

## Sahalee

### Sahalee (means "High Heavenly Grounds")



### **Golf course opens on August 9, 1969.**

On August 9, 1969, the first 18 holes of 27-hole Sahalee golf course open. (The remaining nine holes will open in July 1970.) The Sahalee Country Club is a member-owned private club located in the northeastern part of Sammamish (King County); a residential development with the same name surrounds the golf course. Sahalee's golf course has frequently been ranked by *Golf Digest* magazine as among the nation's top 100 courses in the country. Sahalee hosted its first PGA championship in 1998, gaining further national recognition and acclaim in the process.

### **Beginnings**

The Sahalee story begins in December 1965. Members of the Inglewood Country Club in Kenmore were interested in buying the property, and thought they had a deal lined up with owner Jack Barron. But at the last second the deal fell through. This had happened before, at least once, maybe twice, but this time the members had had enough. A small group of men retired to the bar to drink and debate. John (Jack) Wright hit upon a solution: "Let's build our own golf course" (*Sahalee Country Club*, p. 6).

Wright was immediately joined by Harry Wilson, Maurice "Maury" Proctor, and Dixon Ervin. The men searched for property suitable for an 18-hole golf course in several locations in the Redmond area. They seriously considered at least three different sites, but all in the valleys below and north of the Sammamish plateau. In 1967 four other men -- at least one of them from the Broadmoor Golf Club in Seattle -- joined the group: Carl Jonson, Richard Strand, Gene Lynn, and Buck Biddle. Biddle soon moved to Spokane, but

not before suggesting that the golf course be expanded to 27 holes to accommodate any overflow among players, as well as to accommodate junior golfers and beginning golfers. Harold (Hal) Logan joined the group as Biddle's replacement, and these eight men became known as the founders of Sahalee.

In the spring of 1967 the group went so far as to sign an earnest money receipt to buy property known as Holiday Lake northeast of Redmond, but the deal fell through. At Jonson's urging, the group then began looking for higher ground, one with better drainage that would be less susceptible to flooding, and learned of property owned by Dr. Darrell Leavitt on the northern end of the Sammamish plateau. Leavitt's property was 200 acres of second growth cedar; the only structure on it was an old cabin located next to where the 3 East green and 4 East tee are today (2009). The only way was to get onto the property was to take an old logging road from the northern terminus of 228th Avenue NE, which in 1967 ended at Inglewood Hill Road. Leavitt agreed to sell the property for \$400,000, which translated into \$2,000 an acre, and the contract was signed in July 1967. The next month, the group purchased another 120 acres of adjacent land from Robert Evans.

### **The Sahalee Country Club**

As it became apparent that a deal was going to be worked out to buy land for the project, the founders held a dinner meeting in June 1967 at the Swedish Club in Seattle to raise money for construction of the golf course and for the Sahalee real estate development that would adjoin the course. More than 50 people attended the dinner and were offered limited partnerships for \$5,000, which entitled them to a \$1,500 golf club membership and a fairway lot for \$3,500. Within a few weeks about 100 limited partnerships had been sold, enabling the group to purchase the first 320 acres for the project later in the summer of 1967.

The Chinook word Sahalee, meaning "high heavenly ground," was chosen for the name of the new club, and the Sahalee Country Club was incorporated in September 1967. Golf architect Ted Robinson was hired to design the course. Robinson walked the property and told the group that it needed another 80 acres of land if it wanted a top-quality 27-hole golf course. Two 40-acre tracts were purchased early in 1968, bringing the total number of acres for the Sahalee project to 400. James "Jim" Porter, a registered professional engineer, was hired to be the project manager. Porter oversaw the entire construction project of the golf course, sometimes working 18 hour days; when he died in his early 40s in 1971, some members speculated that he worked himself to death and questioned if the project would have been successfully completed without his Herculean efforts.

Robinson also recommended that the club increase its membership to 500, which helped pay for the project's completion. Memberships were sold as family memberships, meaning that dues for one member included playing privileges for a spouse and children under 18 years old. Membership requirements were fairly simple: Applicants had to pass a credit check, and they had to pass a "good guy standard," meaning they had to have a serious passion for playing and talking golf. And many of them did. Husband and wives joined together, while other members who usually played together in foursomes at other clubs joined Sahalee in groups of four. Membership increased quickly, passing 200 members in January 1968 and reaching the magic 500 number the day before the course opened in August 1969. Membership prices increased too as membership went up: The 500th membership sold for \$4,500.

### **To The Nines**

Construction of the course began in November 1967, with a completion date set for the spring of 1969. New members worked weekends and summer evenings clearing rocks from the developing fairways (eventually rock raking equipment was rented to speed up the process), and 2,700 trees were felled. The course was built in sets of nine holes, referred to by golfers simply as nines. Work on the east nine started first, followed by the south nine, while construction of the north nine started in July 1968. To provide access to the golf course, 216th Avenue NE was extended to the north by about a quarter mile to today's southern entrance to Sahalee. (Sahalee Way from 228th Avenue NE to Fall City Road would not be built until after the golf course was finished.)

