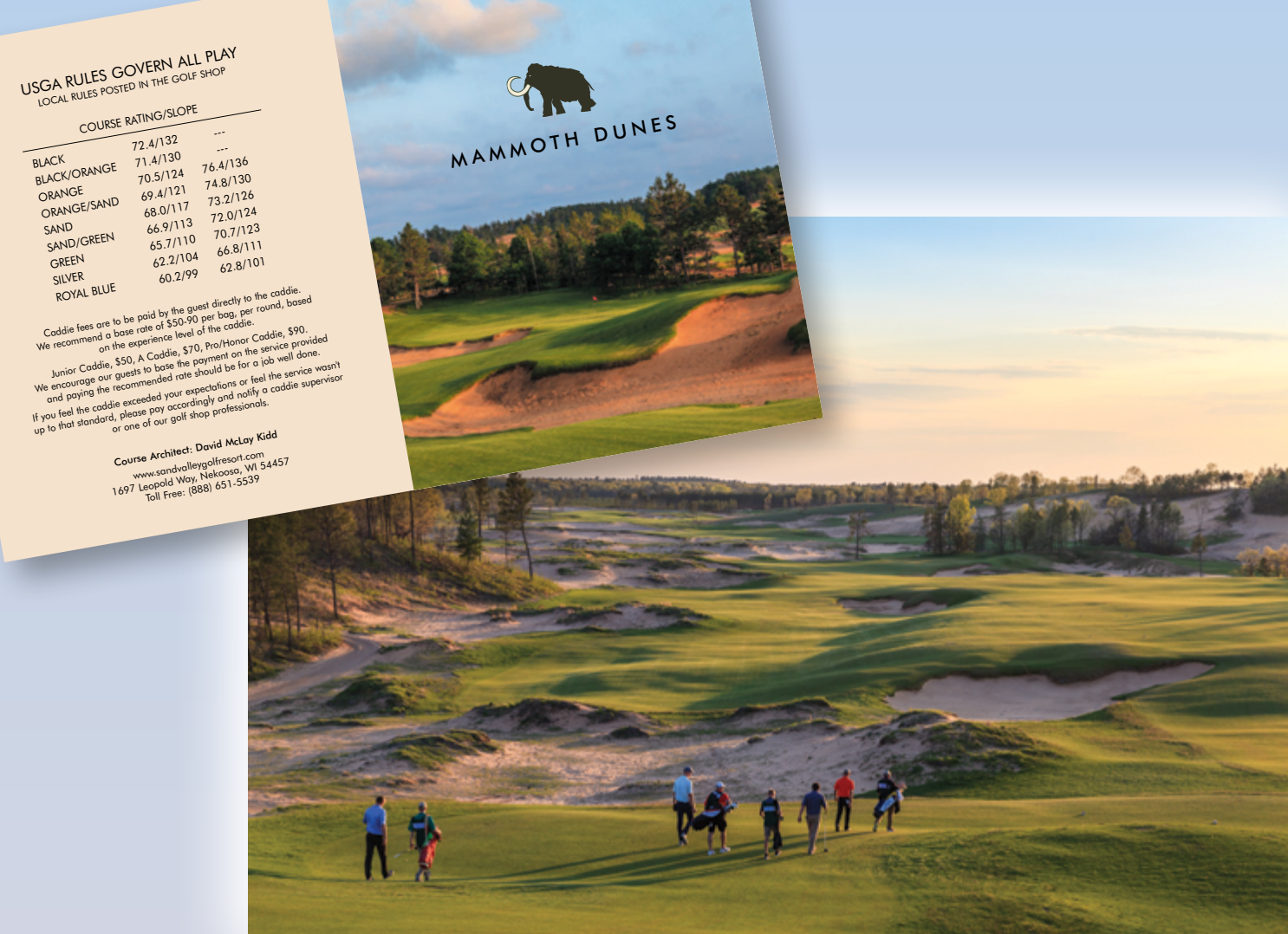


Links is a term that specifically references those splendid golf courses where the land is linked directly to the sea. Famous links include the Old Course at St. Andrews in Scotland, Pacific Dunes in Bandon, Ore., and Pyle & Kenfig Golf Club in Wales. The definition used by the British Golf Museum lists the necessary attributes of a golf links: location near a coast; undulating terrain often associated with dunes; infertile sandy soil and indigenous grasses such as marram, sea lyme, fescues and bents. Using that strict interpretation, there are less than 250 true links courses in the world and only four in the United States.

The three golf courses now open at Sand Valley Golf Resort in Nekoosa, Wis., may very well be deserving of a designation specific to the unique characteristics of the land upon which they rest. Improbably and remarkably, massive sand dunes stretch across and tower above all 53 holes and are remnants of a large lake formed in central Wisconsin by glacial draining some 20,000 years ago. Perhaps these layouts should be called dinks – land linked together with dunes? Or maybe lunes – dunes linked together with land? I personally prefer the latter definition as the word also conjures up the semi-lunar landscape of the property that was revealed once this former tree farm was cleared and landscaped.

A Wild and woolly Course

By Neal Kotlarek



Opened as a single 18-hole championship course in 2017, Sand Valley has expanded spectacularly in 2018 with the May 1 launch of both Mammoth Dunes and the playful par-3 course called The Sandbox. In just a few short weeks, both courses have earned national acclaim for their design and role in the resort becoming a world-renowned golf destination.

Designer David Kidd was confronted with a tough act to follow after Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw unveiled the original Sand Valley course to wide acclaim. While that course – which earned national honors as 2017’s best new course by some national golf publications – had been

a work in progress since 2014, Mammoth Dunes was inspired by Kidd’s earlier work at Bandon Dunes in Oregon. It was on that stretch of coastal landscape that golf entrepreneur Mike Keiser selected Kidd to design the first of what would become a five-course complex. The stated philosophy of Kidd’s design firm is to create courses “as natural as possible, as seamless as possible, and as sustainable as possible.”

