

# Surviving and prospering in the dead

BY VERN PUTNEY

Except for two weeks early in February, when Alaska's Arctic grip returned America's northern states to harsh reality, golf course owners and superintendents gained pleasant reprieve last winter.

Less snow and chilling rain meant more playing days and more bearable maintenance working conditions than normal.

Not that all equipment and course care was a breeze.

Cheyenne (Wyo.) Country Club course superintendent Frederick J. David would welcome moisture.

"We're real dry, and we could use the snow in our ski-golf seasons setup. This unusual winter has meant little skiing," David said. When temperatures go above 42 degrees, he and two aides water the greens and tees.

Equipment repair accounts for 90 percent of David's winter maintenance. Topsy-turvy weather conditions also sometimes trick

gophers into earlier spring appearances.

Elkhorn Country Club in Sun Valley, Idaho, had ample snow cover — more than three feet to accommodate cross-country ski trails. Ken Huring of course superintendent Larry Bauman's staff noted a little problem with moles, but added that they head for waste areas when summer approaches.

Before the Alaskan cold wave sent a mass shudder across the country's northern tier, the novel

winter experience was enjoyable. Peter Freidel of Coronado Golf Course in Hot Springs Village, Ark., recalled days in the high 60s before the "Big Blast" sent thermometers plummeting near zero.

## Freeze-thaw-freeze

"Ordinarily, December through February is our cold period, but this winter largely has been mild freeze and quick thaw," Freidel said. "Our course often is playable, but not always comfortable. We'll gladly accept the weather bonus, even if it means more mowing to combat bee nests in the summer.

International Falls, Minn., grabs media attention as the nation's harshest icebox, but at least two owners of golf courses slightly north and west would argue that dubious distinction.

"It's as cold or colder at Warroad Estates," declared Lee Leach through teeth chattering from a minus 45-degree day. "Especially if one dared venture out to one of our wind-whipped holes. Not all of our 18 holes are tree-protected."

Dan Fabian of Oakcrest Country Club in Roseau shares Leach's frigid view. "The wind-chill factor is numbing, and there seems to be little letup in snow."

Both Warroad and Roseau are about five miles from the Canadian border. Fifty percent of Warroad's daily play comes from Canadians.

Leach wears many hats (in the winter, fur-lined) as owner, manager, superintendent and professional. His is a family operation, and he's able to farm out course chores to wife Jan, sons Guy, 22, and Rick, 17, and daughters Connie, 19, and Janna, 13, as play gets heavy in April when winter-weary enthusiasts shed skis and parkas.

Entering his fourth season at Warroad after pro posts at Abbey Springs in Fontana, Wis.; Bristol Oaks in Bristol, Wis., and Hunter Country Club in Richmond, Ill., Leach must do things differently because playing time is a month less in both the spring and fall.

Somewhat offsetting the short season is summer playing opportunity. It doesn't get dark until nearly 10:30 p.m.

## Tarpaulins an answer

Leach has eyed with keen interest the new tarpaulin-like snow covers for greens. Snow fences help control snow mold.

Equipment maintenance, course improvement, and preparing and mailing of club promotional material help the family partnership pass the long winter.

Like Leach, job description of Little Falls Golf Club superintendent Douglas F. Veillette runs the full gamut. There is no club pro at the 18-hole municipal course located in the center of the state.

Veillette stocks the pro shop, sets clubhouse policy for the 10-12 summer employees and meets with the advisory board to define strategy.

When winter comes, Veillette concentrates on greens safeguard.

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# of a long winter with spring far off

He feels this past winter's abundance of snow is better for green survival chances than last year's open winter.

"Dessication is the major problem," Veillette said. The Little Falls season usually runs from the second week in April to the second week in November.

"If there is no snow cover, greens start to grow in the spring; but if there is a cold snap, greens can be hard hit," Veillette said. "Plentiful snow can mean snow mold, but that can be dealt with through proper treatment."

The season perhaps is two weeks shorter on each end for Double Eagle Golf Course in Eagle Bend, in central Minnesota.

Steve Weibye, whose brother Ron owns the course, believes there was enough snow this winter to form a protective blanket over greens and avoid frost-line problems.

Maintenance can be minimal. Double Eagle's 18 reversible holes span just 80 acres. The 5-year-old layout last summer suffered from lack of rain. Water pumps worked overtime, but nature appears to have provided needed moisture this winter.

#### Tee boxes and landing areas

Tee boxes and landing areas had Weibye's maintenance attention just before he took off for a golfing vacation and visit with his dad in Texas.

Don Tolson has no great maintenance worry at Yellowstone Golf and Country Club in Billings, Mont. For the 28th straight month, the 18-hole championship course a bit south of the Big Sky State's center was playable part of the time.

We're very fortunate as to location," Tolson said. "The Yellowstone River runs through this area, set in a valley. The Chinook winds are an ally. They're usually above freezing and melt the snow. We may close a few days because of snow, but not enough to keep us from year-round operation."

Tolson has three aides and administers an annual budget of \$250,000-\$300,000, including capital. Considered large by state standards, this outlay provides continuing course improvement, Tolson said.

During winters, Tolson and a mechanic concentrate on machine maintenance indoors.

