



Mist rises in the early morning from a pond fronting the 10th green at The Rise, a new Fred Couples signature course at Vernon, B.C.

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## Golfing nirvana in the B.C. interior

Four new courses elevate the Thompson-Okanagan Golf Trail into a spectacular mecca for golfers

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Too many courses. Not nearly enough time.

The Thompson-Okanagan Golf Trail, which meanders from Kamloops in the north to Osoyoos — a nine-iron from the U.S. border — has quickly become one of the most spectacular meccas for golfers.

Simultaneously mind-blowing with its stunning new collection of ambitiously, bold and rugged courses and the serenity of spell-binding lake views, this is a path no golfer will want to miss. It is a stretch that will be hard to rival. Anywhere.

Four new courses have elevated the Thompson-Okanagan Golf Trail into what it is now: The Fred Couples-designed The Rise and Thomas McBroom's jaw-dropping kids — Tobiano and Tower Ranch — and the Wayne Carlton-designed Black Mountain.

Later this year, there will be a fifth — Doug Carrick's new Ridge Course at Predator Ridge. It could easily be the best of them all.

If you want the *Wow!* factor when you play, you will certainly get it any of these four new layouts: Vernon's Ridge and Rise, Kamloops' Tobiano, or Kelowna's Tower Ranch and Black Mountain — all within a short driving distance of one another.

This new quartet may have somehow pushed aside some of the area's deep-rooted classics like Gallagher's Canyon, The Harvest Club, the two courses (Quail and the Bear) that make up the Okanagan Golf Club in Kelowna, the Salmon Arm Golf Club, Canoe Creek (also in Salmon Arm), or Talking Rock in Chase.

For that matter, it doesn't include Rivershore or Sun Rivers in Kamloops, Hyde Mountain on Mara Lake or the Summerland Golf & Country Club and probably half a dozen other yet-to-be discovered delights like Sagebrush, which was named the best new Canadian course of 2009 by *Golf Digest*.

Once again: too many courses, not nearly enough time.

Three years ago, Kelowna was rated as Canada's top golf city by *Score* magazine, citing factors like courses per capita, courses that made their Top 100 list, value and availability to the public. And that was before Tower Ranch and Black Mountain came on board.

"We have over 50 18-hole courses in the Thompson Okanagan with panoramic mountain to lake views — many associated with resorts or situated in vineyards — a total of 83 courses if you include nine-hole courses," said Ellen Matthews, North America market development specialist for Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association (TOTA).

Including nine-hole tracks, there are 83 courses in the Thompson-Okanagan Golf Trail.

"It really is a haven for golfers given the world-class golf, the number of courses people can play and how close they are together."

From Kamloops to Osoyoos, it's all within an unrushed four-hour drive.

Here's a snapshot look at five courses a group of us recently played:

### Tobiano

About 20 minutes west of Kamloops, Tobiano opened for play in 2008 and was immediately named the best new Canadian course by *Golf Digest*. The following year, it was named Canada's best public course by *Score* magazine. Spectacular and robust, Tobiano perches on cliffs. With mountains off in the distance, all 18 holes overlook Kamloops lake.

The course looks like it was gently laid down like a blanket over the otherwise rugged and natural terrain, taking full advantage of the site's natural features. Fairways sweep and curve down and between the wasteland — several requiring forced carries over ravines, gorges and fissures. The greens are large and pure.

There are five distinct tee boxes. The tips play from an almost overwhelming 7,328 yards; the forward tees from 5,289, so that golfers of every ability can play and enjoy.

It's virtually impossible to pick a signature hole given that all 18 are flawless and unique. However, if forced, the bunkerless fourth hole and its elevated, plateau green, which course architect Thomas McBroom has compared to No. 16 at Scotland's Royal Dornoch; No. 5, which dramatically floats through a valley chute which McBroom said makes him think of holes 15 and 17 at Ireland's Ballybunion; and No. 7, a par 3 that balances almost like an island, are all particularly outstanding.

Of course, McBroom's fingering, rough-edged bunkers are everywhere.

Summer green fees booked within seven days are \$110. A 36-hole rate is available for \$180 and comes with a \$20 gift card.

It's most definitely a must play.

### The Club at Tower Ranch

Maybe all that is necessary to say is that *Travel & Leisure Golf* magazine selected The Club at Tower Ranch as the fourth-best new course in the world last year.

That's not a bad introduction, and hard to argue with.

There are no gimmicks here, just 18 solid golf holes, also designed by McBroom. But then McBroom coming out with a great course is like Einstein having some good ideas.

Tower Ranch is quite similar in many ways to Tobiano — except that water actually comes into play on three holes at the otherwise linky Tower Ranch. The front nine is very good. The back nine is tremendous.

McBroom's hard-hewn bunkers are again predominant. Same with dramatic elevation changes. There are several false fronts which require taking an extra club, especially through the stretch from holes 7 through 11.

Golfers will like that the wide fairways are often saddlebacked so that balls funnel back to the centre of the fairways.

Again, it's hard to pick a signature hole, but No. 17, as it moves around a large hill and then climbs to a striking view of a green framed by spiked mountain peaks, is as picturesque as it comes.

Regular green fees are \$110 with a \$75 twilight rate available after 3 p.m. and a \$65 replay. Another must play.

### The Ridge

Constructed at a cost of over \$10 million, the 7,190-yard Ridge involved a complete redesign of the Peregrine course, while the new nine holes, which are incorporated throughout the original, are an absolute masterpiece.