Given 500 acres of pristine land at Sand Valley, the architect produced a feast for the eyes, complete with remarkable panoramas, extravagantly wide fairways, contoured greens and even a pair of drivable par 4s. The end result was a course that *Golf World*’s Stephen Hennessey says “might be Kidd’s team’s best

continued on page 35



continued from page 34

The plan was to play 72 holes, but nature had other ideas.

Thus, when the rain kept falling on the parade that was the 101st Western Junior at Evanston Golf Club on June 21, flooding the course, officials finally had to give up the idea of even playing 54 holes.

That made 43 competitors who made the cut unhappy that they weren't able to

fire at another flag, and one guy reasonably happy.

The one guy was Jeff Doty of Carmel, Ind., who fired rounds of 69 and 64 on the first two days, his score of 7-under 133 on the par-70 layout good enough to beat Karl Vilips by a stroke.

Doty, to his credit, wanted to play. The field was, on the course early in the third round when the rain, which had continued most of the night, became too much for the course to handle. A 7-hour-31-minute delay finally ended with a cancellation.

"I like hard conditions, and I thought the challenge will be good," said Doty,

entering his sophomore year at North Florida. "Canceling the day doesn't really cross your mind."

A win is a win is a win, and the Western Junior, oldest such championship in the game and as highly regarded today as ever, is a feather in Doty's cap.

"This is No. 1 for me," Doty said. "This is the top of the line."

His 6-under 64 second round on the 6,793-yard Donald Ross layout was an attack on par from start to finish, with a five-birdie outward nine and almost as much fun coming in.

"Putter was hot," Doty explained. "I hit the fat sides of greens and made probably a hundred feet of putts. After the turn, I took it one shot at a time."

He wasn't the hottest player in the second round. Will Thomson of Naples, Fla., who'll be a freshman at Texas in the fall, scorched the layout with a bogey-free 63, the seven birdies adding up to a competitive course record. He hit 12 of 14 fairways and 17 greens.



"It was the best I've hit the ball in a tournament round in a while," Thomson said. "I didn't sniff a bogey. I had a lot of birdie opportunities and I knocked a few in. I knew there was a good round out there for me. I just had to get a feel for the greens and keep hitting it well."

The big round moved Thomson to 5-under 135 and a third place finish once proceedings were cancelled.

Vilips, from Perth, Australia, which is about as far from Skokie as you can get and not be on the moon, scored 66-68 for 6-under 134 and finished runner-up for the second straight year, indicative of his No. 1 junior ranking. He'll start at Stanford in the fall.

Both Vilips and Doty earn an additional bauble: a berth in the upcoming Western Amateur at Sunset Ridge Country Club, which begins on July 30.

Luke Armbrust of Wheaton was the top finisher from Illinois, solo seventh via a 66-71-137 score. Hinsdale's Brendan O'Reilly tied for eighth at 2-under 138.

continued from page 25

work yet.” Heady words considering that the designer’s previous work includes Gamble Sands in central Washington, Machrihanish Dunes in his home country of Scotland, and the aforementioned Bandon Dunes, considered by many as one of the top ten public courses in the country.

The course's logo is a woolly mammoth which serves as a reminder that the sand base of the property was a result of the end of the Ice Age. Far more relevant and awesome to golfers is the mammoth sizes of the sand dunes (towering as high as 80 feet), greens (one stretches over 75 yards from front to back) and landing areas (some as wide as a football field) across the property. Most noteworthy of the course's characteristics is the ingenious separation of holes which provides solitude for golfers and allows them to focus on each shot without distraction.

Fans of golf architecture will appreciate some of the flairs Kidd installed in his masterpiece. The horseshoe-shaped putting surface of the short par-4 6th hole was contoured to allow even putts from the front side of the green to curl

toward flagsticks positioned on the back side of the green. Kidd references a round of golf he played at Crystal Downs in Frankfort, Mich., as inspiration for the design. Prior to planting grass around the green's rim, the designer rolled basketballs alongside the ridge to ensure the desired final result.

The par-5 No. 7 provides even more entertainment as the bunker protecting the front side of the green was at one point the foundation for an old settlement home. The brick wall stretches across the width of the hazard. Note to self: Keep your approach shot to this putting surface far, far to the left or to the right or risk a huge X on your scorecard.

No review of Mammoth Dunes is complete without reference to a par-4 designed by the winner of Golf Digest's architecture contest. The short hole begins from the top of a dune and then sweeps downhill all the way to the green. A slight draw can possibly catch a speed slot that can direct the ball onto the green for an eagle putt. Rather than distract from the course's overall design, this hole is in many ways a tribute to Kidd's desire to create a delightful and memorable experience from the first to the 18th hole.

While it is tempting to compare Mammoth Dunes to its sister course, the fact is the layouts are on completely different landscapes. The original, Sand Valley, is wide open with trees only lining the outside of the property's perimeter. The new course uses trees as a prominent feature – not necessarily as obstacles but as much to frame the direction of holes and create isolation.

Along with spectacular golf, the Sand Valley complex offers a variety of lodging options that include cottages, residences and suites. Featured amenities at the cottages are outdoor decks and access to fire pits for evening get-togethers.

Dining options include the Mammoth Bar & Lounge featuring craft beers, specialty cocktails and food, and Craig's Porch – a small shed serving cold drinks, great food and stunning views of Sand Valley's first, 10th and 18th holes.

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