

inherent characteristics of our site, not directly copy a specific bunker or green," Silva says. "Perhaps the latter attempt is a weakness of some themed courses. The direct copy is not as good as the original."

The future

Even with the recent spate of higher quality themed layouts whose emphasis on fun design will solidify their place no matter what the golf market thinks of the trend, some developers are leery of "concept" golf.

"I had dreamed of developing a course that way, but if I do it's no longer going to be themed," says Portland, Ore.-based developer James Kramer. "We had a business plan developed for a thorough experience course. It would've been for serious golfers who appreciate the romanticism of Scotland, the 'Home of Golf.'"

What sullied Kramer on such an interesting concept?

"The Royal Links was the primary reason," Kramer says of the Las Vegas spin on themed

golf that Golf Channel viewers have seen announcer David Feherty endorsing. "[Royal Links] took the idea and did it half-heartedly. Even now, if you try to do a thorough experience, it's probably tainted by another course out there. I was excited at first, but themed courses have been done so much they've lost their novelty."

Still, Kramer points out that places like Tour 18 and other themed courses based on classic design will satisfy a significant number of golfers.

"If a person hasn't played the original, then he doesn't know any better about the replica holes," Kramer says. "From a business point of view, to know you can create something that people will go out to play, even if it's 45 minutes away, is significant."

So significant that themed courses will be here for years to come. Then again, themed courses have been a part of golf course design as long as the game has been played in America. ■

Geoff Shackelford is Golfdom's contributing architecture editor.

"The direct copy is not as good as the original."

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With the wave of new themed courses, most in golf believe that either: (A) the game has taken tasteless, tacky and embarrassing to a new low; or (B) there is a wonderful irony in this fast-growing segment of the business.

No matter what you think of the Disneyfication of American golf, the movement of building new courses that replicate or celebrate classic design allows architects to do something they're prevented from doing in today's normal modern design: present interesting and even bold design ideas.

Sure, sometimes these amusement-park replications fail to remind anyone of the originals. However, deep bunkers, blind shots, alternate option holes and other oddities that lend interest to "traditional" classic courses are returning on themed courses.

It's one of the great mysteries in modern golf how a player can travel to a noted course — enjoy the oddities of its design, maintenance and musty locker room — and find the same features offensive at his home course. If a blind shot or a treeless "links-style" course is presented on a themed course inspired by one of golf's hollowed grounds, it's a good design feature. But if an architect presents the same ideas under the pretense of his own design style, the client inevitably will step in and say, "You can't do that!" In some cases, the architect might get such a course built, but the developer won't let the superintendent present the fast, firm conditions to compliment the traditional design.

The bottom line: Unless it's under the pretense of a themed course, it's not OK to try the quirky stuff found at the places we revere in golf as traditional.

As the golf business begins to suffer the consequences of building too many ordinary, overpriced and unsatisfying designs where repeat business is nonexistent, themed courses figure to emerge as one of the surefire ways to market courses and maintain a steady stream of customers.

The early examples are working because marketing such courses is easier and golfers will try anything once. But themed courses are

Terrible Taste or Wonderful Irony?

BY GEOFF SHACKELFORD



ONE THING IS
FOR SURE: THEMED
COURSES ALLOW
ARCHITECTS
TO PRESENT
INTERESTING AND
EVEN BOLD IDEAS

experiencing more repeat business because the players find interesting holes. Golfers are enjoying the courses thanks to a new take on the old design ideas that initially grew the game.

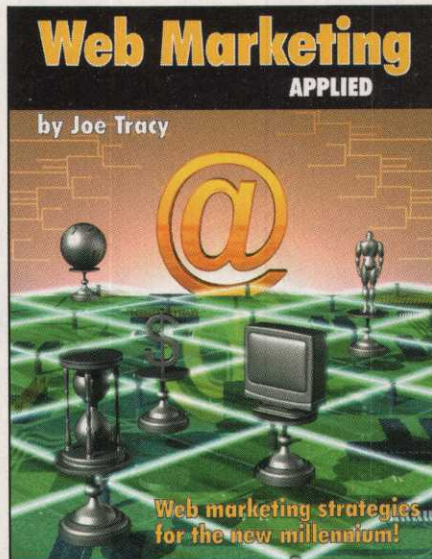
One can only hope that the themes we see in the coming years are more subtle while shedding some of the kitsch. A strong model is Stonebridge GL & CC in Hauppauge, N.Y., the concept course by George Bahto, where a difficult site was transformed into a must-see course because of Bahto's fascinating green-complex designs. Brian Silva's Black Creek Club in Chattanooga, Tenn., where Seth Raynor's style was respectfully used to create a course that's provoking enthusiastic discussion, is another fine model. The theme element merely allowed architect Silva to present design ideas that, for some bizarre reason, might not be acceptable if he merely tried them under the auspices of a typical Silva design.

