

# Battling floods and wildlife

**Floods, critters and creative landscaping make this Washington State course exciting year round.**

by Leslee Jaquette



**Jean Phipps raises about 60 flats of annuals in the Mt. Si greenhouses.**

■ Originally part of the largest hop farm in the world, the Mount Si Golf Course has been mostly dry since Prohibition days. And—though Elliot Ness never made a raid on the Snoqualmie Valley farm—the 18-hole course has since seen its share of excitement.

The public course is nestled in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains at the base of Mount Si, about 30 miles east of Seattle. The old, well-maintained course attracts folks from all over the Northwest—except when it floods.

Because of a slough to the north where three forks of the Snoqualmie River converge, you would think spring runoff

would be the problem.

Not so, explains superintendent J.K. Moore. Annual winter floods, caused when the Cascades receive a heavy snow before Thanksgiving followed by a warm December with rain, swell the river into uncontrollable torrents. The bloated rivers back up first into the first slough, which under less violent conditions acts as a fairly successful reservoir. But when the waters jump the banks, the back nine suffers the consequences.

Moore recalls that one flood measured 12 feet above the 10th green. Three times in the past two decades, the entire course has been submerged, and three times the clubhouse has been under five feet of water. Every year some flooding affects the course.

Fortunately, Moore says, the water backs up onto the course but doesn't cut it into ravines. (If the rivers invented a new fork during floods, the course would suffer much more damage.) Secondly, the water abates quickly, usually within 24 hours.

But what remains is a spongy course strewn with debris.

Moore mobilizes volunteers from the men's club and other local courses, plus his full-time winter staff of three to scrape six to eight inches of silt off the greens. The work takes several days, and the greens are left terribly soft. Surprisingly, even when the back nine is flooded, the front nine often stays open in keeping with the course's commitment to year around play.

**Birds and bees**—Most of the critters—bald eagles, great blue heron, otter and waterfowl—make the slough their home. But the deer and elk graze on everything in sight. Indeed, each of the three Snoqualmie Valley golf courses has its own herd of elk. "Maybe each herd has its own course," Moore muses.

To keep the large animals away and

minimize destruction, Moore buys "Cougar Crap" from the Seattle Zoo. He discreetly places the big cat feces around the wooded perimeter of the course in standing bird-feeder type troughs. "The scent freaks out the deer," he notes.

This year, the course got a late start due to the lingering snow season, heavy rains, late freeze and small spring flood. Because of that, Moore may not be able to purchase any new equipment this year. However, most years he buys one piece of

new equipment. He prefers to invest in top, new equipment on a regular basis as opposed to employing a full-time mechanic. He compares his plan to that of the businessman who drives the latest model car. This way he doesn't have to nursemaid old equipment. He gets efficient performance and minimal service headaches.

Moore explains that this management method is different, but works due to the fact that his core employees,

including son and assistant supervisor Michael Moore and head landscaper Jean Phipps, are reliable individuals who take responsibility for their own machines.

"Our operators do their own maintenance," says Moore. "If their machine doesn't work, they don't work."

Mount Si Golf Course has the smallest crew anywhere in the Pacific Northwest. The three of them, all salaried, mow 135 acres.

Phipps says that by making two fungus spray applications, early spring and fall, both fungi and grubs are easily controlled. She notes that other local courses that only make one application seem to suffer grub infestations some years. When moles attack the course, Phipps traps them.

**Colorful treats**—Since Phipps joined the team eight years ago, she has concentrated on additional landscaping and flowers. Probably the most ornamental course in the Northwest, Phipps raises about 60



**Superintendent J.K. Moore, left and landscape manager Jean Phipps trust in the work of reliable crews.**

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flats of annuals in the course greenhouses and purchases another 60 flats. Perennials are used extensively in the course's 40-plus gardens. Indeed, Phipps maintains enormous gardens, each with its own style and motif with dozens of kinds of flowers, flowering trees and roses. She is proud of the 100 roses on the course and broad spectrum of relatively unusual flowers

they cultivate from seed.

