

Teugega awakes from its slumber

By Bradley S. Klein

ROME, N.Y.

Anyone who cares about pure Donald Ross courses should make the trek to upstate New York.

There, in Rome, a small city of faded industrial and textile glory an hour east of Syracuse, lies a sleeping beauty. A single-minded modernist might miss Teugega Country Club's considerable charms or dismiss the place as old-fashioned. True students of classical design will see past the cobwebs and revel in its mystique.

It's one place that Ross spent a lot of time tweaking. He designed and built the private course in 1919-20, then spent summer 1923 in Rome in the company of his fiancé. (Alas, she died young and they never married.) As for Teugega's routing onto a tight 115-acre parcel, Ross seems to have been disappointed only that he could not route holes along the 80 acres fronting Lake Delta, which were reserved for the clubhouse and adjoining real estate.

Heavy plantings of conifers have narrowed the straight-laced Teugega (pronounced TEE-u-gee-ka). The landing areas also lost width because of single-row irrigation. The putting surfaces shrank, though their contours remained in place. Teugega's relative penury became its saving grace. Various harebrained schemes by green chairmen for flashed-up bunkers and yet more trees didn't cost much (and are easily fixed).

Don Alvarez, 59, a retired defense/intelligence industry executive, knew the place was special when he joined 25 years ago. It always annoyed him that most fellow members didn't quite share his passion for Teugega. His one stint on the green committee 15 years ago ended with a resignation in protest over one of those bunker installations.

"We never had a master plan," said Alvarez, who lives along the par-5 fourth hole.

Gradually, Alvarez began reading up on Ross and spreading the gospel by distributing articles he clipped from golf journals. As the board turned over, with many of the old-guard tree planters gone, a new

core group developed with a fresher approach. Seven years ago, superintendent Alan Tomlinson arrived, armed with something Teugega had lacked: a maintenance regimen rooted in modern agronomics and inspired by traditional ground-game values. The approach clicked well with the club's new green chairman, Bob Carrier.

In 2004, Teugega approved its first master plan. The architect was Barry Jordan, who has worked on 50 projects throughout the Northeast.

Teugega, par 71 and all of 6,514 yards (71.4 rating/ 129 slope) from the back tees, has "one of the finest collections of greens I had ever seen," Jordan said. "It was all overgrown when I first saw it, but beneath that I could see what was going on."

His bound, 54-page master plan is a model of clarity, with a helpful guide to golf architecture followed by meticulous before, during and after images on a hole-by-hole basis.

The work at Teugega is under way, with extensive tree removal on a few holes, gradual work on others and enough greens expansion so golfers can sense the true character of the place. The work is slow, expensive, and largely being done in house, with the main obstacle funding rather than member recalcitrance. When it's done, and the greens are fully recaptured, the fairway width reclaimed, the superfluous trees out and bunkers restored, Teugega should take its place among those fine old heretofore undiscovered golf layouts where history remains alive and challenging. ○



Each month, Golfweek profiles a course that is on one of Golfweek's Best lists or might be a candidate for inclusion.

COURTESY OF BARRY JORDAN



No. 7 at Teugega

Rater's notebook*

* with some speculation

1. Ease and intimacy of routing: 10

Greens seemingly tumble off into the next tees. Unique intimacy for Ross, with ninth and 18th the closest he ever built, converging from 90 degrees and separated only by irregular mounds.

2. Integrity of design: 6

It's all there, despite some discordant but superficial elements that hide the underlying features. Only outlier is the fifth green, which has been shifted slightly off its original axis.

3. Overall land plan: 8

Economically routed, across the road from Lake Delta.

4. Greens and surrounds: 6 (after restoration: 10)

Aggressive at times, bold, unusual – including a Raynor-like thumbprint and punchbowl. Plans call for the Poa/bent surfaces to expand, from an average of 3,500 square feet to 5,500 square feet.

5. Variety and memorability of par 3s: 7

One short, one medium and two long, with the 140-yard seventh rung by bunkers and site of Ross' only hole-in-one, a real gem. The most compelling is the semi-blind, 212-yard 12th hole.

6. Variety and memorability of par 4s: 8

Interesting throughout, but will be far more so when fairway widths (and angles) return.

Teugega Country Club

>> 6801 Golf Course Road, Rome, N.Y. 13440
>> 315-337-7151 >> www.teugega.com
>> Resident membership: \$2,500 initiation, plus \$3,200 annual dues.
>> Nonresident membership: \$1,000 initiation, plus \$1,200 annually.

7. Variety and memorability of par 5s: 4

Short, out-of-date, and the only obvious limitation. If you think of two of the short par 5s as par 4s and play it as a par 69, it's not a problem.

8. Tree/landscape management: 3 (after restoration: 9)

They are slowly decluttering and recapturing angles of play.

9. Conditioning: 5

Tall fescue/bluegrass roughs provide lots of definition. Superintendent Alan Tomlinson is performing Houdini-like maintenance on an annual budget of \$260,000. A capital fund of \$40,000 doesn't cover the implementation of the master plan, which is being piecemealed from other sources.

10: Walk in the park test: 8

Seventy percent of play is walking. The trip is a joy.

Overall: 5.5 (after restoration: 7)

It's a lovely retreat in summertime and fall foliage, as well as a lab case for a restoration in progress. Once fully restored, Teugega will be a strong candidate for top-100 status in Golfweek's Best Classic rankings. It's already a destination for folks who care about traditional design.