

Revamped Meadows worth your time

Pemberton course is on par with Whistler's best

Mark Hood

Special To North Shore News

Wednesday, July 01, 2009

Video: Revamped Meadows worth your time

At the foot of towering Mount Currie in Pemberton, on a lush, fertile plain between the Green and Lillooet rivers, there is a golf course.

Over the years it's shown promise--and had the promise broken -- but now it's back. Like a boxer who needed that last withering uppercut to ignite a primal fury, get up off the canvas and reply with a knockout punch, the Meadows at Pemberton has risen from adversity to provide something quietly spectacular.

First, a little history.

It started out as nine lines drawn with a stick in the dirt at the side of a road. In 1988, an intrepid group of Pemberton residents, tired of making the drive to Whistler or Squamish to play golf, decided to build a course of their own. The Pemberton Valley Golf Society used every resource at their disposal to get the course off the ground. If you owned a backhoe or a shovel and lived in the valley, sooner or later you got a call to pitch in and help.

Originally nine holes, Pemberton was expanded to 18 with the addition of the back nine in 1994 as demand increased.

At the same time, the town of Pemberton became absorbed in the irresistible orbit of the Whistler vortex and new courses were added to the valley: Chateau Whistler (1993), Nicklaus North (1995) and, right next door, Big Sky (1994). All offered resort golf within a few minutes of each other.

As a locals course, Pemberton was always enjoyable and affordable, but over time the cost and energy required to keep up with the big kids proved daunting. Quality control slipped, receivership followed and in August 2007 the lights went out.

Pemberton resident and longtime club member Don Millerd refused to let it die. With partner Gord Bell, they formed Mountain Valley Golf Inc., purchased the course and went to work.

Over the past 12 months they have invested heavily in the technology, course conditioning, facilities and people to elevate the course to something it could never have dreamed of being before: competitive with the best of its neighbours. It was an



CREDIT: NEWS photo Mark Hood

Water comes into play during many of the holes at the Meadows at Pemberton. The scenic course has been given a facelift in the past year and it now offers terrific value.

act of pure willpower.

Today the Meadows at Pemberton is a 6,407-yard, 18-hole, par-72 track that provides golfers of all abilities with the one thing they crave the most: a great day of golf on a course that doesn't take itself too seriously.

With friends Dan Rothenbush of North Vancouver's Lady Jane Landscaping and Steve Becker of Coast Mountain Bus Company, we had the opportunity to try it out at the end of a guys' weekend spent roaming the Cariboo and Fraser Canyon.

It was a gorgeous sunny Monday morning and had been dry for a few weeks. None of us had played the course in its past life and we arrived to find everything you'd expect at a first rate facility: pristine clubhouse and restaurant, fully stocked pro shop and a course just begging you to try it on.

As mentioned, there are two distinct sections of the course. The front nine, the original course layout, is fairly open and level, but there are challenges aplenty. The back nine is heavily treed and rolling, with lots of subtle elevation shifts and undulating fairways.

It was mid-May and we were very surprised how well the course had fared over the harsh winter. Others in the Pemberton-Whistler area weren't as lucky.

The opening hole is a 490 yard par-5 to a slightly elevated green and gives you a great idea of what to expect. On the bank of the Green River, it lets you warm up your game and settle in to the pure joy of playing golf.

As you work your way ahead, the challenges increase. There are two par-5's, two par-3's and the Sea-to-Sky corridor's only island green on the eighth hole. The big issues on the opening stretch are distance and water.

Distance is evident on the par-3s. The shortest, No. 4, is 188 yards from the tips and accuracy is vital. On the sixth, you're looking at 238 yards and if the frequent winds are against you, bring your catapult.

Water comes into play on a number of holes and was once the source of a big knock against the old club: mosquitoes.

No longer.

Superintendent Terry Schlosser has overseen a mosquito abatement program that treats the larvae before they hatch with an environmentally friendly agent. Those that survive are taken care of by the bats and birds that inhabit the many colourful little nesting houses that line the fairways. It works.

The main water feature on the front is the eighth hole. This 287-yard par-4 is short, but the green, surrounded by water, is a small target. If you're a big hitter and are thinking of going for it in one, think very carefully and test the wind. The best play is to lay up at or just beyond the 150-yard marker and home in from there. It's a great hole.

The final hole on the front is a 415-yard par 4 that arcs broadly rightward along the perimeter road toward the clubhouse.

The back nine begins with a 493-yard par-5 that seems a lot longer. It leads you into the forest and offers some great views of the massive mountains that wall the valley in. The par-3 13th, at 171 yards, is one of the prettiest holes you'll find anywhere. It's the type of thing people come to B.C. from around the world to find, but don't necessarily know where to look.

Number 16, at 517 yards, is the longest hole on the course. It's a long trek from the tee to the green, and if your game is starting to unravel, this is where you can pause, catch your breath and regroup.

A special note for summer golf: while there is water available at some of the tee boxes, take lots with you. The Pemberton Valley gets very hot in the summer and dehydration can be a real issue.

The closing two holes, a 201-yard par 3 and a 373-yard par 4, lead you gently out of the forest and back to the clubhouse.

There, you can sit inside or out and reflect on your day in one of the most beautiful settings imaginable.

The Black Squirrel restaurant has a couple of patios and lots of indoor seating, so you've got your choice. Chef Ryan Leitch, of Pemberton Valley Vineyard restaurant and Inn renown, has built up a network of local artisan food crafters and suppliers to create a menu that focuses on area products and the service is refreshingly laid-back and friendly. Like the rest of the course, it's all about having a great time. There's no pretence.

With the improvements to the Sea to Sky Highway, the Meadows at Pemberton is about 1*-two hours from West Vancouver, and a day trip rather than an overnight commitment. It's as close as anything in the Fraser Valley, and when word gets out about how its fortunes have turned around it's going to be a favourite with North Shore golfers.

As I mentioned, for course condition it's easily level with the tonier resort courses in the Pemberton-Whistler area, and with the lowest green fees, it's terrific value as well.

Competition. You gotta love it.

Online video: This season all courses featured in Tee Time will also be available to see in online video taken the day we played. The Meadows at Pemberton is the fourth for 2009. Go to nsnews.com and click on the link to the Tee Time section. Find the video of your choice and check it out.

© North Shore News 2009

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2010 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.
CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.