A water supply for the golf course and residential development, as well as a sewer system, was also needed. Sahalee formed its own sewer district, but ran into problems when it tried to form its own water district, because Water District 82 (managed by Commissioner Oscar Freed from his home near Pine Lake) objected to the new development. As a result King County declined to permit the formation of Sahalee's own water district, but Sahalee did an end run around the County and formed its own private water company, the Sahalee Water Company, to meet its needs. The water company was later sold to the sewer district, which changed its name to the Northeast Sammamish Sewer and Water District (NESSWD); today the NESSWD provides water and sewer service to residents living in the northeastern part of Sammamish.

In the autumn of 1968 Sahalee began looking for a golf professional, and contacted well-known golf professional Paul Runyan for his advice. Runyan had won the PGA Championship in both 1934 and 1938, and in the late 1960s was considered by many to be the top golf teaching pro on the West Coast. Members at Sahalee would have been pleased just with his

recommendations for a good golf pro; imagine their delight when he wrote back with a list that also included his name. Runyan became Sahalee's first golf pro, serving from 1969 to 1972.

### **Fore!**

Construction delays pushed the final completion of the golf course back from its scheduled opening in the spring of 1969, but by August the first 18 holes (the east and south nines) were ready for play. Opening day was Saturday, August 9, 1969.

The first foursome off the first tee included Carl Jonson and Paul Runyan; after completing his round of nine holes, Runyan stayed at 9 South tee and played in with each foursome as they finished. But the clubhouse was not yet finished -- in fact, construction had only begun on it in June. Thus opening day refreshments were served from a tent by members' wives, while a trailer served as the club's pro shop. (Another trailer initially served as the club's office.) The clubhouse opened in January 1970 (it was torn down in 2001 and replaced with a larger version), and the final nine holes of the golf course -- the north nine -- opened in July 1970.

Sahalee's first years had the misfortune to coincide with the Boeing Bust of the early 1970s. A number of club members sold their memberships, while others simply weren't buying them. Membership prices soon dropped below the original \$1,500 that had been set in the club's earliest days in 1967, and most of the residential development properties were eventually sold to the Swanson-Dean company of Issaquah. But after a few years the economy recovered and Sahalee's fortunes improved, and it was on its way to becoming a nationally renowned golf course.



Sahalee has frequently been ranked by *Golf Digest* magazine as among the nation's top 100 golf courses in the country. After years of effort, Sahalee hosted its first PGA Championship (on the north and south nines) in 1998, and in 2002 hosted the NEC World Golf Championship. In the summer of 2010, Sahalee is slated to host the U.S. Golf Association Senior Open.

Phil Dougherty  
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Sources: *Sahalee Country Club: The First 20 Years* (Sammamish: Sahalee Country Club, 1990), 1-29; Dan Raley, "Sahalee In Full Bloom," *Seattlepi.com*, April 14, 1998; Ellis Conklin, "A Boast, A Challenge, And Sahalee Golf Club Was Born," *Ibid.*, August 3, 1998; Ellis Conklin, "New Era Dawns On Sahalee's Old Guard, PGA Championship Puts Changes In Focus," *Ibid.*, August 4, 1998 (<http://seattlepi.nwsource.com>); "Sahalee Club History," Sahalee website, website accessed December 13, 2008 (<http://www.sahalee.com>)

## Sahalee Way



**"A broken Sahalee Way, March 1982" Reprinted with the permission of the Pacific Publishing Company**

Most of us have little reason to give the history of Sahalee Way much thought. After all, it's just a road. But ask any local long-timer about the history of the northern end of the plateau, and you'll hear about Sahalee Way, and maybe see an eye roll too. Building it was far from simple, both physically and politically, and three years after it was finished in 1979, the road "broke" and was closed for more than a year and a half.

In the 1960s, the main route to get to Redmond from the northern end of the plateau was Inglewood Hill Road to East Lake Sammamish Parkway. Northbound 228th Avenue NE ended at a "T" intersection at Inglewood Hill Road, but as early as 1963 King County's major roads and streets plans included a proposed route extending 228th to the Redmond-Fall City Road. As the Sahalee development and golf course came into being at the end of the 1960s, actually building the road became more urgent. The 1968 King County Forward Thrust bond provided funding for the

project, and by the early 1970s preliminary design work for the 228th Avenue NE extension was under way.

As were a lot of doubts. Many recognized that building the road would open the plateau to more rapid urbanization. However, there was a bigger problem. The proposed road would traverse a big, steep hill where the plateau drops down into Happy Valley, and this hill was known to have a history of landslides. Redmond city officials warned of the slide potential in a 1973 letter protesting the road's construction, and an environmental impact statement prepared by King County in 1975 also cautioned of the "possibility of earth slippage...along the descending portion of 228th Avenue NE extension... earth movements of major slide proportions must be considered a possibility."

