

With Mallets Aforethought
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TRYING IT OUT – Two students of the croquet clinic try their hand at the basics. Unlike the backyard croquet familiar from childhood summers, true competitive croquet's wickets are barely wider than a ball.

Croquet can be a thinking person's game

Their slogan is "A Serious Sport for Serious Fun." And they would like others to join them. They're the Sandwich Croquet Club. Never mind the name. They have many players from the villages of Barnstable and from Cape towns that range from Falmouth to Wellfleet who come together at Sandwich Hollows Golf Club, just off the Service Road in East Sandwich

On June 16, the club offered a clinic through the Sandwich Community School, an adult education program, with repeats planned for July 14 and Aug. 11. But you're also invited to join them at their regular sessions, Mondays from 5 to 7 p.m., Tuesdays 2 to 4 p.m., and 5 to 7 p.m.; and Saturdays 10 a.m. to noon and 1 to 3 p.m. The first two sessions are free to visitors and \$10 for each session thereafter unless the person joins the club for \$65 dues. Club members offer lessons and practice 30 minutes before the Saturday and Tuesday sessions.

Many different kinds of mallets are always available to borrow and the club encourages newcomers to try many of them until they are ready to buy their own.

A member is present at each session to organize play and provide advice and instruction. The club plays both a fast version of the game called "golf croquet" and a more complicated and advanced version known as "American croquet."

Later this summer, a new court will be ready to play on, allowing more people to participate. The club, only in its second year, has increased from a handful last summer to 33 this year. It also serves as a social network with lunch either at the golf course or at a local restaurant; potluck suppers; an annual luncheon in September; and other outings as well as a members-only tournament. They also met last winter just to stay in touch.

Depending on the weather, the season for play lasts from May 1 to Nov. 1.

Among the students at the clinic last month were Peter Weldon and Joanne Doherty from Hyannis. Both golfers, they bought a croquet set at a yard sale and decided that they wanted to learn how to use it. They, like the seven other learners, were practicing the "golf" version of the game.

Meanwhile, on the court being used by members dressed in the traditional white (some decorated with croquet motifs in the traditional ball colors of black, blue, yellow and red), an "American" version, the more complicated, was taking place.

On the court was Jane Padwee of Osterville, who said that she has been playing "for a long time." She advised, "This form of croquet is very cerebral. It's good for your mind."

She was joined by another advanced player, Jacquie Zenopoulos of Cotuit.

More members were due to arrive after the student players had finished their session at 12:30. They had made room for the clinic, which was not surprising to the members. "It's a very social group and everyone wants you to learn," said Maureen Villiotte, a summer resident of Mashpee who said that she can play croquet all year long in Florida.

The club's description of the game in the Sandwich Community School catalog says that croquet "incorporates many of the same skills as golf, billiards, and chess."

Members knew of one other croquet club, at Heritage Museum and Gardens, also in Sandwich.

It seems that croquet has plenty to absorb people's interest beyond the childhood memories of a backyard game. Bill Day, a member of the steering committee and a teacher at the clinic, observed to a visitor, "I've been playing for five or six years and I'm just starting to scratch the surface."

It seems peaceful, too. As a visitor left the two courts full of people exclaiming "Nice shot!" under a dramatically cloudy sky, the chimes of a nearby church sounded the noon hour and played a hymn.

The club's website, sandwichcroquet.com contains a link to the United State Croquet Association, or call 508-341-3658 for more information.