



Travel Chronicle, Pt. 2

GAMBLE SANDS





Of all the new links courses inspired by the success of Bandon Dunes, Gamble Sands—set in the high desert above the Columbia River and bordered by the soaring North Cascades—comes closest to the spirit and profound beauty of Mike Keiser’s Oregon resort. In 2008, David Kidd, the Scottish whiz handpicked 18 years ago to design Bandon’s first course, was summoned to the small town of Brewster by the Gebbers family, who, for more than a century, have harvested this land and who saw the chance to give back to their remote hometown by putting it on the map of places in the Northwest where you’ll find great golf. Kidd sized up the Gebbers’ heavenly property and told

them he wanted “to build a course that would fall out of the sky and lay softly on the land.” And that’s what he did. In late 2014, when Kidd’s work on Gamble Sands was complete and Mike Keiser set foot on it for the first time, Keiser was overwhelmed—with reason. What Kidd has achieved is a course so wide and rolling, so magnificent in its contours and vistas, so perfectly nestled into its natural setting, so elaborately bunkered, and such a blast to play, that it seems the ultimate fulfillment of Keiser’s vision of golf that is challenging, sand-based, rooted in the history of the game, and fun with a capital “F.”





5:00 p.m.

Tacoma's been an eyeful, but the ascent into the Cascade Range of North Central Washington is a stunner. For the first few hours, you'll climb through boundless stands of pines and firs. Placid, fresh-water mountain lakes soon appear, and so will your itch for a pick-me-up. At almost precisely the midway point of the journey—after dozens of miles of natural wonder—jump off Route 97 for a refresher in Liberty, Washington.



The former gold-mining town's population barely exceeds the number of clubs in your bag, but in this woodsy outback, it'll look like a metropolis. Kelly presses the espresso at Liberty Latte—a roadside stand not much larger than a phone booth—and it's as deliciously dark as Kelly's spirits are light. She'll welcome you like the out-of-towner she instantly knows you to be, then she'll send you on your way with a caffeinated boost. So much of the fruit America eats is grown up here in Okanogan County, and resuming your travels along the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, you'll first see vineyards, then, in every direction, acres and acres of apple and cherry trees. Steel bridges will begin to crisscross the Columbia River, and once the Columbia is in sight, so is Gamble Sands.

