BEST NEW COURSE

VAUGHAN LAYOUT SOARS PAST STELLAR FIELD OF ONTARIO’S NEWEST COURSES

In another year, The Rock, located in Mimico, near Port Credit, would have been a strong enough layout to finish atop the field as Ontario’s best new course. This season, however, provided as strong a batch of stunning unveilings as has been witnessed in recent memory, making it tough going for all contenders. In the end, five prizewinners, all of which fully opened between August 1, 2001, and July 31, 2004, were chosen as finalists by Ontario Golf magazine. Two others, Barrie’s Heritage Hills, easily one of the province’s great values, and the remanufactured Heron Landing, located midway between Thunder Bay and Winnipeg, were near misses, but also worthy of mention.

Six veteran course ranking panelists—half of whom also represent major U.S. ranking publications—evaluated each of the following five courses: Eagles Nest GC near Vaughan, the Georgian Bay Club near Collingwood, Milton’s Glenview GC, The Rock in Muskoka and Wildfire GC in the Kawarthas. To them, they commented how this was the most difficult of these exercises they’d undertaken, with each property offering unique characteristics, memorable views and provocative designs. Without question, each experience at any of the finalists will linger. “I found it very difficult to rank one over the other since it makes it sound as though there is a big difference amongst the top five courses,” explained one panelist, “but there isn’t. It could almost have been a dead heat for top spot.”

While some of the facilities feature clubhouses that are works of art themselves, each evaluation was based solely upon the golf course; its design, conditioning and memorability all factoring into individual ratings. Points awarded from the six panelists were averaged out for each finalist (five points were given for a first-place vote, four points for second, and so on down to one point for a fifth-place designation). In the end, the Doug Carrick-designed Eagles Nest GC, located in the town of Maple, edged above the competition. What follows is the final ranking of Ontario’s Best New Courses for 2004, with course descriptions and comments from panel members about each facility. Average points are listed for each, with the number of first-place votes in brackets.

1. EAGLES NEST GC

POINTS/STABLE VOTES: 3.67 (3)

LOCATION: Maple

ARCHITECT: Doug Carrick & Associates

OWNED BY York Major Holdings Inc., a partnership between the Zentis, Mzuvo, DeGasperis and Kellner groups

RATES: $210 million, including clubhouse

GREEN FEES: $175

CONTACT: (905) 417-2101;

www.eaglesnest.com

Rather than relying on dramatic scenery or a wilderness setting, Doug Carrick sculpted Eagles Nest GC to emulate the rugged terrain typically found on the linkland courses of Scotland and Ireland. The style for the walkable 5,183- and 6,876-yard masterpiece evolved out of the rugged landscape left behind from former sand and gravel pits, helping create an “Old Country” landscape, with 80 sod-walled bunkers. The project’s 35,000-square-foot clubhouse, five-star restaurant and helicopter landing pad only enhance the experience.

“We were lucky to have a great client who shared the same vision as we had for the land,” says Carrick. “Jim DeGasperis liked the rugged look of the sand pit and surrounding terrain. We suggested that a links course would be in keeping with the look, and he decided to run with it.”

In quite proud of Greywolf (Panorama, B.C.) and Beggar’s Island (Lake of Bays, Muskoka), as well as a number of other clubs we’ve done,” Carrick notes, “but I’d put this at the top of the list with any of them.”

PANEL COMMENTS

“Breath-takingly spectacular. I couldn’t wait to put on pants and get to see the next hole. The high, feature-covered mounds bring most fairways to life, they are set in their own little world.”

“Perhaps the first truly great golf course to be built in Canada since The National opened in 1976. Eagles Nest has it all: the look and the challenge. This is the course against which future clubs will be judged.”

“On some holes, you feel like you’re playing Royal Birkdale, and then you feel like you’re playing the King’s Course at Gleneagles. Some great par-4s.”

“I found it incredible how golf course
architects like Doug Carrick are able to transform a green into something this spectacular. Eagle's Nest is unlike any golf course in Ontario. It is certainly links-like with its punishing, fast-fronted fairways, but it also reminded me of some of the great golf courses we have in cottage country that have been carved through dense forest.

"Carrick has raised the bar for new Canadian work. The golf course has a dramatic flair that modern Canadian courses have lacked in recent years. The scale of the entire course is bigger than Carrick's other work and creates a sense of drama the course captures the golfer. The course offers plenty of challenge for the better player, but with its width affords generous opportunities for the lesser player. The contrasting hazards are the only thing that detracts from this excellent course.

