A COURSE IS A COURSE, OF COURSE, OF COURSE...BUT ALT'S IS ALSO A GEM

By Dick Taylor, Contributing Writer

In the beginning there were just some green pastures with livestock and a farmhouse or two - land optioned by the developer and inked in for a nine-hole golf course - a centerpiece of the recreational facilities to be offered at Auburn Lake Trails. The course was professionally designed by Ken Anderson and built by Homer Flint, who had also built Spyglass in Monterey and courses at Incline Village and in Hawaii. Construction was begun in 1970, and opened officially for play June 10, 1971. Why a nine-hole course? The Bureau of Land Reclamation had a master plan for recreation amenities to be built along with the famous dam - and this included an 18 hole course in Cool. Rather than concentrate recreation offerings in ALT on the one sport, and duplicate what was expected to be offered, the developers elected to build a class nine-hole course and use some of the space for an equestrian complex along with green belt areas to maximize member recreation opportunities.

Although there have always been avid golfers in the Trails, the numbers were relatively small until the late '80s. Golf course maintenance was adequate but there was a steady deterioration as budgets squeezed funds. However, the course was NCGA rated (a mark of respect and approval for the serious golfer) in 1988, and in 1991 a new Golf Superintendent, Bill Nigh, was hired, who accepted the challenge to bring the ALT course up to 'PAR'.

He was aided and abetted by an enthusiastic group of supporters such as Dick Taylor, Dave Cook, Claude Dionne, and Bill Vaughn who organized as Friends of the Golf Course. They were dedicated to provide Nigh with funds and volunteer labor the budget could not. Since early 1992, the Friends have raised more than $22,000, and fielded more than 400 hours of volunteer labor. Presidents included Vaughn, Doug Nelson, and Charles Lewis.

There are several groups using and supporting the ALT course - although ALT residents and owners need not belong to any of them: the original ALT Golf Club; the HOGGS (Happy Old Geezer Golfers), a remarkable just-for-fun group; the NCGA club (here it gets into serious golf); the Ladies Golf Club, originally sponsored by the WIFFS; and the Couples Golf groups combining golf with a social evening or early morning! All have annual tourneys and special events. All groups have open membership, space permitting.

To prevent abuse of the course by non-members, Golf Marshals, complete with radio phone and golf cart, was organized to patrol the course periodically, mostly on weekends, to check players for the now-required membership cards. As a result of this volunteer service, income from POA guest fees promptly doubled. The marshal program was started by Howard Basch.

The course - all 27 acres - still experiences some problems, particularly in the drainage - but is literally a jewel of a course. In this 25th year there are new traps, new sand, trees, a new electrical system, and an improved drainage system. The greens are velvety, the new yardage signs featuring gold leaf lettering (and a labor of love in construction, art, lettering) are now installed. The rebirth started in 1991 continues to provide ALTers with a prize amenity, open to all POA members at this time without a fee.