

Augusta National Golf Club



Ross Perrett

APRIL is a special time in the golfing calendar as it heralds the arrival of The US Masters – the first Major golfing tournament of the year, played at the picturesque Augusta National Golf Club.



The tournament will be watched by millions of golf fans around the world and thousands of Australians who will religiously get up in the middle of the night to watch the drama unfold over the final days.

Ironically, it was not originally built as a tournament venue. Rather it was conceived as a

place where legendary golfer Bobby Jones could enjoy a game of golf with friends in private away from his fans.

In 1930 after he had won the US Open, The US Amateur, The British Open and The British Amateur, Jones, retired and supported by New York businessman Clifford Roberts, set about to

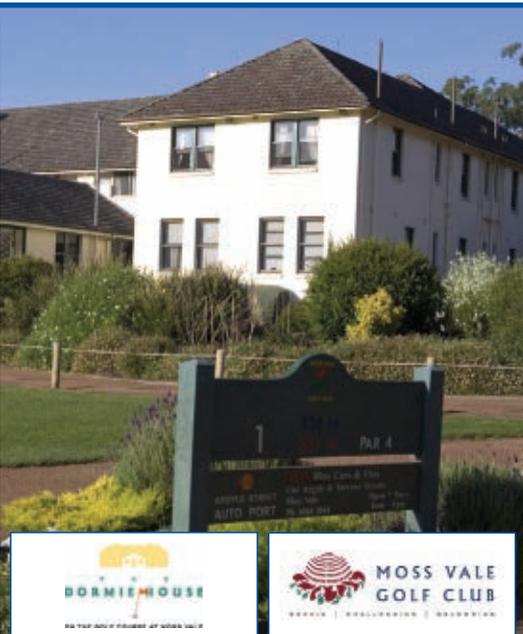
build his dream course. Both men had visited the area to play golf in the winter as Augusta enjoyed a more moderate climate than New York or Atlanta where Jones lived. The site selected was a former Nursery with many established trees and a colonial villa that is now the clubhouse. Scottish golf course architect Alistair Mackenzie was engaged to assist with the course layout and a successful design collaboration followed.

Jones and Mackenzie both had a deep understanding of strategic golf course design and they set out to create a classic course that captured the essence of golf. Whilst Mackenzie never got to see the completed course his involvement in the trio of Royal Melbourne, Cypress Point and Augusta National — all ranked in the world's top 10 courses — has ensured his position as one of the greats of golf course architecture. The course was completed in 1934 and shortly after Jones invited some friends — including professionals and leading amateurs — to play in a friendly private tournament. From this humble beginning the The Masters was born.

The course is a classic parkland layout with two returning loops of 9 holes on a surprisingly steep piece of land. The clubhouse is located on a hill dictating that both nines commence with a downhill hole and finish with uphill holes. Apart from the trees the most significant natural features is Rae's Creek which is utilized particularly well on the back nine. There are relatively few bunkers on the course and generally they are strategically placed to guard the greens. The fairways are generously proportioned but the ever present slopes demand careful positioning of drives to get the best approach to the greens. Given that the putting surfaces are large and fast, approach

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shots require a well thought out strategy and excellent execution to put the ball on the right side of the hole. Putting at Augusta is extremely challenging and has been the downfall of many aspiring champions.

Whilst both nines are of similar length and difficulty it is the back nine that is best known and it has been the scene of some of the most memorable golf in history. Originally it was the outward nine that provided the tougher challenge so with great foresight Jones reversed the nines following the first Masters in 1934. In 1986 Jack Nicklaus, at the age of 46 shot an inward 30 to pip Tom Kite and Greg Norman for the 'Green Jacket'. The tenth is a challenging downhill par 4 that is followed by the infamous Amen Corner, a treacherous but stunning stretch of three holes. The eleventh is now a strong par 4, having been lengthened, but the real teeth of the hole is the water guarding the left-hand approach to the green. Originally Mackenzie had placed a large bunker there, but this was later replaced with the pond that hugs the green. The short twelfth looks harmless enough but it is played to a narrow green that is guarded by Rae's Creek in front and flashed up bunkers front and back. Shots from the back bunkers are frightening, given the narrowness of the green and the fast drop off in to Rae's Creek. The short par five thirteenth completes the trio and is one of the most beautiful and copied holes in golf. It is a sharp dogleg left and easily reached in two but again the green is guarded by Rae's Creek and four bunkers behind the green. All three greens are framed by a dense backdrop of azaleas and mature trees. The par 4 fourteenth offers some respite before another testing par 5 played across water to the green. The short 16th



(Above) Augusta's 10th hole and (left) the picturesque 12th

is also played over water and always features on the final afternoon. Hole seventeen was narrowed and hole eighteen lengthened as part of the 'tiger proofing' of the course that followed Tiger Woods' win by 12 shots in a record-breaking 270 back in 1997.

Since the 1960's television has had been a major force in the promotion of golf worldwide with heroes of successive generations like Palmer, Player and Nicklaus, Ballesteros, Faldo and Norman and now Tiger Woods putting on the show. Augusta is brilliantly set up for television

with its manicured fairways, stark white bunkers, flowering azaleas and colourful crowds and this has resulted in a worldwide TV following of golfers. As a result golfers all over the world can relate to Augusta, even though most will never get the opportunity to see the course, let alone play it.

Consequently, many aspiring golf course developers attempt to create another Augusta, which is an unrealistic expectation that cannot be delivered – especially in Asia where the climate is very different and where golf is still an emerging sport. In reality Augusta is for all but one week a year an extremely private members club that caters for a small elite membership that draws members from all over the United States.

The presentation of the course at Augusta is of the highest standard possible and this is a result of a commitment to excellence that is backed by the best technology money can buy. For example Augusta was the first course in the world to install a SubAir system and heating coils in its greens. This allows the green temperature and moisture levels to be monitored and to either suck water from the soil profile or to pump air through it. The towering trees create a lot of shade which is the enemy of growing healthy turf. Prior to the tournament the course will be over sown with a rye grass that will shoot just prior to The Masters which together with the flowering azaleas that bloom on time produces a spectacular setting.

No doubt at this year's Masters the course at The Augusta National Golf Club will be brilliantly presented and The Masters of 2010 will produce some more memorable moments that would greatly please the legendary Bobby Jones and be an inspiration to all those that follow in his footsteps. ◀

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