

Cross-country tee off

10 courses that showcase the best golf this country has to offer

By Anita Draycott • June 2009

Big Sky, BC

tel: 800-668-7900; www.bigskygolf.com

The hole picture: Tucked into imposing Mt. Currie and bordered by the Green River and seven glacial lakes, the setting is awesome. Designer Robert Cupp sums up his layout as “hard par, easy bogey.” Generous bentgrass fairways, superb conditioning and 77 pristine hectares with yardage stretching from 5208 to 7001 yards will challenge everyone from duffers to single handicappers.

Where: 35 kilometres north of Whistler in Pemberton.

Signature hole: Number 14, named Hang Time, is a dramatic par-four with Mt. Currie looming in the distance.

Bang for the buck: **Maximum summer greens fees are \$99**, excluding power cart. Low-season and twilight rates are cheaper. Golf-and-dine specials every Wednesday and Sunday. Walkers welcome.

Dining: Enjoy the chef’s daily special on the vine-covered patio that has a misting system for cool comfort on hot summer days.

What else? Big Sky will take you by helicopter to the 19th hole on top of Mt. Currie where you can hit biodegradable balls. Or just down the road in Whistler/Blackcomb Village you’ve got three more outstanding mountain tracts: the Fairmont Chateau Whistler, Nicklaus North and Whistler Golf Club.

Bear Mountain, BC

tel: 888-533-2327; www.bearmountain.ca

The hole picture: Designed by Jack Nicklaus and his son Steve, the Mountain Course created a huge roar on Vancouver Island when it opened in 2003. At a cost of about \$1 million per hole, this stunning tract meanders around rivers, valleys, forests and mountain peaks. From the Golden tips (7212 yards) or even the forward Cinnamon tees (5014 yards), it’s no teddy bear.

Where: 30 minutes north of Victoria; five minutes from Victoria International Airport.

Signature holes: Number 11 is a par-three with an island green. A dispenser at the tee sells balls, in case you miss. Nicklaus also shoehorned in a whimsical, 19th par-three betting hole, 300 metres above sea level with spectacular views of the Olympic Mountains and Victoria’s harbour.

Bang for the buck: Stay and Play packages at the Westin Bear Mountain Resort start at \$169 per person (double occupancy) including one night, a round of golf for two with cart, plus use of the practice facility. Greens fees range from \$129 to \$149, with complimentary water and valet club cleaning.

Dining: From fresh lobster sandwiches at the halfway house to unrivalled sushi at the Kuma Sushi Restaurant, the options are brilliant.

What else? This summer, the resort opens its second Nicklaus-designed 18-hole course, the Valley.

Stewart Creek, AB

tel: 877-993-4653; www.stewartcreekgolf.com

The hole picture: The course's formidable Rocky Mountain setting offers sensational views of the Three Sisters peaks. Plus Canadian architect Gary Browning succeeded in creating a course that is playable and challenging from all five sets of tees. "Too often the forward tees miss the great pleasures of a championship course," remarked Browning whose intent was also to "take all players' breath away."

Where: Three Sisters Mountain Village, five minutes from Canmore.

Signature hole: Number 15 is a beauty with Stewart Creek cutting in front of the green.

Bang for the buck: \$175 to \$195 in high season; twilight and Sunday afternoon specials available.

Dining: The new clubhouse offers international cuisine and a handpicked wine list including more than a dozen kinds of champagne.

What else? Play the nearby mountain courses of Silvertip, Banff and Kananaskis.

Jasper Park Lodge, AB

tel: 800-441-1414; www.fairmont.com/jpl

The hole picture: Probably nowhere else in this country is the classic Hollywood image of the great Canadian West better portrayed than on this 404-hectare resort on the edge of Lac Beauvert. The legendary Stanley Thompson's wit and genius shine from the first tees to the 18th green. On many fairways the shapes of the bunkers mirror the outlines traced by the snow on the distant peaks of Pyramid Mountain.