Fifty miles south of British Columbia lies Sudden Valley Golf and Country Club in Bellingham, Wash.

Course superintendent Bryan Newman said the 18-hole links — part public, part private and part resort — largely remains open year-round. "Should snow and rain combine forces for a few days, there might be brief course closing."

That time is welcomed by the maintenance staff. "It's a great opportunity to go over the course, bring in and paint outside fixtures and overhaul and tune up machinery," said Newman.

"We're fortunate to be on the west side of the Cascade Range which splits the state. Eastern region courses in much the same latitude, such as in the Spokane area, must shut down for up to three months. We're real wet, but playable," said Newman. Sudden Valley weathered the Alaskan blast nicely.

On the other side of the United States, in more chilly conditions, golf comes to a standstill. The course superintendent simply shuts down course machinery and hibernates until early April.

Such is the situation for Floyd Sullivan, for the past 35 years superintendent at Aroostook Valley Country Club in Fort Fairfield, Maine, whose pro shop is in the United States while its clubhouse is 50 yards away but in New Brunswick.

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— Douglas Veillette  
**Little Falls Golf Course, Minn.**

AVCC's 18 holes are open from mid-April to mid-October. The remaining time, the course which is solely in Canada rests in the hand of nature which, Sullivan said, hasn't dealt too severely with AVCC over the years. "If we get too much rain early, ice buildup can follow and be damaging," he said.

Massachusetts doesn't lose many days to snow and hail. A blockbuster of a storm in late February changed things a bit along Cape Cod.

"Twenty or 30 members like to play weekends, despite restriction to temporary greens," noted Dick Zepp of Whitinsville Golf Course. "We can work around them, overhauling machinery, clearing brush and trees and adding to area accessibility."

The snow covers for greens, gaining in popularity, are a help, said Zepp, the president of the Golf Course Superintendents Association of New England. "When winter is open but there is a deep frost, broken irrigation lines can be a problem.

"Whatever winter and spring bring, the damage can't be worse than last summer's nightmare," declared Zepp. "Greens in particular and the course in general took a frightful beating from the combination of humidity, unrelenting rain and excessive heat Bay State courses received their worst beating in 30 years. I hope it will be another 30 before nature goes on another rampage."

New York State, like New England, basked in its mildest winter in history.

Dick Perry of Foxfire Golf and Tennis Club in Syracuse, in the heart of the snow belt, welcomes the disappearance of white downfall, but admits many members are pressing for early re-opening. Foxfire usually closes around Thanksgiving and projects mid-April opening. The last two springs, play has begun March 25.

Perry is enmeshed in a three-year drainage program: "3,000 feet last fall and 9,000 to go."

His winter projects include painting tee markers and flagsticks.

Unlike Perry, Jim Masseth of (not so) Chili Country Club in Rochester was concerned with lack of snow. "Without it, we're hurting for water," he said.

Robert A. Haskins of Soaring Eagles Golf Course in Horseheads, due south of Rochester, at the moment isn't worried about the water table.

"We're a public course. We close from Dec. 1 to April 1, not because of the weather but because there are not enough players to justify staff cost," he said.

#### Animal pests

Haskins said he is fortunate to have escaped the mole nuisance at times plaguing neighboring courses, but expects to do battle with skunks next summer.

"They're damaging to fairways as they dig for grubs," he said. "The overly abun-

dant geese prevalent in 1987 didn't return last summer, and the few deer imprints on greens are easily repaired."

The mole cricket insect is occupying the attention of Thomas Sizemore at Brooksville (Fla.) Golf and Country Club.

This pest, transplanted into the United States, probably was at its worst last summer at Brooksville. The mild winter didn't help Sizemore's fight plan. "If it's a cold winter," Sizemore explained, "the mole cricket will go deep. Current warmth means early emergence."

Chuck Poole and his 32-man crew at the 36-hole Woodmont Country Club in Tamarac, Fla., haven't stopped mowing in the warmest winter in state history.

"We could use some rain and a dip in

mercury, he said. "And I haven't seen an alligator on the course. But the presence of one or two would liven things a bit."

Pat O'Brien, an aide to course superintendent J. D. Batten at Kings Crossing Golf and Country Club in Corpus Christi, Texas, in two years hasn't heard a peep out of or seen a whooping crane. Their winter headquarters are at nearby Arkansas.

They've never been a problem in O'Brien's 25-year area residence. Pat O'Brien, an aide to course superintendent J. D. Batten at Kings Crossing Golf and Country Club in Corpus Christi, Texas, in two years hasn't heard a peep out of or seen a whooping crane. Their winter headquarters are at nearby Arkansas. They've never been a problem in O'Brien's 25-year area residence.

Sandhill cranes can make too frequent an appearance, he noted. As with most Southern and Western courses undergoing dry spell, grass continues to grow and extra mowing is in vogue.

As the superintendents swing into spring, they're alert to weather variables and the effect on summer play. West, South and Midwest forces are braced for myriad conditions.

Along the East Coast, drought is their chief worry. April and May may bring unusual rain, but at the moment lack of moisture is a worry.

As one superintendent said, "It never rains but it pours when you contend with climate."

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