



Constanti Kazak

*The serenity of golf is reflected in Crown Point's setting.*

**H**ow can you call a course that has staged the 1983 New England Men's Amateur and the 1992 New England Women's Amateur "hidden"? If the best amateur golfers in New England have played for the region's highest honor, surely the golfing public must be aware of the facility. Yet if you ask players at nearby Woodstock or Quechee where Crown Point is, many will send you packing for

New York State.

Instead of that sojourn, exit Interstate 91 at Ascutney, head two miles west, five miles south, and tee it up at Crown Point Country Club, one of Vermont's hidden gems. You won't be disappointed with this natural layout surrounded by miles of woods and farmland, totally untouched by the noise and confusion of even Vermont's version of urban life.

The club was named for the

Crown Point Military Road, and a serious slicer can take a stroll through history just to the right of the tenth fairway. In 1760, Lord Jeffrey Amherst hacked a path through the wilderness from Fort #4 in Charlestown, New Hampshire, to Fort Ticonderoga in New York. Amherst was Commander-in-Chief of the British forces in America and his mission was to remove the French forts along Lake Champlain. The

mid-summer road-building march through Vermont's wilderness was merely a warm-up exercise for his 800 men. When he and other British commanders were successful against the French, and Vermont was finally considered hospitable land, the road they built showed English colonists "the fertility and value of the lands lying between Connecticut River and Lake Champlain," according to Thompson's 1842 *Civil History of Vermont*.

Nearly 200 years later, a dozen people with the same appreciation of the landscape met to plan a golf club. "A group of interested golfers who had been playing at Bellows Falls, Woodstock, Windsor and elsewhere got together at the Jones & Lamson conference room in 1952," noted Jack Alger, one of that group. *The History of Springfield*, by Keith Richard Barney, announced the outcome: "Springfield got a brand new corporation in September, 1952, when articles of incorporation were filed in Montpelier for the Crown Point Country Club. Shares were priced at fifty dollars and W. Leland Lawrence was General Chairman. After considering several sites, the new corporation purchased the Raymond Trombley 306-acre farm on the Weathersfield Center Road, plus an additional plot of some fifteen or twenty acres from Harold Stokes. Work was begun to develop a course at once with volunteer labor plus some equipment."

The task may not have been as strenuous as building a road through virgin forest, but plenty of sweat was shed. "It was a community effort," Jack Alger recalls. "People picked rocks, cut brush, moved stonewalls. Those that had some talent laid out the front nine. It was very natural terrain, and we all had scars on the bottoms of our clubs to prove it." Their labors during 1952 and the following year paid off on August 22, 1953, when seven holes were opened for play. Golfing President Dwight D. Eisenhower accepted an honorary membership, and according to the town history, "In a letter he explained that while he had resigned his membership at most of his clubs, he was happy to accept this one because of its historic associations and Senator Flanders' interest."

In 1958 the stockholders voted to expand the nine-hole course to eighteen, playable by the summer of



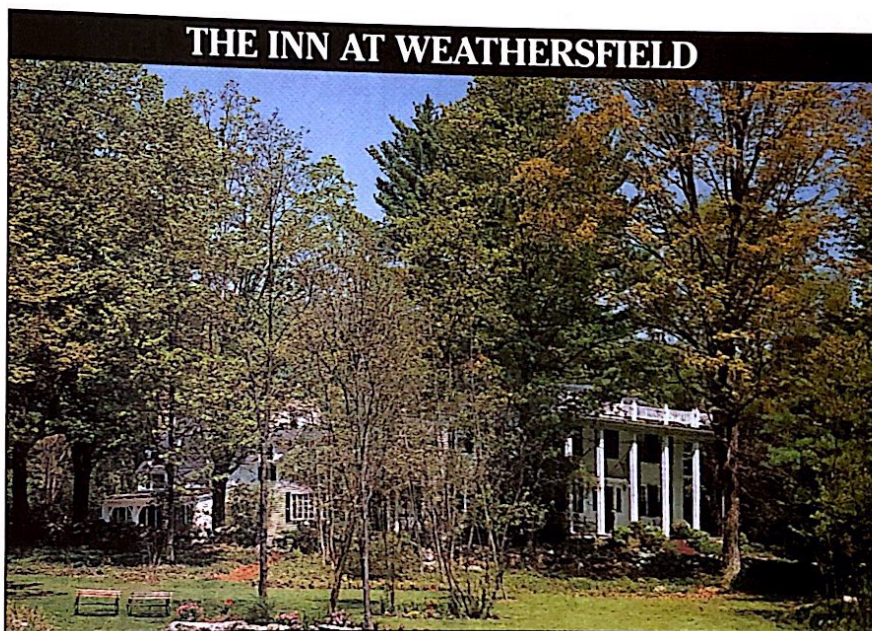
*The sloped fairway and two-tiered green of the tenth hole serves as a gateway to the challenging back nine.*

