

Thoughts From Across The Pond

Environmentalists claim that the pesticides used to keep fairways fair and greens green often flow into nearby streams, killing fish and poisoning the local tap-water. They blame clumsy excavation by golf-course contractors for causing landslides, such as the one that killed 54 people in South Korea in 1992. And they accuse developers in poor countries of stealing water from irrigation projects to use on their courses, leaving local paddy fields parched.

In Asian countries where land is scarce and golf courses are spreading faster than anywhere else, conflict is inevitable. Jungles are being sacrificed to golf. So are fields that have provided peasants with a living for centuries. Hence the vehemence of Asians who hate golf.

A village leader in Indonesia recently served seven months in jail for resisting eviction by golf course contractors from land he and his neighbors had been farming for 40 years. Anti-golf demonstrators in South Korea have fought pitched battles with riot police. And, in Japan (the Global Anti-Golf Movement) is encouraging people to dress up as water sprites and write to the government on behalf of trees which will be bulldozed to make way for the wicked game.

Up to a point, the campaign is working. Community opposition has stymied the construction of 96 South Korean golf courses in the last couple of years, and a spokesman for GAG'M, Gen Morita, claims some credit for the cancellation of 720 proposed courses in Japan, where the anti-

golf lobby has been helped by the plunge in the value of tradable Japanese golf club memberships.

The anti-golf lobby would contain fewer environmentalists if all golf course architects were as sensitive as those in Scotland (where) the aim has always been to design courses that use the existing contours of the land, rather than moving tonnes (sic) of earth, as the Americans do, or installing escalators between sunken green and raised tees, as the Japanese do.

(Scottish-type golf clubs) are able to argue convincingly that they are more friendly to the environment than many other sorts of development. A heather-flanked fairway certainly nurtures more birds and insects than a car park or a suburban shopping development. And a golf course is arguably just as eco-friendly as an arable field that is soaked with herbicides, fungicides, pesticides and all those other-icides several times a year.

(Excerpted from "Golf's Killjoys," The (London) Economist.)



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