Where: In the heart of Jasper National Park, three and a half hours north from Banff up the scenic Icefields Parkway.

Signature holes: Number 16, the Bay, is on a peninsula jutting into Lac Beauvert. The par-three 9th hole, named Cleopatra because of its voluptuous mounds, is another favourite.

Bang for the buck: **Maximum summer greens fee is \$225**, including cart and practice balls; twilight and other specials available. Ultimate Bed, Breakfast & Golf Package, from \$498 for two, includes one night, breakfast, round of golf and cart, including shuttle from your cottage to the course.

Dining: Book a table at the Edith Cavell, the Lodge's fine dining room overlooking Lac Beauvert and enjoy chef Turcot's magic.

What else? Beside the first fairway, Milligan Manor cabin, with its massive stone fireplace, central living room/kitchen area and eight ensuite bedrooms, is ideal for a group.

Waskesiu, SK

tel: 306-663-5301; www.waskesiugolf.com

The hole picture: Designed in 1935 by the legendary Stanley Thompson, this northern gem plays through a mature boreal forest. If you thought Saskatchewan was flat, this roller coaster will change your mind. Between the tricky putts, distracting scenery, wildlife and rarely a flat lie, this is about as challenging and good as golf gets.

Where: Inside the gates of Prince Albert National Park, 90 kilometres from Prince Albert.

Signature hole: On the par-three second hole a narrow funnel of a fairway leads to a severely sloped green with sparkling blue Lake Waskesiu peeking through the birch trees.

Bang for the buck: \$48 for 18 holes; twilight and junior specials available.

Dining: The heritage clubhouse with its massive log walls, half-timbered gables and stone fireplace serves hearty all-day breakfast, lunch and dinner.

What else? Imagine a mini Banff: Waskesiu is a resort town with an interpretive nature centre, hiking trails, galleries, sandy beach, a few hotels and restaurants.

Cobble Beach, ON

tel: 888-278-8112; www.cobblebeach.com

The hole picture: Toronto-based Doug Carrick has created a rugged masterpiece that meanders around the shoreline and bluffs of Georgian Bay, with views of water from every hole. Small pot bunkers, closely mown chipping areas and hollows surrounding the greens provide the bump-and-run characteristics of the UK's great links courses.

Where: Ten minutes north of Owen Sound on the west coast of Georgian Bay.

Signature hole: The iconic lighthouse (actually a water pumping station) on the par-three signature 17th marks the spot used by British surveyors in the early 1800s.

Bang for the buck: \$219 per person (double) for a round of golf and a night at the Cape Cod-style clubhouse which serves as an inn, restaurant, pro shop and spa. Greens fees range from \$85 to \$135, including power carts with GPS, use of practice range and day locker, water and bag tag.

Dining: At Sweetwater Restaurant, the chef has created an eclectic regional menu. On Friday nights, there's tapas and a cool jazz trio.

What else? Shop at Owen Sound's lively Farmers' Market, open every Saturday morning. Visit the neighbouring Tom Thompson Art Gallery and you'll see why playing Cobble Beach feels like stepping into a Group of Seven painting.

Smuggler's Glen, ON

tel: 800-268-4536; www.smugglersglen.com

The hole picture: Kingston-based Boyd Barr blasted this championship par-71/72 through dramatic terrain including Canadian Shield granite, pine and birch groves, wild fescue and creeks. At 6572 yards from tips and 4741 from the forward tees, it's not long — but size isn't everything. Course strategy and precision will dictate how you score.

Where: Five minutes east of Gananoque on the Thousand Islands Parkway.

Signature hole: Set high on a cliff above the St. Lawrence, the first fairway demands a confidence-defying carry over a deep gorge. Not for the faint of heart.

Bang for the buck: One night at the Smuggler's Inn, continental breakfast and round with cart starts at \$139 in summer season. Maximum summer greens fees are \$85 with cart or \$45 if you prefer to walk in late afternoons.

