maintain the tee, a path may be built alongside it. If the winter teeing area is limited, artificial turf may be incorporated into the tee, or a tee-mat position built into the side of the path. If possible, the route design should be such, that between the rear of the green and access away from the next tee, the players will be on an artificial surface, apart from the playing of their next tee shot.

In adopting, designing and communicating a "Path Policy" to the members, the management are showing that the concerns of the membership for improved playing conditions, particularly in winter, are being addressed. Limitations to the rate of progress of those improvements is dependant on the club's income, which in turn is directly related to the willingness (or not!) of the membership to pay an increased subscription.



(Inset shows the use of H girders/sleepers and quick draining loose material in the construction of tee/path-Courtesy of Weston-super-Mare Golf Club)

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