

COORE & CRENSHAW

GOLF COURSE ARCHITECTS

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From the Desk of Bill Coore and Ben Crenshaw

Dear Pinehurst Member and Guest,

It has been our pleasure since February 2010 to embark on an important renovation project on Pinehurst No. 2. You will see some of these efforts as you play No. 2, and we want to take this opportunity to explain the background, goals and elements of this project.

Both of us have known and revered the No. 2 course for many years – Bill having played it in his youth growing up in Davidson County and as a golfer at Wake Forest University, and Ben having played it as a young professional on the PGA Tour in the 1970s. We have deep admiration for Donald Ross, his design style and how those elements and the spirit of golf are manifested in this wonderful golf course. In our golf course design careers, we have attempted to build golf courses that make the best use of the natural terrain with minimal earth-moving; that challenge the player's mind in addition to his golf skills; and that are fun to play without being riddled with harsh hazards that exact a painful toll on a golfer if he's having a bad day. No. 2 is certainly on a pedestal in those regards.

If you look at old photographs of No. 2 – any taken from the 1930s through the 1960s – you'll see that the course featured green tees, fairways and putting surfaces, and beyond that, the perimeters of the course were hard-pan sand, wire grass and pine forests. These comments from Arnold Palmer and Harvie Ward, who played frequently at Pinehurst during their college days in the 1940s, provide a good image of the course:

“Whenever you missed the fairway, you played out of wire grass and sand,” said Ward, the 1948 North and South Amateur winner. “If you were lucky, you could hit the ball again. The course played fast. If you hit it off-line, the ball would roll and roll.”

“I loved the way the ball went straight from the fairway into the wire grass and pine trees,” added Palmer.

The reason for this look was that the course had a single-line irrigation system that ran up the center of every fairway. The sprinklers threw water about 70 feet in every direction – the areas that got water were “fairway,” and the expanses beyond were the natural areas that could afford any number of lies – from good ones to unplayable ones.

While Pinehurst No. 2 has been the site of two successful U.S. Opens in recent years, the feeling among many in golf was that No. 2 had simply become too encumbered with lush green grass and that the fairways had become too narrow. Bunkers were no longer accessible because balls would be trapped in four inches of thick rough before reaching the hazard. There was no width to play, no room to work the magic angles that were such a part of Ross's strategic concepts in designing the course. You knew if you missed a fairway your only option was to hack the ball out of the thick rough; gone was the element of surprise and whether you might draw a good lie on the firm sand or perhaps be stuck behind a tuft of wire grass or a patch of pine straw.

Thus the decision was made to restore much of that essential character to No. 2. We were given the high honor by officials at Pinehurst to coordinate this project. The lengths of the holes and the greens are remaining essentially the same. What will be different is that the fairways will be returned to their original dimensions and the areas beyond them will evolve back into their natural state.

As you make your way around No. 2, you'll see some areas that have been stripped of Bermuda grass and will be returned to a natural state of hard-pan sand and wire grass. You'll see some other areas of the old roughs that are thinning and browning; this is where we have simply turned off the water. This is not a lack of maintenance attention or budget. It is by design and it's part of the master plan.

The result in a year or two – this is a process not easily contained on a time-line – will be a course with more texture and contrast, that will have no sharp edges and no straight lines. We believe it will look as if Donald Ross found a great piece of gently undulating ground and simply “laid” a golf course on top of it. The course will play more as it was originally intended—firm and fast and maintained with significantly less water than before. The fairways will actually be wider than before, but the overall footprint of the course will have significantly less maintained turf.

Donald Ross is not alive and can't tell us what to do. All we can do is use our understanding of this golf course and our understanding through research of what it was like. We are fortunate to have excellent aerial and ground photography from the 1930s and '40s on which to base our decisions. We will take all of this perspective and try to come closer to what it once was. It's an honor to be here and we appreciate your patience as we work to restore one of the true treasures in the game of golf.

Cordially,



Bill Coore



Ben Crenshaw