



You sure about that five iron? A Silvies Valley Ranch goat caddy works the course.

# Just Kidding

Deep in the ranchlands of Eastern Oregon is something you've never seen before.

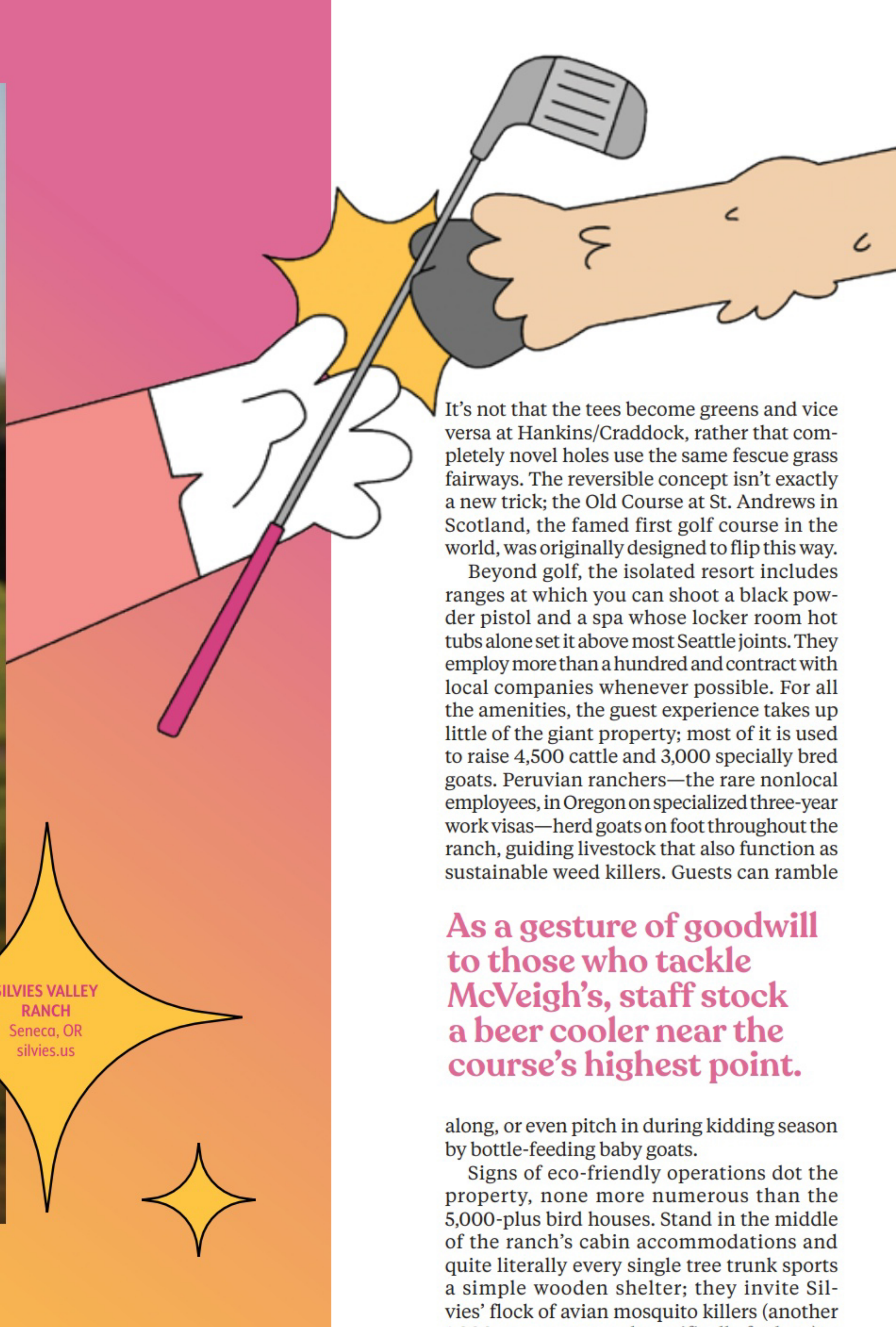
**I**t's fine to tip your caddy peanuts at Silvies Valley Ranch—your caddy is a goat, after all. Besides working for literal peanuts, he's profoundly discreet if you shave a stroke or two off your score.

