

Red Ledges - and the Other Great Courses - in Park City

It's a common enough feeling around Park City, Utah. Poised at a precipice, your heart's a drumbeat as you contemplate the steeply twisting corridor falling away beneath your feet. You take a deep, steadying breath, and prepare to negotiate the plunging terrain safely.



Some of the Vistas at Red Ledges

But it isn't winter, it's summertime. You're wearing a polo shirt and Bermuda shorts, not goggles and Gore-Tex. You were transported by golf cart, not chairlift. You're at the first tee of one of the nation's most breathtaking new golf experiences - Red Ledges, in Heber, Utah.

This is the 200th U.S. course designed by the preeminent Jack Nicklaus. And this milestone course, with its expansive views, up-and-down sensibility, gorgeous sandstone outcroppings and grip-and-throat-tightening uphill approach shots, continues the decade-long trend of Park City's steady metamorphosis into a high-end golf destination.



One of the Elevated Tees at Red Ledges

Owing to its longtime position as one of the world's great ski towns, a reputation further cemented by its star turn in the 2002 Winter Olympic Games of Salt Lake City, Park City will always be more closely associated with snowflakes than fairways. But in recent years, golf gear has assumed greater importance in area toy-boxes, taking its rightful place next to the skis, snowboards, mountain bikes and hiking boots. Red Ledges is just the latest reason as to why.

His most recent honor was being named official starter at the 2010 Masters, alongside longtime friend and rival Arnold Palmer. But Nicklaus has been collecting awards about as steadily as he collected his 18 major championships, and among others, was named for the fifth time by the editors of Golf Inc. Magazine as "The Most Powerful Person in Golf." Apparently, when it came time for the owners-developers of Red Ledges to pick an architect, they espoused the philosophy, "It takes one to know one."



Holes 8 and 9 at Red Ledges

Anthony Burns is the former CEO of Ryder Systems, they of the ubiquitous yellow trucks. His partner at Red Ledges is Nolan Archibald, who still occupies a similar throne at Black & Decker. Besides heading multi-billion-dollar conglomerates known the world over, both men have deep Utah roots. Archibald was born in nearby Ogden, while Burns married into a family that has extensive land holdings in the Heber Valley.

"I am amazed that in just two years since the ground-breaking, Red Ledges will open what we believe will be the finest course in the West," said Tony Burns, whose master plan eventually will include 1,200 homes on 2,000 acres, tennis and equestrian facilities, and spa. "We are thankful to Jack Nicklaus, who has helped make our long-held vision come to life."



16h Hole at Red Ledges

The architect himself is also pleased with the end result, and his ability to assimilate some significant elevation changes into a seamless whole. "Since the topography of this area is so stunning and diverse, we were challenged to stay

true to the Red Ledges vision by planning each hole around its natural surroundings," said golf's "Golden Bear."

"We were able to nestle some holes around the famous sandstone ledges and situate other holes in juniper groves. I am delighted with how the course has turned out."

Equally delighted must be the droves of discriminating golf-lovers who are continuing to discover greater Park City as the perfect vacation-home destination. As a Scotsman might say, those with the requisite dollars and desire are "spoiled for choice." Each of the half-dozen-or-so high-desert venues that have sprung to life in the last decade offers meticulous course conditioning, upscale amenities and 20-mile mountain vistas. Just as importantly, they are all a short drive from a dynamic, culturally relevant, culinary-rich town which in summer is perpetually bathed in sunshine, with 80-degree temperatures and little humidity to speak of. Besides Red Ledges, some of Park City's other golf jewels include:

Victory Ranch is also brand-spanking-new, a Rees Jones beauty bisected by carpets of emerald amidst endless fields of shimmering fescue grass. The two finishing holes are as exciting as any closing holes in Utah, and offer such a steep descent from start to finish a golfer might feel they need a toboggan, if not a parachute. With miles of frontage on the Provo River, Victory Ranch is about fly-fishing as much as golf, but the first of what might someday be several courses on property is a keeper.

"Rees told me when we first spoke by phone that he can't count the number of times a developer has called him and asked for a championship-caliber course on 150 acres," recalls chief developer Bob Larson. "I laughed when he said that, and told him I have 7,000 acres! He quickly agreed to come visit."

While Red Ledges and Victory Ranch are still in their nascent stages, **Promontory** is a much more established development. Of the 7,000 acres comprising the property, more than 60% will remain undeveloped, leaving plenty of wide open spaces with long-range views of the ski hills in nearby Park City. Nicklaus Design delivered Painted Valley, the newer of the two courses on property. It's a no-nonsense test, with heaving greens and a curious routing where about half the holes from mid-round forward climb relentlessly upward, before a much-needed downhill respite as a player heads back to the (temporary) clubhouse.

Pete Dye's Canyon Course is the original playground, and gets far more play to this point than the Nicklaus effort. The eclectic routing features an outward nine that meanders through a sunlit meadow, the southern exposure offering 30-mile views. The back nine is located over a ridge and within a contained valley. The

feeling is more sheltered, less wide open than the outward journey. "The difference between the front and back is like night and day," offers Perry Dye, Pete's son and a noted course architect in his own right. "With 350 feet of elevation change from top to bottom, it's just a gorgeous site."

Unlike the other candidates, **Glenwild**, regularly voted the number No. 1 course in Utah, is not a work in progress. The 900-acre property, with a Tom Fazio gem as its centerpiece attraction, is located in a wildflower-filled valley just a few minutes from Interstate 80 and about 15 minutes to Park City's bustling Main Street. In addition to the site's naturally occurring flora and fauna, 9,000 trees were planted on the property to enhance the feeling of rusticity and remove. The wind is mostly an afternoon factor at Glenwild, which day-to-day isn't buffeted by breezes as regularly as some of the area's more exposed courses.

The homey-but-comfortable clubhouse is centrally located, and its overstuffed couches, porch swings, log-cabin ambiance and tricked-out locker rooms (whirlpools facing plasma TV's) is nearly as big an attraction as the golf course itself. So is the beyond-reproach service, including super-efficient valet parking, and do-everything locker room attendants-slash-bartenders. Is it any wonder that a proud member, who happens to be one of the world's most recognizable and beloved athletic superstars, bops back and forth to his magnificent mansion practically all summer long?

Alpine sports will always be king in Park City. But the aforementioned golf venues, be they brand-new, or well-established, along with several others still in either the planning stages or pipeline, help tilt the town's myriad recreational options somewhat back in balance.