

Building Pulpit no frivolous venture for Hurdzan Group

BY MARK LESLIE

There's nothing trivial about Chris Haney's latest pursuit, a majestic 315-acre golf course 35 miles northwest of Toronto.

The co-developer of the popular board game "Trivial Pursuit" has teamed with architect Michael Hurdzan of Columbus, Ohio, to create a course that Hurdzan says elevates him from "plain vanilla" golf course designs to the "take-your-breath-away" variety.

"You kind of gasp when you get to the first tee," said Andy Banfield, a senior designer for architect Tom Fazio, in recreating his visit to the Haney-Hurdzan creation, Devil's Pulpit.

Set on a "spectacular" piece of land and built with Haney's "well, we had a budget in mind when we started" attitude, Devil's Pulpit will open July 1. And the line to play it has already formed — with 400 memberships bought and paid for at prices ranging from the early \$17,000 figure to \$55,000.

"I know golf courses around the world, and I'm hard-pressed to think of a better one," said a proud Haney, whose main partner in the venture is Trivial Pursuit co-inventor Scott Abbott.

And the course was not even complete when he spoke. The \$2-million first hole was nearing the end of its 17-month construction cycle; and No. 13, a "weak sister" in Haney's words, was being rebuilt by three scrapers and four bulldozers in May.

Hurdzan said: "I think Devil's Pulpit probably has 14 unforgettable holes. They have such strong

personalities that you just cannot forget them; and the other four holes pale by comparison simply because they are up against such strong competitors.

"You could take those four holes and put them on another course and they'd be superstars. That's the kind of golf course it is."

Fry said, "It's not as difficult as people might think by looking at it. It's a psychological golf course in that it looks hard, but it has very large landing areas."

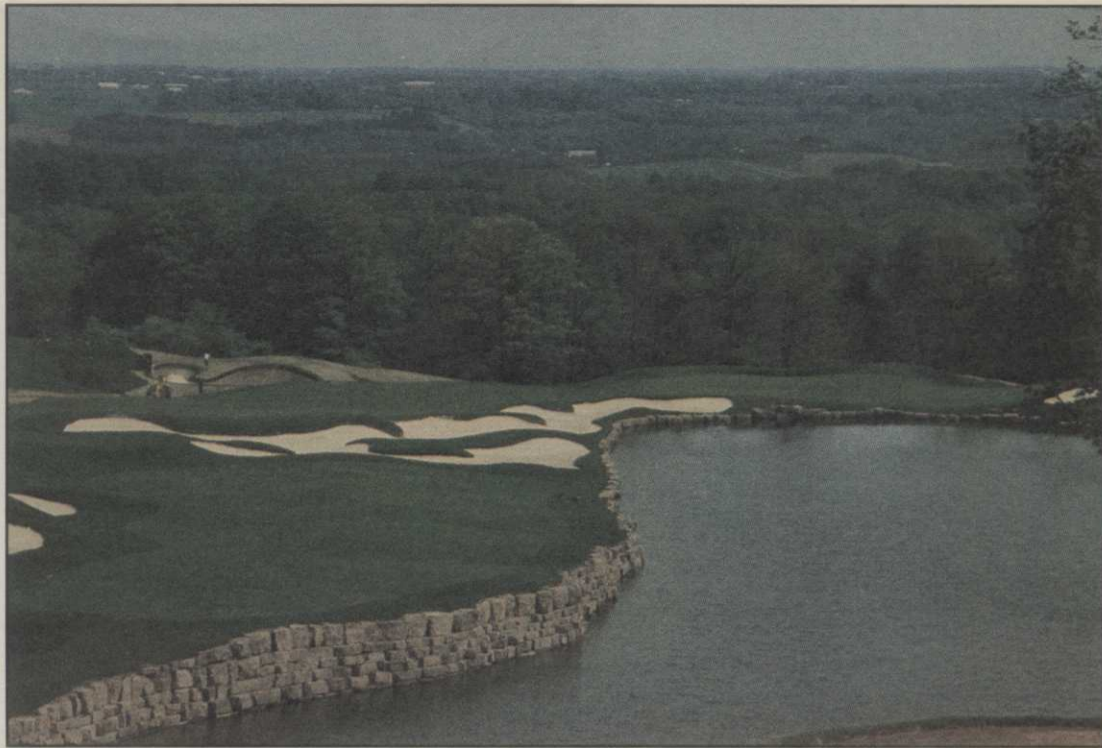
Haney's goal was to build the best golf course in Canada, supplanting No. 1-ranked National Golf Club in Woodbridge, Ontario, designed by George and Tom Fazio. Now the goal is to have the best sister courses, with a second 18 — Devil's Links — under construction on a nearby mountaintop.

Banfield wouldn't concede the Pulpit course is the best, saying, "You have to play a course to judge it." But he added: "It is a tremendous golf course, a great setting. It has spectacular holes from the first tee and a lot of dramatic golf."

"Whatever it takes" became the motto for the project, Fry said. That became obvious when Haney declared the course would fill the entire 315 acres — twice the usual land for a championship 18-hole design.

"We weren't fettered by budget or by the constraint to build houses," Hurdzan said. "I mean, here's a 315-acre piece of ground with zero houses on it. Chris said, 'I don't want houses. I want the best golf course in Canada...'"

"Those guys have tasted suc-



A view of Devil's Pulpit's first hole from one of its seven tees.

Photo by Doug Ball

cess with Trivial Pursuit ... and they recognize that in order to have something successful you have to go that extra bit. They are willing to do that, and if it means digging down into their pockets, by God they'll do it."

