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Rising to the Challenge

A strong field is set to tee off at the Delta Dental State Open of Virginia— who will come out on top?

Flair *for the* Dramatic

by IAN GUERIN



In Upstate South Carolina, The Cliffs offers a special golf experience for homeowners and non-homeowners alike

BRIAN PEEPLES has had years to dissect his own beliefs about The Cliffs.

A collection of six exclusive golf communities in Upstate South Carolina and a seventh just outside Asheville, N.C., the luxurious properties have continued to breed awe-inspiring reactions from those lucky enough to get onto any of the courses.

But for Peeples, The Cliffs' director of golf operations, the mindset encircling those courses is what truly makes them special.



IMAGES COURTESY OF THE COURSES

“I think it is our brand and what we have to offer here,” he said. “You can play up in the mountains one day and down in the valley the next. We have over 5,000 events every year, from Mahjongg to club [golf] championships with member-guests to wine dinners. Simply, the program—it depends on what they want to plug in to. It’s truly a community and a lifestyle that these folks are extremely passionate about.”

It’s true, of course, that The Cliffs is about so much more than just golf. Outdoor enthusiasts have come from near and far, spending as much as a few million bucks to buy homes here and live their days away from the hustle and bustle of whatever made them successful before.

Non-homeowners can purchase memberships that allow them to take advantage of everything The Cliffs has to offer. For

Valley is a very walkable course glistening with stone bridges, rolling hills and luscious vegetation.

many, though, golf was the inroads that got them there. Opened between 1993 and 2013, each of the seven courses possess their own flair for the golf dramatic.



Tom Fazio-designed Keowee Vineyard features eight holes lining the Lake Keowee shoreline.

There's the original, Glassy. It was followed shortly after by Valley in 1995 and Keowee Vineyards in 1999. Walnut Cove, the lone North Carolina track, opened for business in 2005, with Keowee Falls and Keowee Springs getting their starts in 2007 and 2008, respectively.

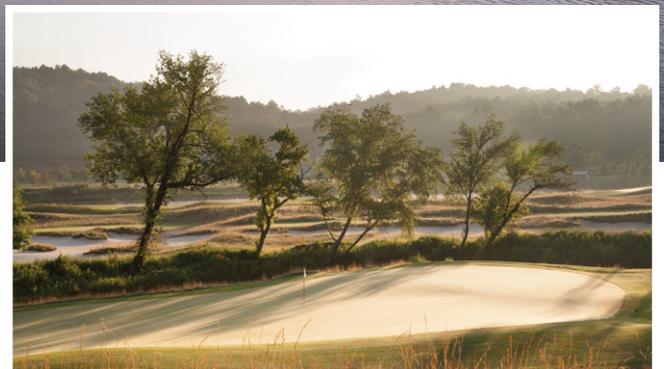
Lastly, Mountain Park went live in 2013 after a few years of financial hang-ups that eventually led to a sale of the entire brand. A few years after that momentary glitch, golf at The Cliffs is as strong as ever.

Each course has its own head golf professional, and 19 certified pros are employed in total.

What they oversee are seven courses designed by some heavy hitters.

Jack Nicklaus laid out two of the designs, as did Tom Fazio. Tom Jackson and Gary Player have one each, and Ben Wright, of

Mountain Park and its 13 acres of sand are consistently ranked as one of top courses in South Carolina.



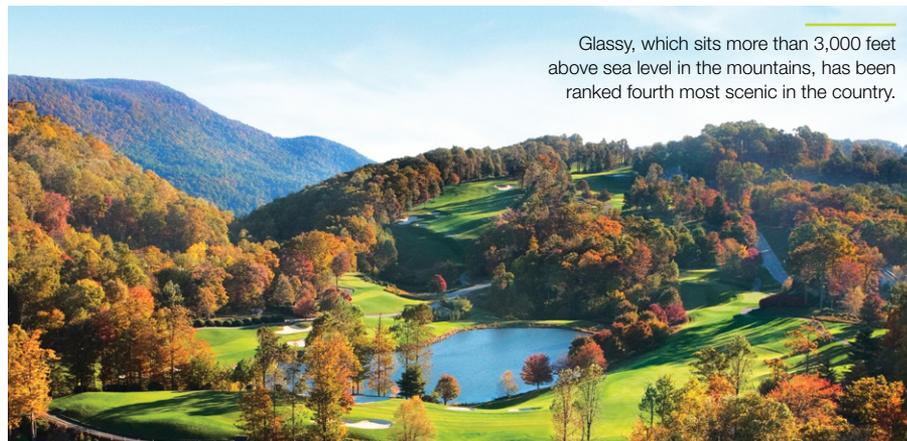
golf commentary fame, rounded out the group. How The Cliffs continues to perfect what those architects originally did pays dividends. The owners, Silver Sun Partners, recently spent \$500,000 on enhancements at Valley, approximately \$400,000 at Keowee Falls and another \$200,000 or so at Keowee Vineyards.

