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# Golfing On Island Time

B.C.'s Vancouver Island Golf Trail is **A MUST-DO**



Bear Mountain Resort • Mountain No. 19

By Dick Stephens  
CG Publisher

**T**hey say a picture is worth a thousand words. In this case, even six pictures and more than 2,000 words can't do justice to my recent stay-and-play trip to Victoria and Vancouver Island.

It is, quite simply, one of the most treasured golf trips I've ever taken — and one of the most affordable, thanks to the packages currently being promoted by the Vancouver Island Golf Trail. I skimmed along the Salish Sea via the Victoria Clipper, but you can also get to the island via ferry from Port Angeles or the Canadian coast, or by seaplane, using Kenmore Air. Whichever way you choose, Vancouver Island is just a hop, skip and jump away for us Puget Sound golfers — closer, in fact, than Bend, Coeur d'Alene and a number of other Northwest golf destinations — yet leaves you feeling like you've traveled to the other side of the world.

## OLYMPIC VIEW GOLF CLUB

When I first covered Vancouver Island many years ago, I designed a magazine page around the image of a waterfall that backs the 17th green at Olympic View Golf Club, wondering at the time what it would be like to play that hole. Last month, I stopped wondering and got to see it, hear it and let it pull me along on a four-hour journey through this Bill Robinson masterpiece, knowing that the scenic 17th would cap a perfect day.

Sculpted through forest, rock formations and dotted with bright red arbutus trees, Olympic View is a calling-card track for the island and a trek here is not complete without playing it. It's breathtaking — many of the holes here would be signature holes on thousands of courses across the continent.

Of its many accolades, those that snagged my attention (and my Bridgestone B330s) were the holes that are Canadian legends. The par-5 13th is a double-dogleg that starts high atop an elevated tee. At five yards shy of 600 clicks, I had to play it from the back. We reached No. 13 as twilight settled and I thought I was in heaven, with shadows and sunbeams piercing gaps in the forest and illuminating the "A" position sightline. The hole has been voted the hardest par-5 in

the province, and deservedly so. If you hit the green in regulation, you're a daisy.

No. 17 is also one of the most popular holes in B.C. I've hit approaches into island greens, over Scottish burns and over a mountain gorge, but never into a green backed by a rushing waterfall. I used the cascading whitewater as my target and had my picture taken, like thousands of others before me.

The course is extremely affordable, gently hilly and is a complete outing with dinner and a drink in their beautiful clubhouse. Visit [www.olympicviewgolf.com](http://www.olympicviewgolf.com) and use the hole-by-hole tour — you'll be sucked right in.

## HIGHLAND PACIFIC GOLF

Day two was special, as I learned the story of a 50-year-old piece of land that was bought, nurtured, protected, crafted and offered up to the world by a family and its love affair with their little corner of this Earth. Herb Plasterer was a Victoria architect and artist who made a visionary land purchase, high atop the View Royal area of the island. While he never got to see his dream unfurl, his five sons, daughter and wife carried forward Herb's vision. In fact, the HP logo is not solely for Highland Pacific — it's also Herb's design initials.



I played with one of Herb's sons, who shared dozens of quips about how dynamite blasts through coastal mountain rock and the handiwork of family and friends built the Pacific (opened in 2008) and Highland Nines with love and sweat.

This place blew me away with its views of Victoria, the ocean, the Olympic Mountains and a weaving Chris Young design that was as unique as the family. Garry oaks, arbutus trees, waterfalls and rock outcroppings are with you all day as you rise and fall in elevation. It's not long, but it's a shotmaker's track. Between jaw-dropping vistas, heathland/coastal style golf layout, water features and the Thetis Lake Regional Park, there's plenty to distract your eye from the best places to place your ball.

I loved the par-3 eighth, a 221-yard rugged jewel with a view I will never forget. Another sweetheart is the 562-yard fifth, which shows off the rocks. I thought it was the most impressive hole at a place where that honor could be debated for days.

The best part was hearing Plasterer's accounts of enjoying the land as an adolescent – camping, boating, fishing and just being a kid, long before it was ever to become a golf mecca. It was a reminder that their life is not about the golf, but about the land. I thought of the movie "The Descendants," where rather than sell out, the family chooses to open their land so that others can come and enjoy something so special that no amount of money can do it justice. Check out [www.highlandpacificgolf.com](http://www.highlandpacificgolf.com) and enjoy it year-round – it's one of the driest courses in B.C.

