

# One Year, Five Courses and Three Tournaments

## Preparing For Tournaments Down Under



The second green on the Legends Course at Moonah Links. The Legends Course was opened just weeks prior to the 2003 Australian Open  
Picture: Moonah Links

**In previous editions of ATM we have highlighted the adventures of Australians packing their kitbags and heading overseas to further their turf management careers. Here Peter Stewart, greenkeeper at St. Andrews in Scotland, provides an account of his trip Down Under during 2003/2004 where he helped prepare some of Australia's finest courses for the rigours of tournament play.**

**A**s a young greenkeeper I had been pretty fortunate. Having just turned 22, I had already worked the 2000 British Open plus three European Tour events at St Andrews, the home of golf.

Yet I felt I needed something new to further motivate me in my chosen career. What better than the opportunity to gain more tournament experience by spending a year in Australia working on some of its finest golf courses and preparing them for top international events.

In March 2000 an Australian greenkeeper by the name of David Goldie came to St Andrews to assist us with preparations for the 2000 Open. David spoke passionately of prestigious courses such as Royal Melbourne, Kingston Heath and Metropolitan, and I found myself intrigued.

David's professionalism and interest in turf management left me extremely impressed by Australian greenkeepers.

After the Open, David was appointed assistant superintendent at 13th Beach and

shortly after I was given the opportunity to head out to Australia to work there.

Under the working holiday visa regulations for Australia I knew I was only able to stay at 13th Beach for three months so I started looking into other courses for work before and during the tournaments they were hosting.

I sent my resume to Royal Melbourne and I felt extremely fortunate when superintendent Jim Porter contacted me to say he had a position for me during the Heineken Classic.

**13TH BEACH, BARWON HEADS, VICTORIA - April 2003**

Arriving with my fiancée Kelly in late March 2003, I was to be based first at 13th Beach with David and superintendent Steve Hewitt.

The sight of 13th Beach was nothing short of awesome. This Tony Cashmore classic links had only been open two years but looked as if it had stood as long as the Old Course at St Andrews. I couldn't believe the links appeal of the course; it looked and played fast and firm with holes winding through the sand dunes with the sea crashing in the background.

13th Beach is situated on a sandy soil site. There is a variety of grass species on the course including Penn-G2 bentgrass greens, a mix of creeping red and Chewings fescue on the tees, collars, surrounds and fairways, with Plateau couchgrass as a base on the tees and common couch as a base on the fairways.

While there I was involved in all aspects of maintenance of the Beach Course. I found the day-to-day running of the course very interesting, as jobs such a fertilising and spraying were a regular occurrence. At St Andrews fertiliser and chemicals are applied very rarely.



Groundstaff at St. Andrews tend to the 18th. Peter Stewart is based at St. Andrews and has helped prepare the course for a number of major tournaments

The different turf cultures between Scotland and Australia require very different management. I found this very interesting and was always keen to do these jobs when I had the chance.

Something else I found very interesting was the use of effluent water. With drought issues

restricting the use of potable water it is another pressure the Australian superintendent faces in day-to-day course management. Fortunately in Scotland it is an issue we don't have to face.

The advantages of using effluent was that Steve could irrigate the course in times of

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severe drought when the use of potable water was restricted. The down side is that the water quality is quiet poor with salinity ranging from 900-1200ppm with high sodium and chloride content. Fortunately with the course having a sandy profile, during the winter rains most of the salt accumulation is flushed out before it can cause any problems.

I was also involved in the construction of the new Creek Course. This was a joint design venture between Cashmore and Nick Faldo. I had been involved in many construction projects at St. Andrews (tees, bunkers and a new green), but never the construction of a course. It was an opportunity I enjoyed immensely, experiencing the likes of hydro seeding and sprigging and also the use of the laser level to build tees.

After leaving 13th Beach I attended the 19th Australian Turfgrass Conference in Adelaide where I was able to set up work at The Grand Golf Club and Moonah Links for the 2003 Australian Open.

The conference was fantastic and helped to further enhance my knowledge of Australian golf course turf management. Everyone was extremely friendly and very interested in chatting about St Andrews and other British courses.

### THE GRAND GOLF CLUB, NERANG, QUEENSLAND - July 2003

The Grand was a fantastic course and only two years previously hosted the Australian Open won by Stuart Appleby. This Greg Norman designed course was highly manicured and the fairways weaved through gum trees that were hundreds of years old.

In fine turf terms I was as far away from St. Andrews as I had ever been but loved every minute learning turf management practices the Queensland way. I was involved with the winter work program which included sodding and construction. They also installed a new irrigation system.

Although the course was in dormancy, superintendent Rod Cook and his team gave me a fantastic insight into turf management and I would have loved to have been there in the height of the growing season.

### MOONAH LINKS, MORNINGTON PENINSULA, VICTORIA

#### 2003 Australian Open, December 2003

I started at Moonah Links on September 1. I was shown the Open and Legends courses by superintendent Leigh Yanner. At that time the Open Course was fully established and the Legends course was still in the grow-in phase.

