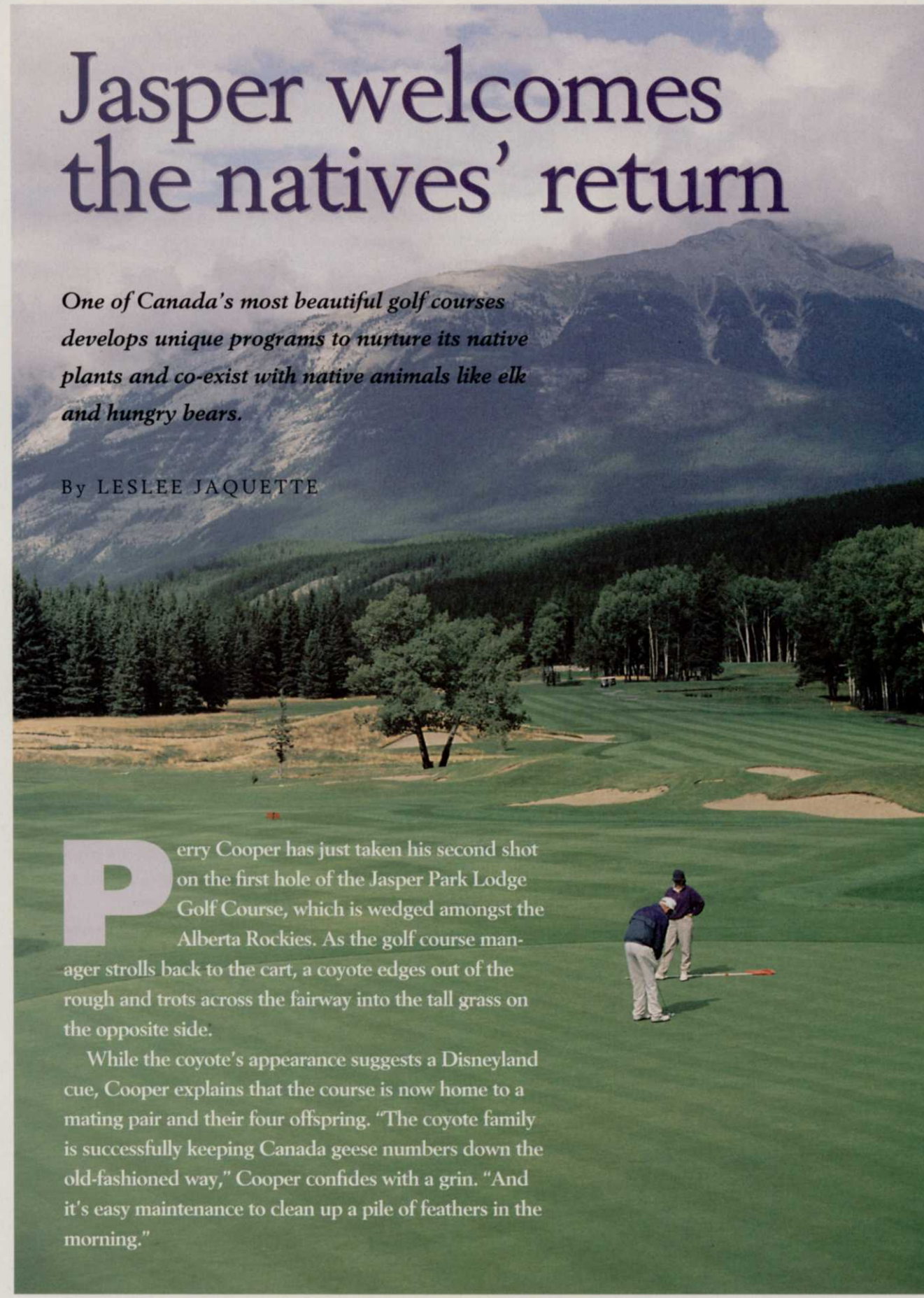


Jasper welcomes the natives' return

One of Canada's most beautiful golf courses develops unique programs to nurture its native plants and co-exist with native animals like elk and hungry bears.

By LESLEE JAQUETTE



Perry Cooper has just taken his second shot on the first hole of the Jasper Park Lodge Golf Course, which is wedged amongst the Alberta Rockies. As the golf course manager strolls back to the cart, a coyote edges out of the rough and trots across the fairway into the tall grass on the opposite side.

While the coyote's appearance suggests a Disneyland cue, Cooper explains that the course is now home to a mating pair and their four offspring. "The coyote family is successfully keeping Canada geese numbers down the old-fashioned way," Cooper confides with a grin. "And it's easy maintenance to clean up a pile of feathers in the morning."

Given that the 903-acre Canadian Pacific heritage property rests amidst Canada's Jasper National Park, Cooper says maintenance of the 18-hole, 1925-built course revolves around the restoration of both native plants and animals. Throughout the last decade, the 40-person crew has made tremendous efforts to meet Parks Canada's mandate to maintain an ecological integrity that calls for a reintroduction of native plants as well as minimal animal control.

