New Nicklaus course in Sonoma for walkers only

By DOUG SAUNDERS

HEALDSBURG, Calif. — Mayacama Golf Club, the newest Jack Nicklaus signature course, opens this summer in the wine country near Healdsburg, and it promises to be one of the more distinctive private golf courses of 2001.

The 6,759-yard track features an intriguing blend of five par-5s and five par-3s that fit the landscape like a glove. Only 150,000 cubic yards of dirt had to be moved to bring the layout to life. The course has no yardage markers except at the tees, and golfers will learn to rely on caddies and their own judgment to play the correct shots.

The 650-acre property is a blend of three rolling hillsides dotted with mature oaks, madrones, redwoods and firs—the terrain lends itself perfectly to golf. On monthly visits to the site, Nicklaus saw the opportunity to design a traditional golf course that relies on early design concepts to create a top-level experience.

"This was an exciting piece of property to work on, and I think it will be a great experience for the members of the club," he said.

WALK, DON'T RIDE

Designed for walking only, members will use carts solely to travel to the private "casitas" being constructed for overnight stays. In contrast to most private golf developments, only 31 homes will be sited at Mayacama; even these will be hidden away from the course to preserve the secluded atmosphere.

The property was formerly owned by a partnership that included the late Charles Schultz, creator of the "Peanuts" comic strip and an avid golfer. But after struggling for 11 years to obtain permits, the group sold the property to the new owners that has created Mayacama Golf Club. Schultz, unfortunately, passed away before completion of the course, but his widow has been given an honorary membership.

Final permit approvals were secured when the new plans toned down the development aspects for the site. Steering the project towards a private club—with little addition of roads and infrastructure—helped to move Mayacama towards reality.

"Our desire was to create the finest private club imaginable," said general manager Phillip Norfleet. "The combination of Jack Nicklaus as our architect and this wonderful site has..."