

BY ARTHUR RISTAU

It is arguably Vermont's most gorgeous golf hole. Stretching northerly from the course's highest promontory, Barre's fourteenth presents a voluptuous Vermont terrain of rolling hills, forests and farms. It is a perspective unique to golf in the Green Mountains.

Arrayed from the new platform tee, this 431-yard signature test first demands a lingering look at the dramatic and diverse Winooski Valley backdrop. In the foreground the fairway undulates into a valley of its own, and demands a pair of long, arrow-straight shots for the average golfer who aspires to a par four.

The mesmerizing panorama of the fourteenth is rivaled only by the view from the new sixteenth tee. Here the golfer is invited to survey dramatic mountains to the west and south including Camel's Hump and Sugarbush's famously steep F.I.S. trail, still well covered by snow in late May. Nearby, the view incorporates a tiered green mined by four bunkers. It is a 115-yard loft from the middle tee and, though rated the round's easiest it can be nasty, particularly on a windy day.

Barre's visual assets were first proclaimed in a prospectus issued in 1924 to obtain financing for what would ultimately become the Country Club of Barre. "It has been said that the grandeur of the mountain views here cannot be excelled in New England," penned the underwriter.

Stock salesmen are not celebrated for understatement, but impartial observers agree that Barre's scenic assets alone are worth a visit. Its devotees contend that the course itself—dollar-for-dollar,



THE SIXTEENTH
CAN BE A SERIOUS
CHALLENGE WHEN
WIND BUFFETS
THE HILLTOP TEE.

Larry Reilly

challenge-for-shotmaking-challenge,—can't be beat in Vermont.

Dave Christy, the club's professional entering his ninth year, has played all of Vermont's public and semi-private courses several times. Home pros, like stock brokers, don't underplay their products, but Christy would find few who could differ with this assessment: "In our (semiprivate) category, for what our members get for their dollar, I can't think of a better golfing value, not only in Vermont, but in New England."

Dues at Barre are a modest \$580 and there are no "assessments" common to other courses. "Sure," Christy elaborates, "Burlington and Rutland are superior but they are more than twice as expensive. We're better than some of the more publicized resort courses. The only comparison in quality and price that I know of is St. Johnsbury. Barre is just an unbelievable value. It is the best conditioned semi-private course in the state."

Barre averages a relatively low 21,000 rounds annually with only 10 percent of play attributable to greens fee participants. The low percentage of visitors is due in part to the club's location on a dirt turnpike in Plainfield. (Despite its name, Barre's 300-acre layout sits four miles north of the city line.)

This year marks the club's 30th as an 18-hole test. Assembling the acreage for expansion was facilitated in great measure by the course's former long-time superintendent, Bill Keaton, a veterinarian.

"At first," the doctor recalls, "we didn't have enough adjoining land to add the new nine. But our holdings included property that leapfrogged the club and neighbored the pastureland of two farmers. I took care of their cows and we got along OK, so when I proposed a swap they agreed."

With the new parcels the course was redesigned by a collaborative of a half dozen members, Keaton, and Brad Caldwell a Burlington contractor who had constructed Kwiniaska a year earlier.

The new nine was not merely integrated into the old layout. Several of the original holes were redesigned and new greens and tees were sculpted. Those who look carefully can identify these former vestiges.

One feature which member and visitor alike appreciate is the virtual absence of parallel fairways. The enhanced acreage and the abundance of trees are employed creatively, and one seldom encounters golfers playing different holes and competing for adjacent lies.

The aforementioned fourteenth is typical in that regard. It is almost completely cordoned off by thick stands of trees. But if it is Vermont's loveliest, the second is its evil twin.

This 400-yard stretch of anxiety plays uphill along an inclined, pitched fairway to a dog-legged, elevated green. The latter, by objective consensus is

among the most bedeviling, not to say sadistic, in Vermont. It slopes top to bottom and approach shots must stick underneath. There is no charitable pin placement and a two-putt is a triumph worth noting in clubhouse chatter.

Each hole now offers four teeing options; some of the differentiations are dramatic, yet others remain negligible. The relatively easy par-five fifteenth becomes a tough par-four from the

front. A half-dozen new forward tees have been installed in recent years.

Like many of Vermont's hillier courses, Barre is replete with topographical nuances. A flat lie is not the norm. Several greens, particularly ten and eighteen require some big-time borrowing. The tee shot on six onto a severe, hump-backed landing area was called 'unfair' by Christy's predecessor, Bill Ross. Pedestal greens on eleven and twelve add

spice to a sumptuous array of targeting challenges. There are few holes at Barre that could be called nondescript.

