



THE **Golf State** *It's nick-named the 'Grand Canyon State', but with more than 300 spectacular golf courses perhaps Arizona should be called the Golf State...* By Robert Kaufman, photos courtesy the Golf Clubs and Scottsdale CVB



“What is that?” my golf partner asked me following a search for the ball. I had sliced off the tee box into Arizona’s Sonoran Desert, surrounding We-Ko-Pa Golf Course. “It’s a golf ball but it’s not mine,” I replied. Clearly, that was not what he meant. On second glance, I looked downward at my shoes only to rapidly react, “Holy jumping cholla!”

Not only did I appear with another player’s errant golf ball but I also emerged with a bonus trophy known as a *Cylindropuntia fulgida* (a.k.a. ‘jumping cholla’) stuck to my shoe. Apparently, this frisky Southwestern native cactus clings to clothing or exposed skin from merely the slightest brush to cause a sting far worse than hitting a ball OB.

So, desert golf rule #2 – right after the most important one to stay hydrated – is do not wander the barren landscape hunting for lost balls or you may also be the victim of rule #3 – beware of rattlesnakes!

Nature’s gifts in the desert appear in many forms to wreak havoc on your game but, if treated properly, they can contribute to one of the most beautiful and serene environments to coexist with your clubs. And that is exactly what lures golfers from around the globe to one the world’s finest golf destinations, Scottsdale, Arizona.

207 GOLF COURSES. From a drone’s perspective, the Valley of the Sun is a foundation for 207 golf courses seeded with a puzzle of 1,223 fairways and greens linked by a magnificent desert oasis.

So, when golfers arrive in Scottsdale, there is never a shortage

of options to tee it up. The dilemma is deciding where. As thrilling as they all are, 72 of those interconnecting puzzle pieces can be discovered at two of the desert’s most celebrated public facilities: We-Ko-Pa Golf Club (Cholla and Saguaro courses) and Troon North Golf Club (Monument and Pinnacle courses).

The 36-hole experience at We-Ko-Pa GC is stitched into the arid terrain of the Fort McDowell Yavapai Nation, an Indian reservation created in 1903, bordering the eastern edge of Scottsdale and surrounded by spectacular 360-degree views of the McDowell Mountains, Red Mountain, Four Peaks and the Superstitions.

The other noticeable visual highlight fringing upon golfers is what’s missing – not one single home or condo distraction lining the fairways. Along with the award-winning 21,000-square foot clubhouse, it is a pristine desert golf experience where the bluer-

than-blue skies and greener-than-green fairways are a striking contrast to the constant changing desert hues.

WE-KO-PA. Given the timeline of when golf first arrived in the Scottsdale area in 1920, We-Ko-Pa has been the relatively new kid in town since the Cholla Course (designed by Scott Miller) was added to the landscape in 2001. It was immediately recognized by Sports Illustrated as one of the ‘Top 10 New Golf Courses in the World’.

While both the Cholla and Saguaro layouts provide an encounter with raw golf in the desert, each confronts players with varying challenges depending upon knowledge or skill to navigate a ball around a rather wild environment.

“I think the biggest difference between courses lies in how the architects worked with the land,” explains Matthew Barr, general



Troon North Golf Club



Golf Club of Estrella



Troon North Golf Club

manager at We-Ko-Pa. “On Cholla, Miller moved quite a bit of dirt around to form some of the changes in undulations and is more in line with what you might think of as desert golf, with pod-to-pod targets. On the other hand, Coore and Crenshaw left Saguaro the way Mother Nature had created it and established more of a traditional layout in a desert setting. They also provided forgiving fairways by making them wider, but the green complexes are a little bit smaller and more complicated than Cholla.

“So anyone intimidated by the desert will typically gravitate towards Saguaro soon after hearing about wider fairways. Cholla’s not unfair, by any stretch, with plenty of landing area but it’s just not always as visible off the tee.”

SHORT DOGLEG. The opening hole at the 6,607-metre Cholla Course immediately sets the desert tone. It has an elevated tee

shot onto a relatively short, 321-metre dogleg par-4 that allows players to use any club in their bag. One player was dialed in when he chose to hit driver from the purple tees at 304 metres and wound up with the only ace ever recorded here to go three under after one hole!

Probably the most talked about hole is #8. This lengthy par-5 at 553 metres from the tips starts with a forgiving tee shot, but is followed with a risky second shot to a narrowing fairway leading to a green surrounded by a sandy wash. Typically, the third shot will play 137-155 metres, which is unusual for a par-5.

At the slightly shorter 6,370-metre Saguaro, Coore and Crenshaw placed great emphasis on designing the layout to be walking-friendly, with tees and greens built close together and walking paths leading from the tee box directly to the fairway. Weaving through the natural contours of the land adjacent to

Cholla, Saguaro offers a much gentler feel.

“Holes number 14 and 18 are really great holes,” says Barr. “The 14th is a par-5 with a split fairway and a fairly small green. The 465-metre 18th is a long par-4 that has left many people wondering why it’s not a par-5. Coore suggested he was limited because the 17th green was too close to the tee area. He didn’t want to make a short par-4 by moving the 18th tee box on the other side of the wash from where it currently sits. So it’s a very difficult finishing hole.”