Bruce and Mike, the goat caddies of this Eastern Oregon course, are far from the only unique aspect of Silvies' golf program. Both courses they work are par-threes (with two par-fours in the mix), shorter-than-usual holes meant for a breezy afternoon or a departure-day round at an upscale guest resort in the middle of a working

ranch. Goats will haul clubs around the more traditional Chief Egan course, whose greens cluster around a lake stocked with fish for guests, or they'll march up McVeigh's Gauntlet, which almost sadistically redefines the short-course experience.

"If you're not a good golfer, it's horrendous," says Tygh Campbell, son of ranch owner Scott Campbell, pointing to where McVeigh's runs over ravines and up steep hillsides. This bonkers experience—they call it a "challenge course"—contains practically no fairways, more akin to a dare than a gentleman's pastime. (One staffer calls it "Dr. Campbell's way

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of getting back at golfers.”) As a gesture of goodwill, staff stock a beer cooler near McVeigh’s highest point.

Thirty miles south of the town of John Day—about halfway between Bend and Boise—Silvies eschews normal resort trappings. No big lawns, no decorative fountains, just 234 square miles of rolling ranchland surrounded by the Malheur National Forest, a plot bigger than the entirety of Whidbey Island.

Campbell and wife, Sandy, Eastern Oregon locals who grew and later sold the Banfield Pet Hospital chain, purchased the giant ranch in 2007. Once a series of homesteads,

the acreage had cycled through failed stints as an exotic wildlife hunting preserve and a *City Slickers*-inspired dude ranch. The Campbells’ twin missions: prove the profitability of sustainable ranching and provide employment for the economically depressed counties the property straddles. Golf was less a particular passion than a means to those ends.

Silvies’ two main courses unfold in the traditional 18-hole links style, stretching west from the hilltop clubhouse, but they have their own twist. Called Hankins and Craddock, only one exists at a time—on alternate days it is played in one direction, then switches the following day.

It’s not that the tees become greens and vice versa at Hankins/Craddock, rather that completely novel holes use the same fescue grass fairways. The reversible concept isn’t exactly a new trick; the Old Course at St. Andrews in Scotland, the famed first golf course in the world, was originally designed to flip this way.

Beyond golf, the isolated resort includes ranges at which you can shoot a black powder pistol and a spa whose locker room hot tubs alone set it above most Seattle joints. They employ more than a hundred and contract with local companies whenever possible. For all the amenities, the guest experience takes up little of the giant property; most of it is used to raise 4,500 cattle and 3,000 specially bred goats. Peruvian ranchers—the rare nonlocal employees, in Oregon on specialized three-year work visas—herd goats on foot throughout the ranch, guiding livestock that also function as sustainable weed killers. Guests can ramble

### As a gesture of goodwill to those who tackle McVeigh’s, staff stock a beer cooler near the course’s highest point.

along, or even pitch in during kidding season by bottle-feeding baby goats.

Signs of eco-friendly operations dot the property, none more numerous than the 5,000-plus bird houses. Stand in the middle of the ranch’s cabin accommodations and quite literally every single tree trunk sports a simple wooden shelter; they invite Silvies’ flock of avian mosquito killers (another 1,000 are constructed specifically for bats), a pesticide-free solution. The guest ranch won’t grow much beyond its current 42 cabins, but the 200 homes under construction for individual sale will all run completely on solar power.

This spring the ranch will launch its final golf offering, a reversible 18-hole putting course that circles a pond outside the lodge where guests eat their meals. Not even St. Andrews has putting holes that go both ways. Of Silvies’ whole out-of-the-box program, Tygh Campbell describes how their remote location inspired untraditional versions of a famously conventional game: “We needed something completely unique for people to come all the way out here in the middle of nowhere to play golf, no matter how pretty it is.”