

FEATURED ARTICLE

Life is Simple at **The Prairie Club** . . . and Nearly Impossible to Describe

Valentine, Nebraska, a place where the deer and the antelope (and, now, a few lucky golfers) play.

BY MARK PAZDUR, PUBLISHER

VALENTINE, NEBRASKA: The prairie of Nebraska is legendary. It's a storied place of flatland, rolling hills, Sioux Indians, wind-blown seas of grass, sandhills, cowboys, wildlife, and historic tales of the Wild West. Now, add The Prairie Club to the lore of the Nebraska sandhills.

I flew from L.A. to Denver and drove to Valentine, Nebraska (pop. 2,700), where General Manager Tyler Swedberg and his dog Brutus met me. Dressed in jeans, boots and cowboy hat, Tyler isn't your typical club manager. We hopped into his Ford F-350 Super Duty for the scenic 17-mile rumble through the sandhills to the Club. On all sides, as far as the eye could see, was rolling prairie.

"It's different out here," said Swedberg. "Life is simple. This is the place to enjoy our big sky, our wildlife, over 100 species of birds—and now, some real fine golf."



About five miles from the club we pass the one-room Tioga-Burge schoolhouse, a tidy green-roofed school that was used for decades up until the early 1990s. I said to Tyler's dog Brutus, "Toto, we're not in L.A. anymore."

Paul Schock, developer of The Prairie Club, conceives it to be a place as pure as the game of golf itself. His vision is to offer an exceptional and accessible experience, an invitation to America's golfers to make a life-changing pilgrimage to the prairie.

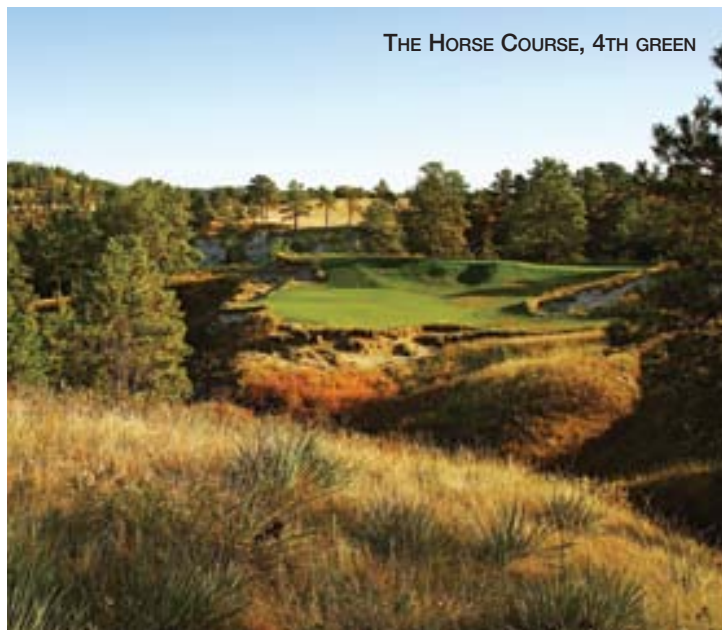
AS PURE AS GOLF GETS

Trying to describe this special place, and what it's doing way out here, may be one of my greatest editorial challenges. A visit with founder Paul Schock helped me get my head around it.

“I’ve been around golf my whole life,” said Schock. “I guess you can say it is in my blood. I’m a member at the Sand Hills Golf Club and for years we’ve had a waiting list. The industry, as a whole, is overbuilt in good golf courses but not in great golf courses. And most of the great golf courses are not available to most avid golfers. For example, 86 of the top 100 courses are private. I wanted to tap into that demand and create an exceptional experience that is available to every avid golfer.”

THREE DISTINCT COURSES

When we turned into the property, we drove onto a picturesque mile-long gravel road where three beautiful golf courses materialized out of the rolling terrain: The Dunes, The Pines, and The Horse. The golf courses gently emerge from a sea of grama grass, buffalo grass, little bluestem grass and centuries-old prairie grass.



