

# This Golf Course was a Public Sex Forest

a queer history larp by Jon Cole

## Sparring

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People used to fuck nasty right here!  
Shame they built that pickleball  
court right in front of the ol' fisting log.

# This Golf Course was a Public Sex Forest

Create and share queer memories inspired by the local queer history of the location you play: somewhere where queer people used to gather and build community, playfully resist oppression, or fuck. Play this larp to be present in nature... in a horny gay way you can gossip about later!

## Stats

4 to 28 players  
90 minutes  
Played outdoors  
Drop in drop out  
Queer and a lil' sexy

## Equipment

Printed emotion cards ([page 6](#))  
A few printed playbooks ([page 4](#))  
One badge holder or hanky per player  
Ring binder with blank paper  
Writing utensils

## Briefing (read aloud, pass to a new person at paragraph breaks)

As students in the Applied History department, we study queer experiences of the past by curiously gazing back in time into the intimate, mundane moments lived by our queer ancestors. The ritual that makes this possible opens a tiny “window” that only covers a small geographic location. Our observation of queer memories is tied to experiences that took place here, where we are today.

We are necessary components of the ritual, it's a “software” that runs on the “hardware” of our bodies and brains. During the ritual we each become a lens into a different set of memories tied to this location. On our way out we'll record our observations into a guestbook.

## How to Play

This is a place where queer people used to gather and build community, playfully resist oppression, or fuck. Once our ritual has opened a window to the past, we will wander the area collecting memories of the people who were here. It is almost exactly as if you are creating a memory by following prompts and taking inspiration from the environment around you. However be assured that any anxiety you feel about “making things up” is harmless side effect of the ritual to archive these memories.

Our focus today is on the personal-scale stories that never make the history books. Skip the grand or sweeping history for the mundane, intimate moments. Your two tools to summon a memory into your mind are:

1. Your emotion card. Everyone take an emotion card and keep it secret for now. Using this prompt you'll seek out a memory that is related to the emotion on your card. This might be what happened that caused someone to feel this way, how feeling that emotion sparked someone into action, or even how you feel observing the memory.
2. The space itself. The ritual calls tiny signs of what happened here into our present. Be present here and the smallest things, like a stick out of place or a scuff mark on the ground, will show

you how queer people used this place. By listening and watching the world around you, you'll be able to find where the memory took place and gain insight into what happened.

Leisurely catch and release as many memories as you need to until you find one that connects to your card, is grounded in this space, and you want to document it as an Applied Historian.

Once you have a memory, choose some small aspect of it to embody or bring into your presence here. That might be how someone walked, the tightness in their back as they squeezed through a crowd, or an eager curiosity about everything around you. To mark yourself as carrying a memory, put your emotion card into your badge holder facing out. Or if you have an even more visual marker of participation, like a hankie or carabiner, shift that from the right to the left side of your body.

Carrying the memory's shifting form upon your body, seek out a fellow historian with a memory of their own to share. Don't show them your card, instead show them where in the space the memory took place, and describe it by offering a brief vignette including sensory details. This might take a couple of minutes, and pull back if you risk going over 5 minutes. Your fellow historian might have a question or two, or a detail to add to your memory.

When it's their turn to share, listen closely and ask about a sensory detail or two. When they've completely described their memory add a detail to their story from the perspective of your still-secret emotion card. You're not taking over or invalidating the core truth of their memory, you're adding a small piece of nuance to it.

Once both memories have been geographically located, shared aloud, questioned for detail, and expanded using emotion cards: Swap your emotion cards without looking at the new one. Then find a place to be alone and start the process of seeking out a new queer memory from this place by looking at your emotion card.

Continue seeking and sharing memories until you get the emotion card you started with back, or you feel like stopping. Our final task before we exit the ritual is to channel some portion of the memories you collected today into a guestbook. Write or draw, as if one or a few of the queer people from these memories were expressing their thoughts through you. Don't worry about making a full and accurate report, think of it more like a scrap book of journal entries, bathroom graffiti, poetry snippets, and warm up drawings.

The guest book binder has some paper inside and a few writing utensils, feel free to separate out paper so more people can add to it simultaneously.

