

Southport's second nine holes

By E. F. (Pat) Doyle

The following article should be of interest to many 9-Hole Clubs contemplating expansion to 18 holes and also to embryonic Clubs about to embark on their first nine.

At a time of rising costs of labour and material, the Southport Club in six months had its second nine holes ready for play at a cost of £750.

As late as 1948 the Southport Club purchased the freehold property of the Club, including undeveloped land suitable for expansion to 18 holes, from a syndicate of private owners and since then its progress has been truly remarkable. In two years, what was a mediocre nine hole lay-out has today become a first rate country course of 18 holes. Apart from the addition of the second 9 holes and revolutionary changes to the existing nine, one Club has become fully mechanised with a modern tractor, fairway mowers, an "Overgreens" mower and other modern ancillary equipment.

With the post war boom in tourist traffic on the South Coast the Club was soon faced with the problems of course congestion, particularly at weekends when many revenue producing visitors were turned away. The remedy then obvious – eighteen holes were necessary.

The second nine hole country, although generally flat, showed considerable undulation in places and luckily was not too heavily timbered. However there was considerable swamp-oak growth plus a liberal sprinkling of gums and wattles. Soil was of the sandy loam variety, completely free from stones and ideal for working with the bull-dozer and later with the fairway mowers. Natural grasses comprised principally a *Paspalum Compressum* with many acres of 3-ft. high blady grass interspersed.

1. **Positioning of greens and fairways:** First procedure, and of course the most important, was to locate the approximate position of the greens. Because of the low-lying nature of the country every piece of elevated ground was seized upon to establish maximum drainage. In several cases it was decided that, at the risk of shortening or lengthening holes beyond generally accepted standards, it was far better to have freedom from possible flooding or have sour turf under wet conditions.

Concurrent with this trial and error green spotting, a series of plasticine scale models was constructed. Each model was designed to suit its particular locale and when the time arrived for the actual laying down was faithfully reproduced.

Outlining the fairways was a time consuming effort. We found that the most effective method was to demark the borders with literally miles of cheap, thick string. This was hung from tree to tree and in open spaces suspended on stakes.

2. **Bull-dozing operations:** Thanks to the generosity of certain Club members we were indeed fortunate to secure gratis the use of a D7 bull-dozer for a week, which time was sufficient to cover all the necessary work.

Fortunately the Club did not fall into the error of gouging out fairways in monotonous straight lines, but rather threaded them through the more attractive groups of trees. The general procedure was to leave small groves here and there and if there was any doubt about removing a single tree it was left. We realised that playing conditions later would determine whether certain trees should be removed or not.

As it turned out such was often the case and many trees have since been eliminated but without in any way detracting from the pleasing appearance.

As the season was suitable, a thorough burn off was possible and this gave a good view of what lay beneath the grass and opened up problems of fairway construction. Concurrent with tree felling the dozer did a tremendous job of scraping off anthills and small hillocks and filled many larger holes with this soil without cutting into the natural grass level.

The Committee took a tremendous gamble in the formation of the greens. As the soil was of the sandy loam variety it was assumed that this in itself would drain adequately. Finances would not permit extensive rubble, ashes or piping in the foundations and luckily the guess has turned out trumps.

After a preliminary pegging out according to the scale models, three of the greens were simply gouged out of loamy ridges. These were saucer shaped opening in front to the fairways. Five of the others on lower ground were pushed up by the dozer as far as from fifty yards away, care being taken not to leave too deep hollows that would hold casual water. Within six months these bare areas grassed over and were completely invisible.

As the two remaining greens were in lower lying areas they could not be dozed up and therefore under contract were built using "foreign" soil. In all cases the greens sloped upwards from front to back from zero to about three feet on average. The backs and sides were in turn sloped down to the surrounding fairway, thus allowing the mower access later and obviating the unsightly growth of grass that is so expensive and time consuming to keep tidy.

Greenside bunkers were cut using the dozer and thanks to the sandy ground allowing free drainage are in most cases just below ground level. The second nine carries no fairway bunkers as it was considered they are a heavy maintenance item and break up the continuity of fairway mowing. The course depends on the caginess of its bunkered greens for its playing difficulty.

Formation of tees was simple. They were dozed up from the surrounds, taking care that they sloped up gently from the fairways thus allowing cutting with the fairway mowers. In addition maximum height was never more than a foot, thus preventing excessive drying out in dry weather.

3. **Finishing greens and trees and drainage:** Following the rough bulldozer work the Club contracted a local firm of landscape gardeners to complete the finishing touches. This comprised the smoothing of all the rough earthworks, covering with two inches of clay (to retain moisture) and topping off with four inches of loam followed by couch planting.

Bumpy approaches to many of the greens received a liberal top-dressing at this point and prepared bunkers were filled with sand.

The drainage problem was acute but was satisfactorily solved by a series of wide V drains running along a main drain passing through the centre of the property. Main purpose of having well dished out drains was to allow grass to eventually grow down into them and permit easy mower access. Also box drains in sandy country are rapidly undermined and soon cave in under flood conditions and allow straggling grass to grow where the mowers cannot reach. Spoil from all the drains was utilized to fill in many holes in adjoining fairways. Cost of all these operations was approximately £400.

4. **Fairway formation:** In this respect the Club was very fortunate as there was in most parts a good basic growth of *Paspalum compressum* grass. We avoided rotary hoeing, harrowing or grading as we considered this would tend to kill too much grass or leave bare patches that would take years to recover. We simply hired an eight ton roller and towed it up and down the fairways when they were soft after rain. Results exceeded our wildest hopes as only the largest ridges and hollows remained. In the last 18 months these too have been practically eliminated by gradual filling with soil and finally by the action of the mowers which is perhaps the best method of fairway construction. Constant cutting worked wonders in a matter of months.
5. **Maintenance:** This was necessary for a period of 5 months and comprised watering, fertilising, mowing and constant weeding of the greens and tees. As the Club's two greenkeepers could not afford the time for this work it was provided by contract at a cost of £230. Water reticulation to all greens and tees cost the Club £120.

Conclusion: Although a tremendous amount remains to be done, particularly to arboretum, detailed planning for the future has obviated the radical (and expensive) alteration of any portion of the course. Nothing will be pulled apart for it will simply be a matter of adding inexpensively to what we have.

Although the total length is only 2700 yards the second nine holes is severely rated with a Standard Scratch of 33. Yardages and S.S. are as follows: 10th, 350 (s.s. 4): 11th, 145 (3): 12th, 335 (4): 13th, 185 (3): 14th, 435 (4): 15th, 385 (4): 16th, 425 (4): 17th, 140 (3): 18th, 300 (4).