

Globe Life

British Columbia

Golf doesn't get hotter than this

With The Ridge, British Columbia cements its reputation as Canada's top golf destination

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Doug Carrick's first crack at a mountain golf course design was Greywolf, a layout so gorgeous and artfully conceived that it instantly became a Canadian classic when it opened near the town of Invermere in 1999.

Now, with the launch of his acclaimed new course at Predator Ridge Resort, Carrick continues the impressive run of high-profile course openings by top architects that has made [British Columbia](#) the country's hottest golf destination.

Tobiano near Kamloops, Sagebrush Golf and Sporting Club in Quilchena, The Club at Tower Ranch in Kelowna, and the two 18-hole courses at Bear Mountain Resort in Victoria have all enjoyed ballyhooed openings in recent years. Like Greywolf before them, Tobiano and Sagebrush were in their turn declared Canada's best new course of 2008 and 2009 by Golf Digest, the sport's equivalent of an Academy Award.

Blessed with spectacular mountain scenery and the country's balmiest climate, B.C. has become a magnet for both golf tourists and baby boomers seeking a congenial spot to spend their retirement years.

Many of the courses that have been built are centre-pieces for pricey real-estate developments with master plans that include hotels, condos, townhouses and luxury homes. Though sales slumped dramatically during the recession – with several properties, including Victoria's Bear Mountain Resort, facing insolvency – most developers remain convinced that the formula is sound.

Carrick's new course, The Ridge, is found near Vernon in the heart of the Thompson-Okanagan region, where the one-two tourism punch of award-winning vineyards and superior golf is an irresistible draw.

In Canada, only Ontario's Niagara Peninsula is able to offer a similarly attractive mix of grapes and greens.

Built at a cost of \$10-million, Carrick's 7,190-yard design seamlessly blends eight completely rebuilt holes of Predator Ridge Resort's old Peregrine course with 10 spectacular new holes carved through rugged mountain terrain offering cliff-top tee shots and panoramic views of Lake Okanagan far below. Though visually intimidating, The Ridge's fairways are wider than they at first appear, with dramatic mounds and slopes to help funnel errant shots back into play.

"Fairly generous fairways make the course playable for everyone," says Carrick, who also left his greens open at the front to give golfers the option of hitting approach shots on the ground. "Most of the classic courses take this democratic approach."

Particularly striking at The Ridge are the dozens of mountain rock formations that have been scraped clean and power-washed to make their colours and striations more vivid. It's a robust and uniquely Canadian design technique that the Toronto-based architect perfected at his award-winning Muskoka Bay Club in

Ontario.

With the launch of Carrick's course, Predator Ridge Resort – whose opening in 1991 put the Thompson-Okanagan on the map of Canadian golf – confirms its position among the country's leading golf properties. The 486-hectare resort and real estate development's scenic landscape of clear lakes, fast-rushing mountain streams and wheatgrass meadows includes a central lodge, two-and-three bedroom cottages, building lots starting from \$155,000, and an additional 18-hole championship golf course called Predator.

And a glamorous new twin attraction to Predator Ridge Resort glitters high on a cliff overlooking both the golf course and Lake Okanagan. Opened in May, [Sparkling Hill Resort](#), a \$122-million European-style wellness hotel financed by the Swarovski family and decorated with more than three million of their namesake crystals, is certain to draw even more visitors to the area.

Despite the economic hard times, golf projects are going ahead throughout the province. Early in June, Highland Pacific Golf Course near Victoria opened nine new holes, completing a 6,616-yard 18-hole layout routed through rolling hills and offering views of the Olympic Mountains and the Juan de Fuca Strait.

Gary Player's first Canadian design, Wildstone Golf Course, part of a Cranbrook real-estate development set in the foothills of the Purcell Mountains, is set to open next season. And in 2012, another famous name, Fred Couples, will launch his Whiskey Jack Golf Course in the town of Sparwood, located in the province's southeast corner.

But the really heavy action, just as for most of the past decade, is found in the Thompson-Okanagan, where the most anticipated new project is the \$1-billion Ponderosa golf course and planned community in the town of Peachland, 25 kilometres south of Kelowna. Designed by Greg Norman, golf's legendary Great White Shark, the Ponderosa Golf Club is scheduled to open in 2012.

With so much stiff competition on the horizon, the managers of Predator Ridge Resort, thrilled by the rave reviews coming in for The Ridge, are already considering the construction of yet another signature course. The likely architect? Canada's most accomplished golfer, Mike Weir, together with his design partner Ian Andrew, a former protégé of Doug Carrick.

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THE RIDGE REVEALED

Wild Kingdom: Though brown bears, cougars, deer, lynx and coyotes are frequent visitors to the course, the surest place to experience nature is the 15th, a par three played over Birdie Lake that doubles as a sanctuary for turtles and the distinctive blue-billed ruddy duck.

Rocky Road: Frazzled golfers putt out with a heavy sigh of relief after navigating over and around the massive rock outcroppings on the narrow and sloping fairway of the par-five 11th, The Ridge's toughest hole.

Female Perspective: Too often an afterthought in golf design, the forward tees offer women the same thrills as those farther back – especially at the par-four sixth (left) where the launch from a rocky precipice encourages long hitters to try to drive the green.

Photo Op: Have the camera ready at the seventh, a gorgeous par five affording sweeping views of the mountains and Lake Okanagan from a tee box perched more than 30 metres above the emerald fairway.

PACK YOUR CLUBS

British Columbia's top courses:

Predator Ridge Resort: 1-888-578-6688; www.predatorridge.com: Green fee for The Ridge Course: \$160;
Predator Course: \$140.

Greywolf Golf Course: 1-888-473-9965; www.greywolfgolf.com. Green fee: \$99 to \$149.

Tobiano: 1-877-373-2218; www.tobianogolf.com. Green fee: \$130.

Sagebrush Golf And Sporting Club: 1-250-378-9555; www.sagebrushclub.com. Green fee: \$800 per
foursome.

The Club At Tower Ranch: 1-877-491-8211; www.mytowerranch.com. Green fee: \$110.

Bear Mountain Resort: 1-888-533-2327; www.bearmountain.ca. Green fee: \$129 to \$149.

Highland Pacific Golf Course: 1-250-478-4653; www.highlandpacificgolf.com. Green fee: \$65 to \$70.

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