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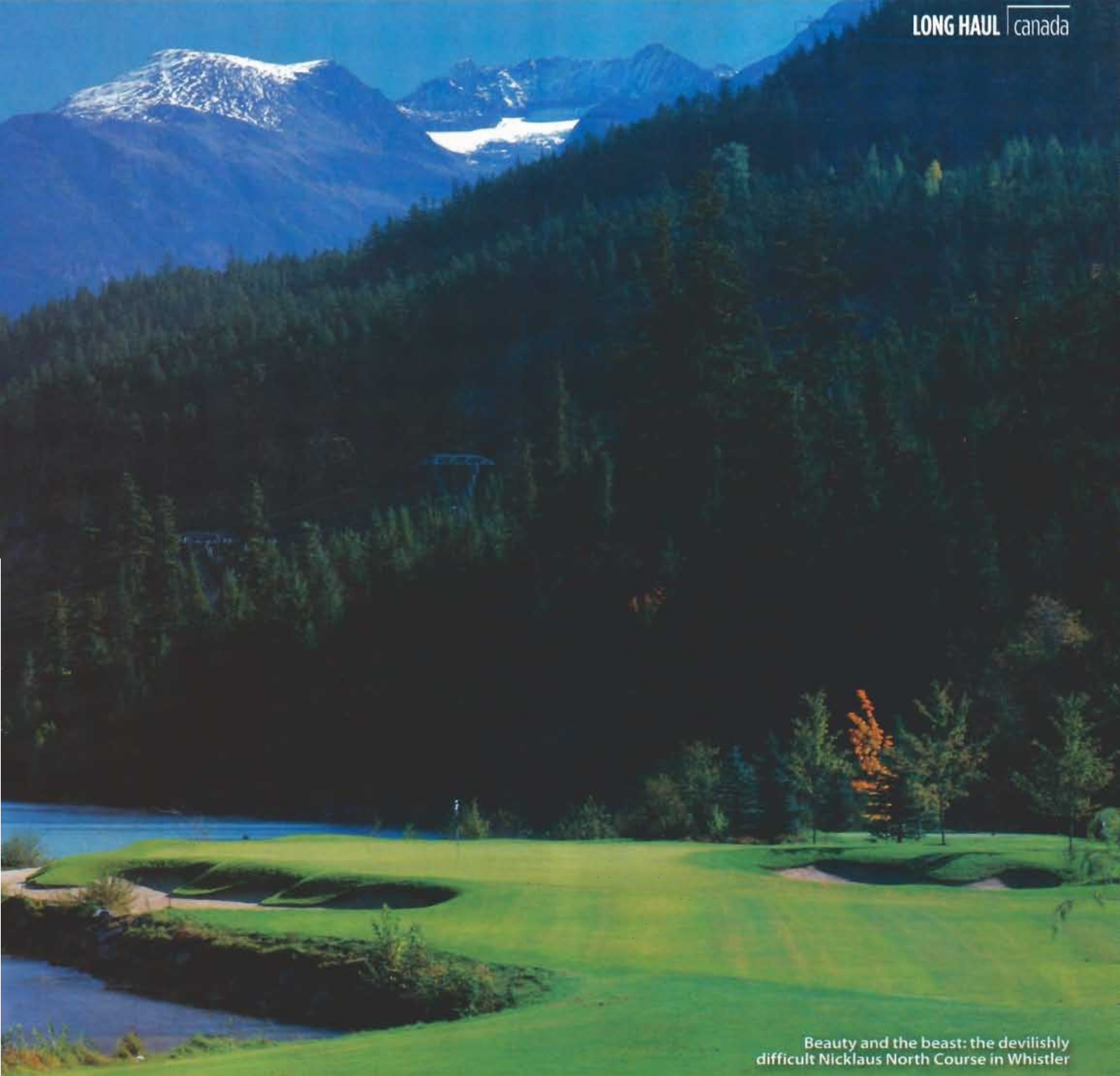


Wild

**For dramatic natural beauty,
amazing wildlife and top-class
courses Canada is hard to beat**

Words: Fergus Bisset

at heart



Beauty and the beast: the devilishly difficult Nicklaus North Course in Whistler

Canada is vast. The mountains, the skies, the seas, the forests, the hospitality are all on a different scale from anything we're used to on this side of the Atlantic. Add an abundance of supremely scenic golf courses, whale watching and spectacular sea plane excursions into the equation and Canada makes for a truly captivating long-haul summer destination.

After the nine-hour flight into the cosmopolitan city of Vancouver in British Columbia on Canada's western edge, the visitor has a number of

options. We chose to take the short ferry crossing to Vancouver Island, where you'll find Victoria, British Columbia's vibrant capital.

