

Society gives stamp of approval to Ross layout

BY PETER BLAIS

The keepers of the faith — The Donald Ross Society — have given high marks to developers of Donald Ross Memorial Golf Course at Boyne Highlands, Mich., for their re-creation of 18 of the famed architect's best-known holes.

"They did one heckuva job," said W. Pete Jones, the society's historical chairman and author of an upcoming book on the life and works of the most revered name in golf course architecture.

"The whole effort was one of total reverence," agreed society founder and President Barry Palm. "They're to be complimented."

Ross Memorial in Harbor Springs was the brainchild of Boyne Highlands owner Everett Kircher, according to son, Steve.

"He came up with the idea about 1980," said the younger Kircher. "There were several 'high-tech' courses being built at the time in northern Michigan. But he felt architects were just getting too far away from the classical work of architects like Ross.

"Anyone can play a Ross course. They're not tricked up like a lot of the modern courses. It's amazing. The new architects get so much more publicity than Ross ever received, and yet he was so much better."

Ross is credited with designing 600 courses. The Kirchers, noted golf instructor Jim Flick, golf course architect William Newcomb and Boyne golf professionals began jetting around

the country in 1982 scouting out all the Ross courses in the "Golf Digest Top 100" plus a handful of others.

That selection team came up with 100 holes that served as the "palette" from which the eventual 18 holes were selected to color Boyne's 300 rolling acres.

"We had a ton of par 5s and par 3s that we liked," said Steve Kircher. "We had to distill that down. We looked at the terrain we had to work with and that largely dictated what we eventually took."

To stay as true as possible to the Ross designs, the selection team tried to avoid holes with features that couldn't be duplicated, like 100-year-old oak trees, and favored those with features that could more easily be copied, like ponds and bunkers.

"We built the largest pond we'd ever constructed in reproducing the par 5, 15th at Seminole Golf Club (North Palm Beach, Fla), our 13th here," said the younger Kircher, whose family has built seven courses at Boyne.

The selection team eventually chose four par 3s, four par 5s and 10 par 4s.

Reproduced at Boyne were the 2nd, 10th and 14th holes from Pinehurst No. 2, Ross' home course in North Carolina; the 6th and 15th from Seminole; and the 16th and 17th from Oakland Hills South Course in Birmingham, Mich.

Also reproduced were the 4th at Plainsfield

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(N.J.) CC; 13th at Oak Hill East Course in Rochester, N.Y.; 2nd at Scioto CC in Columbus, Ohio; 18th at Inverness Club in Toledo, Ohio; 11th at Charlotte (N.C.) Country Club; 11th at Bob O'Link GC in Highland Park, Ill.; 14th at Royal Dornoch GC in Dornoch, Scotland; 13th at Salem CC in Peabody, Mass.; 3rd at Detroit (Mich.) GC; 11th at Aronomink GC in Newton Square, Pa.; and 8th at Wannamoisett in Rumford, R.I.

"I really liked the Royal Dornoch hole," said Jones. "If you took out the woods behind the green, it would be just like the real thing."

Armed with grids, blueprints and as many as 40 photographs of each hole, Boyne's own crew began construction in 1985. The holes were constructed as they exist today, with the modifications made by the clubs since Ross originally designed them.

The holes are not exact duplicates, but facsimiles. Terrain, backgrounds and landscapes differ on some holes. For instance, the tropical palmetto trees and Bermudagrass of Seminole are replaced by northern hardwoods and bentgrass at the Boyne re-creation. There are also extra tees.

"There are a couple of holes that the wind direction has altered here," said Kircher. "For instance, the 16th at Oakland Hills plays mainly into the wind. Here the wind is primarily at your back. That changes the way the hole plays by 15 to 20 yards. We'll be putting a new tee about that far back so the hole plays a little more like the real thing."

Yardages, elevations between tees and greens, landing zones, bunkers, ponds and, most importantly, the subtleties of the Ross greens, have been as nearly duplicated as possible.

Construction began in 1984. Kircher said no wetlands were involved, meaning few permitting problems.

"The only difficulty was closing an old logging road running through the 18th hole.

The road was used by poachers, so we probably did the environment a favor. It took two years to close. Other than that, there were no major problems," Kircher said.

The biggest construction snafu involved the Oak Hill 13th (the 5th at Boyne). Heavy rains caused severe erosion along the 600-yard, uphill hole.

"We had to re-seed it eight times," Kircher said.

But construction continued and Ross Memorial eventually opened in the summer of 1989. It opened officially last summer and has been nominated for Golf Digest's Best New Resort Course list, Kircher said.

"We're pretty confident we'll be mentioned pretty highly," Kircher said.

Being a resort course open to the public is one of the best things about Ross Memorial, according to Palm.

"A lot of Ross' courses are private today," said the society president. "This way the general public will have the chance to experience some of the world's finest holes. They'd probably never get to play them any other way."

Using mostly in-house labor and expertise held construction costs to \$2.5 million. The only sub-contracted work involved a local earth-moving company and some routing by Newcomb.

"If we'd used an architect like Jack Nicklaus and contracted out the construction work, it might have cost \$8 million to \$9 million," Kircher said.

The decade-long process of bringing Ross Memorial to fruition "was a lot more work than we originally thought it would be," Kircher said. "The stakes were much higher in terms of details.

"As we built the course, Ross came into vogue. The magnitude of what we were doing increased and we realized we couldn't take what we were doing lightly."

Lohmann, Zoeller join forces at Boulder Ridge

Boulder Ridge Country Club in Lake in the Hills, Ill., opened this fall and will be ready for full operation next spring.

Fuzzy Zoeller was the design consultant and Bob Lohmann the architect for the 400-acre, private, residential golf course community.

The course is designed for all ability levels. "We wanted Boulder Ridge to have a unique and tough personality. It's a beautiful and challenging layout for high- and low-handicap golfers," Lohmann said.

The course plays 7,130 yards from the back tees, 6,200 yards from the blue, 5,800 from the white and 5,195 from the red.

The small greens have subtle undulations, and are protected by bunkers and mounds.

"We felt it was very important to reward a well-placed approach shot with a very makeable putt," Lohmann said.

Over 500,000 yards of earth was moved to sculpture the rolling terrain and fairways. The 150-yard markers are boulders discovered during earth moving.

Lohmann Golf Designs is located at 800 McHenry Ave., Crystal Lake, Ill. Design and renovation credits include Fox Hills and Cedar Creek country clubs in Wisconsin along with Streamwood Oaks Golf Club and The Merit Club in Illinois.

Reynolds' Nicklaus course on schedule for '92 opening

A construction schedule that calls for a spring 1992 opening has been set for the Jack Nicklaus-designed Great Waters Golf Course at Reynolds Plantation, Ga.

The announcement came from Harold Reynolds, president of the family-owned company developing the 4,000-acre residential resort community on Lake Oconee.

Rough shaping began the first of October on the course that will feature nine holes directly on the lakeshore. Fairways should be planted in Tifway Bermuda in June, with greens of Pennecross bentgrass planted in early next fall.

"At this point in time," said Nicklaus, "we're ahead of schedule. Of course, it's very early

on, but things are going real well.

Set on a 680-acre peninsula across Lake Oconee from the original Reynolds Plantation Golf Course, Great Waters is being cut from dramatically rolling hills and thick forests of hardwoods and pines.

Nicklaus said it will measure between 7,000 and 7,100 yards from the championship tees, playing to a par of 72. Four sets of tees are planned, with the forward markers measuring a course of 5,500 to 5,700 yards.

"We are keeping this course as natural as we can," said Nicklaus. "We've worked very hard to blend the holes into the existing trees and topography."

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