



The home hole at Cutten Fields, with its rectangular green. (Photo: Courtesy Cutten Fields)
GOLF COURSE FEATURES

With a revamped design and a rich history, Cutten Fields is delightful

Returning to the Guelph, Ont., course, which is so different after its “historical restoration,” was a wonderful walk down memory lane.

By Lorne Rubenstein - CREATED: MAY 25, 2024



Guelph, Ont. – Most golfers feel an attachment to a course or courses they played when younger. The course could be where they first whacked a ball around, or from a later period in their lives – or both. I came to golf at Uplands and Don Valley in Toronto, and later developed an affinity for Cutten Fields here in Guelph. That happened while I attended graduate school at the University of Guelph.

A visit to Cutten and the city itself is always nostalgic for me. I had the opportunity this week to play the course that the savvy Toronto-based architect Jeff Mingay – [who contributes architecture columns to this website](#) – has gracefully revamped the last few years in what he terms a “historically sensitive restoration.” It’s all but complete now, and the restoration is both thoughtful and creative.

Mingay worked for nearly a decade with course superintendent Bill Green, who moved to Cutten in 2015 after working at Toronto Golf Club, the beauty that is deep in rich history. It was a treat to play Cutten's front nine with Green and the back nine with Mingay as part of a small media gathering. There's nothing like seeing a course and the work that took place through the eyes of those who were most directly involved.

My day began with a pleasant, brief chat with Jeff Smart, the greens committee chairman. He remembered me from our days at U of G 50 – yikes, 50 – years ago. I lived for one of my two years at the university in a flat in a home overlooking what was then the fourth hole. The home, high above the property, is left of what is now the par-5 15th hole.

Cutten, named for its founder and benefactor Arthur Cutten, opened in 1931. Cutten was born in 1870 in Guelph, went to school there, and moved to Chicago around 1890 where he became a prominent businessman. In Chicago he belonged to the Edgewater Golf Course, where he met the 1916 U.S. Amateur and U.S. Open champion Chick Evans. Evans also won in 1920. He was instrumental in the development of Cutten Fields, as the club notes in the informative background it provides on its [website](#).

From the website: "It was Evans who first suggested the layout of the planned golf course on the 198 acres and recommended that the detail designs of holes be done by the Stanley Thompson Golf Company of Toronto." They essentially collaborated on the design.

As for his caddying at Edgewater, Evans writes about it in his book. It's called, simply, *Chick Evans' Golf Book*. Evans, as some readers will know, was the man behind the Evans Scholars Foundation that the Western Golf Association started in 1930 and which continues. It was founded to send deserving caddies to college. It's worth noting that 12,040 Evans Scholars have graduated since 1930. Evans, by the way, won the 1910 Western Open. The tournament was once considered a major.

I was particularly interested in Evans' comments about caddying, given that I came to the game first as a caddy at the original York Downs Golf and Country Club. It's now Earl Bales Park, a five-minute walk from where I live in Toronto. I've written frequently of my time carrying golf sticks for members.

Anyway, here's Evans, from his book. I love this segment. It follows after he finds a new ball, every young caddy's most satisfying pleasure.



The par-3 ninth green, with the first and 18th holes behind it. (Photo: Courtesy Cutten Fields)

“The next spring I remember finding a brand new ball by a method that I have always claimed to have originated, but, of course, I may have deceived myself. I saw a player drive into some long grass that separated the second and third holes. He knew, of course, that it had gone into that strip but although he looked for a long time, neither he nor his caddy could find it.

“When he left I concluded to try an experiment and went over and lay down where I thought the ball had fallen. Then I rolled over with thoroughness, accompanied, I must confess, by dizziness, all around the spot until some part of my body struck a round, hard object. This, of course, was the ball, which I immediately proceeded to dig out. The method soon made me rich in golf balls, but what was better it gave me a reputation among both members and caddies of never losing a golf ball.”

Now that’s golf writing.

Back to Cutten. Our group of devoted golf writers sat on the patio overlooking the course while chatting over lunch and looking forward to our game. The 18th green just in front of us is a square green. The green, and one or two more on the course with the same shape, pays homage to the Chicago Golf Club that is one of the USGA’s five founding clubs. It’s a Charles Blair Macdonald design that I’ve been fortunate to play once. Here’s another club steeped in history, and the powers-that-be at Cutten were wise to agree to the idea of paying homage to Chicago with some square and always spacious greens.

At this point, I should make clear that Cutten did all the construction work in-house. That cut down on costs. Moreover, the members of this club overwhelmingly agreed to the design concept that involved, essentially, a total overhaul.

After lunch on the patio, we set out for our adventure. As we reached the square, first green, I was taken with its scale and size, not to mention a substantial swale in the right centre. Green tutored us on the green site and its contours.



The 13th, 14th and 15th holes at Cutten Fields. (Photo: Courtesy Cutten Fields)

“The greens on average are 38 per cent bigger than they were,” he said. “The first green is the same as the original [in shape] except for its size and the scaled-up swale.”

Green and Mingay had done something simple in its brilliance while moving the extensive project forward. They had taken members out on the course to explain what they envisaged and wanted to do. As Mingay said, it’s one thing to send e-mails to members (which, in my experience, most don’t read) and another to take out small groups for a course tour. In the end, some 95 per cent of members bought into the proposals for the course.

And what a course it is now, especially the front nine that plays along often-turbulent ground. There’s plenty of movement on the back nine, but the ground is especially tumultuous on the front. Meanwhile, a tree removal program has opened up views across the holes, and more is likely to take place.

Well, I won’t dive deeply into the details of the imaginative work that has come to fruition and made Cutten so enticing. Hole-by-hole analysis isn’t my thing. I’ll say only that members seem very happy as they play the “historically sensitive restoration.” I was certainly happy to play the course again, which is directly across from the U of G campus where I spent two enjoyable and educational years.

That’s when I was first exposed to Cutten. I played in either the 1970 or 1977 Ontario Open there – I can’t recall which. In one, I played with a fellow named Terry Wiens. He was a heck of a golfer and character. He carried a small leather bag and told me I had one of the best right elbows through the ball that he’d seen. What did he mean? I don’t know, but I appreciated the compliment.

I still see Terry and I walking the course and trying to compete in a tournament that George Knudson won multiple times. Moe Norman, Nick Weslock, Gary Cowan and Jerry Kesselring also won on multiple occasions. And Brooke Henderson won a tournament at Cutten when she was 13.

After we played that day, Wiens said something memorable that I would learn was almost a calling card for him. He played well and said he was “the pilot of the flying white moon.” The golf ball, that is. He sent it where he wanted it to go over the fields of Cutten. He even wrote a poem called The Pilot of the Flying White Moon. Wiens eventually turned pro.

The poem begins, “So you want to be the pilot/Of the flying white moon/And you haven’t lost your mind yet/Well, you will soon.”

That’s golf, isn’t it? I hope I get the chance to play Cutten Fields again soon. It’s a sweet spot to be a pilot of the flying white moon, or to try anyway. Restorative, shall we say.

One final thought: Cutten Fields in my opinion would be an ideal site for the CPKC Women’s Open, the only LPGA tournament in Canada. Here’s hoping.

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