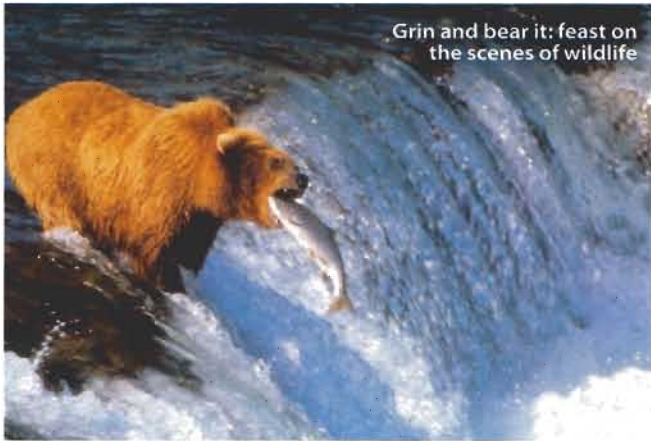
A fascinating city, Victoria is said to be more English than England - high tea is served at the Empress Hotel and restaurants battle to produce the city's finest fish and chips.

Despite this reputation, the city is not comparable to England's seaside resorts. It's a bustling, trendy place where sea planes buzz in and out of the harbour and speed boats take excited tourists to see groups

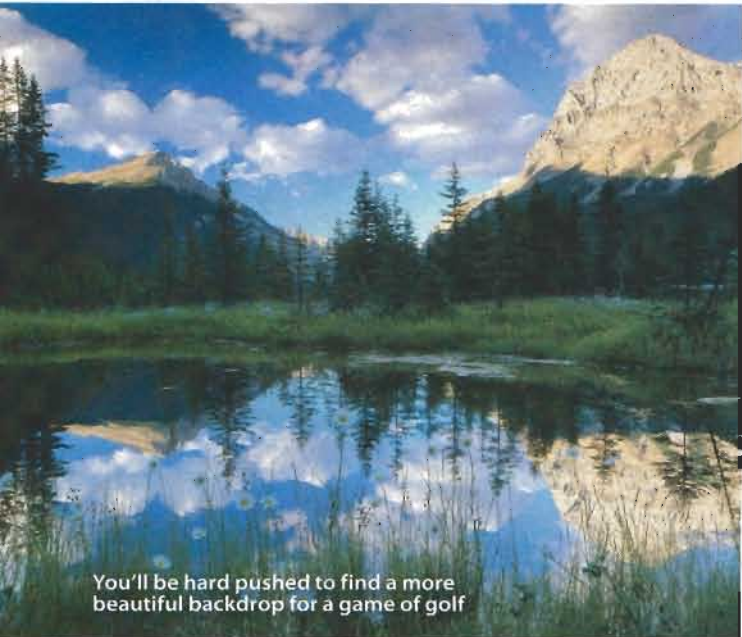
of orca whales - if you can spare a few hours from your golfing schedule this is an experience that shouldn't be missed.

Bear Mountain Golf Resort is just 20 minutes from downtown Victoria. This massive complex has a Jack and Steve Nicklaus-designed 18-hole course at its heart - a second layout is due to be ready for play in 2007.

