

Forse renovating Ross layouts coast to coast

By ANDREW OVERBECK

HOPWOOD, Pa. — So far this year, golf architect Ron Forse has been busy on both coasts renovating four Donald Ross-designed layouts.

The project lineup has taken him to the Peninsula Golf and Country Club in San Mateo, Calif. — the farthest west Ross ever designed a course — and to Penobscot Valley County Club in Orono, Maine — the farthest east. Forse is also renovating the Country Club of Mobile in Alabama

and Lake Sunapee Country Club in New London, N.H.

RESTORING ROSS TOUCHES

On each project, Forse is updating the layout, while at the same time trying to restore some of the original Ross touches that have been lost over time. This includes reinstating bunkers that have been filled in, redesigning green complexes and thinning trees. To justify the changes, he relies on old photographs, member's memories and, when he gets lucky, a

routing plan.

All changes, however, are not easy, said Forse, whose firm has worked on 25 Ross courses since 1988.

"The challenge is that none of the members have seen the course that way before," he said. "We'll get to a course and find a green that has shrunken in and the members refuse to change it because they think all Ross greens were small," Forse said. "Ross greens on average are 6,000 square feet."



Before (above) and after (below) views of the par-3 fifth hole at the Country Club of Mobile. Note the change in bunker style.



DETECTIVE WORK

In order to rediscover the old Ross touches, Forse often has to resort to detective work, especially if the original plans are not available. This was exactly the case at Lake Sunapee CC, which is in phase two of its renovation process, due to be completed in 2003.

"A lot of the bunkers were discontinued to save on maintenance costs," said Doug Homan, the club's third-generation owner. "There were 90 originally, and they were whittled down to 50. We are adding back as many old bunkers as we can, but since we only had photographs we had to do some detective work on site."

Fortunately for Forse and Homan, the sand was left in the bunkers when they were filled in, so a little hand-digging revealed many of the old locations.

According to Homan, many trees will be removed as well.

"This was originally a farm, there were no trees when Ross designed the course," said Homan. "There are some that we are going to leave in, but the place has been overplanted because it was easy to plant trees and not have to maintain grass."

The opposite was true at Penobscot Valley. There, Forse had original drawings from the 1920s and aerial photographs from the 1940s.

"The intent is to bring the course back, within reason, to the original design," said head pro Collin Gillies. "We have to account for players today in the placement of hazards and forward tees, but we will work to match the flavor that Ross had in grass-faced bunkers and shaped greens." Work at Penobscot will continue over the next two years.

HAND WORK IS KEY

Forse did not have much to go on in Mobile. "They had some old photos, but we basically did a master plan working from our database of our knowledge of Ross," said Forse. "When we completed the master plan, someone found a routing sketch from 1922 and we discovered that our plan was similar. The eighth hole had a Redan green, just like our plan did, and a lot of the fairway bunkers were in the same place."

All 18 green complexes, bunkers and tees are being recast and the layout is

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McBroom moving beyond Canada, designing in Caribbean and Finland

BY JAY FINEGAN

TORONTO — Golf architect Tom McBroom, well-known for his award-winning designs across Canada, is making his debut as an international designer with commissions to build courses in Finland and in the Caribbean island state of St. Kitts & Nevis.

The Royal St. Kitts Golf Course will be built adjacent to a new beachfront resort to be operated by the Marriott Hotel group.

The par-71, 6,944-yard course will include a driving academy and teaching facility. Two sides of the property offer stunning



Twelfth hole at McBroom's Algonquin GC, in New Brunswick

ocean views.

Construction of the 18-hole course started in June with a scheduled opening in November 2002, coinciding with the opening of the Royal St. Kitts Beach Resort, a 650-room development already under construction.

"Royal St. Kitts will be a sensational resort course that will

rank among the best courses in the Caribbean," McBroom said.

COURSE OUTSIDE HELSINKI

The Kytäjä Golf Course, 30 minutes from downtown Helsinki, will be a 36-hole private/resort complex, with a practice academy and a teaching facility. It's scheduled to open in spring 2003.

The par-72 Mountain Course will play to 7,079 yards, while the par-72 Lake Course will check in at 7,030 yards.

This North American-style facility includes a country hotel and is located on an 11,000-acre estate owned by the prominent Laakkonen family of Joensuu, Finland.

Forse

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expected to re-open Aug. 1.

"The country club has been here for 85 years," said course superintendent Ron Wright. "Over that time many architects have redone bits and pieces and there are several greens committee greens out here. We basically had an old course that looked modern and we wanted to go back and use Ross' thinking."

In addition to adding 36 bunkers, they are also completely changing the greens. "The greens will be totally different to putt on. They will be more accessible in front, have straighter sides and some will be more severe," said Wright.

The key to getting the classical look back has been the final shaping that builder C.R. Sanders has done by hand, especially on the greens.

"The average contractor in Ross' day made a better golf course than the average contractor does now, because now they get out on the bulldozer and move earth in a way that does not lend itself to the hand-made classic look," Forse said.

ONLY ROSS COURSE ON THE WEST COAST

On the West Coast, Forse is also redoing Ross' Peninsula Golf and Country Club. The 1922 layout is going to be completely rebuilt over the next two years. In addition to modernizing all tees and greens, every bunker will be rebuilt and some Ross bunkers will be restored.

"We did a master plan and we will tackle nine holes at a time," said Forse. "This year we are going to do the back nine, the range and the short game area."

Another focus at Peninsula will be to improve drainage. "There is 250 feet of elevation change throughout the property, but they have a clay soil that does not drain well," Forse added. "We are going to sand cap all fairways and install four-inch drainage tile." ■

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