"Many parts of most new courses have or should have themes," Silva says. "They should be based on classic characteristics and classic golf holes. Whether or not you as an architect decide to directly lift the 'look' along with the lifted characteristic or strategy is the next question."

Let's hope the lifting and borrowing becomes more subtle — so subtle that the words "theme," "replica" and "tribute" are eventually forgotten to the point that talented architects are given the freedom to present interesting designs that are their own. But until that day, at least themed courses present designs that golfers can discuss and enjoy — attributes the golf business needs to take more seriously.

Geoff Shackelford has co-authored a new book with artist Mike Miller, titled The Art of Golf Design (Sleeping Bear Press). He can be reached at geoffshackelford@aol.com

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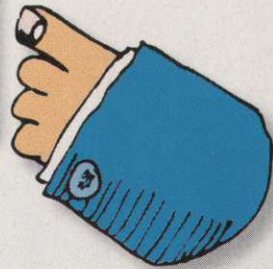
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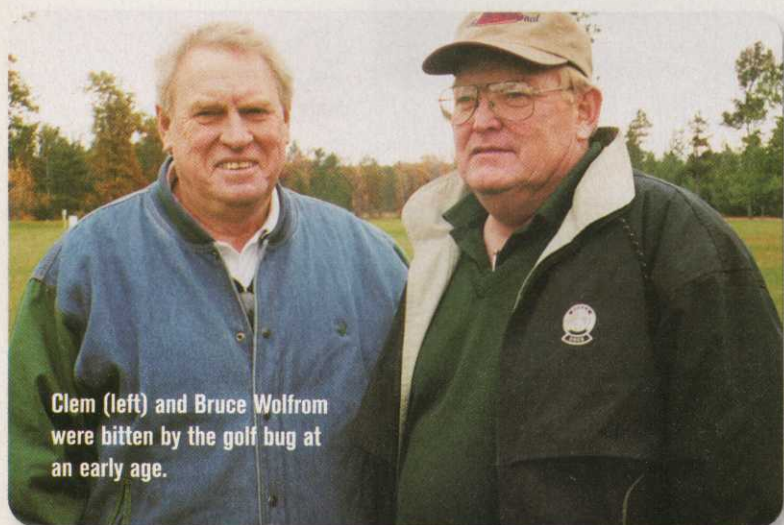
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Brotherly Love

Clem and Bruce Wolfrom designed, built, operate and cherish White Pine National GC



Clem (left) and Bruce Wolfrom were bitten by the golf bug at an early age.

eastern part of the state about 30 minutes from Lake Huron. Shortly after, they designed and built White Pine National GC. "We chose the land because it was conducive to the low-cost, environmentally friendly construction we had in mind," Bruce says.

Clem, 67, and Bruce, 53, are the sons of the late Clarence Wolfrom, who worked as a superintendent for 53 years in Michigan until his death in 1984.

"Dad was the dean of grass growing around here," Clem says. "He trained several people who went on to become superintendents."

Clem greeted the world on a cold February morning in 1934 in a room above the clubhouse at the Maple Lane GC in suburban Detroit, where Clarence was superintendent. For nine years, the Wolfroms lived above the empty clubhouse in the winter when the course was closed. In the summer, they moved to make room for the clubhouse staff.

Clem recalls cutting sod by hand after school and earning a dime from his dad for every piece that sold. One of Clem's biggest childhood thrills was helping his father grade tees during a construction project. "This is the only thing I've ever wanted to do," Clem says.

