

Rock Harbor Golf Course ~ Another Year Boulder

Nick Ciattei



June 2015 just happened to be the anniversary of the opening of the original Rock Course, and golfers finally had the chance to play the new Boulder Course at Rock Harbor in Winchester, VA. Surprisingly, many missed out on what can only be described as one of the most interesting and challenging golf courses in the mid-Atlantic last year.

This year, take time to punch your ticket to one of the “greatest shows on turf.” The Boulder Course features the unusual equal mix of par 3s, 4s and 5s. Yes, you can enjoy six of each on this layout. Designer Denny Perry’s intent to make the Boulder Course one you would not likely forget is met in spades. Perry continued his unique design characteristics introduced when the original 18 opened in 2003 here with ample use of rock, water, and dramatic elevation changes. Huge rocks incorporated into the layout come from the Perry family-owned quarry located adjacent to the course and take center stage on several holes of the front nine of the Boulder Course.

I think it worthwhile to revisit the journey that Perry had to take to complete both the Rock and Boulder courses. Holes literally had to be built from the inside out so to speak. The designer realized right away that the first 18 holes he would open in 2003 would later become parts of the two final course layouts. The initial opening was met with great success, and Rock Harbor was well on its way to becoming a regional favorite. Golfers got a glimpse into the future as Perry began to construct new golf holes shortly thereafter. Perry found difficulty in trying to expand the layout with more golf holes while maintaining a brand new course. This lengthy task concluded in 2010 when Rock Harbor introduced eleven new holes that were mixed into the original eighteen. At this point, with the Rock Course complete, the Boulder Course consisted of a partial layout until the remaining seven holes opened. The proverbial end of the tunnel was finally reached last year when the new holes opened to the public. With Perry’s journey complete, golfers can now rejoice on two exciting designs at Rock Harbor.

The Boulder Course opens with a perfect warm-up hole for the many challenges that wait just ahead. Favor the left side of the fairway with your drive on the

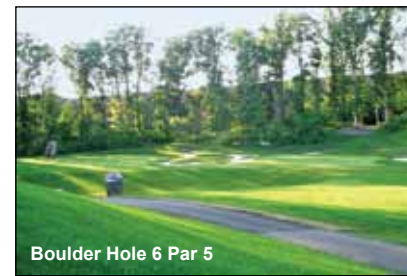


Boulder Hole 4 Par 5

easiest par 4 on the entire course. Hopefully you walk to the second tee with a birdie already on your scorecard because you may need that stroke quickly. The second literally lies between a rock and a hard place and is renowned as one of the toughest par 3s in the entire state. It has even earned an accolade to prove just that. This uphill hole’s many facets, with none more menacing than the deep rock-faced front bunker, add to its obstacles. Three through nine, the seven recently opened holes, deliver a stretch of fun and exciting holes. Designer Perry goes all out here by taking advantage of an amazing number of rock formations and the property’s bold elevation changes. Three’s easy, flowing dogleg right par 4 reveals a fairway wider than it appears from the tee box. At first glance many of the new holes appear



Boulder Hole 5 Par 3



Boulder Hole 6 Par 5

rather troublesome, but after playing them I can say they are not as grueling as you might think. Perry provides plenty of options. In fact, all three of the par 5s on the outward nine have alternate routes that can be taken. The first par 5, the fourth, is shaped like a reverse letter J. The shortest of all the par 5s at Rock Harbor, it offers a great scoring opportunity.

You can reach the green by either the left or right routes, with the latter playing 100 yards shorter and across one of Perry’s signature boulder fields. The fifth hole, a beautiful downhill par 3, plays 193 yards to a multi-level green graced with bunkers, including one very deep one that will gather up shots that go long. At more than 700 yards from the tips, the par 5 sixth boasts being one of the longest holes on the entire eastern seaboard. The downhill contour makes it play shorter, and the two routes this time lead to two greens. So make sure you know which green is in use for the day. I really like the short par 4 seventh not only for its unique design but also for its terrific good looks. This hole also has two greens connected by a ribbon of



Boulder Hole 9 Par 5



Boulder Hole 7 Par 4

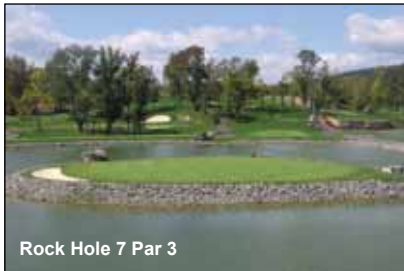
fringe. From the tee, you need to know pin placement to execute your drive to the optimal landing area. Another handsome par 3, eight involves a long downhill ride to the green with plenty of misfortune awaiting missed shots. From the tee box, enjoy unobstructed views of the countryside and the working quarry next door. The final hole on the front side, another par 5, plays to only 690 yards (sarcasm).

Downhill all the way, a split fairway sets up a testy approach to a deep green. These new holes have created quite a buzz and put the icing on the cake to the complete Rock Harbor experience.

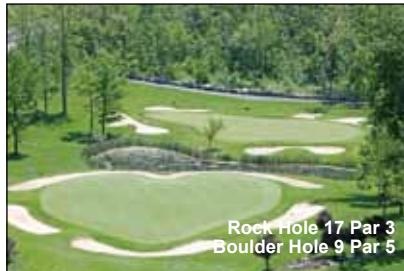
The Boulder Course back nine is highlighted by the “Castle Green,” a par 3 with a fortress-like wall fronting the green (see cover photo). Three more outstanding par 5s show off more of designer Denny Perry’s appetite for creativity. I would be remiss to not at least mention a couple of standout holes on the Rock Course. Two par 3s on this layout make everyone’s signature hole list. They are the island green seventh hole and the seventeenth hole’s heart of Virginia-shaped green. The latter features a remarkable drop well over 100 feet! With so many other memorable holes here, I can not possibly describe them all. Just take my word for it, or better yet, add a visit to Rock Harbor Golf Course to play both courses to your 2016 golfing calendar.



Boulder Hole 8 Par 3



Rock Hole 7 Par 3



Rock Hole 17 Par 3
Boulder Hole 9 Par 5

Their ideal location just off Route 37 minutes from I-81 and an hour from the DC beltway makes for an easy excursion. Winchester, Virginia, provides an ideal golf getaway with an upbeat downtown area filled with entertainment, arts, and shopping. The course works with several hotels in the area as well as Golf Guide Golf Getaways who can put together a golf vacation for you. With 36 exciting holes waiting for you at Rock Harbor with the Rock and Boulder courses, you can rest assured that it will be one trip you won’t likely forget.

For more information visit rockharborgolf.com

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