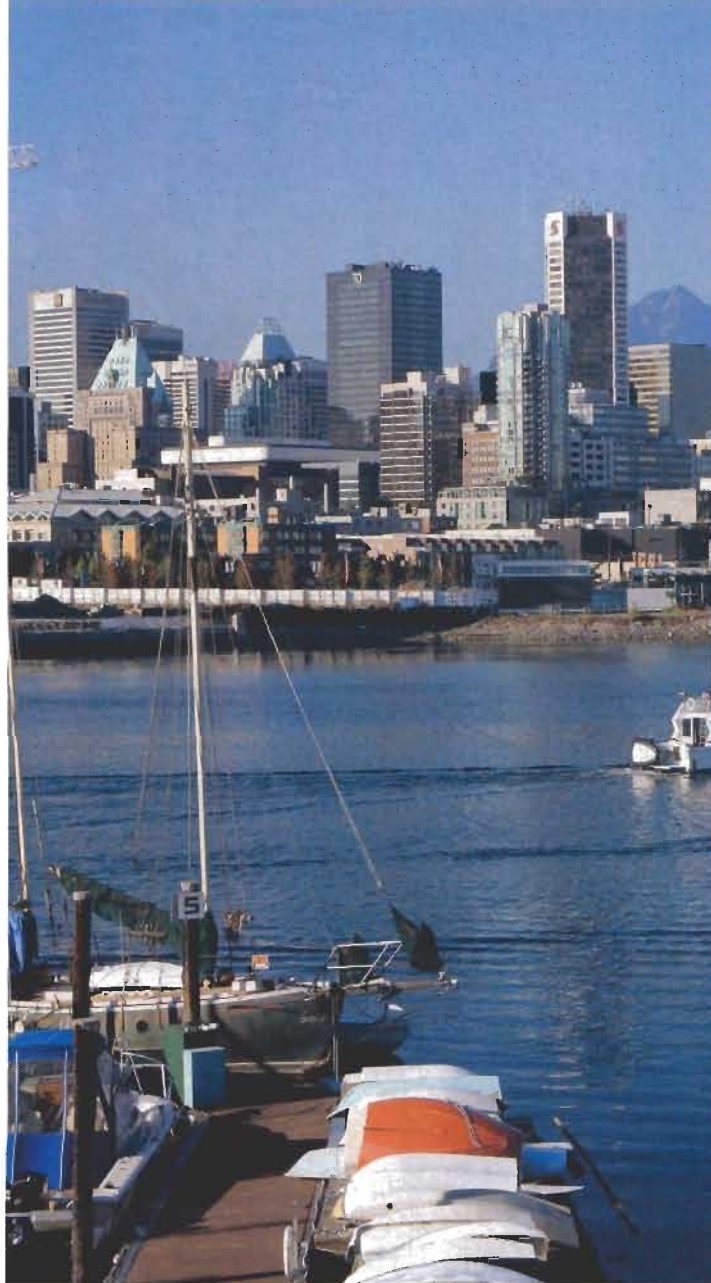
At over 7,200 yards from the back (Golden) tees, Bear Mountain offers a stern test of your long game. The greens are undulating and nerve-shatteringly fast and, typical



Grin and bear it: feast on the scenes of wildlife



You'll be hard pushed to find a more beautiful backdrop for a game of golf



of many Nicklaus courses, there's a considerable amount of water to contend with.

Spotting a tongue-in-cheek commercial opportunity, the owners have placed a machine on the par-3 11th that vends golf balls at \$3 a pop. As the hole is a copy of the famous island-green 17th at Sawgrass this machine sees a good deal of custom.

Another feature is a real 19th hole - a 100-yard downhill teaser where it's green or bust. Anything that misses the target will disappear forever down the surrounding 200ft cliffs.

With 15 courses in the vicinity of Victoria the visiting golfer is spoiled for choice. You'd be hard pressed

to find a track in British Columbia that doesn't have spectacular panoramas but, as vistas go, Olympic View is difficult to beat. The Olympic mountains provide a dramatic skyline that can distract even the most focused golfer. That said, the course

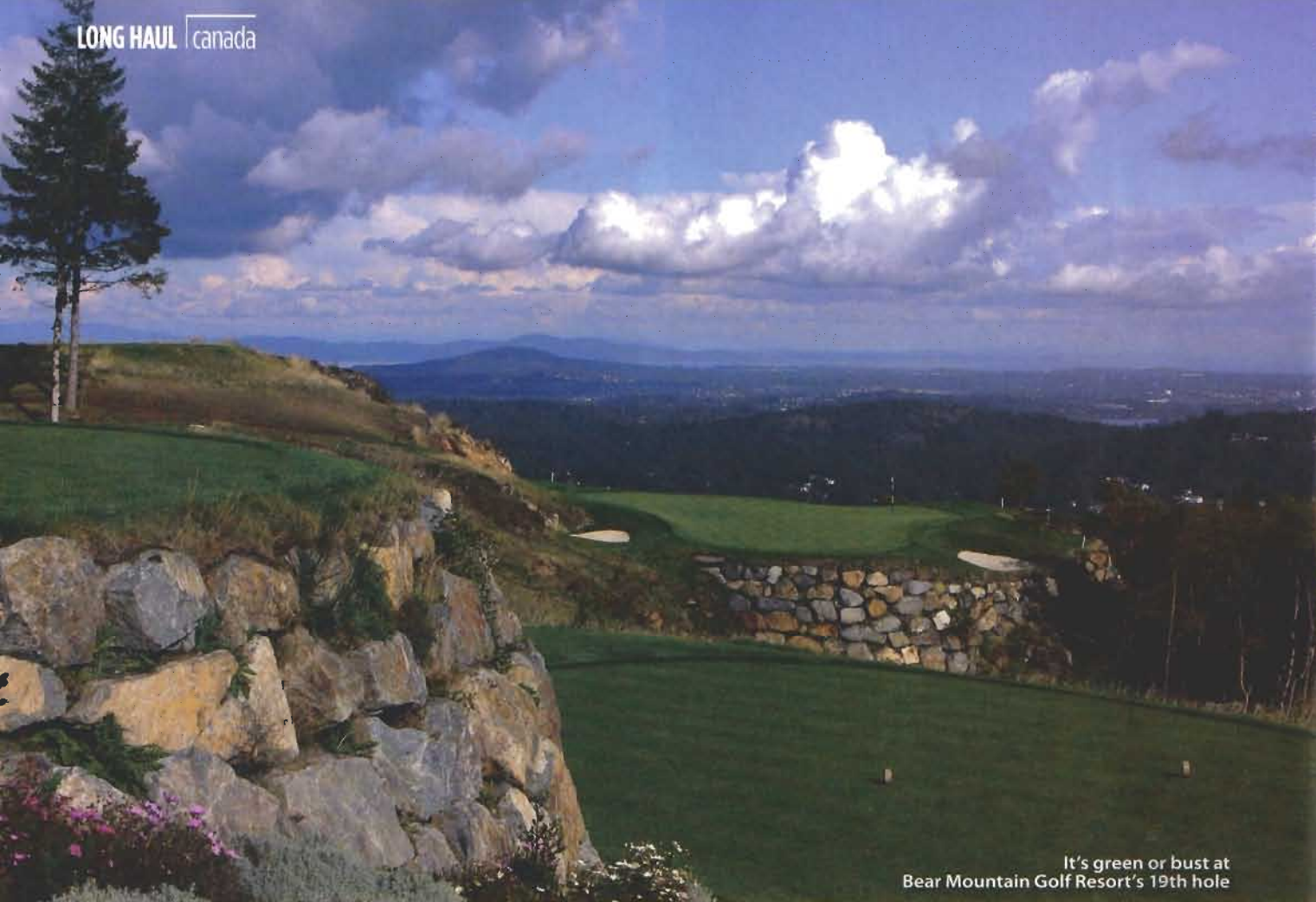
“With 15 courses in the vicinity of Victoria the visiting golfer is spoiled for choice”

