

Norman Inspects Idaho's Teton Rim

TETONIA - As one of the great golfers of his generation, Greg Norman never really had a reason to come to Idaho.

The state doesn't host major tour events, nor does it produce fine wines - another specialty of the Australian. But the River Rim Ranch gave the former world No. 1 golfer a reason to visit east Idaho, enough for three trips this year. And he'll most definitely be back soon.

Norman was seven miles west of Teton on Wednesday to break ground on his next golf course, his eighth currently in development in the United States. The Teton Rim Golf Club is scheduled to open in the spring of 2010, more than likely to a host of eager Idahoans searching for a pro-level course in the state. Which is, essentially, what the River Rim Ranch's developers asked Norman to create.

"They asked us to create something here that's not happened here before," Norman said during a news conference at the ranch. "They're not the first ones who asked us to do that."

Indeed they are not. Greg Norman Golf Course Design has conceived and completed 35 courses in the United States and Europe. The first, the Medalist Golf Club, popped up in Hobe Sound, Fla., in 1994, and before long Norman was racing across the globe turning indiscreet land into world-class golf courses. Another 23 courses in Australia and Asia bear his stamp.

"It's a unique feeling to take a blank piece of canvas and make it into something that will last forever," Norman said.

That's why he makes repeated trips to each course he designs, even if it means he spends most of his life in airplanes.

The devotion seems to pay off, though. A handful of his courses have hosted major tour events, the most notably The Tournament Players Club at Sugarloaf in Duluth, Ga., which hosts the PGA Tour's BellSouth Classic. His course in Livermore, Calif. - in wine country, not coincidentally, for the connoisseur - held a Nationwide Tour event in 2006.

Most prominent among his international courses is The Grand Golf Club in Queensland, Australia, home of the 2001 Australian Open. Many others have received various awards and honors.

What he prides his courses on, though, is their fluid integration with the natural surroundings. That was a major reason the River Rim developers chose Norman instead of other potential designers.

"We're trying to do everything at River Rim absolutely correct, regarding the environment and preserving open, existing space," said Mike Potter, who, along with Tom Clinton, is the primary developer of the course. "When you've got a gem of a project, you want to seek out the absolute best people in the golf design industry."

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Which is precisely what led him to Norman.

What is most unique about the Teton Rim Golf Club is not so much the open space the farmland provides. Courses across the country benefit from such vastness. What sets the plot

near Tetonian apart from others is its openness in a mountainous setting, which the Tetons readily provide. A combination like that, Norman said, is rare, indeed.

"Because this property is a lot more like St. Andrews, for example, with its open space, this lends favorably to a links style," said the two-time British Open champion, referring to the eminent Scottish course. "This will evolve to be a mountain-style, links-style, which hasn't been done before."

Construction is set to begin shortly on the planned 7,740-yard, 18-hole course. Wreathed by more than 250 plots of land, the links will run north-south with a clubhouse anchored in the middle.

On the design renderings, the front-nine holes sprawl north. Three fairways are traced by water hazards, with the majority of greens protected by sand bunkers. The par-5 fifth is the course's monster, at 709 yards from tee to green.

The back-nine will run south, and, as on the front, will sport a pair of par-3 holes and two par 5s to go with its five par 4s. Four holes contend with water.

Of course, Norman still reserves the right to tinker with each hole. On Wednesday he walked the earth where the 18th hole will be played, making a few modifications. He said that happens each time he visits the Idaho course. Nothing, it seems, is immune to the Shark's scrutiny.

"Come 2010, we'll see if it passes the test," Norman said.

To see a whole tour of professionals testing Idaho course - now that would be quite to the developers' liking.