

# Much ado about nothing?

Animals, golfers have coexisted for 100 years

'Birds Gotta Fly, Fish Gotta Swim  
If They're to Retain Vigor and Vim.'

OR

'How Little We Understand What Touches Off That Tingle  
When Sudden Explosion of Two Forces Intermingle.'

BY VERN PUTNEY

Environmental experts have unearthed existence of two bear corridors in Vermont, adding "Bears need an undisturbed corridor, so that they can intermingle."

By strange coincidence, these corridors are smack in the middle of proposed golf courses in Tamarack and the Sun Bowl.

In recent years, state environmental

boards have advanced pesticide use or abuse as a deterrent to golf course developers.

The latest "buzzword," or roadblock, is "animals." Seems they must be protected at all costs



(to developers?) and no matter how glaring state regulatory inconsistency.

Suddenly a shroud of sanctuary has been thrown over the Vermont black bear, to be lifted only when hunters take up arms in November. For three weeks, the big, bad bear will become fair game.

Thereafter, it will revert to lovable "Smokey the Bear" status.

As those professing environmental protection and presumably as well-intentioned developers square off in this second round of course-building arguments in the Green Mountain State, wandering Bruin must wonder at his suddenly elevated importance. Is he worth such fuss?

Why such sudden spotlight on a beast which shuns human attention, a carnivore content to roam the woods and emerge in the wee hours to poke around garbage cans? Developers label this a contrived issue intended to throw a monkey wrench into course building. They contend environmentalists have clasped bears to their collective bosom more for the sake of convenience than true love.

Noted course architect Geoffrey S. Cornish of Amherst, Mass., recalls no bear-deer course problems during his boyhood in British Columbia, Canada.

"Bears positioned themselves near landing areas and would carry balls into the woods. A local rule allowed us to play another ball without penalty," said Cornish.

Cornish ranges as far as Banff Springs, high in the Canadian Rockies, in his work. "Man and most species seem to respect each other. Bear and elk have the right of



John Hawes has an observer as he prepares to blast out of a sand trap at Waterville (Maine) Country Club. Foxes have made a den in a sandtrap at the course

Photo courtesy of Gene Letourneau

way on the course," he observes.

The black bear usually is associated more with Vermont's neighbor Maine, but there the deer is under the publicity gun.

Developers seeking to build a course at Falmouth, in southern Maine, ran into deer preservation problems. A dozen deer had staked out acreage on part of a planned course.

Developers had tried to work with regional wildlife officials on an agreement that would permit golfer and deer to live in harmony, as has been the case on up to 100 Maine courses for almost a century.

State and federal officials entered the picture. The upshot was that 140 of the total 400 acres the course eventually embraced when opened the summer of 1988 became a deer yard.

Except to admit that cost of such tender treatment was "significant," developers haven't tallied and won't divulge dollar loss. Unofficial estimate is \$1 million. That makes each deer worth \$82,000. A dear price?

The state is expected to grab a nice chunk of revenue from hunting permits when 30,000 deer are killed with official blessing in November.

Perhaps there should be reciprocal agreement with New York State. Canada geese which were becoming a nuisance there were trapped and shipped to Maine.

David Canavan, immediate past president of the Golf Course Builders of America and

a University of Massachusetts classmate of Vermont Gov. Madeline Kunin, is somewhat mystified as to Maine's stand on deer.

"Granted, we've had a few fish and wildlife problems when seeking builder approval, but deer seemingly would fare better because of improved habitat. As for the current Vermont controversy, I'd have to see more bear facts to comment," quipped Canavan from his Moore Golf office in Culpeper, Va.

Wildlife and golfers don't always co-exist peacefully.

At Waterville (Maine) Country Club last summer, foxes and deer were downright distracting. One flailer blamed a fawn deer for his failure to break 100 for the first time. Searching for his ball in the rough, the player almost stepped on the fawn. The doe mother nearby blew a warning scream. The shaken golfer's score soared.

At least two sandtraps harbored fox dens. Pups frolicked in them or sunned themselves along the banks. "When you tee up and notice a fox staring at you nearby," said one golfer, "chances are you are going to slice or hook."

Other golfers were more practical. "They're hitting us in the pocketbook by stealing our golf balls," they complained.

Waterville CC's public relations head welcomed fox encampment because of national media attention. "In April I hired five foxes and they took it from there," he joked.

Gene Letourneau, whose Sportsman Say column has been a feature of Maine newspapers since 1946, quoted one vixen as saying she had got there first via homesteading and likely would stay and live in peace with golfers.

At most courses around the country, this live-and-let-live attitude prevails. At The Fountains Country Club in Lake Worth, Fla., many veteran club members objected to removal of a half-dozen alligators from the several ponds dotting the 54-hole complex. "They're part of the scenery and constitute no threat," they claimed.

Northerners sighed in relief when wildlife officials rounded them up and relocated them in the Everglades.

Jack Nicklaus has bagged more than his share of eagles and birdies, but dropped a decision to elk while developing the Arrowhead course in Boulder, Colo. Elk browsing on greens inflicted much damage.

Crane nests on 40 acres at Carlton Oaks Country Club in San Diego, Calif., couldn't be touched and added to problems for course architect Perry Dye.

No matter what the bear essentials show in Vermont, the costs won't approach the celebrated "snail darter" case.

After four years of delay on the \$116-million Tellico Dam project on the Little Tennessee River because the fish was the last of its species, the courts quashed the case. Capitulation came in October 1979.