## BEAR MOUNTAIN GOLF RESORT AND SPA

If you go to Monterey, you have to play Pebble Beach. When you come to Victoria, the Westin Bear Mountain Resort ([www.bearmountain.ca](http://www.bearmountain.ca)) is a must. It's funny – across Canada, the resort is synonymous with golf and hotel excellence and is seen as the cherry on top of Vancouver Island's sundae. But, here in Puget Sound, it's still widely unknown.

That's something I hope to change. With 1,300 acres of hotel, spa, wine, food and two Jack Nicklaus-designed

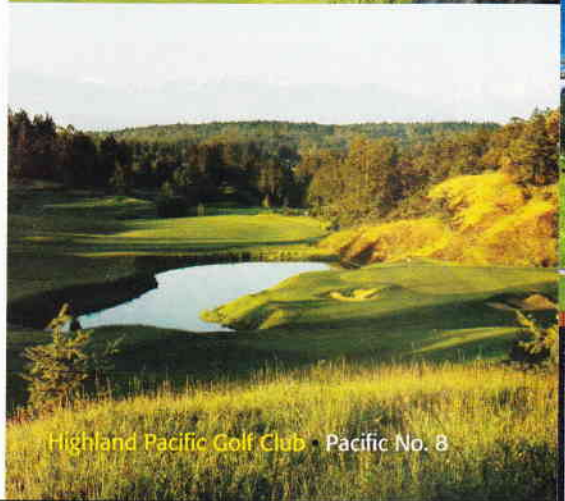
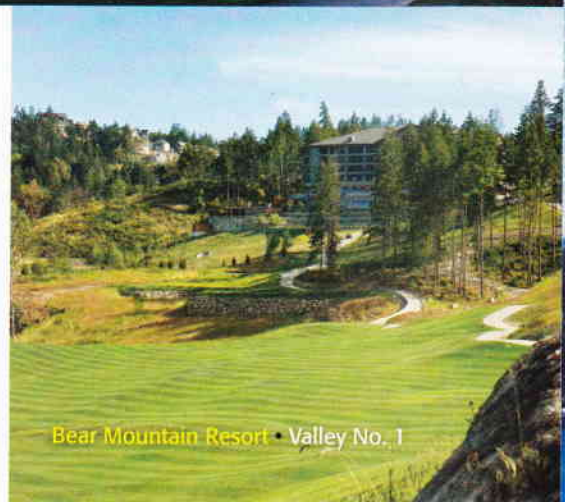


courses, Bear Mountain is relaxed decadence – all the way, all the time. The harder of the two courses, the Mountain Course, is Golden Bear through and through. It reminded me of TPC Snoqualmie Ridge, featuring wildly and beautifully shaped holes that go up and down the mountain, with lots of bunkering and undulating greens. There are lots of places to put your ball in play, plus numerous chances to take a risk for an even greater reward. It could be punishing to a high handicapper, but I found it more than fair as an average golfer.

The jewels of the joint Jack and Steve Nicklaus design were the par-5 14th and the bonus 19th, positioned between the 14th and 15th holes. The 14th is a long, uphill par-5 that seems to never end – and with native grass contrasts, perfect bunkering and a climb to the top accented by one of the best views in golf, featuring Mt. Baker on one end of the panorama and Victoria's Inner Harbor on the other, you almost wish it never would.

Then, there's the old "betting hole" 19th – a 140-yard par-3 from an elevated tee box, played to a shelf of a green hanging off the side of the mountain. It looks like a poster for out-of-this-world holes, and is a memory that's burned in my mind.

The Valley Course, the second 18-hole track at Bear Mountain, is on par with the Mountain course in design, test, playability and beauty. Everyone is so seduced by the vistas of the Mountain Course that it can be easy



Bear Mountain Resort Mountain No. 11

## ENTER TO WIN A Vancouver Island Golf Getaway to Victoria!

*Cascade Golfer* and *GolfVancouverIsland.ca* have teamed up to give one lucky golfer – and an even luckier guest of their choice – a weekend golf getaway to Victoria, including two nights accommodation at the luxurious Hotel Grand Pacific on Victoria's Inner Harbour, plus three rounds of golf for two! You'll be teeing it up at Bear Mountain Golf Resort, Olympic View Golf Club and Arbutus Ridge Golf Club, three of the most acclaimed tracks in all of British Columbia.