Bruce, the youngest of the four Wolfrom brothers (Gerald and Wayne chose other ca-

It's no wonder that Clem Wolfrom is a superintendent, owner and architect. He was practically born on a golf course.

It's no wonder that Bruce Wolfrom is a superintendent, owner and architect. He Clem's impressionable little brother.

The Michigan-bred Wolfrom brothers grew up on golf, and they adore the game. So it's no surprise they designed, built and operate a golf course together in their home state.

Like many superintendents, the Wolfrom brothers longed to build and own a golf course but knew it was an expensive undertaking. They set out to find a way to build a course within their budget.

In 1991, the brothers discovered 400 acres of handsome, tree-laden and made-for-golf land in Spruce, Mich., a tranquil town located in the

**BY LARRY AYLWARD,
EDITOR**

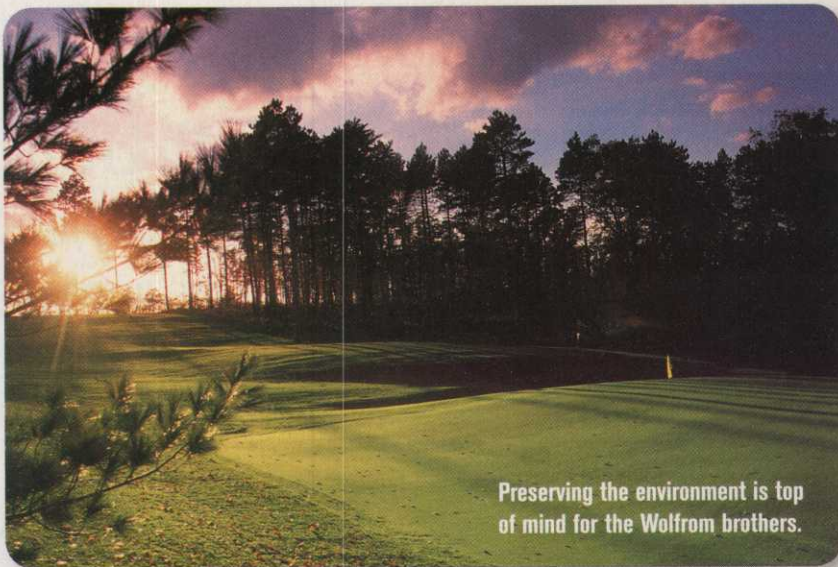
reers), decided to become a superintendent because Clem did. When he was a kid, Bruce was enamored with his oldest brother's job at Dearborn CC.

Bruce remembers other superintendents greatly respecting his father and often seeking his advice. Even though Clarence only had an eighth-grade education, Bruce says his father learned as much as he could about the profession by attending various GCSAA meetings. Clarence also demanded his sons attend college. The four brothers graduated from Michigan State University.

Clem and Bruce wanted to build a golf course together for several years. They picked a good time. Michigan began its golf boom in the early 1990s, primarily in the state's western region. "It was a good time to get in the business, and it was a good investment," says Bruce, who was superintendent at Treetops Sylvan Resort in Gaylord, Mich., before coming to White Pine National.

Bruce is the club's general manager and oversees daily operations. Clem is still the superintendent at Detroit GC, where he has been for 40 years, but he makes frequent visits to White Pine National.

Bruce, who had been involved in various construction projects at other courses such as Barton Hills CC in Ann Arbor, Mich., and Treetops, helped the brothers save money when building the course. For instance, it was Bruce's idea to install



Preserving the environment is top of mind for the Wolfrom brothers.

DAVE RICHARDS

a low-pressure irrigation system with only 50 horsepower. Bruce says the system covers as much property as any championship course in the state — with more heads and slower water.

"An average golf course here spends about \$14,000 to \$18,000 on electricity a year," Bruce says. "We spend about \$5,000."

The brothers also created their own greens mix to save money. They call it the "Wolfrom spec."

Of course, the Wolfroms designed the woody course to be maintenance friendly. There are only 35 bunkers on the course, and they are small and easy to maintain. There's also no water on the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary course.

As owners, the Wolfroms are ad-

ressing issues they know have hindered the golf business and are working to encourage more people to play the game. White Pine National offers a league for women who are beginners.

