

Treasure Hunting: Donald Steel's golf course at Primland Resort

By DUNLOP WHITE III

It's hard to believe that a new golf course could ever avoid detection. Countless golfers continuously search for courses around the globe in hope of discovering a hidden gem. Everyone in the media has their feelers out as well. After all, there's nothing more exciting than stumbling upon a new design that deserves some fanfare. The golf course at Primland Resort in southwest Virginia is one of these rare finds.

The course rests quietly on top of a series of mountain peaks near the town of Meadows of Dan, just over the state line about 15 miles north of Mount Airy. At 2,850 feet above sea level, the course offers breathtaking vistas of the Pinnacles of Dan, the Dan River Gorge and Kibler Valley below. Even Pilot Mountain can be spotted in the distance on a fair day.

Amid all the scenic distractions lies an undisturbed par-72 layout stretching just over 7,000 yards from the back markers, with a slope of 140 and a course rating of 74.1. Each hole offers four sets of tees for players with varying abilities.

Golf course superintendent Scott Kennon, who previously worked at the Country Club of Virginia, already has the bentgrass tees and greens in perfect playing condition. The pristine putting surfaces are unusually large and tie in nicely with their surrounding bunkers – many of which are scooped out pits with open faces – that demand a golfer's full attention.

Primland's bentgrass fairways are also ensconced with a blend of tall native fescue grasses, which offer a distinct Scottish flair. Yet, the course remains faithful to its Appalachian heritage with meticulously constructed stone walls that embellish the entire premises. Cart paths and dozens of tee boxes are enveloped by layers of dry-stacked stonework, which mimics many of the outdated wagon trails nearby.

As with all distinctive layouts, the numbers tell only half of the real tale. The course boasts five challenging par-5s, two of which are reachable in two. Hole No. 13, the longest of the bunch, extends more than 612 yards, requiring three full swings to reach the putting surface.

Interestingly enough, there are also five par-3s on the course, which demand a variety of club selections. Hole No. 4, the shortest of the group, measures less than 150 yards, while No. 8 stretches out more than 220 yards.

A routing plan loaded with par 3s and par 5s is uncommon indeed, but who needs to conform to the archaic rules of design

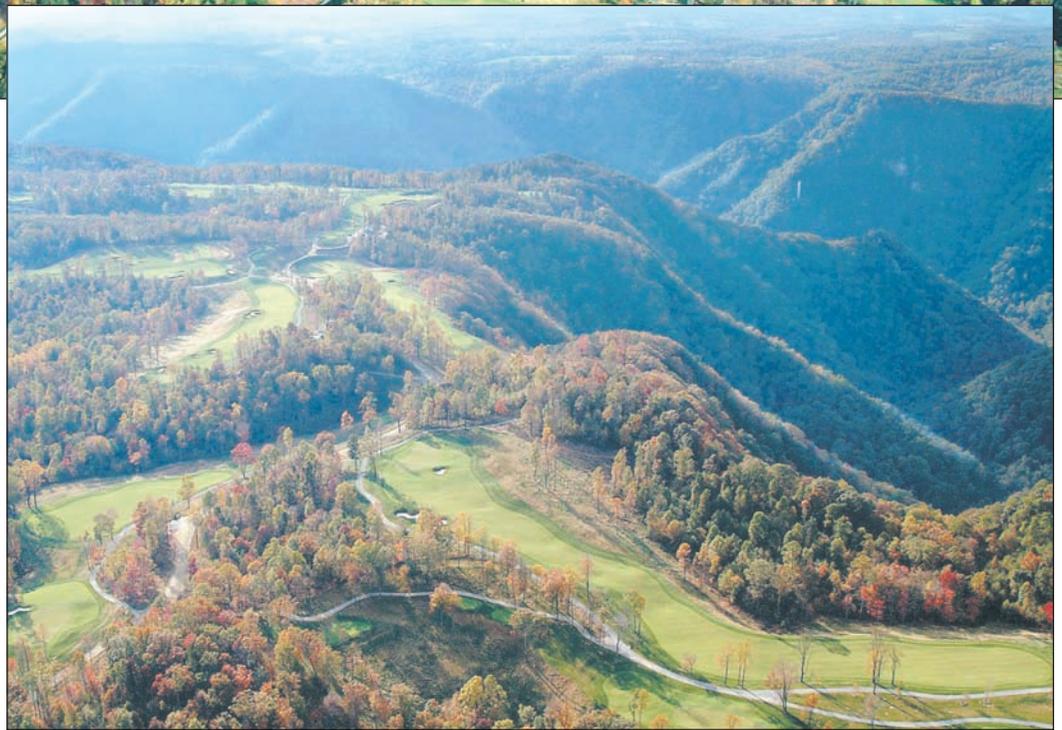


The unique terrain of the golf course led the designer to position five par-3 holes and five par-5 holes to provide the best golf experience.

