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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Questionable attitude

I agree with much of what John Fry said in his article in the March issue of your magazine ("Golf and Ecology," p. 55), but I disagree with his attitude toward the Sierra Club and wilderness land.

At present, only 2½ per cent of our land is now in a wilderness state and of this, only 20 per cent, *i.e.*, ½ per cent of the total land, is protected by Federal wilderness legislation. The West is no longer wild and it's only necessary to see the Coney Island appearance of Paradise Valley at Mt. Rainier or the traffic jams and smog in Yosemite Valley or the garbage dump in Yellowstone, one of the biggest in the country, to understand the destruction that can be wrought by those who seek the beauty and escape of the wilderness, but don't appreciate its fragility.

Mr. Fry's comment that the Sierra Club would prefer Mineral King to be preserved for six dozen backpackers than open it to a million golfers or skiers belies his ignorance of this growing pastime. When I hiked up Mt Whitney last summer, the highest peak in the lower 48 (14,500 feet) and a hike which takes two to three days, I found I was the 143rd person to reach the summit that day, and it was still before noon.

Even more indicative of the situation is an article in the December issue of Summit, a mountain climbing magazine, decrying the fact that Mt. McKinley in Alaska, the highest point in North America (20,320 feet), a climb which requires skill, experience and much technical climbing equipment, is crowded and littered with garbage. The high camp at 17,250 feet has its own large garbage dump, which is large enough to be seen from the air.

The range of people interested in enjoying the wilderness is broad, has grown tremendously in recent years, and in fact, threatens to

damage the wilderness just by their growing abundance. That is why the reaction is so strong against the prospect of a beautiful alpine valley, such as Mineral King, part of a diminishing and increasingly crowded wilderness, being used for facilities which could be placed elsewhere. Links and slopes can be created, lost and created again almost anywhere. But there is only one Mineral King, and its destruction is irrevocable. Disney's proposed shopping centers, hotels, theaters and night clubs as well as golf and skiing is a small gain compared to diminishing still further the miniscule amount of alpine meadow still left in the United States.

Lastly, two points in the article must be briefly answered. First, the Sierra Club is not six dozen hikers. Its membership is over 120,000, almost half of which are east of the Mississippi. Secondly, in referring to the California Redwoods and the Mohave Desert as large compared to golf courses, Mr. Fry was correct. However, these areas are largely part of the unprotected 2 per cent. An article in the N.Y. Times, April 11th, describes the desert as dying from the litter and destruction of weekend campers and off-road vehicles. It pictures the Mohave as a great sandy backyard for 11 million people who live in the sprawling cities, which completely surround the continually shrinking landscape. The coastal Redwoods, some of which have been preserved in the new national park, are still largely in the hands of lumber companies and will fall, not even for themselves, but as a victim of clear-cutting. Of those saved in the new national park, most were already preserved in three long-established state parks which make up almost half the parks area. The remainder of the park area includes such un-park like things as private residences, small businesses and large clear-cut areas.

Although it is true that golf may find it difficult in the future to acquire new courses, or even preserve old ones, it is unfair for Mr. Fry to denigrate the efforts of others who attempt to save what is left of our national wilderness. It is the result of thousands of years, and no part of the earth will ever again be left untouched for even a fraction of that time to produce more.

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