"The league has been very successful and is growing every year," Bruce says. "It's hard to take the embarrassment out of golf, but owners have to work at it."

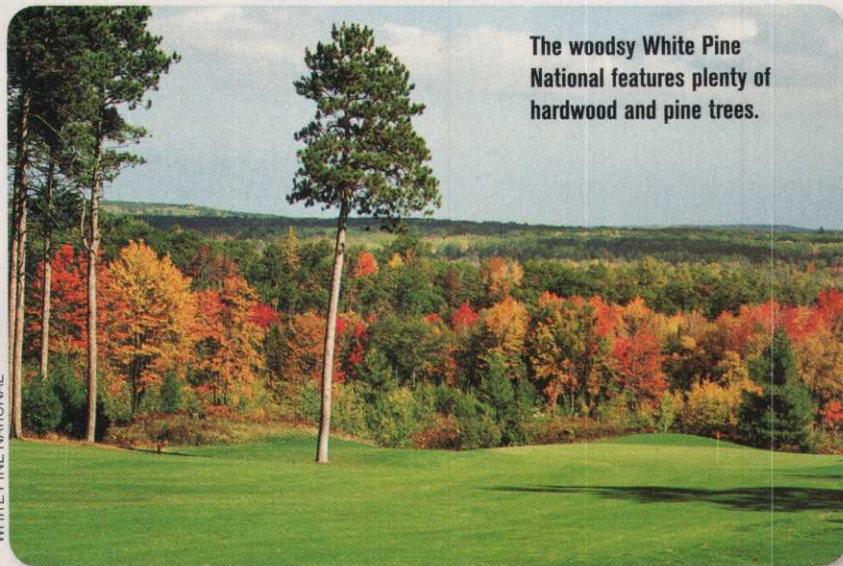
While they treasure owning their own course, Bruce says it has been more difficult than he thought.

"You think as an owner that can you just hire people to get everything done," he says. "But you can't. So you end up filling in here and there to get things done."

Bruce credits superintendent Jim Anderson, an MSU graduate who has been at the course for three years, for taking a load off his mind. "Knowing the course is in great hands frees me up to handle other things," Bruce says.

Clem and Bruce have to be mindful of more things than turfgrass. There's food, for instance. The Wolfroms want to serve excellent food all of the time in their modest clubhouse, but they know how difficult it can be.

But the added responsibility is worth it. On a recent day, the Wolfroms toured their course and gazed at its wondrous hardwood and pine trees. They beamed with pride at their creation. It's no wonder they ended up in this business. ■



The woody White Pine National features plenty of hardwood and pine trees.

WHITE PINE NATIONAL

Dueling Hurdzans in Colorado

Despite skepticism, developers say similar courses can co-exist in the same market

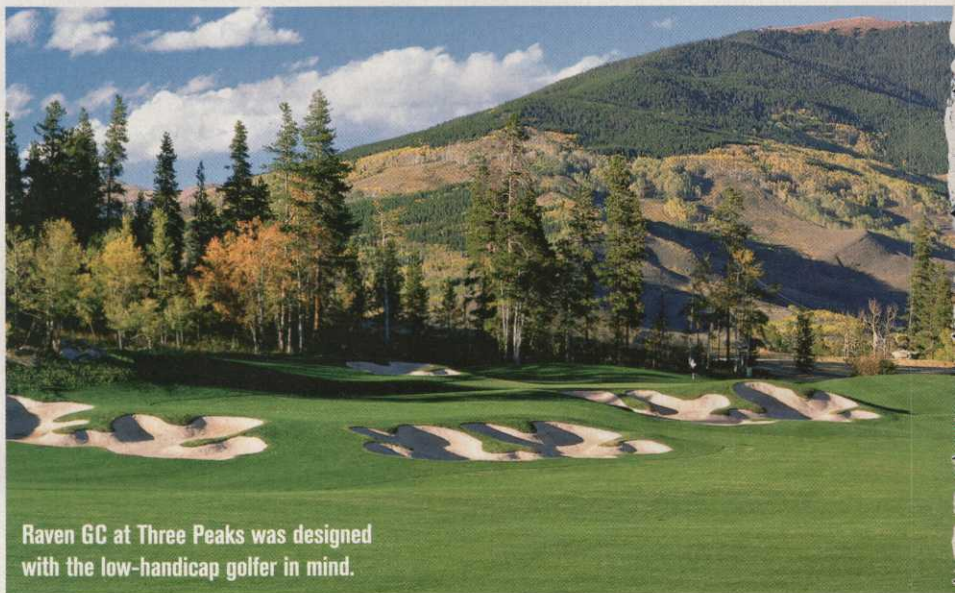
BY PETER BLAIS

Since the number of new courses is growing at a faster rate than the number of new golfers, developers shouldn't oversaturate markets with similar courses.

