



Around the Bend

By Patrick Jones

Serpentine-like bends in the Chattahoochee River as it winds near Roswell cut out a prominent horseshoe-shaped piece of property on its northern banks. This prime piece of water's-edge real estate once hosted the Atlanta Steeplechase until an even better use – a golf course – was envisioned. Architect Joe Lee, whose creations include layouts such as Palm Beach (Fla.) National, and numerous courses across Georgia such as Big Canoe, Bent Tree, Canongate and Callaway Gardens, carved out 18 holes at the aptly named Horseshoe Bend Country Club in 1974.

Located off Holcomb Bridge Road between Georgia 400 and Peachtree

Horseshoe Bend Country Club
2100 Steeplechase Lane
Roswell, Georgia
770.992.2310
www.horseshoebendcc.com

Industrial Boulevard, Horseshoe Bend was one of North Atlanta's most prestigious destinations in its formative years. The 6,700-yard course hosted a trio of PGA Champions Tour events with winners including Bob Charles and Bruce Crampton.

The *Atlanta Journal-Constitution* selected Horseshoe Bend's ninth hole, a 462-yard par 4, among the best 18 holes in Georgia. Nos. 5, 6, 7 and 13 are among the holes that provide up-close views of the Chattahoochee's swirling waters after they spill out of the Lake Lanier reservoir upstream.

In the 1980s, an up-and-coming lefty golfer named Phil Mickelson was a three-time winner of the American Junior Golf Association's Tournament of Champions while

it was being hosted at Horseshoe Bend Country Club. Another promising amateur, Tiger Woods, also competed in AJGA events at the Roswell club.

Horseshoe Bend annually hosted the AT&T Challenge Invitational Tennis Tournament with world-class players like Andre Agassi competing on its 16 courts.

In 1999, on the golf course's 25th anniversary, Horseshoe Bend brought in Bill Boswell to redesign the original Lee design. Along with the course rework, additional updates to the golf facility included a new putting green and driving range renovations. A short-game area was added to the club's practice facilities in 2002.

Club management group Regent Golf, led by partners Steve Paris, Darrell van Ligten and Anthony Mullins, took over day-to-day operations of Horseshoe Bend Country Club in November 2008 with the mission to maintain, and improve on, the heritage of Horseshoe Bend's course quality and levels of service.

Paris mentioned the implementation of what he called "reverse maintenance practices" at Horseshoe Bend to assure that members experience top playing conditions.

"Most members play on the weekends," says Paris. "The course needs to be in prime shape on Saturdays and Sundays. Our process is to assure that the course is better on the weekends than it is during the weekdays. You don't want your maintenance crew to do all their work on Monday through Friday and then not be around on the weekends except to mow greens and cut cups. We make sure bunkers are being taken care of on the weekends. Our schedule of maintenance practices are reversed from most courses. Most close on Monday and the course looks best on Tuesday than it does the rest of the week. We make sure the course looks great at 3 p.m. on Sunday."

Along with Horseshoe Bend, Regent Golf also manages courses in destinations ranging from California to Arizona to South Carolina. Paris has particular interest in the ongoing success at Horseshoe Bend. He has been a club member since 1990.

Regent has overhauled the pro shop, brought in new vendors, upgraded food services and renovated three swimming pools. The changes were the result of a face-to-face meeting attended by more than 250 members and through ongoing membership surveys. The Horseshoe Bend residential community contains approximately 1,350 homes that range in price from the high \$300,000s up to approximately \$1.5 million.

Andreas Boberg serves as the club's head golf professional. His previous experience includes local stints at nearby Country Club of the South and the Atlanta Athletic Club.

Horseshoe Bend features a traditional layout of a pair of par 3s and a par 5 on each nine. All par 5s are "very difficult to get to in two (shots)," says Paris. The course opens with a par 5 and closes with another. No. 18 is a downhill 508-yard finisher that requires an approach over a lake. "It is a great risk-reward closing hole," says Paris. "A lot of tournaments have been won or lost on that bad boy."

Another par 5, No. 5, hugs the Chattahoochee's banks. The 532-yarder is ranked the No. 1 handicap hole for its combination of length, layout and loss of focus (watching the river run). "You have to absolutely pound one out there on this hole to have a chance to go at the green," says Paris. No. 13, the first par 5 on the back side, runs alongside the river as well and provides similar challenges.

Paris called No. 2, a 156-yard par 3, the signature hole at Horseshoe Bend. It features a two-tiered green protected by a bunker on the left side. More precision is required on this hole than just hitting the green. "If the pin is on the upper deck and you are on the lower deck, you have real troubles. Same goes the other way. You are hitting an 8- or 9-iron if the pin is down low, but you are hitting a 5- or 6-iron if the pin is up top."

No. 11 is another relatively short par 3, playing to 146 tees. The remaining two par 3s reach past the 200-yard mark.

"Generally speaking, people think of Horseshoe Bend as a challenging, great track," says Paris. "It only plays in the 6,700-yard range but the slope is 138." There are preliminary discussions to add an additional 150 yards or so in the next couple of years by moving back selected tee boxes, according to Paris.

"Some golfers think they are going to come out here and shoot a low number (due to the course being less than 7,000 yards), but most of the time they don't," says Paris. "There is a lot of risk-reward built into this course." ■

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