

# Augusta



## U N C R O W N E D

The history of *Augusta National* has always been recorded, Masters by Masters, since 1934, as if a sacred ritual, the continuation of a serious tradition. The mystique has been massaged and increased year after year as television coverage projected the world's great players – taking their turns as champion – putting on the green jacket, after a usually breathtaking final round.

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Augusta National Golf Club has long considered the Masters as an “inheritance to posterity.”

The origins of the course, inspired by Robert Tyre Jones, Jr. and designed by Dr. Alistair MacKenzie were, as Horton Smith said, “a cause of character, individuality and personality.”

Over the years, modest changes were inserted into the original design. In recent years, cosmetic changes became common but remained modest. The most significant changes evolved as the standards of maintenance improved with the growth of turf-grass maintenance agronomic knowledge and equipment sophistication to the recent years’ “immaculate perfection” standards – not a blade of grass unkempt.

Of the four recognized major golf tournaments of the year, only the Masters is played year after year on the same venue. This continuity of site helped enhance the legend of famous players, famous holes, famous shots and famous victories. Past shots and past scores could fairly be compared. These past glories are obsolete now.

Throughout the years, the basic playing character was more or less true to the original design and the founders’ original intent. The continuum was in place. Now, in an effort to counter or defend against recent technological advances by club and ball manufacturers, Augusta is undergoing a vigorous redesign that is dramatically changing many of the holes.

Where now is the continuum, the tradition, and the playing link to the course Bobby Jones and Alistair MacKenzie produced? In fact, if Jones or MacKenzie were alive today, they would not recognize the Augusta National Golf Club of 2002. Whatever great shots, superb lightning-fast putts or grand final nine charges that were



Hole 13 from the second shot landing area with a view to the green is surrounded with native trees and flowering shrubs. the stuff of legends and so faithfully documented, will not now be a continuum and link to the past.

The new course may well look like another Tom Fazio course, one of many, but not one of one. Stretching and moving tees, bunkers and approach shots bring new golf not directly comparable with Masters tournaments of 2001 or before.

Will the Augusta National now be automatically ranked as one of America’s truly great courses or is it now one of several or more long demanding courses set into surrounding woodlands? Augusta was never a course of unique natural setting or spectacular and unique vistas. The pine forest actually became more claustrophobic as trees grew taller, wider and were joined by new additions of trees. The glory was in the link to a historic source of original design and a masterful management of the early legends.

While the “splendor, splendor, splendor everywhere” will return, it will surely be

difficult now to claim the legacy or the scoring traditions of earlier Masters. From 2002, it is a new course, a new tournament and a new record to establish.

Will Augusta National again warrant its lofty stature based upon its illustrious heritage? Perhaps not. Perhaps now Augusta National will be another rolling, long, pine tree-lined course with nice spring flowers that merely hosts a prominent tournament and still provides enviable immaculate perfection in turfgrass management.

While modern technological advances are helping the individual golfer’s length of play, technology is doing nothing for the memories and traditions of golf, which are too few as it is.

**W**ith over 34 years of golf course architectural experience in nearly 60 countries, Ronald Fream has been at the forefront of innovation and change in golf course planning and design worldwide. In 1972 he founded Golfplan, headquartered in Santa Rosa, California. Golfplan provides a comprehensive range of services including land use planning, golf course architecture and design, construction supervision, turfgrass management, landscape design and ornamental horticultural consultation.



Hole 10 Green  
Photo: R. Fream

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