

Bargain Gems

Lake St. Catherine and West Bolton are a pair of affordable mountain courses

BY JAMES PENTLAND



Lake St. Catherine CC



LAKE ST. CATHERINE COUNTRY CLUB Poultney For a Vermont course, Lake St. Catherine has an unusually wide-open feel, and it doesn't get much more open than the view from the 15th green and 16th tee, surely one of the finest of any course in the region. From that vantage point, you might like to linger over the eagle's-eye view of the remaining holes to play and most of the rest, merging into tree-clad slopes that fade away to the horizon.

Especially because by that point you've braved the daunting, slanting hillside fairways of the 11th, 12th, and 13th holes, especially the latter, where even a slightly wayward tee shot will leave you either buried on the steeply wooded slope to the right, or bounding toward the wetland that forms a natural barrier below.

Then, having rashly decided to walk

Lake St. Catherine CC

yards	6,414
green fees	\$26-\$33
phone	802/287-9341
location	Poultney

www.lsgcc.com

rather than take a cart, you've puffed your way up a 500-foot climb from the 13th tee to the 16th tee (much of the climbing between holes), along the way taking in the treacherous par-three 14th—125 yards from the back tees along a narrow shoulder—to reach the glorious summit. So, never mind that twosome with a cart on your tail—take a moment. You've earned it.

But there's more than scenic glory at Lake St. Catherine. Based on a 1924 layout, with the afore-

mentioned sequence of holes added nine years ago as part of an expansion from nine to 18 holes, the course offers significant risk and reward over its 6,414 yards. The rest of the course is on flatter terrain, though there are several elevated tees and greens to raise the excitement level. One of the most notable of those elevated greens is at the 160-yard third hole.

The greens have some significant slopes, so that when conditions are dry and the greens are fast, certain

downhill putts require only the tiniest nudge to avoid a longer second putt from the other side of the hole.

General manager and pro Jack Tosone took over at Lake St. Catherine in 2005, having served in the same capacity previously at North Adams and Taconic in Massachusetts. His first order of business was a new, 2,400-square-foot clubhouse that has just opened, with construction help from several handy members and friends.

WEST BOLTON GOLF CLUB Jericho Traveling up the steep, winding dirt road that heads north from Route 2 and the Winooski River valley, it's hard to believe one is heading toward a golf course—at least one that wasn't created by a ski resort to bring in some summer trade.

But West Bolton Golf Club, nestled almost 1,000 feet up in a bowl of land with majestic tree-clad slopes to the east culminating in the lofty peak of Mount Mansfield, has all the scenic advantages of such mountain tracks and one more: It's affordable.

Laid out in 1983 by Xenophon Wheeler on 100 acres of his corn and pasture land, West Bolton has been run since the early 1990s by Wheeler's grandson, Jeff Brown. He and his wife, Mary, have kept the business in the family.

For a mountain course, West Bolton is relatively flat, making it easy to walk. The 18-hole layout runs to 5,758 yards, but plays to a par of 72, offering a sporting chance at birdies on the short par fives, three of which are on the back nine. Water on the front nine is a feature on the fifth and eighth, but is a major factor only on the short par-four fourth, where it borders the right side of the green. On the 11th, a 430-yard par-five, you might need to hit less than a driver to stay short of a large pond with a fountain, hidden from view, which also will catch anything left of center off the 12th tee.



Play through paradise.

THE VERMONT GOLF EXPERIENCE.

There's nothing in the world like 9 in the morning in Vermont. Challenging courses, as unique and individual as you are, set in the midst of breathtaking natural beauty.



www.VermontVacation.com

1-800-VERMONT

Find the perfect course today at VermontVacation.com

A VERMONT LIFE.



West Bolton Golf Club

yards	5,758
green fees	\$26
phone	802/434-4321
location	Bolton

www.westboltongolfclub.com

The 10th, a mercifully short par three, sports a delightful array of large rocks along the fairway, a Green Mountain ledge jutting out of the limited topsoil. And, as the course opens out into parkland on the 15th hole, a massive boulder has been placed into service as the home for a plaque honoring founder Wheeler.

The Browns continue to work on improvements, while remaining mindful that their members really don't want anything to change. Expanding some of the greens,

West Bolton Golf Club

adding some tees to bring the yardage closer to 6,000, and improving the irrigation system are the main tasks ahead, says Jeff Brown.

One aspect that is fully up to date is the clubhouse, which was completely rebuilt in 2001. The spa-

cious, light-filled facility offers a full-service pro shop and generous snack bar. It's a perfect place to soak up the scenery one last time before heading back down to the valley. ■

James Pentland is a writer and newspaper editor from Brattleboro.