

Shennecossett Golf Course: A Donald Ross gem down by the Sound

Of all the noted golf course architects, none elicits as much fascination and wonder as the celebrated Scottish designer Donald Ross.

Each hole of a Ross creation poses a new difficulty, and each hole is built so that no land is wasted. To play a Ross layout requires the utmost in concentration and focus.

In Connecticut, Donald Ross is the designer of five golf courses, but only one is fully open to public play. And that course is Shennecossett Golf Course in the seaside town of Groton.

Since 1898, golfers have been coming to Shennecossett to enjoy the challenge of the legendary design as well as the stunning views of Long Island Sound and the Thames River. This 18-hole championship layout is reminiscent of the great links-style courses of the British Isles.

While the magnificent scenery is worth the experience alone, the Donald Ross signature is

what Shennecossett is all about.

Perhaps no other hole typifies the challenge of a Ross design as the par-3, 208-yard 4th hole. From the tee box, the mounded green rises at the top of a gradual slope, requiring precision to hold this difficult landing surface. Miss left or right, and the ball will fall sharply away from the green, leaving an even more difficult chip or pitch.

The par-4, 425-yard 10th hole is another classic Ross test. From a tee box situated across Plant Street, the options are few. Hit right, and you will land on a hillside occupied by tall fescue. A right-to-left drive runs the risk of running hard down a left-leaning slope into thick rough and yet more fescue. And when you are ready to line up your approach, the challenge is to land your ball on an elevated, undulating green with bunkers guarding all around.

In the late 1990s, a land swap with the sprawling Pfizer complex led to the creation of



three new holes along the Thames River. One of them, the par-4, 400-yard 16th hole, is incomparable to any in the entire state.

This dogleg-left begins tucked away in a natural habitat that is artificially built up by bridges and platforms. Only a precise drive will avoid heavy rough down the left side and a mounded tree line on the right. Then, as you approach your ball in the fairway, the true experience of Shennecossett unfolds.

To the left is Long Island Sound and in the distance (on a clear day) the eastern tip of Long Island. If that's not enough, straight ahead and just a short chip shot from the back of the green is the Thames River where it merges with the Sound. Distractions – though pleasant – are many, from the mammoth ferries steaming up and down the river to the stately schooners and sloops with their sails tightly trimmed.

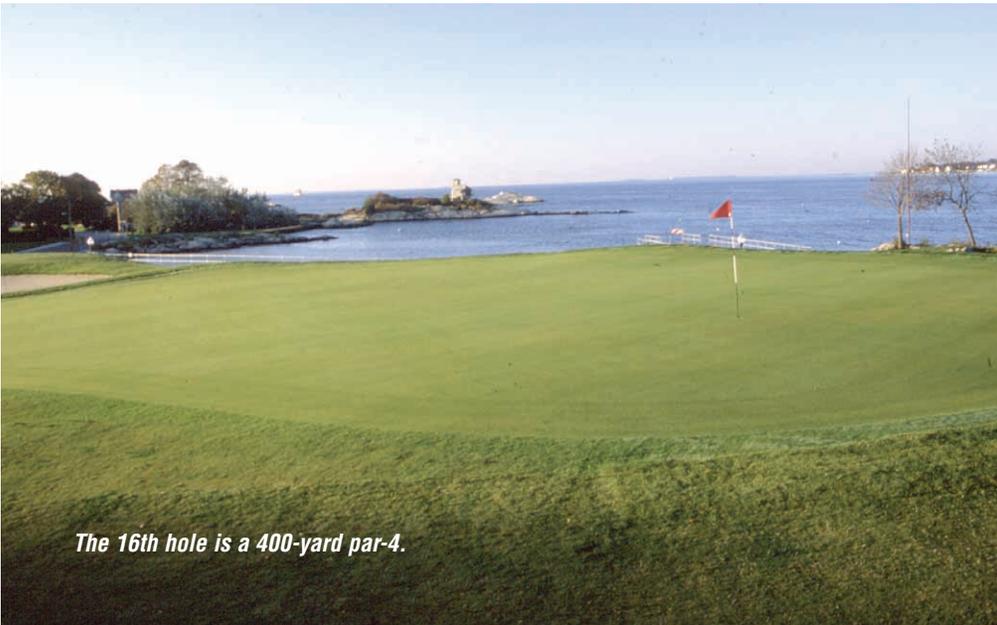
Oh, yes, back to the golf.

Shennecossett clearly has the look and feel of a links-style course. Breezes off the Sound are typical throughout the year, and the fairways are lined with native grasses that deceptively give the course an image of openness. The course is

certified by the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program for golf courses.

The course plays 6,562 yards from the back tees and a par 71. But it's the intelligent design of the master designer that gives Shennecossett its teeth. Knowing the best place in the fairway from where to make your approach is paramount, and understanding the complexities of the greens is equally vital.

Indeed, the course is the creation of a legendary golf architect, whose influence is everywhere. Yet, there is one element that even Ross could not control that makes Shennecossett special for another reason: Its seaside location allows golfers to enjoy Shennecossett all year long. 🌊



The 16th hole is a 400-yard par-4.

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