To ease any agony, however, after sinking the final putt, the best shot on the course takes place at the 19th hole.

ESTRELLA. If you’re a fan of post-round watering holes, the Golf Club at Estrella, situated on the Valley of the Sun’s western edge, is a very enticing stop on the desert golf menu. Fill out a short

survey after 18 holes and you’ll even receive a free drink. But first, you’ll get to enjoy a 6,528-metre layout designed by junior Golden Bear (Jack Nicklaus II). Fairways roll across the natural contours of diverse terrain and elevated tees provide dramatic vistas of the Sierra Estrella Mountains. Like his father, Nicklaus II crafted his inaugural Arizona golf course experience in the traditional sense – challenging, yet playable, for all skill levels and for players to make use of every club in their bag

TROON NORTH. Within the borders of Scottsdale, two courses at Troon North were carved out at the Pinnacle Peak foothills. Starting with the Monument Course in 1990 (designed by Tom Weiskopf and Jay Moorish), followed by the Pinnacle in 1996, designed by Weiskopf.

The list of honors bestowed upon these two courses is so long



With magnificent boulders and discriminating use of grass, the 36 holes at Troon North have long be revered as the role model for all target golf experiences that have since sprouted up in the Scottsdale desert

that the Troon North website highlights those only as far back as 2008, but currently they both appear on Golf Magazine’s ‘Top 100 Courses You Can Play’ at #25 (Pinnacle) and #54 (Monument).
When Monument first opened at the then-astronomical green fee of \$80, Troon Golf supported the cost up by setting the standard for the ‘country club for a day’ atmosphere at many golf courses around the world. From the moment you drive up to the front entry until your golf bag is loaded back in the car after the round, the polished customer service is exceeded only by the exquisite conditions of the courses.

ROLE MODEL. With magnificent boulders and discriminating use of grass, the 36 holes at Troon North have long be revered as the role model for all target golf experiences that have since sprouted up in the Scottsdale desert. And while there are many, one of the major advantages still with Troon North is location.
“For all the public courses that can be played in the Scottsdale area, our elevation at 790-850 metres above sea level is higher than most so it tends to be a bit cooler here, which definitely helps during the summertime,” notes Mitch Harrell, vice president and general manager at Troon North. “Also, because we’re situated on top of a hill with plenty of boulder outcroppings and cactus, that lends to some pretty dramatic vistas, not unlike what one might see at places like The Boulders or We-Ko-Pa.”
In 2007, however, Troon took a huge gamble to alter two highly acclaimed courses by bringing back Weiskopf to re-route both Pinnacle and Monument, which had tended to play very differently. Originally, the routing of Monument was well thought out with plans to incorporate a sub-division whereby the course would traverse between the homes that tended to be higher up. But after Pinnacle joined the landscape, the two nines of each course didn’t seem to flow contiguously with the land so Weiskopf combined the front nine of both courses and likewise with the back nine.
WEISKOPF PERSONALITY. “Pre-renovation, the two courses were pretty different,” says Harell. “Post-renovation, they meld together pretty well and since Weiskopf was involved both times, there’s enough of his personality in both golf courses that made for an easy marriage.”
As far as playability, the 6,424-metre Pinnacle course, which

became better suited for walking and, perhaps, a bit tougher than its sister course, starts out with several target holes forcing golfers to hit the ball in the right spot, after which the course loosens up. On the flip side, once getting past the very intimidating and difficult first hole (par-4, 444 yards) with a code name of ‘Hidden Green’, the 6,465-metre Monument course is the more dramatic of the two with its hypnotizing views.
Both courses maintain a notch on Scottsdale’s golf bucket list, but when it comes to which may have the edge on the number of rounds played, according to Harrell, it lies in the alphabet. “When people book golf online, ‘M’ comes before ‘P’ so, Monument is the first one seen.”
Whichever course you chose, you can’t go wrong – with views to die for and top-rated, challenging courses to play, Arizona really is the golf state. **GGM**



GOOD TO KNOW

GETTING THERE

British Airways offers one daily non-stop flight from London Heathrow to Phoenix Sky Harbor.

WHERE TO STAY

The Boulders www.theboulders.com
We-Ko-Pa Resort & Conference Center www.wekoparesortandconferencecenter.com
Four Seasons Resort Scottsdale at Troon North www.fourseasons.com/scottsdale
The Westin Kierland Resort & Spa www.kierlandresort.com

GOLF

We-Ko-Pa Golf Club www.wekopa.com
Troon North Golf Club www.troonnorthgolf.com
Boulders Club www.theboulders.com/play/world-class-golf
Golf Club of Estrella www.estrellagolf.com

WHERE TO DINE

Spotted Donkey Cantina www.theboulders.com/restaurants-and-dining/the-spotted-donkey-cantina
We-Ko-Pa Grille www.wekopa.com/clubhouse/we-ko-pa-grille
Four Peaks Grill & Tap www.fourpeaks.com
Brat Haus www.brathausaz.com