



Opening tee shot, late 1930s.

The Course

Golf on the Roof of the World

“The most successful course is one that will test the skill of the most advanced player, without discouraging the duffer, while adding to the enjoyment of both.”

—Stanley Thompson, golf course architect

When the official opening shot was hit at the Banff Springs Golf Course on July 15, 1911, the Canadian Rockies was a remote wilderness. Banff Avenue was a rough, unpaved trail with a boardwalk linking early businesses such as the Mount Royal Hotel and the King Edward Hotel. Beyond the main street were a smattering of residential streets and corrals owned by pioneering outfitters like the Brewster brothers, Tom Wilson, and “Wild” Bill Peyto. In the world of golf, Harry Vardon won his fifth British Open Championship in 1911, and famed courses such as Merion (Ardmore, Pennsylvania), National Golf Links (Southampton, New York), Interlachen (Edina, Minnesota), and Shawnee (Shawnee, Pennsylvania), also celebrated opening tee shots that year.

In 1883, one decade after the Montreal Golf Club, North America’s oldest

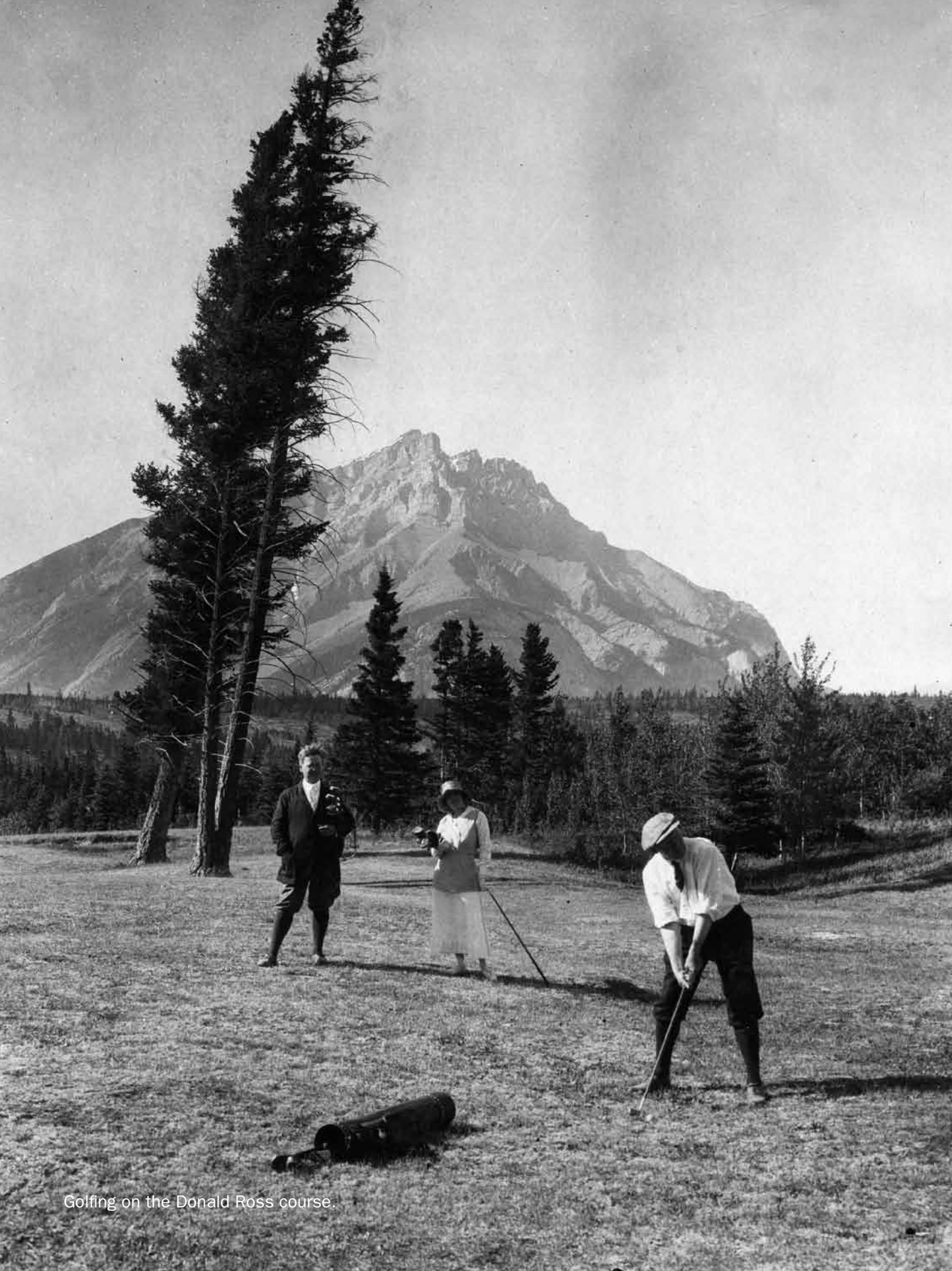
golf course, was opened by a group of Scottish immigrants, construction was well under way on rail line spanning Canada. It was during this period that the Bow Valley was flooded with Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) workers, three of which headed out in search of gold on a day off. Franklin McCabe and William and Thomas McCardell crossed the Bow River by raft and followed the distinct smell of sulphur to a subterranean pool of aqua-green warm water. The men had found not gold but something just as precious: a hot mineral spring that in time would attract wealthy customers from around the world. Word of the discovery soon got out, and the government encouraged visitors to visit the Cave and Basin mineral springs, as it was