is a more forgiving one than Bear Mountain - it's a layout that players of all abilities will enjoy.

Excuse the use of a tired football cliché but Olympic View is a course of two halves. The outward stretch is

rather flat parkland and not particularly memorable or challenging; the back nine is far more interesting - attractive tree-lined fairways are set into the hillside on extremely testing holes. Effective course management is essential to negotiate well-placed water hazards and perplexing changes in elevation.

Returning to the mainland, head north of Vancouver on the famous Sea to Sky Highway that clings precariously to the mountainside and winds its way along the Howe Sound. Stop off at the curiously-named copper mining outpost of Furry Creek. The copper mine is a long-distant memory - the village is now best known for a wonder of ➔



It's green or bust at Bear Mountain Golf Resort's 19th hole

golfing architecture. This 6,000-yard layout has been carved into the hillside and stretches some 600ft from its lowest to highest points. This massive change in elevation gives an idea of the type of holes you face.

From the high terraces on the front nine, where missing the fairway means a guaranteed lost ball, to the spectacular signature par-3 14th jutting out to sea, golf at Furry Creek is not the game as we know it. You can't expect to go out and play

your normal game here and bank 36 Stableford points. However, get past the novelty and you will be thoroughly entertained. And be sure to take advantage of the stunning, Japanese-style clubhouse afterwards.

Drive further north and you'll come across the resort of Whistler. Best known as a ski destination, Whistler is also a busy, activity-packed town in the summer. Having expanded rapidly over the past 20 years, it is now filled with luxurious hotels and lodges and has become a top holiday spot for Canadians and visitors alike. It also boasts a couple of cracking courses.

Nicklaus North, about a mile outside town, is a superb test, while at Chateau Whistler - a huge 550-bedroom complex with tennis courts and swimming pools - a Robert Trent Jones Junior design offers mesmerising views. It is an absolute pleasure to play and there's a good chance you'll spot a black bear or a bald eagle on the way round. Steady play will be rewarded and a number of holes offer a certain degree of forgiveness.

About 25 minutes' drive from Whistler is Pemberton - and Big Sky



Golf & Country Club. Of all the layouts in British Columbia this is the one that Brits will associate with most readily. The fairways are immaculate - never will you have played off a springier lie or achieved such a pleasing strike. Also appealing is the backdrop - the dark slopes of Mount Currie in the near distance serve to flatter even the most poorly struck shot.

With jaw-dropping scenery, wildlife you've only seen before on a David Attenborough TV programme and fine courses it is easy to see why visiting golfers are going wild for British Columbia as a summer destination. 20

DID YOU KNOW?

There are more left-handed golfers in Canada than any other country in the world. The reason? The national sport of ice hockey. Players become adept with their right and left hands so they can play a variety of shots on the ice. Subsequently many prefer to swing a club left-handed when they hit the golf course.