This wisdom received a boost from the "Trends in the Golf Industry: 1986-1999" report from the National Golf Foundation: "In the short term, particularly in specific local markets, oversaturation may already be a reality or may be a legitimate possibility. Over the next several years, development success will come to those who find the appropriate market niches by building golf courses to well-identified segments of the market."

But the operators of two new courses in Colorado have defied the NGF's findings.

Vail Resorts-operated The River Course at Keystone Resort opened for public play in June 2000. Three months later, golfers teed it up less than



Raven GC at Three Peaks was designed with the low-handicap golfer in mind.

10 miles down the road at Intrawest-owned Raven GC at Three Peaks. The Columbus, Ohio-based design team of Michael Hurdzan and Dana Fry designed both semi-private layouts.

Both courses provide expansive mountain vistas, \$12-million price tags and mid-summer green fees in the \$140 range. Despite their similarities,

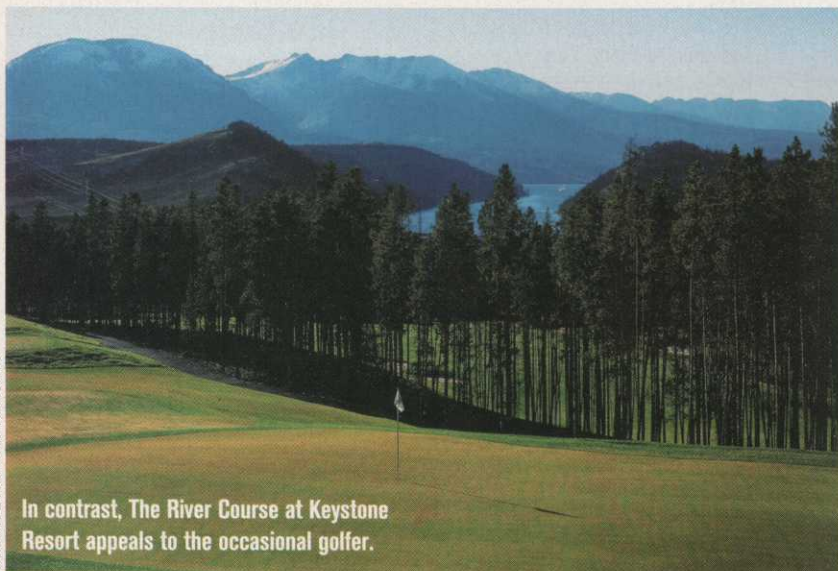
Vail Resorts and Intrawest predict both courses will succeed because the courses target different audiences.

Stretching to not quite 6,900 yards from the back tees, the shorter River Course at Keystone challenges low-handicappers. But it's designed primarily for the resort, conference guest and mid-level public player who may only play a handful of times per year, says Steve Corneillier, Keystone director of golf courses.

The Raven GC at Three Peaks, on the other hand, is roughly 700 yards longer than The River Course, stretching to almost 7,600 yards from the back tees. While high-handicappers can experience enjoyable rounds from the right tees, The Raven is primarily built with better golfers in mind.

"We offer low-handicappers a real challenge," says Steve Adelson, Intrawest's vice president of development and fee management. "Our goal is to be the must-play facility in the area."

If Coloradans didn't know about Hurdzan-Fry a couple years ago, they



In contrast, The River Course at Keystone Resort appeals to the occasional golfer.

COURTESY OF VAIL RESORTS

JOHN AND JEANNINE HENEBRY

certainly do now. The River Course and The Raven at Three Peaks bring to three the number of courses the team has designed in the state since 1998. "Not only is Hurdzan-Fry rated as one of the top design firms in the country, but the firm is also known for environmentally sensitive designs," Corneillier says.

