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Golf | Fairways & Greens



Pinehurst: The Legend Grows

A first in golf history, the prestigious men's and women's US Open will be played back to back on the same course.

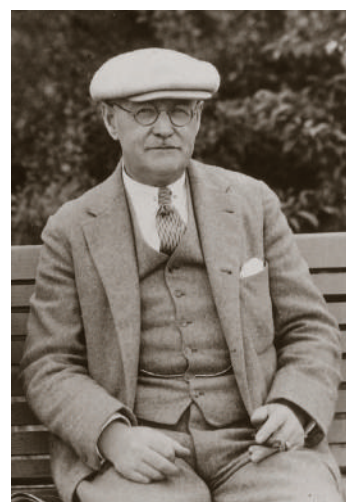
By Dirk Gallagher

★ | North Carolina's quaint village of Pinehurst and its namesake resort have been rewriting sports history ever since nine holes opened in 1897, earning it the title of America's first golf resort. This month, the eyes of the world will be on Pinehurst as it makes golf history again — in a huge way.

Since the resort opened, every great golfer — from Bobby Jones to Tiger Woods — has played its hallowed fairways. With the sole exception of Scotland's Old Course in St. Andrews, the birthplace of golf, no course has held as many heralded professional, amateur, and international tournaments as Pinehurst Resort's No. 2, the premier layout among

Pinehurst's eight courses, which comprise the nation's largest golf resort — another record.

It's almost impossible to overstate the importance of No. 2's starring role in the history of golf. It is best known as the world's only public course to host two different majors — the PGA Championship and the US Open — and the Ryder Cup, an unrivaled trifecta. No. 2 is among the pantheon of courses, a quintet that also includes Pebble Beach, Augusta National, and Scotland's Old Course and Muirfield. The course's legacy boasts a litany of USGA and PGA Tour events, with the U.S. Amateur, U.S. Women's Amateur, U.S. Senior Open, PGA Club Professionals Championship, TOUR Championship, World Golf Hall of Fame Classic, and 50 other PGA Tour events. Pinehurst hosts the country's longest-running amateur tournament, the high-profile North & South, played here for 113 consecutive years. Between all these championships, the list of winners reads like a Who's Who of golf history: Ben Hogan,

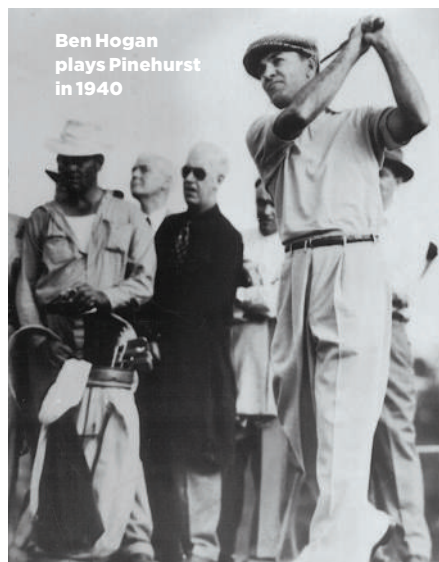


From top:
Hole 9 on the
No. 2 course
at Pinehurst,
course
designer
Donald Ross

Sam Snead, Jack Nicklaus, Byron Nelson, Walter Hagen, Payne Stewart, Curtis Strange, Tom Watson, Hale Irwin, Ray Floyd, and Johnny Miller, just to name a few. One notable repeat winner took three of the resort's first five professional tournaments (his brother won the other two), but it could be argued he enjoyed an unfair advantage, having redesigned Pinehurst No. 1 before building No. 2 from scratch. The young man, freshly arrived from his greenskeeper position at Scotland's Royal Dornoch, was Donald Ross.

Ross became the most famous designer in American golf history and is associated with more than 400 courses in the U.S. and Canada. With No. 2, Ross did something that has never been duplicated: He built a home along its fairways and devoted the rest of his life to perfecting his masterpiece. Ross tinkered so tirelessly with No. 2 that it's hard to say what the "authentic" version was — his first take featured greens made of sand rather than grass. This month when Pinehurst makes golf history again, it will be played on a course he would heartily approve of.

The two most difficult titles in golf, the Men's and Women's US Open Championships, have never been held on the same course in the same year,

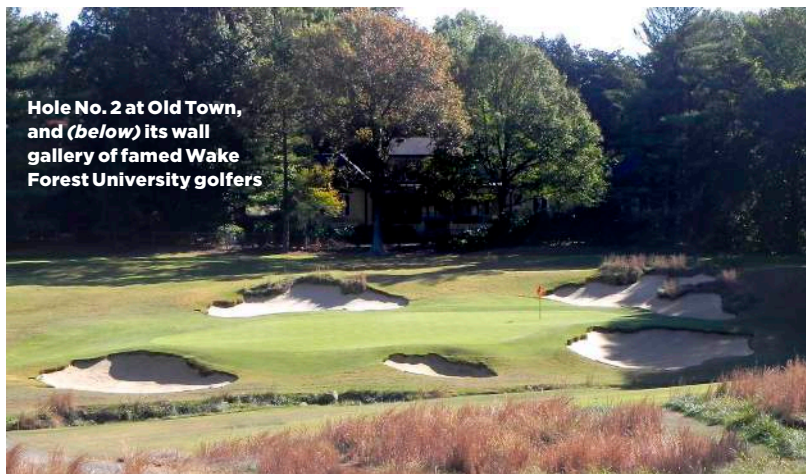


FOR AN INLAND SITE, NO. 2 IS VERY SIMILAR TO THE SANDY COASTAL LINKS TERRAIN OF SCOTLAND.