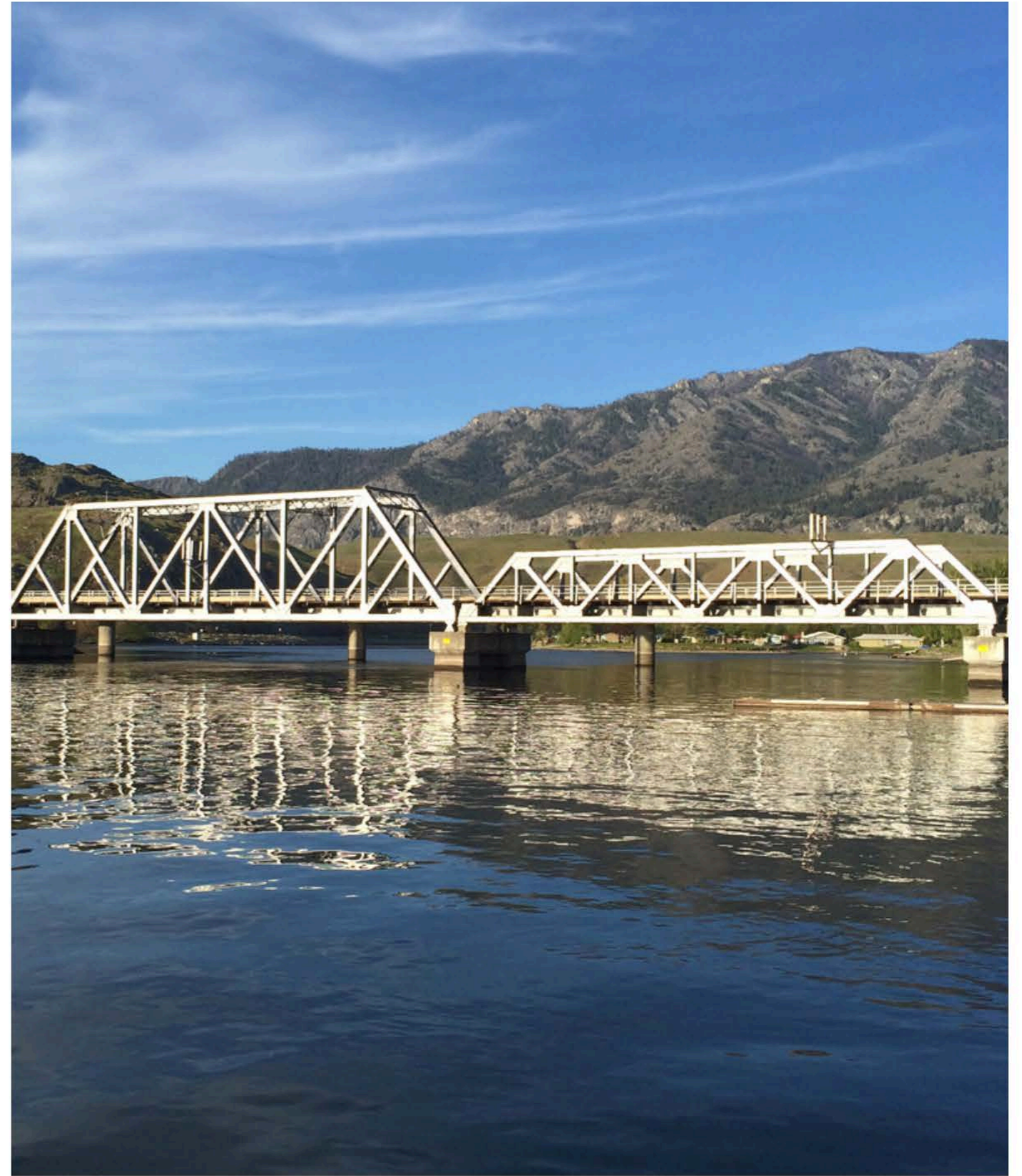




7:00 p.m.

A nice place to stay is Campbell's Resort on Lake Chelan. You won't find a jazz combo or Mary Kay reps here, just a clean and quiet room with a lake view, a small patio, and a night sky worthy of Orion.

This is cattle country, and the steak they plate at Campbell's Pub & Veranda, across the parking lot, is so flavorful, it doesn't need the classy smear of Valhalla Stilton Butter.





Monday

GAMBLE SANDS





8:00 a.m.

Daybreak is a magical time to approach the course. The rays of the rising sun shimmer on the meandering Columbia, and the long horizon brilliantly frames the Gebbers' blossoming orchards—7,000 acres of them. The road sign for Gamble Sands is inconspicuous. More prominent are the towering stacks of fruit crates stamped with the Gebbers Farm logo. Use them as your guideposts for the winding and epic climb—more than four miles of dirt road—to Gamble's gorgeous, neo-rustic clubhouse, which sits atop the vast landscape like an iconic monument to dream golf.



Once you pull your jaw off the ground, you'll be struck by how warm and welcoming the small staff is. Family is of vital importance to the Gebbers, and they treat each visitor to the course like one of their own. They're a regular presence here—golfers and great storytellers who'd love nothing more than to pridefully detail for you the harvesting technique for each of their more than 15 varieties of apples. Luke Luttrell, Gamble's fresh-faced, 25-year-old head pro, grew up a short distance from this place and, coincidentally, was a ranger at Bandon Dunes when he first heard about the incredible doings in his own backyard. David Kidd gave him a trial by fire—a chatty round on Bandon's par-3 Preserve—and before Luttrell knew it, he was up to his elbows in wood stain, slapping coats of amber onto the clubhouse in the months leading up to the course's August 2014 opening.





“If it went far enough, you’re going to be outstanding.” That’s Luttrell schooling me on my 180-yard approach shot on the first hole. During our loop on Kidd’s rollicking course, the young gun schools me on *lots* of things—including the scores we post. But the atmosphere at Gamble Sands is so open and relaxing—and the Ashworth gear I’m wearing is so comfortable and flexible—that my game flows effortlessly.





The par-4 2nd delivers the first of many incredible panoramas, some featuring the bending Columbia, others—like the ones on 6, 7, and 8—the awe-inspiring peaks and plateaus of the Cascades. The blind tee shot on the par-5 3rd, over an acre of sand, is like a desert scene out of *Lawrence of Arabia*—or, if you shank it, *Mad Max: Fury Road*. On two short par-4s, I drive the greens and card birdies on both.

I laugh out loud on the par-3 6th when I intentionally fly my ball to a slope 40 yards right of the green and watch it roll pin-high to 10 feet. Fine fescue blankets all fairways and greens, which, in the true links tradition, are vast but by no means pushovers. The front nine takes you miles from the clubhouse, and your return to it will be trance-like, not only because you'll be following your bliss, but because that amazing clubhouse awaits.

