

Transition from the Flatlands to the Snowcapped Mountains

Fred Opperman

It is quite a change from the Chicago area to Bozeman, Montana. The first thing you notice is that you have vistas, mountains with snowcapped peaks and valleys with grasslands swaying in the wind. Bozeman is located in a broad valley surrounded by a crescent of mountains. The next thing you will notice here is the freshness of the air. Then there is the little amount of traffic, the friendliness of the people and the great temperatures and low humidity (in the summer!).

Judy and I have purchased a new home on 1.2 acres located about eight miles south of Bozeman, approximately one-half mile from the Gallatin National Forest. Our home faces the mountains with great views. From the back of the house, you can look over Bozeman and see the Bridger Mountains about 12 miles away. In five minutes by car, we can be in a forested, steep canyon with a rushing stream where you can fish for rainbow trout. In 15 minutes, I can be paddling on a crystal-clear lake surrounded by tall, spruce-covered mountains with their peaks covered by snow. The

first time paddling on the lake, I surprised a moose, and myself, to say the least. The lake at that time was high due to snow melt, and I was able to paddle quietly through the willow and alder bushes at the shallow end, which is where the surprise took place.

You may wonder what it would be like to run a golf course in this part of the country. While it is different to some degree in caring for the turf, from talking to some of the superintendents here, the members are just as demanding. Part of the problem is the shorter season, and they want absolutely perfect conditions the first sunny 50-degree day. Just like Chicagoland!

The length of the season is seven-and-a-half to eight months, with the last spring frost around June 25 and the first fall frost the first of September. The predominant grasses are the same here: *Poa*, blue and bent. Most greens are made up of *Poa annua* and various bents. Tees and fairways are the same. The greens on the private clubs are mowed at 1/8", tees at 3/8" and the fairways at 1/2". The greens are sanded on a regular basis, and Primo is also used. Dean Krob, CGCS, at

Riverside C.C. in Bozeman tries to keep his greens at 9.6 to 10.6 on the stimpmeter.

The biggest problem seems to be drainage. So what else is new? The valley has a heavy clay and silt problem due to the river. The most common disease problem is snow mold; they receive about 80" of snow over the winter. Snow cover is from November through March or later. Most common insect problems are ants, and weed problems are clover and dandelions.

Rainfall averages about 18" per year, with May and June receiving the most rain. Snowfall is not counted in this moisture tally. The courses usually have three full-time staff, and the summer/season employees number 14 to 16.

I will need to landscape our new home and have checked out the tree nurseries here. The selection of plant material is a lot smaller than in Illinois. I was really surprised to find that they are selling box elder trees. I asked why, and the reply was, "They grow here!" The main deciduous trees are crabapples, patmore ash,

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alder, Ohio buckeye, white and river birch, and lots and lots of aspen. As for shrubs, the lilacs bloom profusely for three or more weeks due to the cool nights and days. The Japanese tree lilac does very well, as do potentilla and various spireas. The evergreens include spruces, pines, firs and junipers, but no yews.

In ending this update of our new life here in Montana, we received this e-mail from our daughter-in-law. She and our son are foresters at the Grand Canyon National Park.

“Sounds like you’re doing a lot of hiking, so I thought I’d pass this on...Get some pepper spray and some small bells to jingle on your packs if you’ll be hiking in grizzly and black bear country. It’s important to know the difference between black bear scat and griz-



Photo by Fred Opperman

Relocating to “the last best place” doesn’t preclude traveling elsewhere. Fred captured this shot on a July trip to California. At Sequoia National Park, a black bear is feeding on grubs, which are under the bark of a dead tree. To the right of the bear: a Sequoia tree about 25’ in diameter!

zly scat when you come across it, so you can take appropriate precautions. Black bear scat is pretty easy to identify: it has berries and leaves in it. Grizzly scat, on the other hand, has bells in it and smells like pepper spray.”

P.S. I’d love to hear from any of you. My e-mail address is: opperman@avicom.net; or phone number is 406-522-9760, Mountain Daylight Time. 

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