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# Stone by stone

Dry-stone walling at Sleaford Golf Club

James Hutchinson, BIGGA

Example old wall ready to be rebuilt

## Location: Lincolnshire



**Bird boxes, bat boxes, ecological rough management, recycling grasses and many other super things are on the go down at Sleaford Golf Club in Lincolnshire.**

Most of these are things anyone can do if you have the time, but what about a more in-depth project and one that takes more time, patience, strength and a great deal of craftsmanship? I'm talking about dry-stone walling.

This sustainable, ecologically-sound and aesthetically pleasing ancient method of land management

has given Sleaford the look of a course that's heading in completely the right direction.

I often think the term 'inland links' is an oxymoron,

but Sleaford is described as an inland links located 20 miles from the sea. Were you to lift the course and place it on the coast, I doubt anyone would



Constructing walls using an A-frame for stability

know any different.

With holes that head out in one direction, turn around at the top end of the course and then head back to the clubhouse, in addition to fine grasslands, revetted bunkers, minimal trees and free draining soils, Sleaford is has all the characteristics of a links course. I'm pleased to report that it is managed as such too, to a high standard.

With words like 'second lift', 'coping' and 'hearting', none of which I understand in this context, I think it's best if I turn to the professionals to explain how dry-stone walling

is carried out.

Nick Lawson, Sleaford's greens chair, explained how the course undertook a five-year project to remove 600 metres of wall and rebuilt it stone by stone. This totalled approximately 60,000 stones and 5,800 copings.

Nick said: "Not only does this visually improve the boundaries of the holes, but the walls also provide a great home for wildlife and hunting lines for birds of prey. Let's hope they stay standing for many years to come!"

The project was entered into the 2021 golf industry's »

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Owl Tower at Sleaford



Nick Lawson feeding birds

### GREENKEEPERS' TOOLBOX

#### The Team

- / Brian Sharp, course manager
- / Jimmy Smith, deputy course manager
- / Gavin Taylor, assistant greenkeeper
- / Fin Hide, apprentice
- / Michael Baines, apprentice

outstanding environmental project award and Sleaford came in the top three at the virtual awards evening.

Elsewhere around the course, new hedgerows have been instituted. These were provided by the Woodland Trust's MOREhedges grant scheme and the team has planted 500 saplings using a mixture of field maple, hazel, dogwood, blackthorn, hawthorn and dogrose. Interspersed with these are also 50 rowan trees.

The club was also successful in being awarded the Woodland Trust's MOREwoods grant for 1,500 trees. However, Natural England would not approve the full planting of these and so a scaled down version will start later in the year. This will include the gradual removal of the existing conifers on the

left of the 3rd hole and their replacement with a band of native trees. There will also be a new band of trees along the edge of the turf nursery, parallel with the 5th, and also more trees alongside the railway line fencing on the 6th hole. A mixture of fruit trees has also been planted in the orchard near the barn.

From my point of view,

I am always wary of clubs planting trees on a site such as this as in my opinion open grassland and their associated flora are more important. However, the team is merely replanting where the dreaded leylandii trees have been removed and that is something I'm pleased with.

Nick told me that Sleaford is subject to a Natural England

Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) status. He explained: "Virtually the whole course is within it, apart from — very broadly — the 1st, 17th and 18th holes and the large practice area. Their interest is in the very rare grasses and wildflowers that we have, together with breeding grounds in the pots for great crested newt. For this

we are paid a sum of just below £6,000 per year, but we must adhere to very strict guidelines. This includes having to get permission to do practically any work on the course and only being allowed to cut the rough areas at certain times of the year.

"While these restrictions are onerous at times, I have to say they have been willing to work with us much more in recent times and, having met them on two or three occasions since I have been involved, I feel they have a »

“While these restrictions are onerous at times, I have to say they have been willing to work with us much more in recent times and, having met them on two or three occasions since I have been involved, I feel they have a better understanding of what a golf club's needs are.



Reconstructing a dry-stone wall

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Nick Lawson

better understanding of what a golf club's needs are.

"Our contract is due to be reviewed next year, but with us coming out of the European Union and the new stewardship schemes coming

into place for farms and landowners, it is likely to be rolled over for another year before any changes are made."

