

## **HISTORY OF KOKANEE SPRINGS GOLF RESORT**

For over 43 years Kokanee Springs Golf Resort has been providing the world with outstanding golf and exceptional customer service. Originally designed and opened in 1968, Kokanee Springs is definitely considered as Norman Wood's masterpiece. Carved from the wilderness and situated along the base of the Purcell Mountain range, Kokanee Springs has been regarded as the flagship of golf courses in the Kootenays.

It all began when Calgary Oilman Ken Jennings started buying land in 1964. At that time the average price per acre had fallen to around \$110, due to the depressed agricultural environment, and the whole countryside was up for sale. In 1966 Jennings amalgamated his land holdings under the name of Kokanee Springs Development Company and that same year The Samedan Oil Company out of Oklahoma bought a half interest in the company which then encompassed over 6600 acres of land and shoreline from Riondel to Boswell. Their goal was to create a world-class recreational and retirement area. By 1967 the company had announced that there would be a golf course and resort development, but not just any golf course, an 18 hole championship course unparalleled to any in the region.

World renowned golf course architect Norman Woods had been commissioned to design the layout, having apprenticed under Stanley Thompson. (Thompson designed the Banff Springs and Jasper Park Lodge Courses in the Canadian Rockies) Woods was well versed in designing exceptional mountain courses.

It was said that when Woods first saw the natural beauty of the area, he became inspired and then created a course even more magnificent than his employers had imagined. Woods had already designed the famous Green Gables Course in P.E.I., the Gorge Vale on Vancouver Island, as well as Toronto's outstanding Richmond Hill. With more than 300 golf courses to his credit, Woods still recalls Kokanee Springs as his greatest challenge. "The entire area looked as though it was nothing but bush, water and rocks", says Woods, "with a towering mountain running into it, my choices were certainly restricted. I was sure the mountain was not going to move, so it was up to me to fit the course in around it", Woods reminisced.

Woods had moved on site and was living in the historic Murray Cabin near #7 to oversee the construction. Some of his enhancements included the hundreds of feet of rock walls along the tiered tee boxes, log trestles and bridges to route traffic and the stone wishing wells. Though many of the small farms that formed the basis of the course had some cleared land, acres of trees still had to be cut and stumped. The irrigation lines and electrical systems and a complex network of drainage channels were installed before the surface work even began. The pond at #14 was created, fed by a small stream; this pond is a beautiful hazard as well as a practical reservoir for the irrigation system. The smaller ponds on #9 and #18 were also built under Woods' watchful eye. In fact, he designed the 120-acre course to take full advantage of its scenic beauty and to challenge the golfers who now play upwards to 30,000 rounds per year.

Sixty-six sand traps, twelve water hazards and 124,000 square feet of elevated, multileveled greens with 90,000 square feet of terraced tee surface were all a part of his plan. As if the

hazards Woods created weren't enough of a challenge, Kokanee Springs is a long course. A well played round can take you 6.5 miles. The yardages are 6604 from the blue markers, 6260 from the whites and 5747 from the reds, on this par 71 track.

By fall of 1968 construction was winding down and the first golfers were playing the 18 hole layout . That year, more than fifty people, most of whom lived in the local communities were on the company's payroll.

During the early years each fairway had a name, many of them recalling the early days. When Wood's old dog Tinker, his constant companion, died during construction, he was buried near the Murray Cabin and the 8th tee is aptly named "Tinker's Grave".

In 1969 the Clubhouse was converted after serving as an equipment shop and the first ten cedar A-frame Chalets were built adjacent to the campground. The 2,700 foot grass airstrip was built in 1970.

Throughout the early 1970's the course had many trials and tribulations; from dying greens to road reallocations and these ongoing issues became impediments to the relationship between Samedan Oil Company and Ken Jennings. At one point the course development was abandoned and locals came to call the area "The Million Dollar Hayfield". During these years, John Stocker, who worked for the company from 1968 to 1981, and Ron Wastrodowski, the equipment maintenance supervisor, were the only employees. It was through their perseverance that slowly hole by hole the course was brought back into play. By spring 1972 the #6 tee was designated as the first tee and golfers played a nine-hole circuit that brought them back to #5. Two dollars would buy a whole day's play and green fees were simply deposited into a locked box on the honour system. By then Ed and his wife Lucy Moore, long time Samedan employees, were managing the Chalets and Campground, so the Chalet Office became the unofficial Clubhouse for Kokanee. By 1974 they had resurrected 15 holes and in 1975 all 18 holes were back in play.

In 1980 a new era began when Kokanee Springs was purchased by the Canadian company, Redfield Development of Alberta. A gardening department was established in the early 80's with an emphasis being applied to the enhancement of the natural beauty of the course. The gardeners rescued heritage flowers from overgrown homesteads and planted dozens of ornamental and indigenous trees. More than 30,000 square feet of cultivated flowerbeds now grace the golf course. In the early 80's with skyrocketing interest rates and overwhelming property holdings the company struggled but by 1988 under the restructured company of Kokanee Springs Resort Ltd, led by President and General Manager Claude Gallinger, one of the original Redfield owners, the course and company began its accent to the strong and prosperous entity that it is today.

Having shed its interests in the Chalets and Campground, Kokanee began work on the infrastructure and the construction of on-site accommodations. The Kokanee Lodge was completed in May of 1992, offering for the first time a complex of luxurious yet casual course-side accommodations. This expansion created several new jobs which in turn helped the community flourish economically. By 1995 the five principal owners began to enjoy the fruits of their decade of efforts.

In 2003, Kokanee Springs celebrated the lodging expansion, with the addition of “Noble Lodge” and the Clubhouse renovation which spearheaded Kokanee into the next era of development. Course improvements and changes included the relocation of the Pro Shop to its current location between the 1st and 10th tee boxes. As the decade progressed, so did course conditions. Improvement to the courses drainage systems helped to ensure that the playability of the course was always maximized. These improvements are still paying off dividends today.

As we proceed into the next decade, the vision which so many shared still holds firm and now is becoming a reality. In 2008, led by one of the original partners in Kokanee Springs Resort Ltd. and a group of strong, driven individuals, the new shareholders of Kokanee Springs Resort Ltd are resolute in creating the future that the original Kokanee founders envisioned, with a 21st century plan. In July of 2010, construction on the new development began.

It is our hope that Norman Woods, Sam Noble, Ken Jennings and Ed Moore, as well as the many others that have given their time and effort, are able to look down upon our efforts now and smile with satisfaction that we are carrying the torch in the dream that they initiated and we all share, namely the development of a world class destination resort for recreation, retirement and the celebration of camaraderie, anchored around this grand old dame fondly known as ***Kokanee***.