



Donald Ross' Lone Contribution to Northern California Golf is Still Going Strong

BY MICHAEL JAMIESON



Legendary Scottish architect Donald Ross left his imprint at some of golf's greatest venues including Pinehurst No.2 and Seminole Golf Club.

Did you know that Ross also built a course in California? There's only one, and it's in Northern California.

Peninsula Golf and Country Club (formerly Beresford Country Club) was founded on December 7, 1911, just five years after the 1906 San Francisco earth-

“California is fortunate to have got him at last.”

—Robert Hunter praising his fellow architect Donald Ross

quake, and caught the new wave of high society and popularity of golf that was sweeping America. Originally founded as an all-Jewish club because members were denied entrance to other area clubs, Beresford CC was built south of ‘The City’ in sunny San Mateo. The original course architect was Tom Bendelow, nicknamed “The Johnny Appleseed of American Golf,” and the course opened for play July 4, 1912.

Just 10 years later it was time for something bigger and better. Club president Walter Stettheimer was just the man with the vision. He secured the property rights for additional land and contacted Ross, the golf course architect everyone wanted.

Interestingly enough, Ross turned down Stettheimer initially. A trip to California was out of the question as summer was prime time for designing

courses, especially in the Midwest and East Coast. Ross declared he could do multiple projects in the three weeks it would take to travel back-and-forth to the West Coast. A war of telegrams ensued with Stettheimer finally telling him to “name his own price.” Ross wired back at once saying he would be there in July for \$4,000 plus expenses and followed it in writing with a signed letter to seal the deal.

Ross spent his three weeks in California traveling the state, no doubt looking for other courses ready to be built, but none materialized. He spent a weekend in Monterey with noted course designer Robert Hunter, who had just moved from Berkeley. When Beresford CC held a farewell dinner for Ross, Hunter summed it up perfectly in a letter: *“In many places where the Lord would not have ventured his hand, Donald has produced courses that will rejoice the world for many generations... California is fortunate to have got him at last... His work is always original and when committees do not ruin his design the finished product is always a fine test of golf.”*

His Beresford layout was a complete redesign of the course, turning the routing to counter-clockwise and utilizing a large tract of land. All of the trademark Ross features were there – elevated, inverted saucer-shaped greens, well-placed

Left: This original Donald Ross drawing was used by architect Ron Forse in the Restoration completed in 2003; Top left: Aerial view of the Peninsula Golf and Country Club; Top right: Donald Ross on the course.

bunkering and doglegs built into the natural curvature of the land. Beresford's then General Manager E.C. Lydon, who had built the original Bendelow Course, supervised construction of the Ross course beginning in 1922. Nine new holes opened in 1923 and the second nine in 1924.

Beresford CC survived the stock market crash of 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression. It tried to rebrand itself as a club open to all faiths with a large picnic on its 30th anniversary, Dec. 7, 1941.

Eventually renamed The Peninsula Golf & CC, the membership embraced Ross again almost 80 years later with a restoration in 2003. At the suggestion of John Zoller, former executive director of the NCGA, the fairways were capped with sand, ensuring it plays firm and fast as Ross had originally intended it.

To honor Ross, who was named the greatest golf course architect of the 20th Century, the club has recently installed a 23-foot-long pictorial display featuring Ross. It shows some of his career highlights and details his sole contribution to The Golden State—The Peninsula Golf & CC. 📍

Michael Jamieson has been the Club Historian at Peninsula Golf & CC for 30 years.