Rugged and natural, the new nine holes involve almost 500 metres of elevation change which, somehow, you never notice on the way up. But, boy, do you see the drops.

The Ridge gives Predator 36 holes as it joins the Osprey-Red Tail course as a perennial fixture in *Score* magazine's top 100.

While not open until August, a tour of architect Doug Carrick's new course left the impression that this is going to be absolutely sensational.

The designer of Greywolf's creation in Vernon gives Predator Ridge 36 holes, with the original Osprey and Redtail nines now called the Predator course. So, now you have the Predator and the Ridge.

It works pretty nicely, doesn't it? The original 27 holes were consistently given 4-1/2 stars by *Golf Digest*, hosted the Telus World Skins Game, and have been voted top 6 in Canada by *Score* magazine.

Radically different than Tobiano or The Rise, The Ridge is top notch, making especially great use of the natural rock outcroppings.

"Doug Carrick brought four versions of the routing of The Ridge Course design to be reviewed by the owner's group at Wesbild. While the first three versions were excellent, version four was the design that he felt would produce by far the best result," said general manager Rod Cochrane.

"Designers typically end up compromising on the design, but the owners really trusted Doug's talents and judgment and chose the design that Doug felt was best."

As well as the golf and its own spa, Predator Ridge is within a three-iron of the \$100-million Sparkling Hill Resort and Wellness Hotel.

The first of its kind in North America, the hotel will incorporate Swarovski Crystal elements into every aspect of its design.

"The Sparkling Hill Resort sits right above Predator," said Matthews. "It's nothing like you have ever seen. The spa itself is 40,000 square feet. It will bring just another level of international tourism."

### The Rise

The Fred Couples signature course is as its name suggests. Making its debut in 2008, The Rise roars 400 metres above the north and south arms of Lake Okanagan.

This certainly isn't a pussycat and, while there has been some criticism that it is too tough, our group unanimously picked it as our favourite. That's really what golf is all about. Some people have loved courses that others have hated and vice versa.

Couples certainly wasn't looking to create a pitch and putt. "We made it fairly challenging and hard," he has stated.

Co-designer Gene Bates, who did the majority of the work, was quoted as saying, "I first saw The Rise four years ago. It scared the crap out of me ... They took me down back at the fourth hole and we had to climb straight up the rock wall (and) I thought, 'I could die on this kind of project.'"

There are holes here you are guaranteed to remember for a long, long time — especially with your camera.

There are a few blind shots and several doglegs, but what's wrong with doglegs? More to the point, if you play the proper tees — and there are five of them on each hole — you should come away impressed.

"With five sets of tees, the course ranges from 4,638 to 6,884 in yardage and from 108 to 137 on slope, so if you seek a challenge, the right selection of tees will afford you an experience that is comparable to your ability," said general manager Terry Yacyshen.

"Couple this with some of the most unique and unbelievable views of Okanagan Lake and the surrounding valley, The Golf Club at The Rise is a must play when you are in the area.

"Now that our course has had time to mature, we've been able to address some of the native grass hazards and further define landing areas ensuring an enjoyable experience no matter your handicap level."

Green fees are \$115 with a \$75 twilight rate and a \$60 junior rate. After Sept. 5, the rates drop to \$69.

### Black Mountain

Sometimes referred to as the 'poor sister' to Tobiano, The Rise and Tower Ranch, Black Mountain is easily one of the best values you'll find.

Green fees are only \$58 during the week and \$65 on weekends and holidays. A twilight weekday rate is even available for just \$46.

Just don't expect anything poor or second-rate. This is, after all, a finalist for Canada's best new course for 2010.

At just under 6,400 yards, Black Mountain is a very playable course and wonderfully uses the undulating topography, natural creeks, ponds, rock outcroppings and elevation changes.

Designed by Cooke Carelton, there are six par 3s, seven par 4s and five par 5s.

It's a course you'll want to play twice to get accustomed to some of its nuances. Our group did just that and thought we were playing a completely different course the second time.

The signature hole is definitely the island green fifth, but there a bunch of other really nice — but tough — holes.

Eric Thorsteinson, who was the director of golf at Edmonton's Royal Mayfair, is now Black Mountain's general manager and head pro.

Located around the course is a three-phase community built by Edmonton-based Melcor Developments.

Brad Pelletier, who previously ran both B.C.'s Nicklaus North and Mayfair Lakes and was vice-president and managing director of IMG Canada (he was agent for both Mike Weir and Steve Nash), has recently been hired to oversee the Melcor Division.

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## Edmonton Golf Association

# TOURNAMENT SCHEDULE

### Ladies Open & Amateur

Victoria Golf Course  
June 21 & 22



MEMBER \$165  
Non-member \$200

### Mens Open

Raven Crest Golf & Country Club  
July 3 & 4

Handicap Flights  
0-9  
10+

PRO \$195

MEMBER \$165  
Non-member \$200

Restricted to EGA & APGA Members

### Senior Amateur

Aug. 26 & 27

#### Broadmoor Public Golf Course

MEMBER \$135  
Non-member \$170

Handicap Flights  
0-9  
10-16  
17+

### Junior Open

Aug. 21 - 22

#### Derrick Golf & Country Club

MEMBER \$90  
Non-member \$100

Handicap Flights  
0-6  
7-12  
13+

### Mens Amateur

August 13 Goose Hummock Golf Resort  
August 14 Stony Plain Golf Course  
August 15 Highlands Golf Club

Volunteers positions are available at all tournaments

MEMBER \$195  
Non-member \$230

Register online

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Price includes golf and 1 meal