Corneillier insisted the course's design incorporate Keystone's hiking, biking, fishing and kayaking facilities, as well as native plant species such as sagebrush, native grasses and wildflowers. "We want people to walk off the 18th hole saying, 'Now this is a Colorado course,'" he says.

Intrawest, on the other hand, consciously imitated the old courses from the East. Specifically, the company asked Fry to craft a number of Alister MacKenzie-style bunkers, similar to those found at The Country Club at Brookline (Mass.). "There's nothing like that around here," says Randy Kish, marketing director at The Raven at Three Peaks.

"The bunkers are Old World, MacKenzie bunkers we copied out of Robert Hunter's book *The Links*," Adelson says. "We wanted a rough and rugged bunker to complement a rough and rugged site."

The \$12-million price tag at both courses might shock many people, Hurdzan admits. While Hurdzan says he would love to see green fees closer to \$40 rather than \$140, he understands construction costs render the wish impossible. "The economic reality is that when you spend that much to build a golf course, you have to charge those types of rates to get back your investment," Hurdzan says.

Hurdzan says the proximity of the courses establish Colorado's Summit County as a golf destination, opening the door for someone to build a lower-cost course with appropriate green fees.

"The pent-up demand in that marketplace is huge," Adelson says. "The municipal course in nearby Breckenridge fills up four days in advance,

which is the earliest you can make a tee time. By 10 a.m., both courses at Keystone are extremely busy."

Adelson adds that the developers knew the risk in having both courses designed by the same architect, but it was a risk they were willing to take.

"It's not a hindrance, but an opportunity," Adelson says. "Some golfers

love to play certain architects' golf courses. When people come up to Summit County, they will have the chance to play The Raven, the chance to play The River Course at Keystone, and then decide which they like best." ■

Blais is a free-lance writer from North Yarmouth, Maine.



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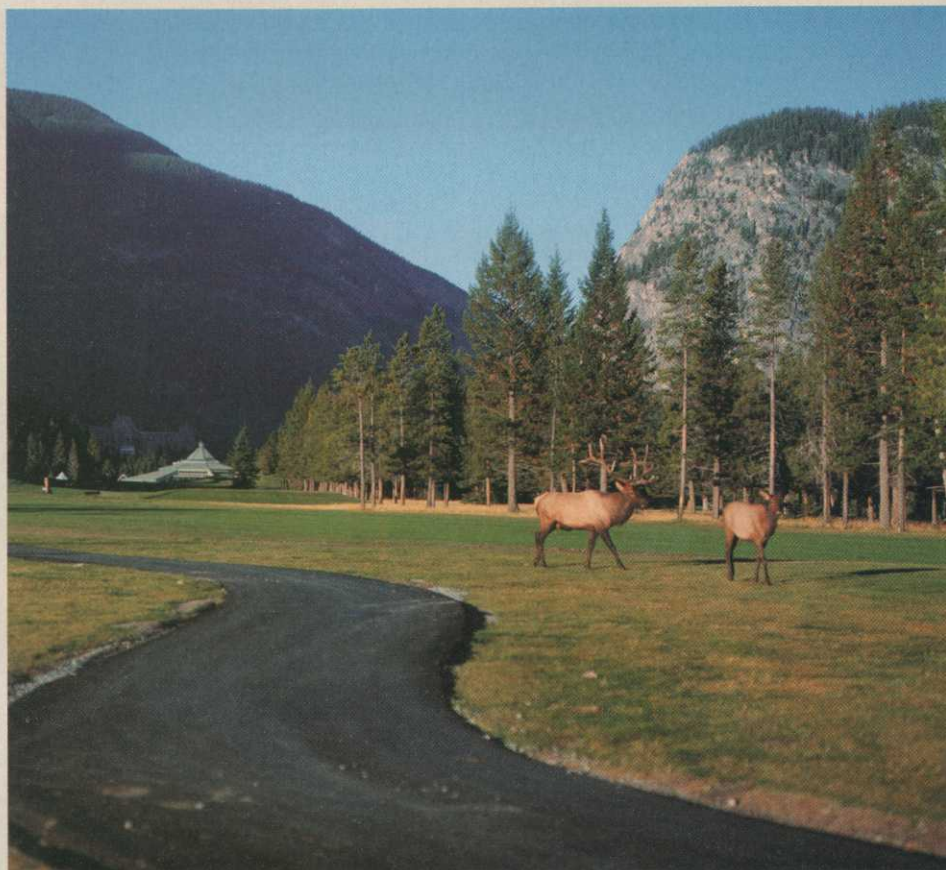
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Neighbors From Hell

