

Restoring the Standards of Donald Ross

Grove Park Inn Golf Course Getting Rave Reviews

by Sam Smith

Playing golf in the mountains of North Carolina has become a very special time for golfers of all levels. Many older mountains courses have revamped their original designs to accommodate the low-handicap players by adding length, but maintaining their playability by adding more forward tees for the average golfers.

One mountain course, in particular, has made many changes. However, their goal was to rekindle the spirit of its original designers and to give golfers a relaxing, but challenging Blue Ridge Mountain experience.

The golf course at the Grove Park Inn Resort in Asheville opened for play in 1899 as the Asheville Country Club. Several designers were involved in the first course layout including Willie Park, Jr., Herbert Baker and Russell Breeden.

But not until 1924 when Donald Ross added his magical touch to this land beneath the crest of Sunset Mountain did the course, by now owned by the Grove Park Inn, catch the eye of golf travelers and personalities that helped spread the word about the mountain course “you have to play”.

Over the years the Ross design was watered down a bit with changes in the rounded greens, moving or eliminating bunkers and making tee-box modifications.



But in 2001, the Grove Park ownership made the commitment to a \$2.5-million “retro-design” of the old course by Kris Spence of Greensboro, returning it to the original Donald Ross plans of the late 1920’s.

Considered one of the better courses in North Carolina before the restoration, afterwards the Grove Park Golf Course began a string of rave reviews, not only in the Carolinas but nationally as well.

Golfweek proclaimed the course as the "Best Restoration" designation in 2002. Golf Digest listed the course as "One of the ten best courses in the United States that is 100 years old or more" in 2004. In 2005, the North Carolina golf magazine vaulted the Grove Park course thirty seven spots from the previous year, to #32 in the “N.C. Top 100”

Also in 2005, Golfweek magazine included The Golf Course in its 2005 "America's Best" listings. The Golf Course is rated in the “Top 10” North Carolina Mountain courses, and this year Condé Nast Traveler Magazine included the Grove Park Inn in its "Top 20 Southern U.S. Golf Resorts".

The 6,720-yard, par 70 layout is a shot maker's challenge with emphasis on accuracy rather than power. The players' ascent from the somewhat flat, yet undulating front nine to the gentle slopes and sometimes steep inclines and descents of the back nine playing closer to the Grove Park Inn, all offer spectacular views of the surrounding Blue Ridge Mountains.

By today's standards, the Grove Park Golf Course is on a very small piece of land, only 80-acres, with the holes running parallel to each other. But, the layout doesn't seem tight or suffocating, with tree lined fairways, golf holes separated by elevation changes, natural areas filled with tall fescue grass roughs or meandering streams that will dissect a fairway bringing water into play on six holes.

The famed rounded greens of Donald Ross are bent grass now and a little larger and flatter than in the past, but with some of the original contour restored, the approach shots and putts can be just as tricky as the original ones. Club selection is at a premium due to the famous "false" fronts, making greens look a little closer than they really are, along with the hidden fairway and green-side bunkers that are a staple of a Donald Ross design.

No trip to the Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa would be complete without an after-golf evening at the Sunset Terrace Restaurant in the main building of the Resort. Watching the sunset, enjoying good company and food may just make you forget about that bunker you tangled with on #16 earlier in the day.



You can pamper yourself and your family with a trip to the famous Grove Park Spa before or after your round of golf. Located below the Grove Park's stately façade and massive lobby fireplaces, this underground facility covers more than 43,000 square feet of treatment rooms, mineral and lap pools, waterfalls, saunas, steam rooms and men's and women's relaxation lounges overlooking the resort's grounds and golf course.

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Located just 2 ½ hours from Charlotte the Grove Park Inn Resort & Spa Golf Course is waiting for you to enjoy the changes and the atmosphere. For information, reservations or tee-times call: 800-438-5800 or visit www.grovesparkinn.com