

A blueprint for the future golf course?

New owners at Vancouver Island's Campbell River Golf & Country Club have installed many innovative and potentially trend-setting features.

Jason Scott Deegan
October 12, 2018



1 of 14 **A golfer hits a shot on the all-turf, lighted driving range at the Velocity Lounge at the Campbell River Golf & Country Club.**
Jason Scott Deegan/Golf Advisor

CAMPBELL RIVER, British Columbia, Canada - I have seen the future of golf.

It is fun, playable, very walkable, plenty challenging and, perhaps most important, fast to play. It's also played after dark with video monitors tracking the distance of every shot. Lots of drinks and food and music are involved, too.

Shockingly, this discovery happened in a tiny logging and fishing community in a remote section of Vancouver Island.



they've done redesigning, rebuilding and rebranding the old, tired Sequoia Springs Golf Course is nothing short of visionary.

Their new golf course redesigned by Canadian architect Graham Cooke debuted in August, tackling most of the issues that are important in the game today. At 6,141 yards long, the par 70 with seven par 3s is a joy to play. In a nod to the millennials' obsession with technology, they built the Velocity Lounge, transforming the driving range into a "night on the town" experience like bowling or karaoke but using golf clubs instead. Its bar/lounge opens every evening for customers to enjoy good food and signature cocktails/craft beers, while hitting balls tracked by Toptracer Range technology, the same software used at popular Topgolf facilities around the world.

The Mailmans, who own a large construction company, have never worked in the golf industry. Maybe that's a plus more than a minus. Their expertise and equipment helped to keep costs down and allowed them to quickly complete the project in just 17 months. Plans are to eventually tear down the clubhouse next fall to be replaced by a four-star 100-room boutique hotel with a conference center, restaurant and spa.

"We really want to be next level. We want to go above and beyond," said general manager Amanda Raleigh, the owner's daughter. "... We want to turn this into a destination golf resort."

I can think of hundreds of courses and driving ranges built pre-1990s that could use this kind of makeover to reinvent their businesses and upgrade their facilities and course infrastructure like irrigation and turf. Following this blueprint won't come cheap, but it's likely a necessary step to draw in the next generation of golfers. Is all this too progressive for a small town? After all, Campbell River already has its own world-class course, [Storey Creek Golf Club](#), one of the more popular sites of the Vancouver Island Golf Trail.

The Course: Campbell River Golf & Country Club

A pond and bunkers line the right side of the par-5 15th hole at the Campbell River Golf & Country Club. Jason Scott Deegan/Golf Advisor

The course dates back to the 1950s when it was a five-holer called Glen Alder. The new name is a throwback to its days as the nine-hole "Campbell River Golf Course." Both these old scorecards are on display in the Velocity Lounge, along with old photographs.

The modern version of the routing reused the original footprints of three or four holes. Unconventional, shorter routings seem to be an emerging trend - Tom Doak has already announced that the third course at [Sand Valley Golf Resort](#) in Wisconsin will be a sub-par 70, 6,100-yard course called Sedge Valley. The total yardage of Campbell River may look short, but your score won't reflect that.

Water comes into play on at least 11 holes. From the tips, two par 3s play longer than 190 yards. The day ends on a narrow peninsula green surrounded by water at the 195-yard 18th hole. Three of the par 5s have real teeth stretching to longer than 540 yards. The usual parade of long par 4s - my biggest pet peeve in modern architecture - are wisely missing. Only two par 4s stretch out longer than 400 yards - the third and 13th. The other four par 4s



The bentgrass greens were lightning-quick and in incredible shape. The maintenance staff will have to work hard to keep them that way and stave off the poa that haunts putting surfaces throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Perhaps the biggest question mark is the price point - \$99 for tourists and \$85 for locals. No memberships, only bundled rounds on punch cards, are available. Raleigh admits there was backlash when the rates were first released, but she says that subsided once residents played the course. That translates to a \$75 round at the current exchange rates of the U.S. dollar.

"So many people said we couldn't accomplish this in the time that we did," she said. "It has been super well received."

The Range: The Velocity Lounge

The Velocity Lounge at the Campbell River Golf & Country Club has eight hitting bays for evening golf fun. Courtesy of Campbell River Golf & Country Club

Although it's dark and cold outside, the grand opening of the Velocity Lounge has the all-turf, lighted driving range lively with music playing and golf balls flying.

