

Reprinted From  
**The New York Times**

**Escapes**

FRIDAY, JULY 5, 2002

H A V E N S

**Looking to Flee the Crowd So the Crowd Can't Follow**



Photographs by Jenny Warburg for The New York Times

By J. R. ROMANKO

**B**EFORE 1980, the handful of people who owned vacation homes on isolated Bald Head Island, off the North Carolina coast, called themselves the Generator Society, after the diesel generators that powered their homes. Owned by a single small developer, the barrier island had a golf course and a few paved roads, but no running water, and no access to the island except by private boat.

Electrical service arrived in 1980, but little else changed. By 1983, there were still only 50 homes.

That year, a partnership named Bald Head Island Ltd. bought the island from its struggling owner. Today, a ferry connects Bald Head to the town of Southport, just across the Cape Fear River. There are island-wide water and sewer service, restaurants, a country club and even a

**'I can get on the golf course any time I want. In Cape Cod, it's wall-to-wall people.'**

new 14,000-square-foot supermarket.

Bald Head Island Ltd. has transformed the island into one of a growing number of second-home communities that, through carefully planned development by a single company, maintain a village atmosphere that lures a clientele tired of the increasingly crowded Palm Beaches and Southamptons of the world. The resort giant Intrawest Corporation has accomplished a



**HARBOR VIEW** Taking a break at Bald Head, N.C.

similar feat, albeit with a different look, at resorts like Copper in Colorado, Whistler-Blackcomb in British Columbia and Stratton Mountain in Vermont.

When Bald Head Island Ltd. bought the

island, 10,000 of its 12,000 acres of land — marshes, creeks, forests, dunes — were already state-protected preserved area.

Development on the remaining land began with the infrastructure: a water and sewer system, phone service, roads and ferry service. A chapel was built, and the Old Baldy Lighthouse, built in 1817, was restored. Gasoline-powered vehicles were phased out, leaving electric golf carts as the preferred mode of transportation.

Housing growth followed gradually, most recently averaging about 40 new homes a year. Currently, the island has about 800 houses, and about 1,200 other lots have been sold for future development.

The partnership does not have free reign, however. Since 1995, when the village of Bald Head was incorporated, all development has had to be approved by the Bald Head Island Village Council.

That's also the case at the Copper Mountain resort, where Intrawest's development plans for the property it acquired in 1997 must be approved by Summit County officials. Back then, Copper Mountain was a well-regarded day-tripping destination with about 1,100 homes, but no centralized community.

Intrawest changed that. The company now owns all undeveloped land on Copper Mountain and 90 percent of the commercial space. It has built 500 residential units, mostly condominiums in the pedestrian only village center it created. Intrawest executives say that through thoughtful planning, Copper has so far avoided the kind of commercialization and sprawl that has affected Colorado resort towns like Vail and Breckenridge.

The "controlled village" phenomenon has surfaced elsewhere in this country: in the "new urbanist" towns — communities like Seaside, Fla., on the Gulf Coast, in which the architecture mimics that of an idealized small town — and even in exclusive communities like Windsor, Fla., which calls itself a "village by the sea." Architectural and design styles may vary, but the target audiences are similar.

"A lot of people are looking for an escape," said Jerry Ray, a spokesman for the St. Joe Company of Jacksonville, Fla., whose first planned community, WaterColor, which borders Seaside, celebrates its third anniversary this year.

Buck Cook, an insurance agent in Uncasville, Conn., didn't even know he wanted to escape his second home in Cape Cod until he and his wife were invited to Bald Head. "We got a solicitation in the mail," he said, "and we went down there on a whim to look at this island. We fell in love with it."

The Cooks bought a house on the island, and about five years ago traded up to a four-bedroom, \$1.1 million house in a part of the community called Harbor Village. They sold the Cape Cod house, worth about half that. "It's not crowded in Bald Head, and I can get on the golf course anytime I want," Mr. Cook said. "In Cape Cod, it's wall-to-wall people."



Photograph by Jenny Warburg for The New York Times

**THE SLOW LANE** John Stout outside his home in Bald Head, N.C., a barrier island where housing, top, is limited, and golf carts have replaced gas-powered vehicles.

In Bald Head, a 1,200-square-foot inland home is going for about \$400,000 (elsewhere on the island there are a few town houses that start at \$200,000). The most expensive house on the water is on the market for \$2.95 million and is almost 5,000 square feet.

Although interest in homes on the island has risen — this year's first-quarter sale of six homes was double the number of last year — the numbers are still small enough to preserve the personality that draws people like Buck Cook in the first place. In Harbor Village, houses with picket fences and shingled siding recall elements of old fishing towns; at South Beach, homes are grouped to resemble family compounds, with common areas and connecting walkways leading down to the water.

The developers of Copper, too, seem to have found a way to suggest an environment that, while tightly planned, still feels somewhat unforced to potential homeowners.

Frank Constantini, while an advertising creative director in Manhattan, owned second and third homes in the Hamptons and on Copper Mountain. Also a ski instructor, he chose Copper for his winter vacation home because it seemed more laid back than its alternatives. "I just wanted to ski," he said. Nearby Breckenridge "is so commercial it makes me nervous," he added.

Mr. Constantini, 49, who moved to Water Mill, on Long Island, permanently about four years ago, is now thinking about making Copper Mountain his year-round home. He currently owns a million-dollar town house there, but has bought one of the new single-family lots for \$600,000.

"The Hamptons are still one of the most beautiful environments you can be in," he said. "But the traffic is incredibly bad and people are rude. And I think age has something to do with it. You just don't need the scene and the vibrancy

so much."

No scene, however, does not mean that there is nothing to do. The main village, at the mountain's base, may lack the glamorous night life of the more famous Colorado towns. But there are casual restaurants, like the popular Indian Motorcycle Cafe. Each "street" — really just heated pedestrian-only walkways — has a different commercial function: food and drink, say, or night life. Most stores are owner-operated, although a few nationally recognized brands crop up (there is a Starbucks).

The key to Copper's appeal, though, say Intrawest executives, is the village's design. The condominiums that line the street, with retail shops on the first floors, are in what he called "high alpine" style, built of natural stones and heavy timber. Sightlines have been planned to maximize views of the mountains and the forest.

The condos are priced from \$250,000 to \$1 million. Intrawest is offering only 27 single-family lots, including Mr. Constantini's, all at the top of Copper Mountain. Homes there will probably cost \$1.5 million to \$3.5 million.

Intrawest's plan seems more aggressive than Bald Head's. Although only half finished with its original proposal, the company has presented Summit County with an amended proposal for the next 15 to 20 years, which includes an additional 1,200 residences, 110,000 square feet of community and conference facilities, more hiking and biking trails, and a 135-foot hotel.

The key to a successful planned village, said Greg Ashley, president of the sales and marketing arm of Intrawest, is a vibrant community that is nevertheless easy to opt out of. "People want to get away, but they don't have to slow down," he said. "In our villages there's stuff to do any time of day or night, or there's nothing to do. You can experience as much of it as you want."