

Kamloops earns its place on B.C.'s golf map

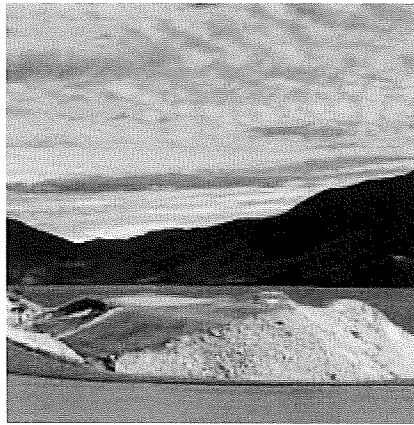
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KAMLOOPS - It takes a collection of quality courses for a region to be considered a golf destination and one truly special layout to become one.

With the arrival of Tobiano, Kamloops seems to have finally earned its place on the British Columbia golf map.

There's a buzz in the air about this central Interior city and we're not talking about an early start to the mosquito season.



CREDIT: Handout/Tourism Kamloops
Tobiano Golf Course in Kamloops.

Tobiano, it seems, is about to do what Predator Ridge did for the Okanagan and what Greywolf accomplished for the East Kootenays. These must-play courses helped complete the package in their respective markets and lured golfers to their area.

The same thing is now happening for Kamloops. Everyone wants to play Tobiano, the magnificent Tom McBroom layout on Kamloops Lake about 20 minutes west of the city. Other area courses figure to benefit as Tobiano begins its first full season.

"With a Trent-Jones classic like Rivershore and courses like The Dunes, Sun Rivers and Sun Peaks, we've always felt like we were a golf destination," says Ian Henson, general manager of the Sun Rivers Golf Resort in Kamloops. "But when you throw in a golf course which in my opinion and the opinion of many others is one of the most spectacular courses you will ever play in your life, it really is amazing. Tobiano is a tremendous addition to the region."

For many years, the Kamloops area has attracted more fishermen than golfers. The trouble is, they head straight to one of the many lakes in the area and frequently stay in their own campers or sleep in tents. Golfers, on the other hand, come bearing money. They help fill area hotels, they cough up lots of cash to play golf and eat meals in area restaurants.

That's part of the reason why Kamloops has begun a major advertising push.

"The Kamloops area has always had some great golf courses," says Lee Morris, chief executive officer of Tourism Kamloops. "And it always had a diversity of courses which is what made it unique as a golf destination. But our sense is the addition of Tobiano and the new Talking Rock course (in nearby Chase) takes us to a new level.

"We recognize that there is an incredible opportunity for us to become the next new hot golf destination. In fact, we think we are."

Talking Rock, located on the grounds of the Little Shuswap Indian band's Quaaout Resort about 65 kilometres northeast of Kamloops, has received positive reviews since opening last August. However, Tobiano figures to be the course that drives the Kamloops golfing bus.

Although it just opened for the season a little over two weeks ago, a tour of the course this past weekend found it to be in tremendous shape. Tobiano sits on a sublime piece of property -- the former Six Mile Ranch site directly below the Trans-Canada Highway -- and features holes that take full advantage of the land's unique topography.

The par 4 fifth hole, for example, has to rank among the best in the province. It literally tumbles down a dramatic chute set between giant dunes. To his credit, McBroom takes no credit for designing this hole. Mother Nature did most of the work.

The par 3 seventh has a similar feel to the famous island green 17th hole at TPC Sawgrass in Florida. There's no water, but the green sits on knob of land in the middle of a fissured gully. Miss the green and you're dead.

Developer Mike Grenier plans to add an equestrian centre, hotel and village centre in coming years. When complete, the 1,000-acre development will contain 1,100 housing units. Grenier says steps have been taken to ensure that the integrity of the golf course is not affected by future housing. For starters, housing will be set back 70 or 80 metres from the middle of fairways.

"If you look at the location of the golf course and the lake you will find there are very few housing units between the golf course and the lake," Grenier says. "The golf course is the one that gets the benefit of the bluff edge."

And the other courses in the area figure to benefit from the golfers who make the trek to Kamloops to play Tobiano.

"Most people don't come in for just one day and given the opportunity most golfers would rather not play the same place over and over," says Sun River's Henson. "So if the number of golfers coming into town increases quite a bit, then we'll all benefit from it."

And that's a birdie for everyone.

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