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Best New Upscale Public

America's Best New Courses of 2005



Best New Upscale Public

The Wilderness at Fortune Bay: Are you game enough to cut the corner? The 465-yard 11th weaves through Minnesota's northwoods and around massive bunkers.

Photo: Stephen Szurlej

By Ron Whitten

Golf Digest
January 2006



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Double Down

When Jeff Brauer was hired by the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa to design a layout adjacent to their Fortune Bay Resort Casino in northern Minnesota, he figured the only way to lure gamblers away from gaming tables was to offer them the equivalent on the golf course.

So the opening hole at **The Wilderness at Fortune Bay**, America's Best New Upscale Public Course of 2005, is a 649-yard par 5, with two distinct fairways off the tee, separated by ledge

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rock, two more fairways for second shots and a bell-shape green that looks big but plays small. The uphill, 410-yard fourth also offers two distinct routes, one a straightaway, where the green will be blind on the next shot. The alternative is to the right, over a diagonal rock ledge to a perched fairway, where you can get a view of the green.

It's like that for the entire round at The Wilderness, where options outnumber rock outcroppings, and there are outcroppings galore: More than \$1 million was spent dynamiting a mammoth granite ridge to carve out half the holes.

The Wilderness is as beautiful as it is cunning. Its northwoods setting is a pristine palette of red pine, white pine, spruce and cedar, and visible wildlife commonly includes ospreys, herons, loons and even the occasional moose.

Adding to its allure is its location adjacent to Lake Vermilion, perhaps the prettiest of the 10,000-plus in this state, with 3,013 miles of shoreline and 365 islands in its basin. It's a shame only one hole of The Wilderness could be placed along the lake bank, but what a hole it is. The 340-yard 13th curves to the left along a lake cove, forcing golfers to bite off what they dare from the tee. The carry directly across the water is 242 yards from the back tee and 317 to the center of the green. It can mean death or glory in a singular swing of a driver, or a namby-pamby iron to acres of dry land off to the right. The 13th at The Wilderness is the ultimate casino golf hole, posing that most fundamental of all questions: Did you come all this way to play safe?

Second-place Mattaponi Springs Golf Club in Ruther Glen, Va., midway between Fredericksburg and Richmond, is a bit of déjà vu. Like the private Canyata, it's another Bob Lohmann design, again with the assistance of former associate Mike Benkusky. Like Canyata, it's pure golf, without housing, constructed by its owner, patent attorney Jim Oliff, who bought equipment and took his time--six years, in fact--to construct, irrigate and grass the course and edge a couple of prominent water hazards with walls of stack boulders. Unlike Canyata, Mattaponi Springs is a daily-fee course open to all, and every hole is framed by dense stands of hardwoods or pines. This is Lohmann's first East Coast design, and it's a grand debut.

Best New Upscale Public

* *Walking allowed anytime.*

1. The Wilderness at Fortune Bay

Tower, Minn.

7,010 yards, par 72.*

\$86 includes cart.

Jeff Brauer, designer.

800-555-1714.



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Buy a link here

thewildernessgolf.com

- [Read Whitten's Course Critic Review.](#)
- **Web exclusive:** [View more photos of this course.](#)

2. Mattaponi Springs G.C.

Ruther Glen, Va.

6,937 yards, par 72.*

\$74 (\$90 with cart).

Bob Lohmann and Mike Benkusky.

804-633-7888.

mattaponisprings.com

3. Marquette G.C. (Greywalls Cse.)

Marquette, Mich.

6,828 yards, par 70.*

\$125 includes cart.

Mike DeVries.

906-225-0721.

marquettegolfclub.com

4. Old Greenwood

Truckee, Calif.

7,518 yards, par 72.*

\$170 includes cart.

Jack Nicklaus.

530-550-7010.

oldgreenwood.com

5. Lakota Canyon Ranch G.C.

New Castle, Colo.

7,111 yards, par 72.*

\$85 includes cart.

Jim Engh.

970-984-9700.

lakotacanyonranch.com

6. May River G.C.

Bluffton, S.C.

7,171 yards, par 72.*

\$240 includes cart.

Jack Nicklaus.

843-706-6580.

palmettbluffresort.com

7. Lake of Isles G.C. (North Cse.)

North Stonington, Conn.

7,252 yards, par 72.*

\$195 includes cart.

Rees Jones.

888-475-3746.

lakeofisles.com

- [Read Whitten's Course Critic Review.](#)

8. Poplar Grove G.C.

Amherst, Va.

7,059 yards, par 72.

\$65 includes cart.
Ed Carton with Sam Snead
434-946-9933.

poplargrovegolf.com

9. Laughlin Ranch G.C.

Bullhead City, Ariz.
7,155 yards, par 72.
\$135 includes cart.
David Druzisky.
928-754-1243.

laughlinranch.com

10. Reunion Resort & Club (Independence Cse.)

Reunion, Fla.
7,152 yards, par 72.
\$150 includes cart.
Tom Watson and Bob Gibbons.
407-662-1100.

reunionresort.com



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