2. THE GEORGIAN BAY CLUB

POINTS:15/15 PLACE: VOTE: 3 (1)

LOCATION: Wasaga Beach

ARCHITECT: Jack Nicklaus

OWNED BY: Collingwood

Avenue Development and Management Corp.

BUDGET: $24 million, including clubhouse

GREEN FEES: Public

CONTACTS: (705) 446-4994

www.georgianbayclub.com

From the creator of Devil's Paintbrush and Devil's Punchbowl comes an ambitious design on the Niagara Escarpment overlooking the greenest and blue lakes of Georgian Bay. Fairways are wide and playable, although well-guarded green complexes can be sinister, while sporting some of the finest greens in Ontario.

2. GEORGIAN BAY CLUB

3. WILDFIRE GC

POINTS:15/15 PLACE: VOTE: 3 (1)

LOCATION: Milton

ARCHITECT: Thomas McBroom

OWNED BY: ClubLink Corp.

BUDGET: $50 million, including clubhouse

GREEN FEES: Public

CONTACTS: (800) 661-1818; www.clublink.ca

This 27-hole development, located on Hwy. 25, just north of Hwy. 401, is a feather in ClubLink's cap. Membership backed by the facility months before its opening. It may be as close to a pure Scottish inland experience as you'll find in this province, with pencil-like fairways and a good variety of sand bunkers. With its overall setting, it is a true gem and should be on every golfer's list.

3. WILDFIRE

Wildfire is a great course. The bunkering is perfect, the greens are fast and true, and the overall layout is excellent. The course is well worth the drive from Toronto and is a must-play for any golfer in the area.

4. GLENCARRON GC

POINTS:15/15 PLACE: VOTE: 3 (1)

LOCATION: Mississauga

ARCHITECT: Thomas McBroom

OWNED BY: ClubLink Corp.

BUDGET: $50 million, including clubhouse

GREEN FEES: Public

CONTACTS: (800) 661-1818; www.clublink.ca

This second great links-style course to open in Canada this year, Glencarron could be McBroom's best work. It replicates Muirfield well. Its only failings being the holes for forced carry over marshlands, which hurt the overall theme. Still, McBroom has shown that he can do something out of the ordinary. A huge success!

5. THE ROCK

POINTS:15/15 PLACE: VOTE: 3 (1)

LOCATION: Mississauga

ARCHITECT: Nick Faldo

OWNED BY: Ken Fowler Enterprises

BUDGET: $20 million, including clubhouse

GREEN FEES: Public

CONTACTS: (905) 765-7625; www.thecrockgolf.com

Although Faldo has carved a layout on the shores of Lake Rosseau that could test Tour professionals, course officials have done a great job cleaning out the underbrush of many of the tree-lined fairways, leaving a bed of pine needles to help players find errant tee shots on this spectacular piece of cottage country real estate. There's a bevy of signature holes, including the dramatic 367-yard dogleg right, the green of which is guarded by a pond in front and a wall of rock in behind. The course may read just 6,541 yards from the tips, but it's misleading—play this par-70 gem from the appropriate tees.

5. THE ROCK

 "Glencairn gives you the whole package. The use of the bunkers throughout the course was well done and truly fits. When I looked out onto the course from the patio of the wonderful clubhouse, I recalled Canoeistic in Angus, Scotland. They have a couple of stands of pines there, too, and I felt as though I was playing No. 9 on the championship course."

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"It's like someone scooped out 200 acres from Dornoch, Scotland, and plunked it down just north of Milton, Ontario. An inspired links-style layout with a few clues of classic Ontario geography. Possibly McBroom's best work to date."

"McBroom's tribute to golf in Scotland. If you didn't know you were an hour outside Toronto, you might think you were in Muirfield. His into those sod-walled bunkers and you'll likely be chipping out sideways, or even backtracks. It's so authentically Scottish looking that it even has a rock-walled burn running through it."

"Faldo's made great use of the granite for some of his target lines. The toughest course of the bunch, you can be thrown off if you lose your concentration—particularly with a lot of rough and downhill shots. That said, it's fantastic, thorough test of golf."

"Arguably the most visually spectacular of the five courses on this list. Magnificent granite rock outcroppings appear on almost every hole (hence, the course name). Although not exceptionally long, I found it to be extremely difficult because of the narrow fairways and severely undulating greens. Playing with some friends with the layout on paper, it helped given the several blind tee and approach shots."