

British Columbia Golf Member Newsletter

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The Diversity of Golf in BC

By Jim Lee

British Columbia is home to a diversity of golf experiences, perhaps unmatched in North America. While the province is vast, and courses are found in most regions, the topography of the Province means that you can experience different kinds of courses within a few hours of each other.

With the number of mountain ranges running north and south through the province, you would expect to get some great mountain courses. You'll find them in almost all regions of the province. Mountain courses tend to be more expensive to build and as they are at higher elevations they have shorter seasons. Mountain courses are usually found on the side of mountains (so are terraced), have dramatic elevation changes, with extensive exposed rock.

Bear Mountain (the Mountain Course) is one example. The course meanders through rugged country, before climbing on the back nine – then descending – about 200 meters. Yet its only 30 minutes from Victoria, and less than 5 km from quite different courses. Greywolf, in the Rocky Mountains in the eastern part of the Province, is perhaps the best known of BC mountain courses. Rising up the side of Panorama Ski Resort for the first 4 holes, it then descends down to the valley floor. Several holes have dramatic elevation changes, including the well-known Cliffhanger. Talking Rock, east of Kamloops is a more gentle example of a mountain course and Westwood Plateau, about an hour from downtown Vancouver is also an example of a mountain course.

Predator Ridge, in Vernon, is an interesting example of both a mountain course and a desert course in one resort. The original 18 has the look and feel of a desert course, with few trees and arid vegetation. The new Ridge Course has some dramatic elevations changes on several holes and is carved through rugged, rocky terrain. Like Bear Mountain though, it is not at a high elevation.

While the 4 courses at Whistler might be thought of as mountain courses, in fact only one – the Fairmont Chateau Whistler – is a true mountain course. Rising up the side of Blackcomb Mountain to an elevated plateau it exhibits the features of a mountain course. On the road to Whistler, Furry Creek is both a mountain and an Oceanside course. The first hole is located well above the clubhouse, with a drive off at least a 30 meter cliff. The course then winds its way down the side of the ridge using a series of terraces to several holes adjacent to the ocean. Hole #14 is one of the most scenic in the Province, a par 3 over an inlet to a green set on a small peninsula in Howe Sound.

The other 3 Whistler courses are Valley courses. While not a necessarily recognized type of course, they are found – obviously – in Valley bottoms, surrounded by mountain views. They are almost always well treed and with vegetation that prefers higher elevations. They also often have a variety of wildlife. Most of the courses in the Rockies are valley courses. Sun Peaks, north of Kamloops, is located on a ski resort at about 1500 meters. Yet is a valley course without the changes in elevation found in mountain courses.

Most of the courses in the Thompson Okanagan region, stretching from Kamloops south through the Okanagan to the US border, are desert courses. The southern part of this region is actually part of the Sonora Desert. Desert courses are usually more open, with fewer and smaller trees and arid vegetation. However, extensive use of irrigation has allowed the creation of sometimes quite lush and green courses. The Harvest, just on the edge of Kelowna is an example of a well irrigated course set in a largely desert climate. Both the Okanagan Club and Gallaghers Canyon are at higher elevations, set in more natural surroundings. Several of the Kamloops courses are found in similar surroundings, although Sun River and Tobiano are set in very arid micro-climates.

Most of the courses in the Vancouver area and on Vancouver Island, are parkland courses. Depending on the local terrain, courses such as Morgan Creek, Mayfair Lakes and Meadow Gardens are more open courses with few trees. On the other hand, Northview and Redwoods are heavily treed, with magnificent stands of forest.

The courses on Vancouver Island, with the exception of Bear Mountain, are parkland courses set in more rugged topography. Both Olympic View and Highland Pacific wander through some forested areas, but have considerably more elevation change on holes. Storey Creek, Morningstar and Crown Isle, further north, also are well treed, but in more gentle terrain.

Golfers have the opportunity to sample a range of course types in almost all of the golf destinations in BC. A good golf trip could easily include all of these types and give the golfer a wealth of different experiences.

Who Best Represents Golf in BC?

While working on another project, I had the opportunity to think about who best represents golf in BC.

BC has had, and continues to have, considerable success in amateur golf. Doug Roxborough has one numerous Canadian championships, and Nick Taylor and Eugene Wong are beginning to make their marks on the national scene. Vancouver's Sue Kim has just turned professional. However well known in the golfing community, they are not (yet) household names.

BC has had some success on the professional tours, with Dawn Coe Jones, Dick Zokol and Jim Nelford all winning on the professional tour. Dick continues to have involvement with the golf industry in BC with his development of Sagebrush winning awards. But again, none are "household" names.

Fred Couples, who grew up in Seattle, played a number of courses in BC in his amateur days and still speaks fondly of his experiences in BC. He was also involved in the development at The Rise in Vernon.

Destinations are often known for designers who have created a number of courses in the area. BC has no "homegrown" designers, with Les Furber (from Alberta) being the closest who has designed some very good courses. Some of the great names in course design have worked here - Palmer, Nicklaus, Trent-Jones, and soon, Gary Player. A couple of Ontario based designers have also created courses in BC, including Tobiano, Greywolf and Predator Ridge, but they really have not established themselves yet in the Province. With the exception of Jack Nicklaus, none have developed more than one course. Nicklaus can claim several "iconic" courses with Bear Mountain and Nicklaus North, as well as the Bear Course at the Okanagan Club. Thus

Nicklaus could be the best fit as representing golf in BC. If the development at Wynd-and-Sea proceeds at some point, this would certainly add to his body of work in BC.

Is there a possibility a well known individual, not necessarily a golfer or designer, could represent BC. Steve Nash was very believable in the television ads promoting the Olympics and Scott Niedermayer has appeared in tv ads since. Both could be assumed to be golfers, at least occasionally, but would they, and could they represent golf in BC?

If not an individual, then how about an image or an icon? I don't see a mascot, but perhaps an image. The fourteenth at Furry Creek or Cliffhanger at Greywolf certainly would work, but neither totally defines the experience of golf in BC.

So what are your thoughts?

Let me know.

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