an ongoing source of revenue to support the new railway. A 2,500-hectare (6,177-acre) reserve was established around the springs on November 25, 1885, and two years later, the reserve was expanded and renamed “Rocky Mountains Park.” The new park was primarily a business enterprise centred around the springs and catering to wealthy patrons of the railway, who mostly stayed at the Banff Springs Hotel, which, when it opened in 1888, was the world’s largest hotel. Enterprising locals soon realized the area’s potential and began opening

restaurants, offering guided hunting and boating trips, and developing manicured gardens. By 1910, Banff had grown to become Canada’s best-known tourist resort and was attracting visitors from around the world.



Banff Avenue, 1911



Golfing on the Donald Ross course.

of a layer of glacial clay laid over a sunken piece of wood; the boxes were very hard when dry but extremely greasy and slippery after a rain. At each tee box, there was a bin on a stand divided into two parts, one containing water and the other sand. The players would take some sand in their hands, wet it, and then build a small mound to act as a tee for their drives.

Descriptions of how the nine-hole course played are few, but one given in 1916 by club member Don Matheson provides an idea of its challenges. However, it may be a bit mystifying to the modern player given the terminology of the times:

The course is practically a triangle with the apex resting on the clubhouse and the other two points on Rundle Mountain and the River respectively. Thomson's best score is 32; but then he is a golfing machine, with a good deal more nerve than nerves. For instance, he has had the long hole (680 yards) in four, while the bogey is 6 and the par is 5; he has had the home hole in 2, while the par is 3 and so on. For the average good player 43 to 45 is a good score, while for the average player 48 is not to be sneered at. The course is not to the strong so much as to the strong mid-iron player, their mid-iron being potentially worth two brassies from the utilitarian point of view. The iron in the hands of the player who can save a stroke on the green with his mashie shot, is mightier than the driver and the baffle combined; and less conducive to the development of the sin of execration than a fozzle with a cleek in cuppy lie.

Ross's Revival

The opening of the Banff Springs Golf Course in 1911 coincided with the creation of the Dominion Parks Branch, a division of the Department of the Interior and the precursor of Parks Canada. The man appointed to head the branch was James Bernard Harkin, who was to play a crucial part in the history of both the golf course and club in the years ahead.

