

Carved from a Depression

Story and Photos by *Bill Bauer*

TIGHT, TESTY RABUN COUNTY COURSE PROVIDES EXCITEMENT

From 1933 to 1942, the Civilian Conservation Corps and the Works Progress Administration employed thousands of unskilled laborers in public works projects across America. As part of President Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, they constructed more than 800 parks and built a network of service buildings and public roadways in remote areas in nearly every state, including Georgia.

Just over the South Carolina border, Hiawassee, Blairsville, Blue Ridge and Clayton, Ga., provided the setting for

CCC and WPA camps, and evidence of the workers' tireless efforts still remains.

Perched on a hillside under the shadow of Tiger Mountain, is a little golf course on which ground was broken in 1939, when the CCC and the WPA came to Clayton.

"They built a swimming pool, tennis courts and a pavilion along with the golf course," said Fred Derrick, the Rabun County Golf Club Director who oversees the entire operation. "But now only the golf course remains, along with a spring



Returning to the clubhouse is a picturesque par-5. A row of pines defines the left side of this slight dogleg right. At the end of the 505-yard, fairly flat fairway, a small pond protects the green.



house, a rock smoker and an old out-house.”

In its heyday, Rabun Country Club was a hotspot, a gathering place for all in search of a little relief from the Depression.

The golf course opened officially on July 4, 1940. Today it is county-owned and open to the public 363 days a year.

“We technically close on Christmas and Thanksgiving,” Derrick said.

While its designer remains anonymous, it is evident that the layout for this short, but challenging, golf course was carefully carved out of the natural terrain, with little disturbance to the original lay of the land. From the first tee box to the last bent grass green, changes in elevation combined with narrow tree-

lined chutes provide a moderate rise and fall, flowing gently through the landscape.

Consequently, club selection, direction and distance control are a must.

“It may not be long, but it is tight and some holes play longer and shorter than they appear,” Derrick claims.

Designed as a nine-hole course, white and blue tee boxes for each hole provide sizeable changes in distance, some over a hundred yards, allowing for an 18-hole round of play. Two holes actually change in par from four to three and present unique challenges.

A pond on number two, a picturesque 274-yard par-4, must be carried, while its counterpart, the par-3 11th hole plays alongside the same water at

165 yards. A tiny, target green, typical of all holes, is fronted by a bunker. Big hitters might attempt to drive the par 4, but a safe shot to the ample landing area is the better option.

“Overpowering the course can lead to trouble,” Derrick said, when speaking on the size of the putting surfaces combined with the narrow fairways.

A roller coaster ride begins at number three, with a series of up and down par-3s, and a downhill blind par-4. Things level out on the number one handicap sixth hole. While it is not a long par-5 at 485/505, its double dogleg requires a long fade from either tee if trying to reach the green in two. A raised green, sandwiched between a bunker to the right and a creek to the left, demands

Opposite page: The Rabun County Golf Club was carefully carved out of the natural terrain, with little disturbance to the original lay of the land.

At right: A roller coaster ride begins at number three, with a series of up and down par-3s, and a downhill blind par-4.

that you approach carefully and hang on.

"Day in and day out, our golfers tell us that number seven is the most challenging hole on the golf course," Derrick explained. "You have to hit a high draw to get up the hill and hit a small green."

If you go up, you have to come down, and numbers eight and 17, the second par 3/4 combo, do just that. From the tee box on eight, the green sits far below on a little knoll, 174 yards away, but playing much shorter. Miss the green left, right or long and you'll find yourself pitching back up. Seventeen, the par-4 to the same green, lengthens to 288 yards, but begins with a blind tee shot.

Returning to the clubhouse is a picturesque par-five. A row of pines defines the left side of this slight dogleg right. At the end of the 505-yard, fairly flat fairway,

a small pond protects the front, left side of the green. A line of thick bushes will gobble up anything long. It is a fitting test to finish your round. And, if you signed on to only play nine, it might just make you go around again!

Milton Brown works in the pro shop, has played at the Rabun County Golf Club for over 20 years and wouldn't think of playing anywhere else.

"It is beautiful here nestled in the mountains, and the course is tougher than you think. It's a challenge!" he said.

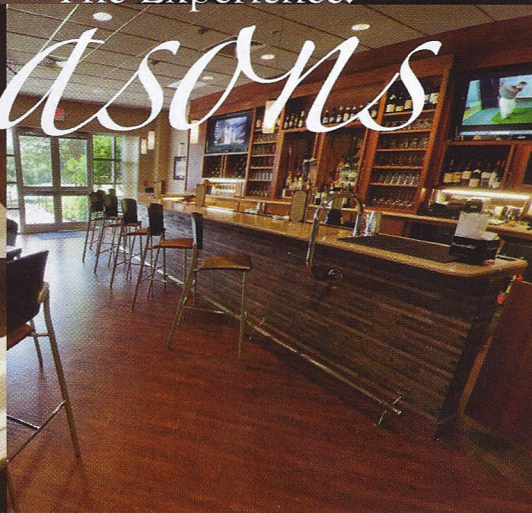
Recent improvements — a driving range and putting green — have made this course the "Best 9-Hole Golf Course in Georgia." ❖

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