



## Penn National Golf Club & Inn ~ You'll Feel at Home Here

Nick Ciattei

On my latest visit to one of my favorite golf places on earth, Penn National Golf Club & Inn, I was reminded of the secret to the success of this golf destination in Mont Alto, Pennsylvania. Yes, it could be the two award winning 18-hole golf courses. Both the Founders Course and the Iron Forge Course have received top ten honors in Pennsylvania. It might well be that Penn National is one of the most popular stay-and-play golf resorts in the mid-Atlantic with an ideal location 90 minutes from D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. But for this writer, it became evident once again as I joined up with three local residents on the first tee at Iron Forge what separates Penn National from the others. It's the people.



Founders Hole 1 Par 4

I know that sounds maudlin, but let me explain how I have come to this conclusion. My first association with Penn National dates back to more than 20 years ago when I arranged for a group of golfing couples from the Baltimore area to stay and play there. Some of the same people that I worked with at Penn National back then, I still work with today but only in a different

capacity with *The Golf Guide*. I've always thought it's a testament to any business when you look and see how long folks have been working there. It's like Cal Ripken Jr. was to the Orioles or Mike Schmidt was to the Phillies. Much like these two baseball icons, folks that work at Penn National seem to really love what they are doing and show up with a smile each day. The passion they exude is evident right on down to the bagmen that welcome you to the course.

My love affair with the Founders Course began that 80s weekend at Penn National and continues today. My girlfriend is slightly jealous, but she understands it's just a golf thing. From its debut in 1968, when a round of golf cost about two and a half bucks, to today, the Founders is a classic design with tree lined fairways. The work of Ed Ault, a long time popular Northeast golf architect, the Founders Course plays 5360 yards from the forward tees presenting a real challenge for the ladies. At a chip shot under 7000 yards from the tips, there is plenty of girth for even the best players to tackle. The par 4 first is a great starting hole played from an elevated tee to a green set against a large lake, which is the focal point of some of the key holes. The first par 5, the second, plays around the corner of the water hazard. It's a realistic birdie hole if you can keep it in the short grass. The 615-yard seventh is the longest hole



Founders Hole 7 Par 5

on the Founders Course. Like most traditional designs, fairway bunkers are quite prevalent on Founders, and this par 5 has seven of them to skirt. The par 4 eighth is rated the hardest hole while the ninth is the longest par 3, so you have a couple of tough holes facing you as you close the front side. The inward nine is solid from start to finish and is one of my favorites in the mid-Atlantic. It is always remembered for its three pretty darn good closing holes. The sixteenth and seventeenth, par 4 and par 3 respectively, play around and over the aforementioned lake and are the most identifying holes on the course. The Founders Course is old school all the way, so "Get down on it."



Founders Hole 17 Par 3

The Iron Forge Course at Penn National opened in 1996 and immediately was lauded as one of the best new courses in America. Bill Love's wind-swept links design has aged beautifully and is better than ever. The ideal sister course to Founders, Iron Forge is definitely a "course" of a different color, Wispy tan and brown natural grasses and heather border most of the spacious fairways, but when the wind blows, and it will, those landing areas tighten up. This is where the difficulty of Iron Forge can jump up and bite. Spread across a large piece of farmland, there's plenty of room here making it a driver's paradise. The "grip-it-and-rip-it" philosophy is evident right from the outset with roomy par 5s and 4s to open things up. Put away the driver for the sixth, a par 3 over water to a green fortressed by a stone wall. The par 4 eighth, located farthest away from the clubhouse on this single looped layout, is a hole where cutting off the corner of the fairway bordered by a pond can leave you just a short iron left to a deep green. Remnants of the old farmland, in the form of a rustic, towering silo, are kept intact as a backdrop to Iron Forge's signature par 5 eleventh (pictured on the cover). The par 4 fifteenth, also a visual pleaser, plays downhill to a green bordered on the right by a large lake laced with fieldstone. Golfers generally consider Iron Forge a shot or two easier than its older sibling, so take advantage of the gift from the gods.



Iron Forge Hole 15 Par 4



Iron Forge Hole 6 Par 3



Iron Forge Hole 8 Par 4

To be successful in the golf travel business, you have to have all aspects fine-tuned like they do at the Penn National Inn. They have always prided themselves in making a golf trip easy. The lodging is located right on the property with golfer-friendly crafted bungalows that house up to 16 golfers. Each lodge building offers common areas for socializing and card playing.

For larger groups, hospitality rooms are available. The historic 1840s Manor House, once visited by Robert E. Lee, houses all guest services. Penn National is located in a “dry” county, so it’s BYOB when you stay and play there. Make sure to bring plenty of your favorite beverages, and the staff will be happy to provide a cooler and ice for your liquid loot.

That “people” thing I referred to earlier must rub off onto the folks that have chosen to spend a lifetime at Penn National. My previously mentioned three escorts for the day on the links, (Fran, Bea, and Nicole) were as pleasing as could be, almost as if they were on the company’s payroll! It’s not every day a 55-year-old can share cold draft beers on a hot summer afternoon with three classy dames. Each has called Penn National home for nearly 15 years. A thriving adult community of over 1,000 families, it has been ranked among “America’s Best Master Planned Communities” for eight straight years by *Where to Retire* magazine. The beauty of the surrounding area and the accessibility and affordability of living there are two of the main draws. The golfing ladies, who have become fast friends, shared with me that the locals always have something going on, and there are more resident clubs than you can shake a stick at. They certainly went out of their way to make this writer feel right at home, and that’s what Penn National does best.



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