Bob Labbanace

1959. They hired William Mitchell of nearby Lake Sunapee to plan the route along the ridgeline and to sod the greens in the excellent velvet bent grass that he nurtured at his turf farm in New Hampshire. Mitchell had been a course superintendent since he was nineteen, and had designed and built golf courses in partnership with his brothers. He piloted his own twin engine Cessna into the

Springfield airport to check on the expansion, then lifted off to one of ten other projects he might have in progress.

"The second nine at Crown Point Country Club went into play July 4, 1959. The greens were said to be in excellent shape, but players were urged to help by picking up stones on the fairways," notes K. R. Barney in his history of the town. This second



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opening session was highlighted by a match between four-time British Open Champion Bobby Locke, Rutland Amateur star Mac Murray Jones, Les Mercer and Ed Keating (see photo on p. 147). Club President Jack Alger cut the ribbon to open the full course. "Bobby Locke had married a Fenton girl from Rutland and he was in the area frequently, so we hired him to speak and play at the opening. He was past his peak but he was still a big attraction, and he was paid a small fee compared with what the guys get today."

Forty years after neighbors built a local golf course, the members and guests at Crown Point enjoy a championship facility with excellent playing surfaces. You won't have to pick rocks or scar your clubs as Superintendent Karl Vogell has continued a tradition of slick putting greens in a naturalized course setting.

Dave Pfannenstien has taken over as professional in the past few years, working in the tradition of Til Albanese who served the club from the 1960s into the 1980s. Dave is assisted by his wife Shari, running a well-stocked pro shop, conducting junior programs, knowing his membership, and welcoming the fortunate visitors who make the pilgrimage. He describes what went on at the fortieth anniversary in the summer of 1993. "Nearly half of the original members showed up and they got 1953 prices for the day. There was a meal for \$1.50 and plenty of golf. It coincided with our annual Divorce Open where husband and wife hit each other's drive and then play alternate shot." Dave laughs. "We had a couple of broken clubs, but no broken marriages."

In the early 1990s the club finally outgrew the old farmhouse that had housed the operation since its inception. Jack Alger's son Bob, who cad-died for Bobby Locke on that opening day and has been involved with CPCC his whole life, hated to see it go. "I fought tearing the old farmhouse down for years," Bob reflected. "But it was the right thing to do. We've got a fine facility here now." The new dining room overlooks the treacherous eighteenth green, and the lounge, restaurant, pro shop and locker rooms are all comfortable and well-appointed.

At the heart of the Crown Point experience is the unique character of the golf holes. You won't find many

of these holes repeated elsewhere, and they don't build them like eight, ten, twelve or fourteen anymore. A string of nine excellent exams begins with the uphill sweep of the 365-yard, par-4 sixth. By the time you hole out on fourteen, and stop to appreciate the classic Vermont horizon visible from that tabletop putting surface, you will have challenged a diverse assortment of natural holes, the envy of any world-class course.

The 376-yard, par-4 eighth doglegs around a rock pile, and you won't see the green over the hill no matter where you place your drive. The big mistake would be trying to cut the corner and finding an abundance of trees in your path as well. Number ten features 344 yards of sidehill lies and a sloping double-decker green to match. If you can bend alternate shots in opposite directions, you'll have a picnic on the 390-yard twelfth, as long as the drive goes right to left and the second shot left to right, and not the opposite.

By the time most first time visitors reach the wildly tilted fourteenth they've remarked on the enchanting quiet that engulfs these golfing grounds. This removed-from-the-mainstream, out-in-the-country stroll down emerald pathways is what golf in Vermont is all about.

Like any great golf course, Crown Point can be enjoyed by players of all ability levels. From the tips, the 6572 yards will provide perfect stimulation for the talented ball striker. Move to the middle markers and even the rookie will have room to spray it and play it. The woods do encroach on some holes but should only snag the significantly far afield. The 154-yard ninth is the only forced carry on the layout. Choose your club carefully, the embankment behind the green on this par-3 is not the best arena to demonstrate your chipping skills. You'll conclude by putting up towards the cup on the tiny carpet, no matter how many strokes precede that final poke.

Crown Point may be the perfect cross between Vermont mountain golf and the historic metropolitan clubs. There is terrain deviance on every hole but none would be characterized as mountain climbing. There are holes to fire away at and others to lay back on. By your second trip around you'll start to know which is which.