"Digging down" started on the first hole, called the Tower Hole because you tee off aiming at the CN Tower in Toronto 35 miles away.

Perhaps the biggest in the world, the first hole covers 25 to 30 acres and is "an engineering marvel."

"Basically the land was on a 45-degree slope and we sort of tilted the slope to 180 degrees," Haney joked.

A 10- to 12-foot-high, 400-yard-long quarried stone wall was built along the entire first fairway, separating the fairway from a lake. A seven-head-wide system irrigates the 160-yard-wide double fairway.

There is no down side to the

figures:

- \$25 million for the project, including \$2 million for the land, \$6 million for the clubhouse, and \$2 million on environmental concerns.

- 1.7 million cubic yards of dirt moved.

- 100 acres of sod including 80 acres of bluegrass in all the playable roughs, and 20 acres of bentgrass on greens, tees and fairways.

- 120 tees covering more than four acres.

- Four acres of greens, which average 8,000 to 8,500 square feet, compared to the normal 5,000 square feet.

- 128 sand traps and 80 grass traps.

- Seven miles of cart paths, which Hurdzan "went to extremes to hide."

- A second, 250-yard-long stone wall that runs one to three feet

above water on a pond between the 15th and 16th greens.

- Fifty-six pieces of earth-moving equipment kept busy at one time.

- Rainbird Maxi 4 Irrigation System, with 1,200 sprinkler heads.

"It's impossible to hit another fairway — even if you tried," Haney said. "You cannot see one hole to the next. It's like the magical mystery tour."

Hurdzan has been known as the master of \$1-million golf courses. The Pulpit has changed that.

"When you work with a low budget, you build something that's functional. But it doesn't show how good you really are," he said. "You're doing plain vanilla. When you have a Devil's Pulpit, where you have a client who says, 'Show me how good you are,' then that's a step up. We've had a lot of good projects. But this is the first time

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Take your pick: Bells & whistles or Scotland reborn

BY MARK LESLIE

When they're completed, Devil's Pulpit and Devil's Links may be the most diverse sister golf courses in the world. And that suits co-developer Chris Haney just fine.

"These are night and day," Haney said of his two championship 18-hole layouts in the hills northwest of Toronto. "You can't compare them. It's like comparing PGA West to Muirfield. The Pulpit's got all the bells and whistles. At the Links, it's like you're in Scotland; it's only missing the North Sea. Plus it's got great views — better views than (the Pulpit)."

"If you're not hitting the ball you've got something to look at, as opposed to a housing development."

Architect Michael Hurdzan of Columbus, Ohio, agreed, describing the Pulpit as an Augusta National type — "very contemporary, high-tech golf course architecture. It would make (architect) Pete

Dye smile. It has awesome vertical cuts."

The 164-acre Links course, he said, is "a Spanish Bay type and our goal is that it look like we never touched it. We're moving minimal dirt, with limited irrigation, using fescues everywhere. It will be absolutely as natural as possible."

Hurdzan was 99-percent through the maze of government approvals for the Pulpit course when Haney called him to say he had found another site. Believing Haney meant to scrap plans for the Pulpit after years in the permitting process, Hurdzan was aghast.

But Haney jumped in: "No, no, no. I have another site for a second course... It will sail right through (the permitting)."

He topped it off thus: "And this one makes Devil's Pulpit look like a mud fence."

Hurdzan couldn't believe any site could outdo the Pul-

'You can't compare them. It's like comparing PGA West to Muirfield.'
— Chris Haney

pit, from which you can see downtown Toronto 35 miles away.

Yet, "I went out and looked at it, and it does, comparatively," he said. "On a clear day you can see from Niagara clear around the edge of Lake Ontario (probably 200 miles). It's at an elevation of 1,200 or 1,300 feet."

Hurdzan said the Links will truly be a links course, with only two trees being cut down, and less earth moved than on the first hole alone at the Pulpit.

Item: To ensure that they would know exactly what he wanted in a "links" course, Haney paid the way for a two-week stay in Scotland by proj-

ect manager Dana Fry, director of golf Doug Ball and superintendent Ken Wright, and a one-week visit by Hurdzan.

Item: A London taxi cab and a Rolls Royce will transport golfers from Devil's Pulpit parking lot the three miles of a dirt road to Devil's Links.

Item: The Links course will boast a thatched-roofed, English-style clubhouse where British beer is served in an Irish pub.

Item: Haney bought a flock of sheep to roam a neighboring pasture alongside the Links' 3rd hole.

Item: Wear knickers to the Links clubhouse and the first beer's free.

Haney's personality as the co-inventor of Trivial Pursuit comes through in a number of ways at the two courses. Every hole at the Pulpit is named after a local historical event or person.

One hole that adds a twist is the 11th, a betting hole. Called Jun's Hole after part-

ner Jun Matsuura, who was killed in a car accident last winter, it has two greens, making it possible to play 19 holes all together.

Teeing off on the 11th, the golfer can drive to a par 3 green to the left or to a par 4 to the right that has a bunker right in the middle of the green.

By playing the hole to the left, you can then play to the green on the right, thus creating an extra, "betting hole."

Haney said 400 golfers from North America, Australia, Great Britain, Japan and the West Indies have signed up as members. He is aiming for a total of 750 for the two courses.

"My research shows my membership is the lightest for 36 holes anywhere," he said. "Most have 900 to 1,500 members."

Said one observer: "The courses are a blast. I can't wait for the game to come out."