Leigh was only in his early 30s and I couldn't believe how calm and composed he was when there was so much construction going on. The Open was only two months away and the clubhouse and all surrounding areas were still a long way from completion.

At first sight I was very impressed with the Open Course and I knew from the start that I was going to love working there. Moonah Links would not have looked out of place on the Open rota in the UK such was its amazing links appeal.

Leigh had just returned from a two-week trip to the UK during which he had been to watch the 2003 Open at Royal St Georges, had played the Old Course at my native St Andrews and met up with Links superintendent Gordon Moir.

He explained to me that he wanted to present the course in a true links fashion for the tournament and the chance to visit such courses

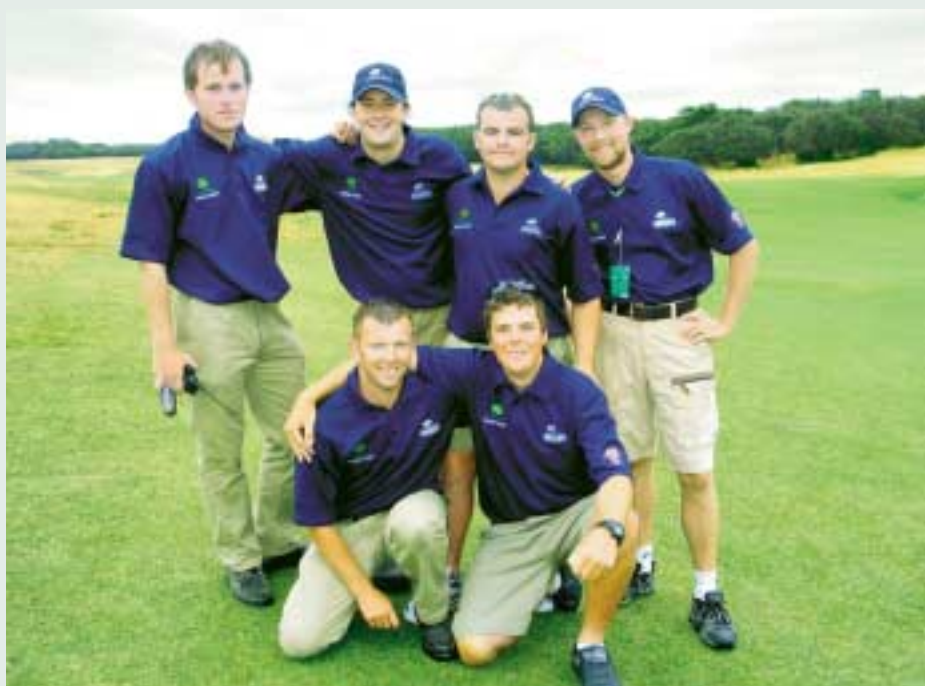
and chat with the superintendents was invaluable to his tournament preparation.

Moonah Links had a staff of 22 plus six international staff in the run up to the Open.

There were two guys from Ireland, one from England, one from New Zealand and one from Denmark as well as AGCSA Graduate of the Year James Dalton who was over from 13th Beach for six weeks to help out.

There was also another Scotsman, Graham Winter from Kingsbarns.

Leigh had two assistants, Scott Calder (Open Course) and Nathan Bennett (Legends Course)



Peter Stewart (back row, second from left) with the other internationals working at the 2003 Australian Open at Moonah Links



The Moonah Links crew with 2003 Australian Open winner Peter Lonard

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and together they had an extremely difficult job, not only preparing the Open course but getting the Legends open before deadline.

The team at Moonah was excellent and we worked extremely hard to get the Legends Course and all the surrounding clubhouse areas ready before we could really turn our attention to the Open Course.

Six weeks out from the Open we started to increase the mowing frequency. Everything was cut daily with the fairways mown in one direction. This was done so as to let the natural undulations be the main feature of the fairways, a method we also use at St Andrews for the British Open and Dunhill Cup.

We also started to hand mow the greens every day; we used brushes on the mowers as and when it was required. The brushes were used to take the grain out of the greens and also to give as much contact between plant and ball. This is a practise we do not use at St Andrews but was extremely effective in producing a true roll. Greens were dusted lightly on a fortnightly basis then brushed and then cut with the brushes down.

One month out, news came through that the Open was to be put back three weeks due to

Channel 7's clash of commitments with the Davis Cup.

This was a blow for us internationals as four of us were due to finish up at the end of November after the tournament as that was as long as our visas allowed us.

The only option was for Leigh to get in touch with the Department of Immigration and see if he could put in a special request to keep us there until after the tournament in December. After a short wait we were granted our wish.

Leigh had been Richard Forsyth's assistant at Metropolitan Golf Club before taking on the role as Moonah superintendent. He had been involved in the World Matchplay there as well as an Australian Open so he was no stranger to the rigours of a big tournament occasion.

