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Nicklaus swings into Sandpoint

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By ERIC PLUMMER
 Sports editor



--Photo by ERIC PLUMMER
 Club owner Chuck Reeves, left, and Jack Nicklaus ponder a hole design Monday afternoon at The Idaho Club.

The Golden Bear returns to Idaho Club for fourth visit

SANDPOINT -- Jack's back.

The line was on a famous Sports Illustrated cover in 1980 after golf legend Jack Nicklaus had just won his fourth U.S. Open, but on Monday it more aptly described his return to North Idaho, where he continues to put the final touches on The Idaho Club.

Monday marked the fourth time the Golden Bear had made a site visit to the new course, which is scheduled to open in the summer of 2008. After flying into Sandpoint, Nicklaus met a group on the course that included PGA tour

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pro Scott McCarron, former Superbowl MVP quarterback Mark Rypien, recent British Open qualifier Ewan Porter, club owner Chuck Reeves and a host of course designers.

"Imagine that, a site visit with wine," said Nicklaus with a chuckle, having arrived just as the group was making an impromptu toast on dusty land that will soon be hole No. 7.

The transformation from dirt, rock and trees to luscious green grass and stark white sand is currently happening in various stages at the Idaho Club, evident by the number of massive trucks hauling earth around.

Five holes are "grassed," and another six will be green in the next couple of weeks, and the remaining seven holes on the north side of Highway 200 are still being "roughed out." None of the greens have been seeded yet, most still waiting Nicklaus' final stamp of approval.

Once the Nicklaus-designed course is finally finished, head pro Mike Deprez, admitting bias, says it will not only be one of the top courses in Idaho, but in the entire region.

"I won't be surprised if this is a top-five course in the Northwest when it opens," says Deprez, noting the combination of the setting and Nicklaus design make it uniquely special. "Someone asked if this (Idaho Club) could host a tour event. The golf course? Yeah. Could the town handle 50,000 people? No."

The final plan for the course is to eventually have more than 420 homes on nearly 900 acres of the gated community. Lodges ranging from 1,800-3,400 square feet are selling for anywhere from \$700,000 to more than \$1 million. People wanting to build their own home are paying an average of \$500,000 just for the site. Each home comes with a membership to the club.

Brad Arnold, Director of Sales for The Idaho Club, says many of the prospective buyers are looking for second homes. Many of the clients are from California and Scottsdale, Ariz., and are looking for a place to spend much of their summer. He admits the allure of Sandpoint is a strong selling point.

"What differentiates this place is Sandpoint and Lake Pend Oreille," says Arnold, noting the club also sports a health club, spa, pool and hiking trails. "Once people get up here they fall in love with the lake, the four seasons, Schweitzer."

Despite the hefty membership fees, the course will still be available to the public, albeit at a yet-to-be-determined rate commensurate with a top-tier "resort course" -- which could mean anywhere from \$100-200 per round. Deprez says both Sandpoint and Clark Fork High Schools will still have carte blanche use of the course, and the public will most likely have access after 2 p.m.

After touring a few holes and suggesting the necessary alterations, Nicklaus met with nearly 200 invited guests and members at the new clubhouse. Then McCarron, a three-time PGA tour winner and club member, put on a golf clinic. Nicklaus plans to continue the site visit today, clearing the way for more progress as the club plans to have all of the grass seed planted by fall.

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