THE HORSE COURSE, 4TH GREEN

“The essence of the game, after all, is to escape the rigors of life for at least four hours,” Schock declared emphatically. “We’ve put our hearts and souls into creating a place that is all about pure escape, pure nature, and pure golf.”

THE DUNES COURSE, designed by Tom Lehman, is set among the chop of time, wind, and water that has impacted the sand dunes. It provides 360-degree views of the horizon, contains massive sandhills, wind-blown rolling seascapes of prairie grass, and immense blowout bunkers.

“The land has history,” said Rick Fretland, director of golf. “While preparing to shape the tee box on the 5th hole, we discovered a homestead foundation dating back to the 1800s. We moved the tee box to protect the site. When you stand and look out from the 5th tee, you’ll know why they decided to settle here.”

THE PINES COURSE, designed by Graham Marsh, is set on the rim of the Snake River Canyon and plays in-and-out of a ponderosa pine forest, which offers protection from the wind and sun. It’s hard to believe that there are two courses, this different, happily coexisting on the same property.

THE HORSE COURSE (a short course) was designed by Gil Hanse. Unlike a typical par-3 golf course, The Horse will have no tee boxes, only expansive fairways and 10 greens. The concept is that the winner of the previous hole—like the basketball game of ‘horse’—gets to choose the stance, lie, shot, and green for the next hole. “The Horse Course,” said Mark Amundson, director of operations, “will offer unique challenges and will be a lot of fun for golfers of all abilities.”



THE DUNES COURSE, 1ST FAIRWAY

THE PINES COURSE, 13TH HOLE



UNDISTURBED HOLES OF GOLF
Like the great links courses of the world that never forgot their sheep pasture upbringing, The Prairie Club was created to leave well enough alone. “These sandhills were created by a glacier that receded about 20,000 years ago,” explained Swedberg, “We’re fortunate that these courses were created, for the most part, well before the bulldozer.

“You can’t get better soil composi-

tion than the Sandhills of Nebraska for a golf course. We are managing the grow-in right now and by May of next year, all three courses and our Lodge will be open and fully operational.”

The soul-cleansing elements of sky, wind, and prairie were not lost on me as the day progressed. Even the water conspired to add to the pure experience. The sand is a natural filter for the ground water and you can drink it right out of the ground.

OUR THREE CHALLENGING, FUN-TO-PLAY GOLF COURSES AND OUR CANYON RIM LODGE WILL OPEN BY MAY OF 2010. THE GOLF COURSES HAVE LEFT THE LAND RELATIVELY UNCHANGED. YOU, ON THE OTHER HAND, MAY NEVER BE THE SAME.” — PAUL SCHOCK, FOUNDER



A RENDERING OF THE COMFORTABLY APPOINTED PRAIRIE CLUB LODGE THAT SITS ON THE RIM OF THE SNAKE RIVER CANYON.

PLANNING YOUR PILGRIMAGE

If you are a lover of the game of golf, you will find kindred spirits here at The Prairie Club. It is a place that is as pure of heart as it is pure of purpose.

“We have created a membership plan that is a smart choice,” said Schock, “You and your guests will enjoy the exclusive benefits of being a member. At the same time, we are reserving 18 holes each day for public play, so we are able to welcome any avid golfer who makes the pilgrimage.”

“After a full day of golf and a hearty steak dinner of Nebraska corn-fed beef,” says The Prairie Club brochure “you will drift off to sleep under the thick blanket of darkness and stars that is the Nebraska Sandhills night.”

But as for me, it was time to return to L.A., by way of airports and taxis, a little bit different person than when I had left. Back home, I dumped a little sand and prairie grass seeds out of my shoe, and smiled.

For more information, you may phone (888) 402-1101 or visit their web site at theprairieclub.com.