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BACKSWING

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Springs club 100 years old

BANFF'S BIG BASH



COURTESY OF BANFF SPRINGS GOLF CLUB

WES GILBERTSON
Calgary Sun

Shooting your age remains one of golf's greatest achievements, and members of the Banff Springs Golf Club will have plenty of leeway this week.

Wednesday marks the 100th anniversary of the club, with government documents showing an organizational meeting was held July 13,

1911, at Banff Springs Hotel.

The current members will tee it up for a centenary tournament Wednesday to celebrate a rich history that dates back to even before Stanley Thompson arrived in the shadow of the Rockies to sculpt the now-famous layout.

"We're all very proud of the club and the history," said Andrew Hempstead, a club member and publisher of

Banff Springs Golf Club: Celebrating 100 Years. "It brings everyone in town together that golfs."

"I know there are other clubs that are as old as this, but it's pretty cool in a small town like Banff."

Starting in 1911, male residents coughed up \$15 to belong to the club, with females securing a membership for \$5 and out-of-town-ers paying \$10.

Their original nine-hole course was renovated by legendary architect Donald Ross in 1924 but lasted only a few years before Thompson tore it up and started construction of the first layout in the world with a price-tag of more than \$1 million.

Thompson's track is still winning awards, and there's no doubt members are still proud to call it their home course.

"When you play at a golf club like this, sometimes you'll just go down and play and you get paired up with people from literally all over the world," said Banff Springs club president Rick Erickson.

"And the one thing we seem to get told all the time is, 'You don't know how lucky you are.' And it's true. It's really a beautiful place, and I think the bulk of our membership love being

ambassadors, whether it's here or at other courses.

"People will say, 'Oh, I've played that online,' or 'I played Banff Springs in a game,' and 'I've always wanted to play it.' So yeah, there's a lot of pride there."

And a lot of history, too.

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BACKSWING

Step back into golf history



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And you thought knocking a golf ball into a four-inch hole was a challenge?

Try finding the sweet spot on a brassie, the weapon of choice before everybody started unleashing tee-shots with watermelon-sized drivers.

After an eye-opening round with hickory-shafted clubs as part of the Heritage Experience at historic Fairmont Banff Springs, I'd argue that particular portion of the golf club is a relatively recent development.

"With these clubs, its not about pin-seeking," said Steven Young, the director of golf at Banff Springs. "It's about survival"

And then, about a dozen holes and countless shanks later, this assurance ...

"You'll get the new clubs out next game, and you'll feel like you're a hero."

Long before they began building golf clubs with graphite shafts or 'Tiger-proofing' some of the world's most beloved layouts, the legends of the links — from Bobby Jones to Sam Snead to Babe Didrikson Zaharias — were making birdies with hickory-shafted clubs in their hands. Take it from me, it's not easy.

When Banff Springs hosted the 2006 Telus World Skins Game (the picturesque course will welcome the unique event for the second time from July



Even back in the day, the Devil's Cauldron at the Banff Springs Golf Club was a tough, yet beautiful, test.

COURTESY OF BANFF SPRINGS GOLF CLUB

25-26), the pros selected hickory-shafted clubs to challenge the world-famous fourth hole, affectionately known as the Devil's Cauldron.

Sergio Garcia nearly carded an ace on the 192-yard assignment.

Jack Nicklaus knocked his shot on the green and then confessed that he'd had a tough time choosing the right club, erring on the side of caution and then purposely hitting it off the toe to get the right distance.

And John Daly? After missing the mark with his attempt, golf's bad boy quipped that using a hickory-shafted club was "as bad as getting back

together with an ex-wife."

With this week marking the 100-year anniversary of golf in Banff National Park, the Heritage Experience gives birdie-hunters an understanding of what it was like to fall in love with the game almost a century ago.

Banff Springs' assortment of hickory-shafted clubs — your bag will include a brassie, a spoon, a jigger, a mashie, a niblick and a couple of others — are replicas of sticks from the late-1920s, when Stanley Thompson scrapped the old course in the shadow of the Rockies and sculpted the existing layout.

The Heritage Experience

also includes a controlled-flight golf ball, similar to the old gutta-percha model. With the help of a caddie in traditional knickers, you'll even play from the original tee-boxes, proof that Thompson's award-winning work has stood the test of time.

As we walked up No. 15, the original starting hole at Banff Springs before the course was re-routed in 1989, Young pointed out a lonely sand-trap about 75 yards from the green, saying "nobody would put a bunker there anymore."

Moments later, I was grabbing my mashie niblick and a rake and sizing up an intimidating bunker shot.

"When you play the course now, some of the bunkering all of a sudden has a different feel," Young said. "You might bomb a TaylorMade R11 40 yards over a bunker, but when you're hitting a hickory brassie, which is the equivalent of a 2 1/2 wood, if you don't hit it right, it doesn't quite have the same forgiveness and those bunkers come a lot more into play."

"We were really cautious that the experience would replicate it, and when you look back and knew that the course record was 78 and you go out there and shoot an 82 and feel like you just aced the course, it gives you an appre-

ciation for the people that played in the footsteps before us at this course."

It's an experience, alright.

And after spending four hours trying to bash a brassie, you likely won't regret shelling out a few hundred bucks for the latest, greatest golf club technology.

"It's a step back in time," Young said. "It's not something you do every day. It's kind of hard to go backwards, right? A lot of people like to move forward with a more modern ball and a modern club, but it is a fun game to play."

Just not necessarily an easy one.



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