balance when the piece of ground you're working with runs the zenith of mountain crests – which comprise 300 acres of the highest points on the estate – where broken ledges and crumbled rock outcroppings are the norm. Given the sheer steepness of the setting, plenty of earth movement and craftsmanship was required, though it remains undetectable to the naked eye.

The golf course blends in astoundingly well with its rugged mountain aesthetic. Much of the credit for its natural appearance goes to Donald Steel and his lead men, Tom Mackenzie and Martin Ebert. Steel is one of the most prolific golf course architects in all of Europe. Though he is not a household name on this side of the pond, his credentials solidify him among the "who's who" in all of golf.

As a player, Steel is an ex-international British Amateur star from West Sussex, England, who can still play rather well at



At 2,800 feet above sea level, Primland offers breath-taking views of the Dan River Gorge and the Pinnacles of Dan below.

the age of 68. As a writer, Steel was the editor of the legendary, "Shell Book of Golf" and an author of the three-volume "History of the Royal & Ancient Golf Club" — which ranks among the greatest of all golf books ever produced.

Fifteen years ago, Steel became the first person to hold the posts as Chairman of the British Golf Writers Association and Chairman of the British Golf Course

Architect Society simultaneously. Today, Steel is the incoming President of the English Golf Union and serves as a consultant (with Peter Thompson) to the R & A.

Paul Daly, owner of Full Swing Publishing says, "in Donald Steel's profession three skills are at hand: playing ability, writing ability and design ability. At each of these three, one can readily point to oth-

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Rock out-croppings and native fescue grasses add to the drama of the downhill approach shot on the first hole.

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ers who are more proficient. But if you take the three skills as a composite, Donald Steel is the leading golf personality in the world today and among the top-five of all-time."

Even so, Steel and golf were not a part of Primland's original conception. In 1978,

the Primat family of Switzerland purchased the 14,000-acre estate to facilitate a timber operation of saw logs and chips. Soon thereafter, they became the leading manufacturer of bundled firewood in the United States. In the process, many of the fields were re-seeded with hardwoods and pines, but still others remained cleared for recreational hunting.

Want to Play Primland?

When will it open?

A June 2006 opening is expected.

Who can play?

Initially play will be limited to resort guests and certain members of the public with a certified USGA handicap not in excess of 18.

How much will it cost?

Expect to pay around \$175 for a round of golf.

How do I get there?

From Winston-Salem, follow highway 52 North from to Mount Airy. Take Highway 89 East exit in Mount Airy. Highway 89 takes you through Mount Airy. Do not turn anywhere in town; this road changes to Highway 103 in downtown Mount Airy. Follow 103 into Virginia. After you cross the Virginia line, you will go approximately 4 miles to Claudville. Turn left onto state road 773, go 1 mile to state road 763 to the right. 763 dead ends at the Primland Gate.

From Greensboro, take US 220 North past Madison to Highway 770 West (Left) to Highway 704 West (Right). Follow 704 approximately 10 miles to Highway 8 North, turn right. Go approximately 9 miles to Highway 103 South (Left) for about 9 miles. Turn right onto state road 773, go 1 mile to state road 763 to the right. 763 dead ends at the Primland Gate.

How do I get more information?

You can call 276-251-8012 or look them up on the web at www.primland.com.

Today, Primland has evolved into an outdoorsman's paradise. The property contains more than 90 miles of private trails for hiking, horseback riding and ATV four-wheeling. Other activities include deer hunting, pheasant hunting, spring gobbler hunting, sporting clays, fishing, tennis and now golf. Guests can stay at any of the 15 attractive chalets currently available around

the estate. Plans are also under way to construct a lodge beginning in 2007.

As for the golf course, General Manager Steve Helms, stated they expect to open for play June 1.

So no matter what you are hunting for – whether it's game or a stunning new golf course – look no further than Primland.