Log on to [CascadeGolfer.com](http://CascadeGolfer.com) to enter to win your chance to play on island time!



# Stay In Style

## Hotel Grand Pacific

One of Canada Select's 5-star winners, the Hotel Grand Pacific ([www.hotelgrandpacific.com](http://www.hotelgrandpacific.com)) is right in the middle of Victoria's Inner Harbor. Less than a 90-second walk from the Clipper Vacations ferry terminal, it's perfect for golfers hauling their clubs. There are four top choices to dine in and the Spa at the Grand is a great option after a work out in the Athletic Club. A perfect place for couples or golfers wanting the true Victoria experience.



## Westin Bear Mountain Golf Resort and Spa

The incredible craftsman-styled hotel and grounds at the Westin Bear Mountain ([www.bearmountain.ca](http://www.bearmountain.ca)) looks perfectly tucked into the dramatic mountain backdrop. The food, wine and spirit options are world-class, headlined by The Cellar, which boasts one of the finest wine collections in the province. The Bella Montagna restaurant overlooks the courses and was perfect for fine dining. I also enjoyed a golfer's massage in the Sante Spa after 36 holes – a highly recommended experience.

## Oceanfront Suites at Cowichan Bay (pictured, above)

Sights and sounds of waterfowl and the calming saltwater tides are a part of your experience at the Oceanfront Suites ([www.oceanfrontcowichanbay.com](http://www.oceanfrontcowichanbay.com)) in the quaint village of Cowichan Bay. A perfect companion to Arbutus Ridge, it's quite luxurious, with all-new appointments and euro-design furnishings. I loved leaving the windows open when I slept and hearing the sounds of the bay. The hotel's Terrain Kitchen is also famous throughout town.

## Fuel For The Golfer's Soul

Canoe, in Victoria, is right up the golfer's alley with hearty fish and beef dishes, an incredible beer flight and a bar with a great vibe. Moon Under Water Brewery and Pub, located on the edge of Victoria's Inner Harbor, had the comfort and coolness of a place you might find in Seattle's Fremont District. Little Jumbo features cool mixology, with unique twists on cocktails. It's hip, but not in a hipsterish way. Lastly, Cherry Point Estate Wines ([www.cherrypointestatewines.com](http://www.cherrypointestatewines.com)), just down the road from Arbutus Ridge in Cobble Hill, is a must. I spent a chunk of an afternoon with the estate owners hearing their stories and loving their wines. It's a little patch of heaven.

# TRAVEL BAG

Arbutus Ridge Golf Club • No. 17



to say the Valley is a step down. In fact, the greens are dramatically different and the rocks are with you on this ride. I played both courses the same day and donated more balatas to the Valley than the Mountain. I would play the Valley first if I could do it again – making a fairer comparison.

## ARBUTUS RIDGE GOLF CLUB

My last stop was the perfect one, slamming a stake into the island's grounds and tethering an all-around experience. I left Bear Mountain on a perfect spring morning and drove to Arbutus Ridge via the Malahat, a 1,110-foot climb featuring heart-pounding views of the Saanich Peninsula and Gulf Islands before dropping back down into Cobble Hill, where Arbutus awaits atop a plateau overlooking Mt. Baker, the Gulfs and Satellite Channel.

The flattest of the five courses I played, Arbutus Ridge is another Bill Robinson track that stands the test of time. The 6,100-yard design weaves through a residential neighborhood, but is not overtaken by it. The course has as many awards as any on the island, but the thing that struck me most was how personable and proud the members and residents are.

General Manager Jason Lowe has shaped this well-traveled and well-known destination course into one the top values in all of Canada. I saw hawks and deer during my four hours, capped by a closing series of three holes that at 411, 214 and 426 yards, are as challenging as any you will find.

The Satellite Bar and Grill has one of the best menus in the Cowichan Valley and has an amazing B.C. wine list. See what *Audubon International* and *Golf Digest* are gushing about at [www.arbutusridgегolf.com](http://www.arbutusridgегolf.com).

## BACKYARD PARADISE

This is just a sampling of what Golf Vancouver Island offers, as the trail features 11 championship courses that run along 250 kilometers of the stunning coast on this heaven-like rock. It's affordable, too, with a favorable exchange rate driving the value even higher. Design your own version of island time on their fantastic website, [www.GolfVancouverIsland.ca/Seattle](http://www.GolfVancouverIsland.ca/Seattle).

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