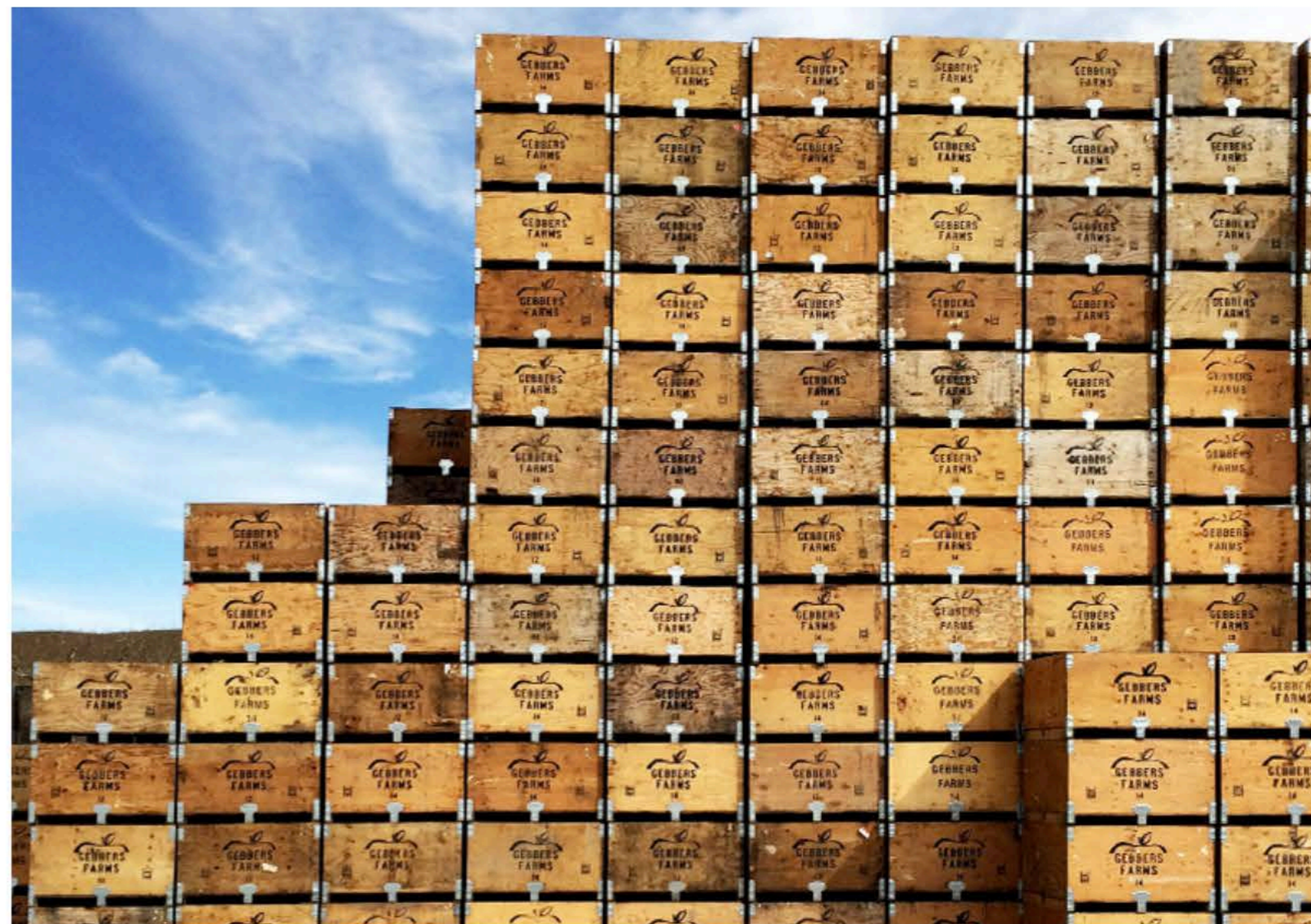


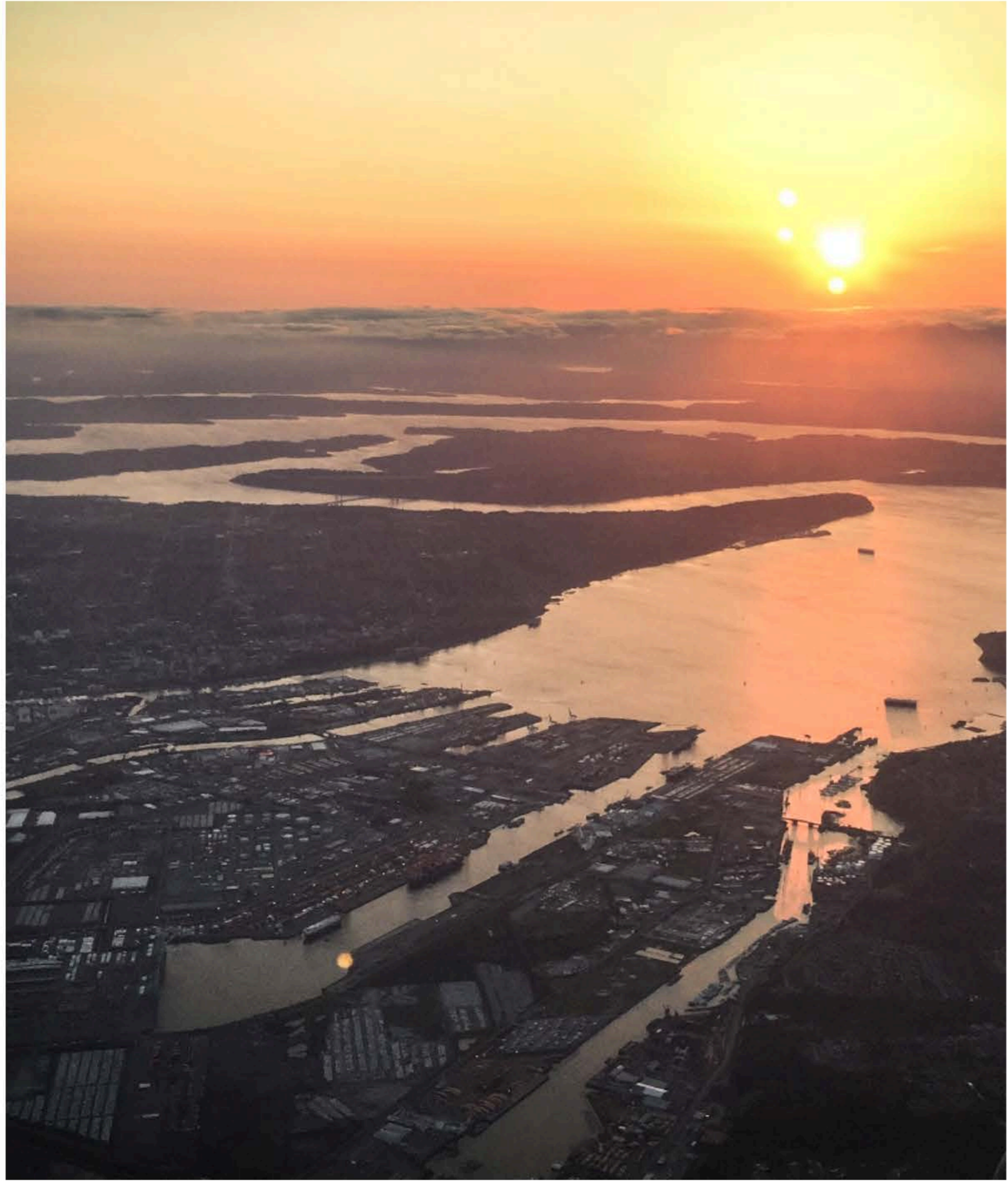


1:00 p.m.

The Gebbers made their fortune, in part, by selling fruit under the instantly recognizable “Danny Boy” label, and the clubhouse restaurant, Danny Boy Bar & Grill, is as down-home, smartly designed, and built-for-fun as David Kidd’s course. The restaurant anchors the back corner of the clubhouse, with views of rolling hills as far as the eye can see. Retractable doors open onto two covered patios with four-tops and picnic tables, making indoor and outdoor one and the same. A more utopian, post-round chill-out is unimaginable until you spy the rack of bourbons just inches from taps that pour up Bootjack IPA and Mirror Pond Pale Ale, and find out that the beef served up—as burgers and T-bones and French dip sandwiches—is bargain-priced and raised by the Gebbers right here on the property. The rib eye with mashed potatoes and asparagus? It actually earns the chef applause when he swings through the kitchen door. Then, of course, there’s the apple pie...

It may have taken a little extra effort to get to Gamble Sands, but the experience is beyond worth it. At some point, you will literally have the thought, *I don’t want to leave.*





8:00 p.m.

But life and a flight out of Sea-Tac beckons. The drive back to civilization—a reverse descent past the orchards and wineries and mountain lakes and majestic pines—is just long enough to relive the weekend’s golf triumphs and torments, strange encounters and wild times, and unreserved beauty. If I had a goblet—even *your* lady’s goblet—I’d raise a toast to going west.

