

MIKLAGARD GOLF

Smart irrigation for a short season

Close to Oslo Airport and 25 minutes from Oslo itself, Miklagard Golf is an 18-hole, Robert Trent Jones Junior-designed championship course that opened in 2001.

An inland, parkland landscape with elevated greens protected by deep bunkers, Miklagard is rated one of the top 100 golf courses in Europe and has hosted the European Challenge Tour, the Canon Pro Series and the Turkish Airlines World Golf Series.

Miklagard means 'great city' and was the Viking name for Constantinople (later Istanbul). In keeping with its Nordic heritage, all the club's holes are named after Norse monarchs or deities.

Following construction of a new five-star hotel, which began in 2018, a Rain Bird irrigation system was installed by contractor Nelson & Vecchio as part of a course remodelling by (re)GOLF and the Robert Trent Jones design team in 2019 to relocate the driving range, 18th hole and five new holes. Groundworks took a while longer to complete than planned given the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted travel in and out of Norway, but finally, in January 2022, Golf Course Manager Duncan Bruce took over the course and its new irrigation system.

The hybrid system now in place combines decoders in block formation on the old course, with a new Rain Bird IC System on the six new holes, all controlled by one Rain Bird Central Control with a Rain Bird GSP plan providing back up.

As the season in Norway is short and intense, Duncan explained that it's been a steep learning curve since the start of the year: getting to know the holes, levelling heads where winter frosts had moved the

ground as well as putting the finishing touches in place and fine tuning the way the system performs in a short season.

Having had a dedicated irrigation technician previously at Losby Golf & Country Club, Duncan created a new position and recruited a new member of staff to his team. Rudolfs Vaivods is solely dedicated to irrigation and has considerable irrigation experience.

Rudolfs's appointment brings expertise that will help Duncan's wider team to realise the ambitions of the new general manager and club to improve the course and playing experience.

"The new system is more accurate," said Duncan. "On the old holes, you had to have three heads on at the same time.

"What we have now, for example, are 64 sprinklers (rotors) on the 18th fairway alone, giving us the ability to fine-tune the irrigation down to a single sprinkler, which makes our water use more efficient.

"We've really noticed how the climate is shifting. Things are intense anyway in Norway given the brief season, but in summer it can be very hot — 30 degrees in the shade and with 21 hours of sunlight. We begin to winterise the system in mid-October, to shut it down for the long Norwegian winter and even then, it can vary wildly, from minus 10 to

plus 10 degrees. In the winter here, there is no sunlight and where we used to have snow, in recent years there has been more ice than snow, which can actually be more damaging.

"Coming from the UK, that stark difference was a real eye opener for me to begin with. In the UK, managing the course is a continuous process and you're able to build on what you've done the previous season. Here, it's completely different and you have to start afresh every year. Winters can be bad in the UK of course, but not in quite the same way.

"The challenge is squeezing everything into a shorter season where there's very little leeway anyway. Golfers can play here right through till 11.30pm with the long, light evenings and play starts again at 8am.

"One of the challenges that all courses are facing now is the rising cost of electricity. There is a lake at Miklagard but although the water is free, running the pumps uses power, which is becoming more expensive. Having an efficient irrigation system that limits unnecessary water use and corresponding pump activity will play an increasingly important role in our cost management. That's where the mobile interface has also proved to be very helpful when it comes to managing irrigation and our time. What we're dealing with at Miklagard is two courses in one — so the Rain Bird hybrid system allows us to manage the new and the old technologies together in a smarter, more efficient way".



Rudolfs Vaivods (left) with Duncan Bruce on the course

Working in partnership with



Miklagard Golf's 10th hole



Miklagard irrigation system in action



Hotel beside Miklagard Golf's 18th hole