But the project moved forward. The J.J. Welcome Company of Redmond submitted the lowest bid for the project at \$993,731 (just over \$4 million in 2010 dollars). This had to have surprised some people, since at least one prior estimate for the road's construction had exceeded \$2 million (although admittedly for a more deluxe version of the road, complete with a 300-foot trestle). Construction of the 3.5-mile extension began in October 1975, with completion scheduled for the autumn of 1976. An especially rainy 1976 here washed away those plans. Construction slowed to a trickle. Then, in February 1977, the hill started to slide.

The first slide occurred about a third of a mile south of the intersection of today's NE 50th Street in Happy Valley, and at that point the new road was still dirt. Much of the four-and-a-half-acre slide involved the hill west of the road and didn't damage the road itself, but the project was still forced to pause for months while the county purchased additional right of ways around the landside and seeded the slide area. It worked -- when construction resumed, there were no more problems there.

Part of the 228th Avenue NE/Sahalee Way NE extension opened in March 1978 and by the end of the year all of the road was finished, though not officially open in its entirety. Signs were posted forbidding use of the closed section of the road, but that didn't stop people from driving it, and county police occasionally rewarded the scofflaws with a citation for their impatience. Finally the full extension opened without ceremony on January 6, 1979, more than two years late. Cost overruns doubled the original \$1 million contract price for the job.

All was well for the next three years. But on February 18, 1982, drivers on Sahalee Way noticed a crack snaking diagonally along the road for about 150 feet. It was located near the top of the hill at the northern end of Sahalee Way, just within today's Sammamish city limits, near where a traffic caution sign warns northbound drivers of a sharp left turn ahead. Within 24

hours the road sank six inches along the crack, and on February 19 Sahalee Way was closed along a three-quarter of a mile stretch from the top of the hill (near today's NE 37th Street) to the bottom of the hill at NE 50th Street.

Still, the road continued to sink, and the crack continued to spread. Soon miniature cliffs appeared as the affected part of the road sank further -- three feet in the first week, between five and eight feet by early March. By the time the slide stopped in the spring, it had grown to more than 800 feet long and had become a series of cliffs, some up to 10 feet high.

The break was precipitated by the winter's heavy rains. The affected part of the road was built on fill which itself sat on a layer of sand and silt. The sandy, silty layer lacked natural drainage channels to let water flow out of the ground. As a result the soil's weight increased, decreasing its resistance to shear; the additional water trapped in the soil also served as a lubricant that further aggravated the ground's tendency to slide along the steep hill on Sahalee Way.

The county retained a soils engineering consulting firm, Golder and Associates, to figure out what exactly caused the slide and how to fix it. This took time, and it didn't help that in 1982 the economy was in a recession. That summer rumors began to fly on the plateau that King County might not be prepared to handle repairs to the road. When a community newsletter published said rumors, irate residents bombarded the Department of Public Works with complaints. They were assured the department was working toward a solution.

And it was. It just took awhile, infuriating local drivers, who were again forced to use Inglewood Hill Road to get to Redmond from the northern end of the plateau. On the other hand, their children were delighted, finding the mysterious cliffs and fissures along the broken road just fine for championship climbing and bike riding.

Eventually a solution was reached to install a system of drains in the hillside under the road to allow water to escape, and these drains were installed in the late winter and spring of 1983. Reconstruction of the road began that summer, and completion was initially anticipated by late in the year.

But this time the transportation gods smiled upon Sahalee Way. Good weather enabled construction to proceed faster than expected, and the road reopened early, on October 4, 1983. Total costs of repairs (including consulting fees and drain installation) exceeded half a million dollars, a pricy ending to an unusual story in Sammamish's history.

Phil Dougherty

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Sources: Marilyn Papakyritses, "Controversial 228th May Be Built This Spring," *Sammamish Valley News*, January 9, 1974, p. A-1; Evan Jones,

"Landside Shifts Hill Towards Road," *Ibid.*, March 2, 1977, p. A-1; "228th NE Opens -- Finally," *Ibid.*, January 10, 1979, p. A-1; "Plateau Residents May Be Using Inglewood Hill Road For The Long Haul," *Ibid.*, February 24, 1982, p. A-1; Susan Bottles, "Sahalee Way NE Still On The Move," *Ibid.*, March 10, 1982, pp. A-1, A-4; "Soils Testing Finished," *Ibid.*, July 28, 1982, p. A-2; Susan Bottles, "Progress Made On Sahalee Way Repair," *Ibid.*, September 8, 1982, p. A-1; "Work Begins To Fix Drainage On 228th," *Ibid.*, February 23, 1983, p. A-1; "Yes Plateau, There Really *Is* A 228th!" *Ibid.*, August 31, 1983, p. A-1; "Sahalee Way Open -- Really," *Ibid.*, October 5, 1983, p. A-3; "CPI Inflation Calculator," Bureau of Labor Statistics website accessed June 26, 2010 ([http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm))