

# FEATURED CLUB THE LAKES GOLF CLUB

SIMON BLAGG

“ THE CITY WAS IN NEED OF NEW GOLF COURSE AND THE LAND WAS PERFECT WITH ITS RUGGED SAND DUNES AND LARGE LAKES... ”

- ▶ **The Lakes Golf Club is located in the Sydney suburb of Eastlakes. This is on the southern side of Sydney, roughly around 15 minutes from Sydney’s CBD and around ten minutes from the city’s airport. The area is a popular golfing destination, with the Lakes backing on to both Eastlakes and Bonnie Doon Golf Club and The Australian within a 5km radius. The golf club is situated within the Botany Wetlands.**

In the 1920s, the Botany Water reserve current site of the Lakes Golf Club was under the control and still is the government department named Sydney Water. The land was being used for Sydney’s water supply. The city was in need of new golf course and the land was perfect with its rugged sand dunes and large lakes. A syndicate was formed by several gentlemen including Sir Denison Miller, the then Governor of the Commonwealth Bank; Sir Hugh Denison from the Sun newspaper; Tom Raine from Raine and Horne as well as other influential people. The syndicate wanted to build a championship golf course with a substantial clubhouse, as well as tennis courts and bowling greens.

On July 30th 1928, The Lakes golf club was registered as a company. Former Australian Open champion and Course Architect Tom E Howard designed both the Lakes Golf Club and nine holes of the original Mascot

public course (Eastlakes Golf Club). Tom had assistance from Eric Apperley who designed both the clubhouses for the two courses. By April 1930 both courses had been built. Annual membership fees were a whopping \$10! The club hired AB Robertson who was in charge of the construction of the golf courses. AB Robertson had experience from Scotland as he was involved with the construction of the Kings and Queens courses at Gleneagles. The native soil onsite is a dune sand making digging very easy. Horses, shovels and rakes were used to plough and shape the rugged terrain.

The first course was seeded with Bent and Fescue greens. The fairways and approaches were sown with Poa Pratensis and native trefoil. The first course at the Lakes measured 5,852 metres. Unfortunately, large storms in 1931 swept through the course causing

some serious erosion resulting in four holes having to be reconstructed.

1951 saw plans from the State Government to build the Mascot expressway through the course. Prosper Ellis was employed to redesign the new holes. However, the Department of Main Roads decided to change their plans for the original Maloney street express way only to make things worse with the plan of building a six lane express way right through the middle of the course. This road is the current Southern Cross Drive.

The club then employed American Robert Von Hagge who agreed to redesign the course. Von Haggés' redesign was constructed and completed by June 1970. Over 600,000 tonnes of soil was removed off site to accommodate both the express way and course. The course then measured 6261 metres and was a par 73. The new course took a long time to establish as it was so exposed and open to the wind. This made establishing seed on fairways and dunes very hard. The club even resorted to spraying bitumen onto some of sand dunes and mounds. This was to hold the sand together whilst the seed was trying to establish.

During the 70s and 80s the Lakes was renowned for its fast true greens. However, by 1994 the greens were beginning to show their age and the winter grass population was too much. The club then decided to resurface all of the greens with SR1020 bent grass. This renovation included a new pump shed at the 11th hole. During the next twelve years, minor changes were made to the course. The club used Peter Thompson during this time to make some amendments to some bunkers on the course.

By 2006, the greens were again over populated with Winter grass and did not meet specifications. The board approached Mike Clayton to conduct a course master plan. The club decided to rebuild both the 1st and 18th greens first. After the members' approval of the two new greens, Clayton was commissioned to rebuild the remaining greens. The redesign included

rebuilding the whole golf course as well as upgrading the irrigation system.

The greens were seeded with A4 bent grass. Tees with Santa Ana couch and any areas of fairways that we reconstructed were re-turfed with common Kikuyu. Roughs and dunes were overseeded with Fescue.

The course was re-opened in July 2009. The current course measures 6286 metres and is a par 72. In 2010 the club hosted The Australian Open, which was the first tournament since the 2002 ANZ Championship. The club was asked again to host the tournament for both the 2011 and 2012 Australian Opens. The 2011 tournament was a successful event, hosting pros to the likes of Tiger Woods. It was seen as good preparation for the 2011 Presidents Cup.

## MODERN DAY

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The club has around 1200 members and for the first time in 15 years there is now a waiting list for new members. The golf course averages around 45,000 rounds of golf per year.

