

MAINTENANCE REPORT

BY STEVE MILLERCHIP

Dear Member,

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to our captain, Geoff Newton, for his excellent work in compiling the course reports, which many of us have enjoyed reading. Geoff has set a very high standard for these reports, and I will do my utmost to keep everyone informed of all developments going forward.

It is my intention to prepare the course reports quarterly.

Both golf courses have been exceptionally busy this spring. Given the number of rounds played, I believe the courses have held up remarkably well. Annually, around 27,500 rounds are played at West Cliffs and 40,000 at Praia D'El Rey. Both courses continue to rank in the top 10 in Portugal and the top 30 in Europe, and we are extremely fortunate to play on courses of such high quality.

PRAIA D'EL REY

Projects completed in the last three months:

- New steps have been built to access the back tees on hole number one. Members are asked to use these steps whenever possible to prevent damage to the banks leading up to the tees.
- A new back tee has been constructed on hole number 14.
- The two bunkers at the rear of hole eight have been replaced with new linings and drainage. Additionally, a bunker to the right of the seventh green has been replaced. This is part of an ongoing programme as some of the bunkers, over 20 years old, are showing their age. New bunker linings made from a rubber composite material, similar to that found on children's playgrounds, are being tested. These should help with drainage and sand compaction, reducing the frequency of bunker replacements.
- Many new satellite irrigation boxes have been installed, along with new software for the irrigation system. This software allows the time the sprinklers are on to be measured in seconds rather than minutes, which is highly efficient. This change is expected to save about 10,000,000 litres of water annually, equivalent to the water in the pond by the second hole.

Upcoming projects for the next three months:

- Work has started on a new yellow tee on hole number eight. The steps up to the tee box are being removed, and the tee will be considerably larger. During this time, the blue tee will be used.



The new yellow tee on hole 8 which is 3 times the size of the old one.



The new digger being put to good use in the construction of the new tee on 8.

- Further upgrades to the tees are planned, particularly replacing the blue tee on hole number 17.
- Significant efforts will be made to maintain and improve the buggy paths. Quotes are being obtained for replacing these paths with more durable materials, which should reduce future maintenance costs. Currently, about 600 labour hours a year are spent on buggy path maintenance.

New Equipment:

- Over €200,000 has been spent on new equipment, including:
 - A mini digger for work on bunkers, buggy paths, and irrigation ditches.
 - A new tractor with various attachments for woodcutting, verti-draining, and other maintenance tasks, expected to yield significant labour cost savings.
 - Three new manual mowers for tees, which are lighter and less compacting, helping to prolong the life of the tees and improve irrigation.
 - Two new electric buggies for staff and equipment transport, replacing models that are 26 years old.
 - Robots are being trialled for cutting fairways and rough. Currently, a robot is operating on hole number 10 and another on the driving range. These robots are expected to save on labour costs and improve drainage due to their lighter weight compared to traditional machinery.

Green Speed and Trueness:

- The average green speed in 2024 thus far is 10.1, with an average trueness of 7.62. These statistics are based on weekly readings taken from three greens in three different places.
- Efforts are ongoing to increase the firmness of the greens, with monitoring tools showing encouraging results.

Driving Range:

- There have been comments about the amount of sand used on the driving range. The heavy traffic necessitates a new row every 48 hours, leading to significant sand and grass seed usage. The entire range lasts about 24 days before the first row is reused, which is enough time for grass to cover but not establish strongly. Over the years, this has elevated the range significantly, requiring sprinkler adjustments. Solutions, including the use of mats, are being considered to address this issue.

Winter Rules:

As a result of the continuing improvement of the fairways and rough winter rules are no longer in use (effective 1st July)

WEST CLIFFS

Projects completed in the last three months:

- Two green-side bunkers on hole nine have been replaced with different types of linings for evaluation.
- Issues with invasive acacia trees and quickly growing new pine trees have been addressed. These plants require continuous management as they impact the playability of the course.

Upcoming projects for the next three months:

- The bunkers on hole 16 are a priority. There have been issues with sand quality, with some sand procured being contaminated with stones. Efforts are ongoing to resolve this with the supplier.
- Significant work is anticipated on the buggy paths, with quotes being obtained to replace the existing surface with a more durable artificial substance.

New Equipment:

- A new electric mower is on order, with delivery expected within 12 months.
- A visit from the new owners is scheduled to discuss capital expenditure and equipment acquisition.

Green Speed and Trueness:

- Green speeds have been a concern, particularly around the Portugal Day tournament. Speeds slowed due to pythium issues, but treatment has since improved the speed to 10.5.
- An expert from Lisbon University is investigating the cause of pythium, suspected to be related to the water used on the course. Pythium has been a persistent problem since the course was laid out. Chemical treatments do work and will continue to be used until the source can be identified and eliminated. Further the greens are being rolled more often which should help the speed of the surface when it is not possible to lower the height of the blades.

Fairways:

- Areas on the fourth fairway have been designated for re-wilding and cutting to rough height to protect properties from errant golf balls.

Greens:

- Blue spots marked 'A' and 'B' on greens have been part of a treatment study. Spots marked 'A' have been treated with hydrogen peroxide to balance organic matter, while spots marked 'B' have not. Soil samples are routinely sent to the United States for analysis to inform future chemical treatments aimed at firming the green surfaces.

Tees:

- Ongoing issues with small tees and heavy traffic persist. It is hoped that increasing the size of the tees will improve their condition.

Did You Know?

- Green speed is measured using a stimp meter, which averages the distance a ball rolls from both directions. Comparatively, Augusta's greens average around 12-15, while St Andrews ranges between 10 and 11.
- Trueness is visually assessed based on a ball's movement across the green, with a universally adopted scale from 1 to 10. Our target for Praia D'El Rey and West Cliffs is 8, in line with similar courses in Portugal and Europe.

If anyone has any questions on the issues raised please get in touch.

Steve Millerchip

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