Phipps jokes, "Golf is free at Mount Si. Here people pay for the botanical gardens."

Her newest and largest garden parallels the 18th tee. At a whopping 130 feet by 20 feet, this garden includes everything from Asian pear trees, peach and apple trees to poppies and the popular and somewhat unusual feathery, purple astilbe.

One of the reasons Phipps can cultivate

such enormous and varied gardens is that the course rests at an elevation of 400 feet. Despite its proximity to the volatile, mighty Cascades the weather is mild and inviting in the valley most of the year.

—The author is a freelance writer based in Edmonds, Wash. She is a frequent contributor to LM.

## Turf stress a factor with 9-hole courses

**When to expand**—For courses of 2,500 to 3,000 yards and a Standard

**To handle double play, use two sets of tees for each hole, and find a way to vary traffic patterns.**

■ On the face of it, managing a nine-hole golf course should be no more difficult than looking after 18. Yet, some factors related to golfer traffic and maintenance make 9-hole management more challenging.

The decision to develop a site for 9 holes, as opposed to 18, usually relates either to a lack of space or finance. Generally, these basic constraints follow through to produce management problems for the shorter course.

Excellent 9-hole courses are located throughout the country, but many golfers consider them the "poor relation" to 18-hole facilities. This perception is grossly unfair, as some have layouts that are as good as, if not superior to, the quality of an 18-hole layout.

If a 9-hole golf course is built on land too small for 18, there may be more room to design a superior course in terms of its playing qualities, assuming that the architect fully appreciates and capitalizes on the opportunity. Many 18-hole courses are ruined because two or three holes have been squeezed into the available area.

It's more difficult to attract visitors to a 9-hole course due to the perception that a standard 18-hole course is better. The supposed tedium of playing the same hole twice in a round may be another reason.

This can be overcome to a degree by having two sets of tees per hole, located well away from each other. This presents a totally different tee shot to the fairway on a par 4 or par 5 hole, or green shot on a par 3.

Scratch Score as low as 60, the option to go to an 18-hole format should be resisted, if there is only the room to double the existing yardage. It may make more sense to design a quality, 9-hole layout with a better balance of par 3, 4 and 5 holes.



Some superb 9-hole layouts have a special character of their own which would be impossible to repeat through a full 18.

**Turf stress concerns**—A round of golf on a 9-hole course still adds up to 18, and this results in double the turf traffic.

If room was initially a constraint, it is unlikely that much thought was given to designing large greens, adequate tees and wide, diverse traffic routes.

Nine-hole courses with separate tees and varied landing and approach areas will have less wear damage. A tighter layout also provides less opportunities to divert winter play.

The question of access around the course has implications for equipment as well as golfers.

If the layout takes up most of the available room, then maintenance vehicles may encroach more onto the playing areas of the 9-hole course. Less room through the site may necessitate having to mow everything, an added maintenance burden many 18-hole courses avoid by promoting banderoughs and conservation areas.

**Morning glut**—It won't take long for a 9-hole course to become choked with golfers first thing in the morning, and there will be minimum amounts of time for greens mowing and other important morning maintenance.

Maintenance for 9 holes is not half that of the 18-hole course due to down time—traveling around the course, maneuvering around small greens and small tees takes up a major portion of management hours.

**Machinery costs**—Essentially the same machinery range is required to tend a 9-hole golf course. A triplex mower is needed for the greens, regardless of number. At first glance, it may be thought that a walk-behind greens mower is more feasible on a 9-hole course. However, the lack of time may mandate using a riding triplex.

Half the topdressing, fertilizer and fungicide can make for a tidy savings, although the difference can be eaten up by increased repair costs.

Fertilizer and pesticide bills may not show lower costs, due to the demands of play, which require a greater input to stimulate growth.

Equivalent costs with reduced income will not make the club's accountant a happy man and the budget will be strained by major outlays, such as irrigation projects, or larger equipment purchases.

—Source: "Northern Ohio Turf"