Experts have continued to take notice. Five of the six courses located south of the state line were rated in the top 50 of the South Carolina Golf Course Ratings Panel's 2018 rankings. Keowee Falls

was selected to host the NCAA Division I men's golf championship in 2020, and others in the group have hosted Web.com Tour events and Bill Haas' annual charity tournament.

Those big-ticket events pale in comparison to the daily environment. Peeples said the courses see approximately 108,000 rounds per year, a creation of the seven diverse options. Roughly 80 percent of those rounds are played by members; the rest is a product of the properties' numerous charity events, which take place on a weekly basis. What those lucky enough to get more than 18 holes in notices is something different from one course to the next.

"Our two Nicklaus courses are different playing surfaces. Our two Fazio's have different surfaces on the greens. They all play different," Peeples said. "We could have a member play an all bentgrass course in the morning and an all Bermuda course in the afternoon. It's just unrivaled golf. From a golf standpoint, it doesn't get any better than this. To have seven quality golf courses at a member's disposal is unusual. The condition in which we provide year in and year out is probably what I'm most proud of."



Glassy, which sits more than 3,000 feet above sea level in the mountains, has been ranked fourth most scenic in the country.

SWEET CAROLINA

WHILE YOU'RE IN THE AREA, take a look at these fully public playing options, sure to give you another feel for what Upstate golf has to offer.



FURMAN GOLF CLUB, GREENVILLE

Following a massive greens project in 2008, the home course to the NCAA Division I Furman University Paladins has been awarded various state, regional and national honors from the South Carolina Golf Course Ratings Panel, *Golfweek Magazine* and *Golf Digest*.



PEBBLE CREEK COUNTRY CLUB, GREENVILLE

While half of the 36-hole facility is comprised of the private Linkside Course, unaffiliated players can book tee times at the public Creekside Course. The 6,500-yard track was recently touched up to further define the natural habitat around it.



THE WALKER COURSE, CLEMSON

The buildup to the final five holes of the round are certainly worth the wait. Starting with the 528-yard par-5 No. 14, that final leg through the course includes all five holes lined by Lake Hartwell, the massive recreation area joining the northwestern corridor of South Carolina and neighboring Georgia.



Keowee Falls will host the 2020 NCAA Division I men's golf championship.

THE CLIFFS COURSES AT A GLANCE

Number in parentheses corresponds to 2018 South Carolina Golf Course Ratings Panel state ranking:

Glassy (No. 41) - Resting 3,000 feet above sea level, this Tom Jackson design plays as far as 6,805 yards from the back tees and is frequently named one of the most scenic courses in the country.

Valley (NR) - Considered the easiest of the seven Cliffs courses, Valley and designer Ben Wright ran this course between the mountains and within eyesight of the North Carolina state line.

Mountain Park (No. 22) - Lined by more than 13 acres worth of sand, Mountain Park was designed by Gary Player with conservation in mind. The course is a par-72, 19-hole track.

Keowee Vineyards (No. 14) - Fazio's other design at the Cliffs, the par-71 Vineyards includes eight holes overlooking Lake Keowee.

Keowee Falls (No. 36) - Jack Nicklaus gave players virtually no easy holes to work with here, as sand, water and plenty of trees are in play from start to finish.

Keowee Springs (NR) - The Tom Fazio design is actually three six-hole "loops" and is frequently broken up for those not in the mood for a full 18 and want to be able to pry themselves away early.

Walnut Cove (NA) - Nicklaus' second layout is located just south of Asheville, N.C., while wrapping through both farmlands and woodlands. 



LEFT: The unique setup at Keowee Springs allows folks to play six, 12 or 18 holes when time is tight. RIGHT: The Jack Nicklaus-designed Walnut Cove course opened with a nationally televised PGA event in 2005.