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Wild Alaska: Robin Nelson opens course at aptly named Moose Run

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COURSE DESIGN & DEVELOPMENT
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COURSE MANAGEMENT
Del Webb to expand REIT holdings

SUPPLIER BUSINESS
Simplov T&H putting new pieces together

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The 600-yard 18th hole at Robin Nelson's Moose Run in Alaska

XS Inc. to extend ag model to turf market
choose the best part of the area, design a course, and build it within the budget. Eleven companies applied, and we won.”

**BEAR REPELLENT BACKFIRES**

Nobody thinks of Alaska as a mecca for golf, and it’s not. This new course brings the state’s total to 19. But the season runs from May until late September or early October, Nelson said, and in June and July you can play around the clock. “This is the land of the midnight sun,” he said, “and in the summer they’ll start four-somes off at eight o’clock at night. This course will easily see 35,000 or 40,000 rounds a year.”

Wildlife added a special dimension to the construction phase. “The whole area is environmentally sensitive,” Nelson said. “The area we chose is in a woodland with a riparian stream that comes down to form an alluvial fan. It’s a high habitat for bears, wolves, foxes, moose—all kinds of animals. Everybody who worked on the course carried a can of bear repellent in the event of attack,” he said. “It is actually pepper spray. You’ve got to make sure to spray it on the bear and not on yourself. There was one guy from the ‘lower 48’ who didn’t know any better. He thought it was like insect repellent and sprayed it all over himself—and man, he just went wild, because it affects your nervous system. It really works on bears, too.”

Moose proved to be the most destructive beast, especially on the fourth green, which sits way out in a remote corner of the site. “That green was completely destroyed when a couple of moose rutted there,” Nelson said. “They love to do their mating rituals on putting greens for some reason, and that green hasn’t fully come back yet.”

The animals haven’t left the area, but nonetheless Army officials have declared the course safe for play.

**NO SAFE SLICES**

Nelson said he didn’t design the Creek Course to be unusually difficult. The extreme slope rating of 142, he said, has mostly to do with the 100 yards of nearly impenetrable forest between holes.

“Beyond the proper maintained rough, where you get into the jungle, the ball goes in there and it’s gone,” he said. “Eventually the Army is going to have to clean that out—it’s just incredibly overgrown. I talked to a guy on the slope committee, who said they’d come back in a year and do another review. The rating will probably go down after that. It wasn’t designed to be that hard. It’s just that if you hit a bad slice, it’s all over.”

Why the huge space between fairways? “The job specified 300 feet of natural area between them, mostly because of wildlife habitat,” Nelson said. “The animals like the forest edges and they love to hide between the fairways.”

The course’s length should not pose an undue problem for golfers, he said. “The 11th hole is about 640 yards from the gold tees, and 18 is close to 600,” he said. “But you can almost get there in two, because these are big downhill shots. You can hit it 300 yards off the tee, so it works well.”

Nelson has been involved in designing more than 100 courses worldwide, including numerous layouts in Asia and the South Pacific. He recently moved his headquarters from Hawaii to Mill Valley, Calif., near San Francisco.