## THE LAKES BY NUMBERS

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- Greens: A4 Bent grass 2 hectares
- Tees: Couch Santa Ana 2 hectares.
- Fairways: Approaches Common Kikuyu 27 hectares
- Bunkers: 75
- Sandy Waste 10 hectares
- Machinery- Toro Mowers, Sprayers, and Utility vehicles.
- Irrigation system/ Dacoda Toro Lynx

Anthony Mills has been Superintendent of The Lakes Golf Club since 2012. Myself and Aaron Taylor have been Anthony's assistants since January 2016. We currently operate with a full team of 18 full time staff. An additional 4 casuals are added to the team during the summer months.

## 2018 AUSTRALIAN OPEN AND FUTURE PROJECTS

Two years before the Lakes hosted the Australian Open in 2018 the entire practice facility, driving range and 10th tees were reconstructed. The old practice greens did not replicate the course greens and had a large population of Poa Annua in them. Course architects OCCM were involved with the bulk shaping and the Lakes team completed all of light shaping, turfing, irrigation installation and seeding.

The winter before the 2018 Australian Open we completed a major fescue renovation of all bunker surrounds. This process involved spraying invasive kikuyu out of the existing fescue then shaving the fescue down with whipper snippers. We then used a large concrete mixer to mix 80/20 topdressing with a fescue seed. The fescue blend consist of Chewings fescue, Slender creeping fescue, shoreline fescue, and hard fescue. Once mixed all of the bunker surrounds were top-dressed. We adopted a hand watering program to ensure the fescue seed germinated quickly and we can then concentrate on establishing a tight sward. In all of the preparation for the tournament the bunker surrounds took the most effort to get them to standard. We were applying fertiliser and wetting agents regularly and even fungicide to get the fescue nice and thick.



Mixing Fescue Seed in Concrete mixer



Fescue at 18th Green



Fescue Bunker at 18 ready for Tournament

The tournament week was a massive success with many of the pros saying the course was in the best condition they had ever seen it. As well as our normal team we were very fortunate and getting assistance from 30 volunteers from all over Australia and even some internationals from New Zealand, UK and Ireland. Two years of extensive planning and hard work to get the course in top condition to see Abraham Ancer win the Stonehaven cup with 16 under. With such a successful tournament the club hopes it can host another tournament in the future.

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**TORO**



The Team



8th Hole one week out from Australian Open

In the two years after the Australian Open we have completed an extensive concrete pathway replacement program. All of the old crushed granite pathways have now been replaced with new concrete. A major project completed in 2019 was the upgrade of the 11th tees. The men's tee raised in height by 300mm and a new concrete pathway and sandy waste areas were built.



Replacement concrete pathway at 9



## DROUGHT 2019/2020

You don't get the name 'The Lakes' for no reason. The catchment area that runs into our main irrigation dam runs all the way from Centennial Park. A great water catchment is ideal but if you don't get the rain then it's useless. In 2019 we only received around 800mm of rain for the year. 400 millimetres short of Sydney average. Heading into the 2019/2020 summer our irrigation dam was at its lowest for a long period. By February the irrigation dam was at its lowest since the early 80s. We had cut down irrigation cycles on tees and fairways and were just keeping the greens program on. The pump system at the Lakes consist of five submersible pumps that float on a pontoon around twenty metres of lake edge next to the 11th green. As the water level drops the pumps get closer to hitting the lake bed. The system does not have a town's water connection so as the water level was dropping by the day the more concerned we were. We were looking into installing

a submersible pump at the opposite end of the dam next to the 11th tees as there was still some water that we could pump. Thankfully all of our concerns were fixed when in late February we received 413mm of rain. Enough to start topping the dam level back. The club have continued to research alternative water supplies for the future as it is probable that this will happen again.



Irrigation Dam

The club is always looking at ways to improve its facilities for the members. Future plans include renovating the clubhouse and outside surrounds. We are currently trialling Sir Grange Zoysia in a few areas out on course. We are trialling this as an alternative to fescue. The fescue is a great grass but it is just not sustainable in Sydney's climate. If successful we hope to start a turf replacement project on all fescue areas in the coming years.

In November 2020 the Lakes will host the Annual Elite Sand and Soil Rube Walkerden event. We will have the course in great condition and look forward to seeing you all for this well supported event.