As this was his first time in charge of a large-scale tournament he wanted to get it just right. After the unfortunate circumstances surrounding the 2002 Australian Open and the choice of venue being one hour away from Melbourne on a course that had never hosted a major tournament before, the pressure was on.

So the whole team gave it 100 per cent up to and during the tournament. We worked

tirelessly without any time off because everyone wanted to get the course just right, a result I personally feel we achieved.

For the tournament we arrived at 4am. I cut greens 1, 16 and 17 and everything else was cut every day in the morning and afternoon except the greens which only required one cut a day to get them running at 10.5 feet!

The course presented as well as any I have seen for a tournament. The only downside if any was the fact we had a bit more rain than we wanted in the run up and so the fairways were darker in colour than we would have hoped for.

The course was received extremely well by all the players and spectators. Even Open winner Peter Leonard was so impressed by the presentation of the course that he twisted our arms into drinking bourbon and coke out of the Stonehaven Cup with him the night after the tournament finished!

The memory of Moonah Links and the Australian Open is one that I will hold on to for the rest of my life. It was a fantastic experience and one I loved every moment of. I learnt so much from Leigh, Scott and Nathan and all the team in my four months there.

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Peter Stewart was lucky enough to work under Jim Porter at Royal Melbourne during the Heineken Classic

### ROYAL MELBOURNE, BLACK ROCK, VICTORIA

#### Heineken Classic, February 2004

After Christmas spent with family in Adelaide, I returned to Melbourne with the exciting prospect of working at Royal Melbourne for the Heineken Classic.

Royal Melbourne is without a doubt the pinnacle of Australian golf courses! As well as being Australia's most famous golf course it is held in extremely high regard throughout the world.

Royal Melbourne superintendent Jim Porter has been there for 15 years and been involved in preparing the course for no less than 13 tournaments. The fact that he knew his course inside-out became apparent from the first time I met and spoke with him back in March.

He reminded me very much of Old Course superintendent Eddie Adams in the way he knew his course and exactly what was required to get it to peak condition just at the right time.

Royal Melbourne had a certain mystique about it, very much like that of St Andrews. It goes without saying it's a very special course and was already in fantastic condition when I arrived. The staff were very much in tournament mode as we were only six weeks out.

Mowing frequency was already very intense when I arrived. The whole course was being cut every day and the use of wire brushes on the greens mowers was becoming more prevalent.

Staff were issued with their jobs for the tournament not long after I started. I was going to be hand cutting in the morning and then rolling greens, which I was really looking forward to.

Jim had a target speed of between 11.5-12 feet so readings were taken on a regular basis during the weeks before and maintenance adjusted accordingly. Greens were dusted on a regular basis also in the month before the tournament.

Fertilising was done on a fortnightly basis from about eight weeks out. Rates were determined by growth, but mostly it was low rates of nitrogen but high potash.

Each full-time staff member was assigned their own holes, usually two or three, which they took care of daily after their morning jobs. They looked after bunker maintenance, monitoring of greens (hand watering where required) and general hole maintenance. I really liked this idea as all staff took a real pride in their holes and there was plenty of friendly rivalry.

The Suttons mix bentgrass greens at Royal Melbourne are the truest and most uniform greens I have ever seen.

The tournament itself went off without a hitch. Members of staff knew exactly what was required of them during the tournament.

Greens were double cut each day and rolled to get the required speed from them. Some greens with severe slopes were monitored and only cut and rolled once. This required some precision to make sure they ran at exactly the same speed. This further displayed Jim Porter's knowledge and understanding of his course.

One of the highlights of the tournament was after finishing rolling the 17th green on Friday morning I was approached by Greg Norman. We had a five minute chat about the course and St Andrews. He had a very good knowledge of turf management and it was great to talk to an Australian golfing legend.

After finishing at Royal Melbourne I was lucky enough to go to Mark Parker's Concord Golf Club in Sydney to help out for the Women's Australian Open. It was a great way to top off my Australian experience and also get another tournament under my belt.

#### The green, green grass of home

One year, five courses and three tournaments passed by in a flash, but my memories and love for Australia will certainly never fade.

At the time of writing this I am back at St Andrews and working on the Old Course which has a new head greenkeeper in Euan Grant after Eddie Adams departed after 19 years to work as a consultant on the European Tour.

Since my return we have hosted the British Amateur and are preparing for the Dunhill Cup. As soon as that ends we will be busy preparing the Old Course for the 2005 British Open.

My time in Australia was one big learning curve, which is what I feel the profession of turf management is all about. I found Australian turf managers to be extremely hard working, professional and knowledgeable.

Their passion was very similar to that of our own in the UK. We all strive to create the same finished product - the best turf possible. It's just that the methods we use to achieve this are slightly different.

Although there was one thing that will always remain better in Australia - the weather! ☀️