The elk are welcome at Banff Springs GC, but they tear up turf and smash flagsticks to smithereens. However, superintendent Kevin Pattison has learned to live with his unruly companions

BY ANDREW PENNER

The approach shots at the Banff Springs GC in Banff, Alberta, are made against by massive granite walls, stately pines, and the emerald blues and greens of glacier-fed lakes and streams. It's world-class golf in the heart of the Canadian Rockies — a stirring experience for any



MIKE KLEMMER

Problem

Elks are one segment of an abundance of awesome wildlife at Banff Springs, but they can cause several problems — from damaging greens and fairways to getting in the way of golfers.

Solution

You just have to deal with them, especially since the elk are protected by the Banff National Park, where the course is located. Strategically planting montane grass is effective in controlling their flow, as is using dogs to herd the animals.

golf connoisseur.

While the approaches and their stunning views can be distracting, it's what's often in the foreground that can pose a problem. That would be the elk — and there are plenty of them.

Not only can these large animals cause problems for golfers navigating the course (power cars often have to weave in and around herds feeding on the fairways), but they also present challenges for superintendent Kevin Pattison to keep the course in top form. This isn't an easy task when hundreds of 1,500-pound crea-

The elk are fun to watch on the course, but they can wreak havoc.

tures are continuously urinating, sparring, feeding and generally acting like the wild beasts they are on the pristine property.

While Elmer Fudd may offer a quick solution to the problem, the elk are protected in Banff National Park, where the course is located. Elk can't be hunted, and they are watched closely by park authorities for disease and injury. "We're in a position where we must work with the animals," Pattison says.

The elk present many problems agronomically. The animals continuously urinate on the course, which Stanley Thompson designed in 1927. Elk urine is secreted at body temperature in high volumes. During fall and winter, when the air and soil temperatures are low, the turf is stressed considerably and can't synthesize the chemicals in the urine nor handle the severe change in temperature. Consequently, the greens and fairways in Banff are dotted with dead spots in the spring. "We spend 120 hours in the spring repair-

ing urine spots on the course," Pattison says.

That's not all. The bulls have a tendency to spar with flagsticks, shattering them into pieces.

"We remove the flagsticks every evening; otherwise, we'd be cleaning up shrapnel on a regular basis," says Doug Wood, Banff's longtime director of golf. The elks' fixation with the flagsticks begins with their love of salt. When the golfers handle the flagsticks, salt is left behind from hands and fingers — a tasty treat for the elk.

Elk hoof prints also cause considerable damage to the turf.

"It takes us 25 percent longer to cut the greens in the morning because hoof marks must be repaired prior to cutting," Pattison says. "The worst situations in green damage arise when the bulls dig up large sections of the greens with their antlers. Sometimes these areas of destruction are the size of a car. Unfortunately, when this type of devastation occurs, the mangled turf must be painstakingly repaired and put back into place like a jigsaw puzzle."

Urine isn't the only substance that elk secrete in large quantities. While elk dung isn't anything to worry about from a plant's perspective, most superintendents and golfers consider it displeasing from an aesthetic standpoint. Interestingly, the maintenance crew in Banff uses leaf removal equipment to clean

up elk dung in the spring and fall. It's an immense job that requires over 600 working hours a year.

Many people don't realize that elk can be dangerous animals, and one must use common sense around them. Elk have charged golfers at Banff Springs, but there have been no reports of physical contact or injury.

The most dangerous time of year is mating season in late fall. Just like any man wooing the woman he loves, the male elk tend to get a little defensive, protective and downright stubborn when it comes to outside interference. The course enforces a free drop rule if a golfer's ball comes to rest near a bull defending his love interests.