Before we learn about the history of where we are today, what questions does anyone have about how we enact the ritual today?

## Local History

Let's learn about this place, by taking turns reading aloud our location playbook ([page 4](#)) or creating our own history ([page 5](#)).

## Vulnerability and Safety

When queers gathered here in the past, it was an open secret. Spaces like the one we are returning to were vulnerable, especially when the area fell under outsiders' scrutiny. Today when we conduct our ritual we're going to be slightly weird in a public space, which introduces some extra vulnerability and the possibility of scrutiny. Consider your own vulnerability when you're in public, and what being weird might mean for you. Imagine what behaviors might feel comfortable or uncomfortable for you, what behaviors might accrue consequences. Make a mental note of what activities feel easy, and what are close to or at your limit.

Consider also your safety factors, for example if you can stay within visual range of other participants or wave over a buddy if someone approaches you.

## Final Words

The past might feel far from our experiences, but it is not far away at all. Some of the people we will look in on today are still alive and can personally tell you what they experienced here. The people looked, spoke, and smelled just like you. They had needs and problems just like you.

You might discover in play that you're following the memories of one person in this space, or a small community of people. Resist the urge to consciously shape a narrative, it is the discipline of history to simply observe and report; let a coherent tale appear to you or not through what the ritual shows you.

Momentarily we'll take hands around the circle. On the count of three everyone will choose a pitch and start to hum continuously. Continue humming, nice and loud, until our humming settles on around a similar pitch and resolves. When we stop humming the "window" is open and we can silently go our separate ways, starting our inquiry into the memories of this place. Let's begin...

## Conduct the Ritual!

### Debrief

- Empathy is not real experience. Despite the pervasive-game fun of imagining these were real memories, they aren't. Imagining allows us to expand our capacity for empathy, while recognizing we haven't had the historical experiences we made up for each other.
- Let's go around the circle and take turns replying to a prompt one at a time. You can choose to pass. The prompt is: Describe an aspect of the imaginary queer memories you want to experience, further cherish, or want to prevent other people from experiencing.
- Discuss as a group: How could we learn more about the real experiences of the people who were here? Odds are very good that some of them are still alive and live in our area.
- Discuss as a group: What are contemporary spaces near us where marginalized people gather and build community, playfully resist oppression, or fuck? What are some ways that the people here can support or protect these spaces?

# Bareass Beach

Minneapolis MN USA  
1980

## Look and Feel

During the sticky Minneapolis summer, this quiet spot nestled on the eastern banks of the Mississippi river flats between the Franklin and Short Line bridges is a reliable place to catch a breeze. Part nude beach part gay men's cruising area, the entrance to Bareass Beach lies at the bottom of a steep, staggering staircase, the woods giving way to wide stretches of sand, root, and stone. Common objects along the shoreline: spent cigarettes, old rope swings, bonfire remnants, broken shells.

## Queers

The beach was frequented by gay, bi, MSM men from the 1970s–1990s. Some men you might encounter suckin' and fuckin' amongst the bushes are:

- Sunburned College boy (Go Gophers!)
- Closet case civil servant
- Radical Faerie visiting the Cities, here for the nudity as much as anything else
- Blue collar man taking the edge off after work
- Bears, twinks, queens, clones, and all the other archetypes

## History

Bareass Beach was the abandoned dregs of river dredging in the early 1900s. Besides cruising, it was also a treasured site for Twin Cities pride picnics offering "Free Barbecue, Fruit, & Beverages To Anyone." In their heyday, these late-June bashes saw upwards of five hundred attendees before the chosen pride locale swapped to Loring Park, where it remains to this day.

## Repression

From the zine *Make The Golf Course A Public Sex Forest!*, "In 1981 the city spent \$176,000 on an access ramp down to the park, ostensibly to facilitate trash collection but in reality to allow police to drive down and attack queers having sex. This was justified with the typical rhetoric about how gay people having sex in the typically-deserted park was unfair to families." The space is now known as East River Flats Park.