and certainly not on back to back weeks, but that is exactly what the USGA is doing with its marquee events at Pinehurst. The women will start their practice rounds the day after the men finish their tournament, and for the first time ever, fans will see how they compare on the same fairways and greens. The "Dual Opens," or simply "Opens," are so unprecedented they have inspired every imaginable superlative in the golf world. "It has the potential to be extremely important," says Bill Coore, half of the legendary design team Coore & Crenshaw, who just restored America's golf gem to its creator's original vision. "I think the USGA is hoping for people to see just how good these women are. Their skill level is unbelievable."

The USGA often brings in an architect to modify courses for the US Open,

but in this case they let the resort hire Coore & Crenshaw to do a historically accurate renovation it was planning, and to focus more on authenticity and quality than the tournaments. "When they approached us, our first question was 'Restore it to what?' because it had evolved so much, even in Ross' lifetime. In our research, we found the answer was to go back to the course Mr. Ross fully restored and presented in 1935," says Coore. That was for its first major, the 1936 PGA Championship, and the last of the seismic changes Ross made, including the construction of two entirely new holes (today's four and five). In recent decades, the space between fairways and the famous stands of pines has been filled with Bermuda rough, and most visitors have played from this. But Bermuda was largely unknown to Ross, who embraced the sandy soil. For an inland site, No. 2 is remarkably similar to the sandy coastal links terrain of Scotland. Coore & Crenshaw removed more than 35 acres of rough, an enormous amount, and today — as in 1935 — fairways are flanked by sandy waste areas spiked with tufts of wiregrass. Standing at the tee, the view is com-



I PLAYED NUMBER TWO AS A KID, AND IN COLLEGE I WALKED FROM MY DORM TO OLD TOWN WITH MY BAG ON MY SHOULDER.

—Bill Coore of Coore & Crenshaw

pletely different from Ross' old vantage point and perhaps more intimidating, but the fairways are actually wider.

"I don't know of any other US Open that has been played on a course with no rough," says Coore. "It won't be overly green or lush like a garden. It's rough and tumble and a bit of Scotland — what Mr. Ross envisioned when he came here. It's going to be a presentation of golf from the past, but also a glimpse at the future. The industry is going to have to cut back on water and maintenance and be more natural. Golf just has to. It's a game played in nature, not on the perfect conditions we've come to expect."

Amazingly, No. 2 is not the only high-profile renovation Coore & Crenshaw just finished in North Carolina. They also tackled Old Town, a fabled Winston-Salem private course by Perry Maxwell, who redesigned Augusta National. "If I could have picked any two courses as the cornerstone of my understanding of what outstanding golf course design is, it would be these two," said Coore. "I played Number Two as a kid, and in college I walked from my

dorm to Old Town with my bag on my shoulder." Old Town is the home course for Wake Forest, where Coore played as a student. "This project is something we've been working on for



years," says Dunlop White, Old Town's golf chairman, "and I always knew that it would be Coore and Crenshaw. My interest in them predated Pinehurst's.

Bill Coore played Old Town almost daily, and Ben Crenshaw grew up playing a Perry Maxwell design. When I look at their work at Friar's Head, Sand Hills, and Bandon Dunes, it looks just like early photos of Maxwell's work."

The sites are quite different: Pinehurst is flat, expansive, and sandy, while Coore calls Old Town "an example of how to route a course on a small site that is also hilly." Yet much of the methodology is similar. In both, they removed acres of Bermuda, reshaped bunkers, and reintroduced indigenous flora. "They restored the look and character of Maxwell's original bunkers and reintroduced the early American color scheme," says White. "So now we have this jagged bunker, with native grasses growing out of it, that looks like part of nature, like it's been there for centuries." The results have been favorable: No. 2 leapt from seventh to third best in the nation on *Golf Magazine's* list, while Old Town made the biggest move in the history of *Golfweek's* rankings, jumping 43 spots to no. 29.

Ross fans have a lot to look forward to in conjunction with this year's historic Opens. Just outside the village, another Ross public masterpiece, Mid Pines, just got a top to bottom facelift by Kyle Franz, a shaper who did much of the bunker restoration on No. 2 for Coore & Crenshaw. Critics quickly made Mid Pines the area's must-play after No. 2. The other Ross course worth a special trip is Sedgefield in Greensboro, North Carolina, a private club that warrants trying to wrangle an invite to play. As annual host of the Wyndham Championship, Sedgefield is the only Ross-designed course (1926) currently a fixture on the PGA Tour. The 36-hole club also has a second design by Pete Dye, the most awarded living architect. With a fabled history, illustrious names, and growing acclaim, it's a good time for Carolina golf. ★

Dirk Gallagher is an avid golfer who resides in Fort Collins, Colorado.