

Salish Cliffs, Rope Rider make debuts

LOCAL GOLF | The new courses, both within driving distance of Seattle, were made for play by pro and recreational golfers.

BY SCOTT HANSON
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After a couple of years without any golf courses of note opening in the state, two upper-end courses have opened in a one-month span, each about a 90-minute drive from Seattle.

Rope Rider opened late last month at Suncadia Resort near Cle Elum. Salish Cliffs Golf Club, at the Little Creek Casino Resort east of Shelton, opened this past weekend with festivities that included a clinic by Fred Couples.

Salish Cliffs had hoped to open months ago, but weather issues — runoff and erosion during a harsh winter, and spring temperatures too cool for growing bentgrass — put the project behind schedule. The Squaxin Island Tribe, which owns the course, decided that the clubhouse should be finished before the opening.

"You only get one chance to make that first impression," said David Kass, head pro at Salish Cliffs.

The course was designed by Gene Bates, who also designed acclaimed Circling Raven in Worley, Idaho.

Salish Cliffs is built on a hill and there are no homes nearby, nor plans for any. The setting is serene, and the most talked-about holes are likely to be those on the back nine.

The obvious intention at both Salish Cliffs and Rope Rider is to have courses that are tournament-worthy tests from the championship tees



GREG GILBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

The setting for Salish Cliffs is serene and heavily wooded, with no homes built near the course.

(more than 7,200 yards) but give the recreational golfer a chance to score well from tamer distances. Generous landing areas help make this possible.

Rope Rider co-designer Jim Hardy said he and partner Peter Jacobsen want golfers to say, "Wow, I had a lot of fun and want to come back again."

Salish Cliffs has a mandatory cart policy, but Rope Rider is walkable.

Rope Rider is Suncadia's third course and its second public one, along with the Arnold Palmer-designed Prospector. Its pro shop is in the Swiftwater Cellars building, an eye-catching, 41,000-square-foot structure that is home to a win-

ery, bar and restaurant.

Brady Hatfield, director of golf at Suncadia, boasts that Rope Rider "looks like it's been here a long time." He said Jacobsen and Hardy "let the land be the hero."

The course does indeed fit in seamlessly with the terrain on the site of a former coal-mining operation. The seventh and ninth holes run along Tipple Hill, a 120-foot-high pile of coal tailings covered by dirt and vegetation. The course is named to honor the miners who balanced themselves on the roped coal cars that descended into the mines.

Rope Rider has junior tees cut into fairways and rough that make the holes 60 to 170 yards long for young-

Rope Rider

Suncadia Resort, Cle Elum

Rates: Greens fees \$100 on Saturday, \$85 on Friday and Sunday; \$70 on other days. Fees include cart and range balls. (The practice area is under construction, but there is a range at nearby Prospector.)

Yardage: Rope Rider is as long as 7,271 yards from the Jake tees and 5,001 yards from the women's tees, with three sets in between.

Information:
suncadiaresort.com or
866-715-5050;

Salish Cliffs

Shelton

Rates: Greens fees are \$89 through September, including a cart and range balls.

Yardage: Salish Cliffs has five sets of tees, ranging from 7,269 yards (75.4 rating, 137 slope) to 5,313 (women's rating of 70.4 and women's slope of 125).

Information:
salish-cliffs.com or
360-462-3673

sters. The course also has a three-hole loop (7-9) and a six-hole loop (1-6) for golfers short of time.

Both Salish Cliffs and Rope Rider have memorable finishing holes. The par-5 18th at Salish Cliffs shares a monster green with the par-4 ninth hole and is guarded by a pond. The scenic par-4 at Rope Rider wraps around a lake.

Freelancer Craig Smith contributed to this report.