Mothers with calves can also present a problem. Keeping a safe distance from a cow with her calf is the safest bet. "On occasion we have moved tee markers up to the fairway if, for instance, a mother is parked by a tee box with her calf," Pattison says.

Elk are as much a part of Banff Springs as the panoramic mountain vistas, beautiful bunkering, and elegant green complexes. But controlling the movement of the animals is critical to keeping the course in decent shape.



GORDON HUNTER

Banff's fairways are marked with dead spots in the spring, thanks to elk urine.

The course has a number of strategies in place to help guide the animals to positions where they'll be least affected by Joe Hack and his titanium artillery.

Montane grass, which the elk eat and bed in, has existed naturally on many areas of the course since its inception. However, when Pattison took over four years ago, he began an extensive program to strategically plant montane grass in areas where he wanted the elk to gather. Incidentally, the young elk also find protection from predators as they are camouflaged in areas where the grass grows long.

The areas containing the natural grass are situated between holes, behind greens and in other open areas on

the course.

Other steps include using scare tactics to move large herds off fairways into areas off the course or out of high-traffic areas.

Occasionally, "bangers" or "screamers" are used, which make loud noises and excite the animals into moving away from the threat and into safer areas.

In addition, Parks Canada implemented dogs to herd elk away from the town site. It recently began using

dogs on the course, and the elk consider them predators. This method is an effective way of moving elk in a controlled fashion.

The elk were at Banff Springs long before Thompson was commissioned to design the course in Banff National Park.

They are permanent fixtures. But finding ways to work with and around the animals will continue to challenge superintendents long after Pattison is gone.

Educating the golfing public and implementing natural systems which help minimize confrontation and turf damage can go a long way in ensuring this mountain golf getaway will leave all parties at peace, Pattison says. ■

Penner is a free-lance writer and golf instructor from Calgary, Alberta.

Betting on Bent

Presidio GC
superintendent Kevin Hutchins opted to resod his greens with bentgrass – in a poa annua region – to combat nematodes

BY DOUG SAUNDERS

The Presidio GC in San Francisco is a historic golf course located in one of the world's great urban settings. The former military course, designed by Robert Johnston in 1895, is one of the oldest courses west of the Mississippi River. Its unique combination as a military course and a civilian private club existed until 1994, when military downsizing forced its closure.

Problem

A severe nematode infestation damaged Presidio GC's greens. Use of chemicals to eliminate the problem wasn't possible because of government regulations regarding the course.

Solution

Remove the old sod by hand and replace it with a bentgrass mixture that contained species that were nematode resistant.



The Presidio's maintenance crew removed the old sod by hand to preserve the greens' contours.

FREDDY BIRD

But the course's land was added to the National Parks System in 1994, and the Presidio became part of the largest urban park in the country. It's the only 18-hole course on national park land.

The federal government determined the course should become public and entered into a long-term lease agreement with Arnold Palmer Golf Management to renovate and operate the course under strict federal guidelines.

In 1995, Arnold Palmer Golf Management embarked on an \$8 million renovation program for the course that included a new irrigation system, re-sodding of tees and improving fairways.

However, renovating the greens to championship level presented the biggest challenge.

The problem

A severe nematode infestation was discovered in 1997 on the greens. Superintendent Kevin Hutchins, knowing a chemical remedy was not an option because



Kevin Hutchins, Presidio GC's superintendent, had to be creative to combat his nematode infestation.

of federal restrictions, had to find an alternative solution.

"Our mission is to operate the course with minimal chemical applications," Hutchins says. "By federal mandate, we're restricted from using many remedies available to other courses. This could be looked upon

as an unfair restraint, but I look at it as a challenge and an opportunity."

During 1997 and 1998, Hutchins tried several options to battle the nematodes. He changed his fertilization rates, tried different watering rates, and used several natural nematicides. But seven months of experimenting brought few results.

The solution

So Hutchins pursued another avenue. In 1999, he presented to the Presidio Trust, the operational oversight body governing the Presidio, the option of resurfacing the greens to eradicate the problem. The committee agreed to the \$500,000 project, and Hutchins developed a program to perform the task while still keeping the course open.

Continued on page 53