Dining: Be sure to work up an appetite for the resort's famous slow-roasted prime rib in the Shipman's Dining Room, deemed the best in the region.

What else? For more than 50 years, David Seal and family have owned the Glen House Resort across the road, where guests can angle for monstrous muskies, or kayak and cruise the St. Lawrence.

Le Diable, QC

tel: 888-738-1777; www.tremblant.ca

The Hole Picture: Host to the Export 'A' Skins Game in 1999, Le Diable gave pros John Daly, Fred Couples, David Duval, Canadian winner Mike Weir and fans a devilishly good time. Well-

known American architects Michael Hurdzan and Dana Fry designed long fairways meandering through a red-pine forest. Numerous waste bunkers and 44 fiery red sand traps make you feel a bit like a Japanese Zen gardener.

Where: A few minutes from Mt. Tremblant Village in the Laurentians, 90 minutes from Montreal.

Signature Hole: Gray Rocks, number 15, is a giddy par-five from elevated tees and down a tree-lined steep fairway where gravity gives your drive an added boost. There's a superb view of Gray Rocks resort and sparkling Lac Ouimet. If you need some swing doctoring, there's an excellent Golf Academy.

Bang for the Buck: **Maximum high season greens fees are \$175**, including GPS cart, access to practice facility with tips from a pro and breakfast for tee times before 11am.

Dining: You are minutes from a terrific selection of eateries in Mt-Tremblant Village — from fine French cuisine to beavertails.

What Else? Play the area's other mountain courses: La Bête, Le Géant, Le Maître and Royal Laurentian.

Crowbush Cove, PEI

tel: 800-235-8909; www.golflinkspei.com

The hole picture: Routed through 1000-year-old sand dunes on PEI's north shore, each fairway presents its own unique series of challenges. There are nine water holes, plenty of pot bunkers and sudden gusts from Crowbush Cove. If you can tame the 6903 yards at the Links you should be able to score well anywhere.

Where: Near Morell and a 30-minute drive from Charlottetown.

Signature hole: From the elevated tees at Sully's Run, the challenging 565-yard par-five 11th, you have a grand view of the beaches along the north shore.

Bang for the buck: Follow in the Footsteps Stay & Play Package, \$161 per person (double occupancy), includes a night at Crowbush Resort and a round on the Links. **\$99 greens fee**, plus cart. All greens fees include complimentary range balls, Risksha pull carts, course guides and tees.

Dining: Tuck into the steamed blue mussels and sesame-crusted halibut at David's, the Rodd Crowbush Golf & Beach Resort's restaurant.

What else? Crowbush lets juniors accompanied by a paying adult play free after 3pm.

Highlands Links, NS

tel: 800-441-1118; www.highlandslinksgolf.com

The hole picture: The late Scotsman Stanley Thompson claimed that God designed Highlands and that he merely discovered it. The course is ingeniously routed from rocky headlands to secluded wooded glens with fabulous mountain and sea views, brilliant bunkering and rarely a flat lie. Many golfers consider the stroll along the Clyburn Brook from the 12th green to the 13th tee the most delightful walk in Canadian golf.

Where: In Cape Breton Highlands National Park.

Signature hole: Tattie Bogle (Potato Pit) sums up the bumpy terrain on number 15, a par-five reachable in two if you flirt with a forest on your tee shot and catch the slope of a hillock on the second. Whatever you score, you'll be rewarded with a view of Ingonish Island.

Bang for the buck: Maximum 18-hole rate for summer is \$91 plus cart. I recommend walking this gem if you're in shape. Low season and twilight rates also available.

Dining: At Keltic Lodge, just a five-iron away, the Purple Thistle Dining Room serves great seafood.

What else? Highlands, plus three other championship courses — Bell Bay, Le Portage and Dundee — make up Cape Breton's Fab Four.

This article was accurate when it was published. Please confirm rates and details directly with the companies in question.