In addition to the ecological work, Nick also had the help of fellow Sleaford member and renowned wildlife photographer Nick Williams, who last year built an owl tower. It appears the tower is in use this year with sightings of barn owls and owl pellets beneath the opening.

Along with the tower, the team has erected nest boxes of differing sizes and hole dimensions. The pièce de la resistance has to be a pair of long-eared owls that have taken over another bird's empty nest in one of the pine trees. These beauties are quite elusive so to find a nest on a golf course is a noteworthy achievement and credit goes to photographer Nick who, after much searching, discovered it.

This hide is not for the faint-hearted and participants must be able to safely negotiate a ladder in and out of the three-man hide

Not only that, but a professional photography opportunity has been developed in the form of a wildlife watching hide 20 feet in the air.

These hides are run by a local professional wildlife photographer, Tom Robinson.

Tom said: "This project has been over four years in the making now, so we are super excited about finally being able to offer a hide for the UK's rarest breeding owl.

The hide itself is elevated to 6m to achieve an eye level view of the nest where the adults are bringing up their five owlets. This hide is not for the faint-hearted and participants must be able to safely negotiate a ladder in and out of the three-man hide we have erected."

Viewing sessions begin at 4.30pm, making daylight images achievable. The birds, however, are nocturnal so food drops for the chicks begin after dark.

Sleaford is without a doubt a special place. I have visited well over 400 courses while on BIGGA duty and I'm sometimes asked which is my favourite. That's a question that is impossible to answer but I would nudge you in the direction of Sleaford and say this place is a real fizzer.

[Continue the conversation](#)

James is on Twitter at @Ecology1BIGGA and Sleaford Golf Club is at @SleafordGC

## How to build a dry-stone wall

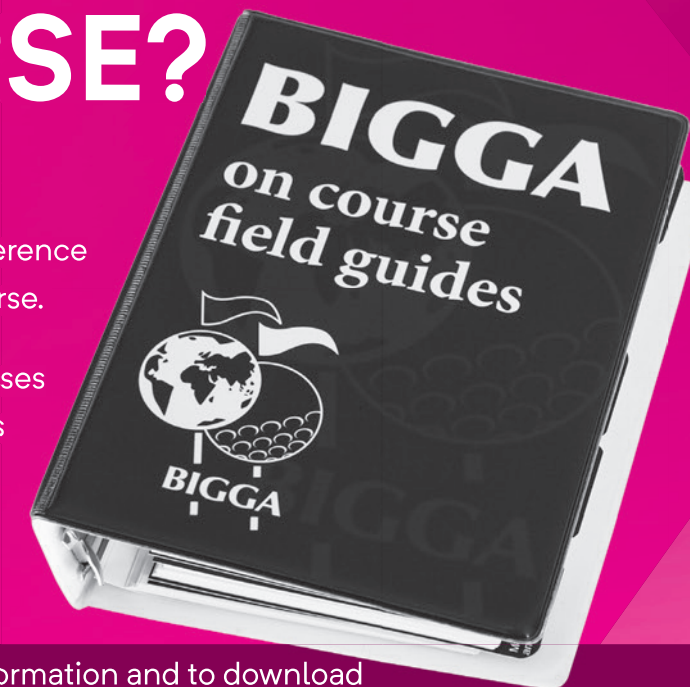
1. Prepare the soils where the wall is to be built.
2. Sort the stones into different sizes and place them near to the wall.
3. Lay the foundation stones. These are the largest of the stones and ones that will take the weight of the rest.
4. Pack any gaps with smaller stones.
5. Build up layers in the shape of the letter A, with larger stones at the bottom tapering to smaller stones on top
6. Fill in any holes with smaller stones. Long stones, called fillers or hearting, should be used as these extend all the way through the way and act as a strengthening brace.
7. The final touch is to add coping stones. These should be flat and will add the finishing touch to the wall.

# INFORMATION ON COURSE?

MEMBER RESOURCE

BIGGA's Field Guides are the go-to reference guide for use while working on the course.

Identifying flora, fauna, pests and diseases commonly found out on the course this pocket sized guide is a must have for BIGGA members.



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