

BEAR MOUNTAIN'S NEW VALLEY COURSE INSTANTLY AMONG ISLAND'S BEST

BEAR MOUNTAIN'S
VALLEY COURSE # 17

Golfers may have gotten a taste of Bear Mountain's new Valley Course with the opening of a hybrid nine last year but only now can they play the complete 6800 yard, par 71 eighteen.

The stunning Valley layout is the solo work of Jack Nicklaus' son, Steve.

The challenge given to him from a design perspective was to give the golfer a totally different experience from the sister Mountain course, a co-design with father Jack that opened in 2003.

And there is no question that Steve Nicklaus has achieved his goal. The differences in the design approach are immediately apparent on the first tee box.

A reachable 500 yard par five where your downhill drive is followed by an uphill approach, the fairway here rolls and undulates in a manner that echos the fescue grass that fronts the tee boxes. Then there are the huge, ragged edge bunkers that would not look out of place on the Scottish seaside... cunningly placed to penalize errant aggression from the tee box and at the same time save off-line approaches to a green perched on the hill-side.

These dramatic elements are repeated throughout all eighteen holes... Elevated tees leading to rolling fairways edged by rugged bunkering that then lead to interesting and challengeing green complexes.

In short this course seems to be a fusion of Nicklaus Sr.'s design philosophy with the minimalist / traditional aesthetic that is becoming more and more popular. Think of the existing Mountain Eighteen meeting Tom Doaks' work at Bandon Dunes... all set amid the rocky outcroppings and Arbutus trees that uniquely define southern Vancouver Island.

This course also has great rhythm. From the outset, the holes swoop and dive around the topography like a salmon seeking eagle.

The third hole has a jaw-dropping elevation change from tee box to green that may redefine the term hang-time. The views here toward the coastal mountains are superb.

With the Mountain eighteen, the Pappa Bear may have been very much involved but in the case of this course, make no mistake it has been all the cub's work. And it's in the slopes, swales and mounding where Steve Nicklaus has shown the subtleties that he should be taken seriously as a solo designer.

Collection areas, green surrounds and the slopes on the putting surfaces all seem to be designed to reward decent shots bringing them back into play and closer

grass into the natural vegetation, you generally will be able to pitch out.

While all the holes will demand your full attention, like on Jack's layouts, son Steve seems likes tough par threes. There are five on this course with only one under 200 yards.

Which is going to be the signature hole?

There are truly many to choose from here but a personal favourite would be lucky number thirteen, a 471 yard downhill par-four that finishes with a very narrow green right beside a large pond.... so far, so fair. The 19th hole debates will centre around a very large rock outcropping that is literally feet from the left edge of the green. Smart shots that land short left will release right toward the green but it will require steady nerves to avoid seeing your ball careen off this



THE VIEW TOWARD THE CLUBHOUSE AND HOTEL FROM THE 18TH FAIRWAY

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to the hole. Development owner Len Barrie confirms that was a goal, "We did not want to create another layout the same as the Mountain Course. They (the Nicklaus design group) were pushing for another very demanding layout but we wanted to make sure that this course would be playable for the occasional player as well."

The result is a course that is a pure joy to play for every level of golfer. Holes have more than generous landing areas (many well over 75 yards wide) but if you carry your shots on the fly much further afield, often there are steep drop offs where you will be lucky to locate your ball. Still if they only roll off the short

'Rock of Gibraltar' when attacking a flag on the left side of the putting surface.

Where does this new layout put Bear Mountain? Well, first of all, it makes Bear Mountain the only resort in Canada with 36 Nicklaus designed holes. Add in a spectacular Westin hotel with first class accommodations, spa and restaurants (Panache is fine dining not to be missed), and Bear Mountain has to be considered as the standard against which all resorts west of Ontario must be judged.

For more information call 1-888-533-2327 or visit bearmountain.ca.