The regulars of Bareass Beach were no stranger to scrutiny or violence, however, and reaching for each other in the shadows of the East bank bluffs was not without risk. Gays faced frequent harassment by the Minneapolis Police Department's vice squad, and an unsettling murder that occurred during the summer of 1991 ushered in a sharp decline in cruising along the secluded, sandy paths.

## Bibliography

*Make the Golf Course a Public Sex Forest*

[https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anonymous-make-the-golf-course-a-public-sex-forest#fn\\_back4](https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/anonymous-make-the-golf-course-a-public-sex-forest#fn_back4)

Van Cleve, Stewart. *Land of 10,000 Loves: A History of Queer Minnesota*, 147–149. University of Minnesota Press, 2012.

Campbell, Tim. *GLC Voice*. 1980–1981.

"Bareass Beach" is a playbook for *This Golf Course Was a Public Sex Forest*, a #QueerHistory game.

# For Facilitators

## Where to Play

Choose a place you can access where queer people used to gather and build community, playfully resist oppression, or fuck. It's a nice bonus if the place's character has changed dramatically since then, such as a grimy Mafia bar becoming a squeaky-clean tourist trap or a bug-bitten cruising spot becoming a manicured public park. Anywhere large enough for players to spread out and find space to be alone, though playing outdoors tends to work best.

How to find queer history:

- Use a pre-made history playzine. There's one included with this game, and maybe more online.
- Research it. Visit a queer archive, interview community elders, hit up interlibrary loan.
- Make up some queer history. Based on what you know about a local landmark and queer history generally, invent some plausible sounding queer uses for your space. Queer spaces were often temporary and marginal; queer history is often unrecorded or suppressed. Use that unspecified space to imagine queer history for about 5 minutes with the people who show up to play.

## Practical Considerations

If possible choose a rendezvous point where you can leave the guest book for people to use throughout play. A completely ideal place will have places to write and nearby toilets.

## Drop In Drop Out

Stash an extra copy of the briefing and some playbooks in the guest book, so late-arrivals can self-brief.

## Making Playbooks

Find the answers to the following sections about your own local landmark. The sections happen to correspond to the pages of a [letter-sized zine](#).

1. Title, location, date
2. Look and Feel
3. ^
4. Queer Inhabitants
5. History
6. ^
7. Repression or Elders' Voices
8. Bibliography, credits, link to game

## Ludography

[Night Forest](#) by Mo Golden and Ross Cowman  
[Royal College of Neraidology](#) by Ivan Nevill  
[The Doomsday Book](#) by Connie Willis  
[Make the Golf Course a Public Sex Forest](#)  
[Desaparecidas](#) by July Pilowsky  
[Hoffman Institute Feelings List](#)

# Accepting

Calm, Centered, Trusting

# Acceptance

Peaceful, Patient, Fulfilled

# Aliveness

Radiant, Delighted, Free

# Joy

Refreshed, Vibrant, Eager

# Powerful

Satisfied, Passionate, Playful

# Courageous

Valiant, Afraid, Grounded

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# Proud

Daring, Capable, Determined

# Anger

Disturbed, Vindictive, Hostile

# Annoyed

Bitter, Impatient, Contempt

# Connected

Empathy, Safe, Affectionate

# Curious

Stimulated, Exploring, Involved

# Loving

Compassion, Worthy, Intrigued

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# Sadness

Melancholic, Heartbroken, Grieving

# Despair

Discouraged, Grieving, Longing

# Disconnected

Numb, Isolated, Resistant

# Ashamed

Humiliated, Weak, Inhibited

# Embarrassed

Worthless, Self-Conscious, Mortified

# Fearful

Anxious, Panicked, Paralyzed

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# Fragile

Helpless, Sensitive, Trembly

# Grateful

Blessed, Touched, Lucky

# Guilty

Regretful, Remorseful, Heavy

# Hopeful

Expectant, Optimistic, Encouraged

# Powerless

Resigned, Trapped, Victim

# Tender

Self-Loving, Vulnerable, Warm

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# Reflective

Grounded, Accepting, Transforming

# Stressed

Burned-out, Shaken, Exhausted

# Unsettled

Hesitant, Questioning, Ungrounded

# Doubting

Suspicious, Reluctant, Disturbed

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