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Book Review of, The Nature of the Game: Links Golf at Bandon Dunes and Far Beyond by Mike Keiser with Stephen Goodwin (review)

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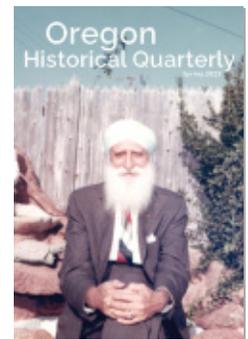
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The Nature of the Game: Links Golf at Bandon Dunes and Far Beyond by Mike Keiser with Stephen Goodwin (review)

William L. Lang

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difficult biannual trip each way. There are some typos in this edition, along with the omitted figure numbers to the eleven maps.

A general complaint is that Anderson uses the recent Canadian term “First Nations” with reference to Indigenous people both north and south of the present border. It would have been appropriate to use the actual names of the Indigenous groups where possible.

While we do not know many names of the voyageurs, whose tradition was oral, the book’s epilogue is an homage to the “invisible” voyageurs. Anderson concludes by stating: “This was a huge accomplishment and was largely due to the character of the Canadien and Iroquois men who rowed the boats in the early years, and the Métis and First Nations men who later replaced them” (p. 252).

The book is a labor of love, which Anderson attributes to her personal connection to the fur traders — her great-grandfather Alexander Caulfield Anderson and her great-great-grandfather James Birnie, who traveled with the express in 1826.

The book is a must for fur-trade buffs, scholars, and students on both sides of the border. Many of the voyageurs ended their fur-trade careers in the Willamette Valley, where they eventually took up land and homesteaded; names such as French Prairie, Champoeg, and St. Paul are early reminders of their presence.

KENNETH FAVRHOLDT

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THE NATURE OF THE GAME: LINKS GOLF AT BANDON DUNES AND FAR BEYOND

by Mike Keiser with Stephen Goodwin

Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2022. Photographs. 320 pages. \$40.00 cloth,

In 1999, Mike Keiser and his associates welcomed golfers to a new and remarkable links golf course on the southern Oregon coast near the town of Bandon. At the mouth of the Coquille

River and small bay some thirty miles south of Coos Bay, Bandon had begun as a mining camp in the 1850s and developed an economy in the late nineteenth century based on fishing, logging, dairying, and cranberry cultivation. The area’s spectacular coastline brought tourists, but nothing quite prepared the town for the advent of world-class golf courses — six in total at Bandon Dunes — and an influx of golf tourists that propelled the destination resort to be an economic linchpin in Bandon.

The Nature of the Game is a memoir of Mike Keiser’s creative and passionate pursuit of links golf that brought him to Bandon and spurred a fluorescence in golf architecture and design. It is the inside story of how Keiser and his teams of golf architects created links golf courses at Bandon and took their methods to Wisconsin, Nova Scotia, and Tasmania. He tells the story of each project in a conversational style, providing details of building the many courses with commentaries by the principal architects — Michael Clayton, Bill Coore, Tom Doak, Ben Crenshaw, David Kidd, and Jim Urbina. Keiser willingly exposes arguments about specific project details that erupted between himself and principal architects, but those glimpses of the inner workings underlined his devotion to his vision of how golf should be played on natural courses. His pursuit was an embrace of the historical origins of the game of golf, a contrary vision of the 1990s mode in golf design that often destroyed natural forms and created faux environments. Keiser’s vision was, as he puts it, “a lay-of-the-land” approach, minimalist in disturbance of place, a creation that integrated golf into existing landforms, retained native vegetation, and favored scenic views. He argues that it is a return to the original Scottish and Irish courses — links laid out on a natural landscape. What began in the Bandon Dunes project, Keiser exported to other locales with sandy soils, variegated topography, and stunning natural viewpoints — especially the courses, like Bandon’s, that stretch along a dramatic seacoast. On each project, Keiser and his golf architects faced challenges posed by the natural environment, existing land-use regulations, and community acceptance of a destination golf resort.

Keiser devotes his longest chapter to the initial project at Bandon. There were physical, cultural, political, and economic challenges on the southern Oregon coast. Don Ivy, the late chief of the Coquille Indian Tribe, addressed the use of formerly Native homelands, concluding that Keiser's plans more closely mirrored respectful land use than mining, ATVs gouging the landscape, and other soil-degrading developments. An earlier owner of the land — five miles north of the town of Bandon — had planned to build a golf course but had failed to gain approval under the state's restrictive land-use laws. It was an economic windfall for Keiser, who purchased the 1200-plus-acre parcel for what he considered a "bargain price of \$2.4 million" (p. 47). One of the physical features of the acreage was an invasive plant — gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) — which was purposefully planted in the early 1870s by George Bennett, an Irish immigrant from Bandon, Ireland, who wanted gorse growing to remind him of his homeland. Gorse is a spiny and oily plant that grows thick enough to impede easy walking and is a significant fire hazard, which Bandon

discovered in 1936 when dry conditions and a gorse-fueled firestorm raced through town, killing eleven and causing \$3 million in property destruction. Controlling the rapidly spreading gorse was not easy, and that conservation problem became the lever Keiser used to get approval for Bandon Dunes. "Planting grass and maintaining open fairways," he argued, would help control the invasive plant, and that won approval with the land-use authorities (p. 48). The economic value of Bandon Dunes to Coos County and Bandon soon became evident: by 2020 Bandon Dunes employed 610 people, with a payroll of \$20 million.

There is more to the Bandon Dunes story recounted in this memoir, especially in the descriptions of golf course construction and what most readers might well miss when they encounter a golf course as a player or observer. Keiser's memoir is recommended for golf aficionados, anyone who has played one of the six courses at Bandon Dunes, and those curious about why and how a world-rated golf resort found a place on the Oregon coast.

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