The Canadian golf publication, *Score*, recently rewarded Cooper and crew's efforts by naming the Jasper Park Lodge Golf Course Canada's top golf resort. It was designed by Stanley Thompson. Accolades aside, Cooper says since taking over the manager's position in 1987, the most dramatic changes on the course focus on eliminating nonnative plants. For example, a decade ago the landscapers grew 110 varieties of nonindigenous plants and flowers in greenhouses to populate some 30 gardens.

Not so tasty natives

After years of watching the moose and elk learn to eat every variety, they were reduced to only marigolds and geraniums. "Now snapdragons are the only plant they won't yank out of the earth and spit back out, leaving big, ugly holes," says Cooper.



The coyote: a natural method for controlling the Canada geese population on the course.

Throughout the restoration of 20 tee boxes since 1993, the JPL crew has replanted using only natural materials such as wild roses and a native shrub, golddrop potentilla, in combination with snapdragons. Most of these planters use a maintenance-free ground cover of beautiful, black, lodgepole pine cones. Cooper buys the pine cones from Smoky

Lake Tree Nursery near Edmonton, Alberta.

Along a similar vein, Cooper says his biggest headache is keeping colorful planters high enough to keep away from the dozens of elk that roam freely about the property. Again, trial and error has taught the crew that superpetunias are the only flowers that thrive under the semi-arid conditions (16 inches of rain annually), producing perpetual color with little fuss. Cooper says the superpetunias are worth the extra cost due to their "low" maintenance. "Blossoms last longer than regular petunias, they are thick and lush and the old blooms blow off clean."

Get rid of the pit

Another long-term "back to nature" project Cooper has been working on entails filling in an ancient borrow pit that has been an eyesore since the course opened. The pit serves as a terrible scar and as a breeding ground for all sorts of nonnative plants such as toad flax. Cooper regrets that due to a development freeze in Jasper, it will take at least three years to back fill with clean material, grade and plant. Fortunately, Forestry Canada staff contributed 400 native tree plugs for the site, including buffalo berry, poplar, aspen, fir, spruce and lodgepole pine.

While several areas of restored native grasses have encroached too far onto the fairway, slowed down play and have since been pushed back, Cooper supports a return to plants that belong in the region: "We are constantly evaluating what works and what looks good."

One of the biggest improvements to the dramatic course in the past decade, says Cooper, re-



Perry Cooper, golf course manager, contends with multiple users—golfers, coyotes, elk, Canada geese and ground squirrels. It can get rather busy.



Canada geese make themselves at home.

mains promoting the *Poa annua* on the greens. After decades of watching from 50 to 100 percent of the greens die after every harsh Alberta winter, Cooper and colleagues put solid tarps over the greens. These tarps act as greenhouses heating to 90° F. temperatures that force the *Poa* to germinate.

The "back to nature" mandate creates even more demanding challenges when applied to critters. Cooper, who is obviously very fond of his family of coyotes, says he welcomes their hunting of elk and smaller mammals.

The crew keeps an eye on both an old black bear and an all-too-friendly moose. The bear thrives on buffalo berries and roams the perimeter of the course. Formerly, the crew used milorganite to fer-

tilize greens until it became apparent that the application appealed to the bears' sensitive noses; the scent of sewage sludge causing the bears to dig holes.

Protecting the animals

A major problem is protecting the bear from visitors. Recently, the bear wandered out on hole number 12 to be greeted by awestruck Korean and Japanese golfers. Soon four parties were waiting for the bear to amble on. The problem escalated, Cooper reports, when just two holes later, the same golfers followed the bear into the woods to take pictures. He laments that folks fail to understand that a black bear weighs 500 pounds and runs up to 45 mph. The moose is also a problem because he lets people get close for photos.

Another critter issue revolves around fir beetles. Cooper notes that these, too, are protected by park mandate and cannot simply be eradicated. While the fir beetles represent a big threat to some of the fairways' 300-year-old trees, the beetles are food for several species of birds. "Our only option is to keep the trees as healthy as possible so they can survive an infestation," says Cooper, who notes that some of the big firs survived a fire 100 years ago. "We do that by injecting a slow-release liquid fertilizer into the ground and minimizing foot traffic around tree roots."

Finally, the crew at JPL is proud of how they relocated a growing colony of Richardson's ground squirrels. Cooper notes that the rodents had increased to a critical mass, drilling holes everywhere and creating nasty ankle-turners. Outside national parks, products such as strychnine-laced Gopher Cop would be used to eradicate the hole diggers. In a national park, using poison is illegal.

Cooper's crew baited live traps with little individual peanut butter containers--the kind found in restaurants. This method worked so well that the crew trapped 57 squirrels in one week. The rodents were relocated to the site of an abandoned colony about 12 miles distant. "Fortunately," says Cooper with a laugh, "it will be pretty tough for them to return from across the Athabasca River." □

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