



Donald Ross Society's Featured Club – Inverness Club

INVERNESS RETURNS TO ITS DONALD ROSS ROOTS

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Since 1903 much of the land on the western edge of Toledo, Ohio belonging to the Inverness Club has been used for golf. This land with its valleys and streams (including the Inverness Brook or Inner-Ness) has challenged golfers of every level. For the last 115 years designers have embraced these natural features to create a course worthy of hosting six professional major tournaments and champion golfers from Bobby Jones and Harry Vardon to Ben Hogan, Jack Nicklaus, and recently Jordan Spieth.

The first Inverness Club layout was nine holes designed by prominent golfer Bernard Nichols, likely with assistance from early club member and first course superintendent W. J. Rockefeller. Club lore suggests that Nichols' original routing had only eight holes by accident. The oversight was corrected by adding a short par three along the ridge parallel to today's 18th fairway. This hole possibly became the 13th in Donald Ross' design a decade later. A drawing from 1911 shows that early in the club's second decade more holes were added. However, few details exist of these holes or the Nichols nine.

The championship course of today began to develop in 1916 when the club hired the noted golf course architect Donald Ross to lay out 18 holes. Many of the holes still being played were created at this time. Even today the par four sixth and seventh (originally Ross' fourth and fifth) are considered two of the best anywhere in golf. Ross' design first saw significant tournament play for the 1919 Ohio Open which led to club founder S. P. Jermain proudly landing the 1920 National Open.

As decades passed, other prominent architects modified Ross' design. A. W. Tillinghast added yardage, made changes to bunkers, and revised greens prior to the 1931 National Open. In the mid 1950s Dick Wilson also added yardage, while renovating and removing bunkers. He said, "Anyone who changes this Rembrandt is crazy." Wilson's work stretched the course to nearly 7,000 yards for the 1957 National Open. Neither Tillinghast nor Wilson changed Ross' routing.

In preparation for the 1979 U.S. Open, George Fazio and his nephew Tom were commissioned solely to reduce slope on the 17th green. However, before the tournament was played, they had also made major changes to the front nine to

reduce spectator congestion. Their work resulted in four new holes and the first routing change to Ross' layout. These Fazio holes were played through 2017.

Current club member and noted architect Arthur Hills has contributed to the Inverness design since the 1980s. Prior to the 1986 PGA Championship he refined the Fazio holes, especially the par four fifth by removing a pond near the green. Continuing with the lead-up to the 1993 PGA Championship and until recently, he has directed bunker renovation, added yardage and built new tees.

About 100 years after Donald Ross laid out Inverness' first championship 18 holes, the club embarked on a major project to "return Inverness to its Donald Ross roots." Andrew Green led the design work. By late 2017, many trees had been removed and the Fazio holes were eliminated. A new routing with three new holes was in place, each with Ross design cues. Similar holes to Ross' par three eighth and 13th were back in the routing as the third and fifth holes. Much of the new par four fourth, with its green complex typical of Ross, still plays along the fairway of the Fazio fifth, but in the opposite direction. Finally, a new green and surrounds similar to Ross' sixth mark the end of the previously existing, but now realigned, par five eighth. In addition to the new holes, Green rebuilt or repositioned all existing bunkers while adding and deleting others. The completed project is a course representative of Donald Ross' style and challenging to today's most skilled players.

The series of images on the pages that follow illustrate the major elements of Andrew Green's work.

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Essential to Green's project was the re-creation of the two lost Ross par threes since the Fazio's work. Ross' 210 yard par three eighth (as it looked in 1931) has been rebuilt and plays as the 274 yard third (bottom).



Possibly dating from Nichols' design in the early 1900s, Ross' 146 yard par three 13th in 1931 is now the 172 yard fifth.



Today irregular mounds typical of Ross have replaced the bunkers that formally surrounded the par four 10th.



Green increased the size of the putting surface on a number of Ross' holes to provide additional pin placements. An example is the par three 12th.



Tree removal to reflect Ross' era and improve turf health was a key part of Green's project. The approach to the par four 14th is shown here.



Before (top) and after pictures of the approach to the 17th illustrate Ross-like bunkering.



Photographs of the par four 18th show improvement in bunker visibility typical of the entire project.