

New 18-hole Colorado course to include island green, open in 2001

Andy Johnson design set to begin final seeding this spring

By BOB SPIWAK

FIRESTONE, Colo. — Preliminary seeding on tees and the driving range began late last year at Coal Ridge Golf Club north of Denver. The 18-hole, 7,100-yard championship course near the town of Firestone is scheduled to be ready for play in the spring of 2001, with final seeding to begin early in 2000.

Designed by Andy Johnson, the course contains six ponds, the largest of which is 15 acres, according to owner Tom O'Malley. A natural centerpiece, the pond is home for number 4, an island par-3 of 145 yards from the blue tees; number 3, a 525-yard par 5, and number 16, a very short par-4 of 292 yards.

"The lake seemed to be a natural convergence point where a lot of holes could come together," said Johnson. The 16th offers a choice of going for the green over the water or laying up with a long iron to the fairway along the

lake and then a short iron to the pin. "The bets are getting higher by 16," Johnson said. "And it offers risk and reward, or prudence and safety."

This hole is indicative of the strategic versus penal nature of the course, noted Tom O'Malley, who also shares project manager duties with Troy Weidner. "We designed the course to have fewer penal shots, like forced carries and blind shots, in favor of a strategic philosophy. It is a design rich in risk versus reward with a number of different routings making for an interesting and enjoyable round of golf."

Coal Ridge, which may have a name change by opening day, offers five sets of bluegrass tees ranging from 7,100 yards from the tips to 5,400 from the forward markers. The greens are a 50/50 mix of Penncross and Providence bentgrasses with bluegrass and ryegrass fairways in an 80/20 mix. The course is nurtured by a fully automated 1,400-head Toro system, which includes



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fertilization, 19 satellites connected to a central computer, and a weather station. R&S Construction of Phoenix did the shaping, which included moving more than 500,000 cubic yards of earth.

Both owner and architect said there were no major environmental roadblocks to the project. Although there are wetlands on the property, O'Malley said that by working closely with the Army Corps of Engineers, crossings of these areas presented little problem. Johnson noted that the total wetland impact was under 12,000 square feet. "There was," he said, "a brief time where protection of a certain type of mouse appeared to be of concern."

O'Malley pointed out that a new type of decking, called IPE wood (from Brazil) was being employed on the bridges. "This is like ironwood," he said. "Most other places have traditionally used yellow pine, and there have been problems with deterioration. With two 200-foot long bridges and numer-

ous other creek crossings, we wanted something more durable. The IPE is guaranteed for 40 years. Of course, it's so new that there isn't any around that's 40 years old."

Coal Ridge, the working name for the course, is subject to change by the time it opens. A prime consideration is a name which will be compatible with an attractive logo. Johnson thought that a heron-oriented name was being considered (among four others) as the big birds are plentiful around the course.

Intended as a daily-fee venue, the course is surrounded by 200 acres, 175 of which are zoned residential. The other 25 are commercially zoned, and O'Malley, a part owner of Killarney Hills in River Falls, Wis., stated that the Coal Ridge property would be for sale with or without the course.

Asked if he was at liberty to divulge the cost of the Colorado project, he replied, "very expensive."

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