Generally, the front (par 35) is the shotmaker's side—shorter and more exacting. The back (36) is longer, slightly more open and kinder to the big hitters. The 6,000 (whites) yards are a pleasure to walk since the green-to-tee spans are minimal. Soft spikes are now required.

One of Rose's predecessors was Bob Brannum, the huge, hulking Norwich basketball coach and former All-American in both football and basketball at the University of Kentucky. Brannum, who served from 1963 to 1969 had been famous for whacking opponents as the "policeman" on Red Auerbach's first Celtics teams. He was famous locally for whacking jaw-dropping 300-yard drives.

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Bill Evans, the superintendent lured three years ago from Northfield is putting his own imprint on the course—as did the now-retired Doc Keaton. Evans, who hits it as well as any superintendent in the state (5 handicap) is the grandson of the late Fuzzy Evans, celebrated former athletic director at the University of Vermont.

Evans has accentuated the old invitation to bump and run by opening up the corridors fronting the greens, thereby enhancing the enjoyment of most of the ladies and those few older gents who might admit they need a little help. But, as always, the super giveth and the

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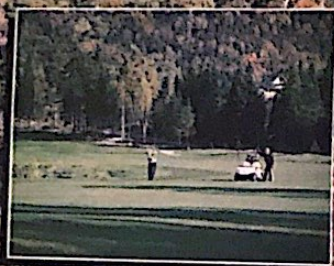
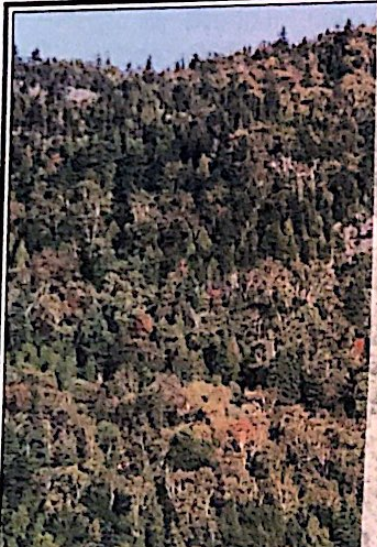
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super taketh away. The rough is wider and thicker these days and has been extended by 10 to 20 yards in front of some tees. Another Evans innovation is the utilization of bronze tees which a few senior members consider condescending. But if they want to enjoy their score more, they'll use them anyway.

Evans, who learned about soils and such at Catawba Valley Tech in Hickory, North Carolina, credits his crew and a conscientious greens committee for recent improvements. Greens were a focus during his first two years along with a recontouring of fairways to minimize the influence of ledges which come into play on a half-dozen holes.

IT'S MY HOME COURSE
AND I'M PROUD
TO BE A MEMBER.

Improvements for this year include \$100,000 for construction of a maintenance garage, driving range and a couple of hundred yards of new cart path. If you haven't played Barre in a few years you'll also note the expansion of the handsome old clubhouse which incorporates a new lounge, a hospitable wrap-around verandah, a portion of which overlooks the 18th hole and a hospitable host in the person of Paul Rumley.

Superintendents retire, courses mature and philosophies change. Barre, like member-managed courses elsewhere, has become more democratized.

Seventy years ago the club's management was dominated by affluent businessmen—"Preferred Stockholders" as they were styled. Formal Sunday dinners dominated the social agenda and the dress code mandated white flannels or linen plus-four knickers

with white shirt, tie and blue blazer. Women wore dresses and hats.

Today the membership and management is heterogeneous, reflecting the socio-economic diversity of the greater Barre community. Custodians and lawyers, granite carvers and teachers, ministers and state employees all can be found in the same foursomes. No vestiges exist of the social stratification of the 1920s.

One's home golf course is a little like one's home. You derive a certain amount of pride in pointing out to a visitor its attributes and unique qualities. That's the way I feel about Barre. It's my home course and I'm proud to be a member.

♦♦♦

Arthur Ristau has been an asset to Vermont Golf since its inception. He continues his popular Fly & Play series in our 1997 New Hampshire Golf magazine.

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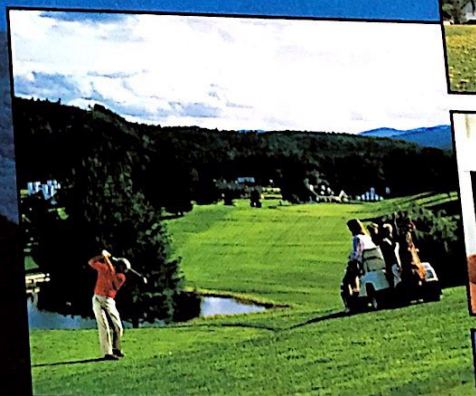
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