Harkin saw his role as having a dual purpose—protection and expansion of park lands as well as increased public use and economic development of the lands. According to Harkin, “National parks provide the chief means of bringing to Canada a stream of tourists and a stream of tourists’ gold,” while at the same time “give Canadians an opportunity to see incomparable scenery and enjoy unequalled opportunities of recreation under the best conditions.” While he saw the commercial side of the parks providing a real service and benefit to the people of Canada, he believed that their most important role was “helping to make Canadian people physically fit, mentally efficient, and morally elevated.” He called the parks “pleasure grounds,” wherein facilities would be provided to enable Canadians to obtain pleasure through play, by which he meant fresh air, exercise, and the exhilaration that comes from beautiful scenery and life lived close to nature.

The Course

After being appointed in 1911, Harkin made annual trips to Banff. In 1915 and 1916, he spent virtually the whole summer in the area engaged in setting up and supervising camps for “alien internees,” who were to perform labour on the roads and other park facilities during the war. Harkin was a golfer himself, and he was joined for part of the summer by his supervisor, deputy minister for the Department of the Interior, William Wallace Cory, who also enjoyed the game. They became familiar with the Banff links, a process in which they were ably assisted by Superintendent Clarke, a member of the Banff Springs Golf Club who had his eye on being its best player. The men discussed creating national playgrounds, and in his annual report for 1916, Clarke provided one of the means to realizing his goal:

The management of this course (Banff) has been taken over by the department and will be part of the administration for next year. There is ample room, through good country, for the extension of this nine-hole course to the full medal size of eighteen holes. It is hoped the department will, if possible, undertake this important work during the summer of 1917.

The events leading up to management being “taken over by the department” began with the CPR’s decision early in the 1916 season to increase the daily

green fee at the Banff Springs Golf Course from \$0.50 to \$1.00, but Harkin refused to approve the increase, leading to an angry letter from the CPR stating, “The cost of maintaining the Golf Links at Banff during the past three seasons has exceeded our receipts by twelve hundred and fifty six dollars...” There the matter rested until September 1916, when Cory met with Frederic L. Wanklyn,

DONALD ROSS COURSE, 1924

Hole 1	342 yards
Hole 2	457 yards
Hole 3	353 yards
Hole 4	455 yards
Hole 5	162 yards
Hole 6	375 yards
Hole 7	180 yards
Hole 8	502 yards
Hole 9	368 yards
Hole 10	383 yards
Hole 11	194 yards
Hole 12	424 yards
Hole 13	140 yards
Hole 14	398 yards
Hole 15	500 yards
Hole 16	403 yards
Hole 17	392 yards
Hole 18	374 yards

HOLES	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	TOTAL
YARDAGE	420	382	358	358	358	376	376	359	352	349	349	349	349	349	349	349	349	349	349
PAR	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	36
SCORE																			

A scorecard from the Thompson course.

The exclamation point of the brochure was the all-important information on green fees, which were stated as \$3.00 per day or per round, \$15.00 per week, \$50.00 per month, or \$75.00 per season.

The Great Depression

As the iron grip of the Great Depression tightened each year through the 1930s, the number of tourists arriving in Banff decreased markedly, and the CPR's return on its investment in building the Thompson course was failing to materialize. The decision to keep the green fees at the Banff Springs Golf Course relatively high for the times and concentrate on

Banff Golf Course was only the most elaborate of a number of print vehicles the company used to promote golf in Banff. All CPR advertising of resorts in the Rockies included a section on the course, and information provided to travel agents included specific facts on green fees and competitions. Even menu covers illustrated guests enjoying a game. A handsome, illustrated scorecard carrying the now famous slogan "Banff Springs Golf Course On The Roof Of The World" was also provided to each player to keep as a memento of his or her round.