The Velocity Lounge feels like a mini-Topgolf facility without the extra stories of hitting bays or the glowing circle targets out on the range. Instead, you aim at normal flagsticks while playing the same games that Toptracer Range offers at Topgolf - closest to the pin, long drive and rounds at famous courses. The foursome in my hitting bay took on a pair of legendary holes: No. 7 at [Pebble Beach Golf Links](#) and No. 18 at [Harbour Town Golf Links](#). If I was looking to improve my swing, I could have measured the distance of every one of my clubs with another challenge called "What's In My Bag" or used the "Launch Monitor" function to analyze my ball speed, ball flight, etc. These tools will be useful for the golf academy that will offer lessons during the day.

Toptracer - a ball-tracking software formerly called Protracer before being acquired by Topgolf in 2016 - is now available at golf facilities in 15 states, but this is at least the second introduction into Canada. The only glitch in the technology comes when you need to putt on the greens while playing virtual holes. The software forces you to hit a wedge to the closest target - on this range, 76 yards - to simulate your putting stroke. Hit it close to the flag, you make the putt. Hit a bad one and the computer will assign a missed putt.

Every half hour or so, the staff brought out a new menu item to sample - three-foot-long hot dogs loaded with extra cheese and jalapenos, chicken wings and tiny tacos. Vancouver Island Brewing helped host the party with swag and their craft beers flowing from the taps.

Even if I wasn't into golf, I could see coming to hang out at the bar. It had a casual vibe. There are less barriers to the game here than the traditional golf course. You can swing as much or as little as you want. You could wear jeans and a tee shirt - even high heels - and nobody would judge your outfit. If golf is to be more inclusive - which is the future of the game - it will need more facilities like Campbell River.



and play when the hotel is finished, maybe in 2020-21. Sound like the perfect business model? Only the future knows for sure, but it sure looks promising.


Innovative experiences at the new Campbell River Golf Club

News

Jason Scott Deegan

Jason Scott Deegan has reviewed more than 700 courses and golf destinations for some of the industry's biggest publications. His work has been honored by the Golf Writer's Association of America and the Michigan Press Association. Follow him on Twitter at @WorldGolfer.

0 Comments



Default

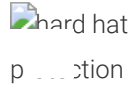
Join the conversation. Post a comment

Notify me when someone replies to my comment

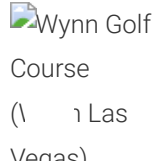
I'm not a robot

reCAPTCHA
Privacy - Terms

Related Content



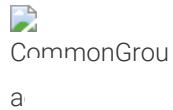
Articles
Will golf be the next sport to require helmets?



Articles
A Second Chance: Wynn to revive its Tom Fazio design along the Strip

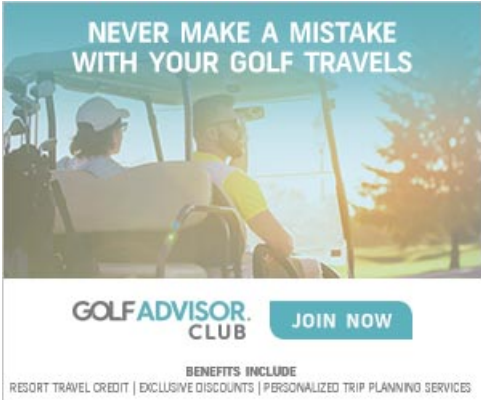


Articles
Trip dispatch: Sea Island keeps improving



Articles
A decade of CommonGround

Next Page



NEVER MAKE A MISTAKE WITH YOUR GOLF TRAVELS

GOLFADVISOR CLUB [JOIN NOW](#)

BENEFITS INCLUDE
RESORT TRAVEL CREDIT | EXCLUSIVE DISCOUNTS | PERSONALIZED TRIP PLANNING SERVICES

Recent Articles

My (unexpected) new favorite golf club

Play bucket-list golf with the Youth-On-Course national auction

New Bobby Jones Golf Course opens in Atlanta; first reversible muni doesn't disappoint

Writers



Matt Ginella

Editor-at-Large



Bradley S. Klein

Senior Writer



Brandon Tucker

Managing Editor



Mike Bailey

Senior Writer



Jason Scott Deegan

Senior Writer



Tim Gavrich

Senior Writer



Stay Connected

Copyright 2018 Golf Advisor All rights reserved.