While promotional activity to gain the attention of potential golfers was important, it was the product that the CPR could offer on the course that was its best attraction. When the two were combined, it was a recipe for success, and it is not surprising that this would become the company's main objective

those players with the resources to afford them undoubtedly meant that many potential golfers were turned away. The Banff Springs Golf Course moved out of the Great Depression with Bill Thomson still firmly at the helm as the golf professional and Casper McCullough responsible for course maintenance. Yet it continued to face financial challenges due to the slow rate of recovery on the

during the difficult days of the Great Depression. In the heyday of the 1920s, John Murray Gibbon, the CPR's brilliant general publicity agent, struck on the idea of providing special activities and events to attract tourists who might not otherwise visit the Canadian Rockies. In 1927, Gibbon began a Highland Gathering and Scottish Music Festival that included a week of traditional games, dancing, piping, and other cultural events. In fact, in 1928 he began utilizing the newly opened Devil's Cauldron hole in this event for the outdoor service, performed by the noted Scots Presbyterian minister Charles W. Gordon (Ralph Connor). The hole formed a natural amphitheatre, and Gordon was rowed out to a rock in the middle of the lake. He used this rock as his pulpit and would preach the Sunday service to some 500 adherents.

overall tourism scene. While 1936 saw a brief rally in tourists coming to Banff, it didn't last, and by 1939, visitation had barely reached the pre-Depression numbers of a decade earlier. The situation was made all the more complicated by the appearance of the long-predicted competitor in the form of a government-operated course.

Cascade Golf and Country Club

In 1938, Roy Gibson, director of the Lands, Parks, and Forest Branch, announced that the government was developing a golf course at the foot of Cascade Mountain, on a site that originally been set aside as a landing field. Green fees were to be considerably less than those at the Banff Springs—a season pass was \$5 for men, \$3 for women, and \$2 for juniors; an 18-hole green fee was to be \$0.35, a half-monthly pass \$2.75, and a weekly pass \$1.75. Built with mostly volunteer labour, the nine-hole course was officially opened on May 14, 1939, by park superintendent P.J. Jennings.

At a meeting held on April 14, 1939, the Cascade Golf and Country Club was created with W.H. Cook as president, Joe Woodworth as vice-president, Stan Johnson as secretary, and Jock McCowan Jr. as treasurer. Although the Cascade Golf Course had never been used as a landing field, the club foresaw that it might and ruled that "a member has to immediately leave the runway upon the approach of any aeroplane desiring to land" and that golfers "shall have no claim for damages whatsoever, which may be sustained from aeroplanes."

The Cascade course immediately proved popular, claiming some 120 members by the end of July

and reporting 500 visitors. Among its most loyal supporters were the local teenagers, such as Wally Anderson, who made good money as caddies at the Banff Springs Golf Course but could not afford to play it. They were often seen riding their bikes with their clubs slung over their shoulders, as they would head out to the Cascade course for a round after school. Trophies for competitions were soon put up by local companies; the men's championship was sponsored by The Banff Cafe and the ladies' by Unwin's Hardware.

In 1946, the government announced that the Cascade golf course was being converted back to a landing field. Cascade club members expressed their concern, but officials maintained that it had always been the understanding that when it was needed again, the land would be returned to the government.



Wally Anderson's Cascade Golf and Country Club membership card from 1939.

CASPER MCCULLOUGH (1906–1975)

Casper McCullough was born in Bocabec, New Brunswick, in 1906. As a young man, he worked on the CPR's Algonquin course at St. Andrew's. In the 1920s, he attended the Massachusetts State College during the winter to study turf agronomy and then heard of the plan to have Stanley Thompson design and build a new course at the Banff Springs. He came west with Thompson in 1927 to work on the project and, due to his increasing abilities, eventually became construction foreman. While continuing his winter education in Massachusetts, he worked in Banff for several summers after the course's completion, and upon graduation in 1933, he was offered the job of general superintendent at the Banff Springs Golf Course. The CPR advertised the Banff Springs Golf Course widely as the best on the continent. McCullough, who had already proven himself as a perfectionist when it came to turf maintenance, was the ideal choice to fulfill the promise, and the appointment marked the beginning of his leaving an indelible mark on the course and its history over the next four decades.