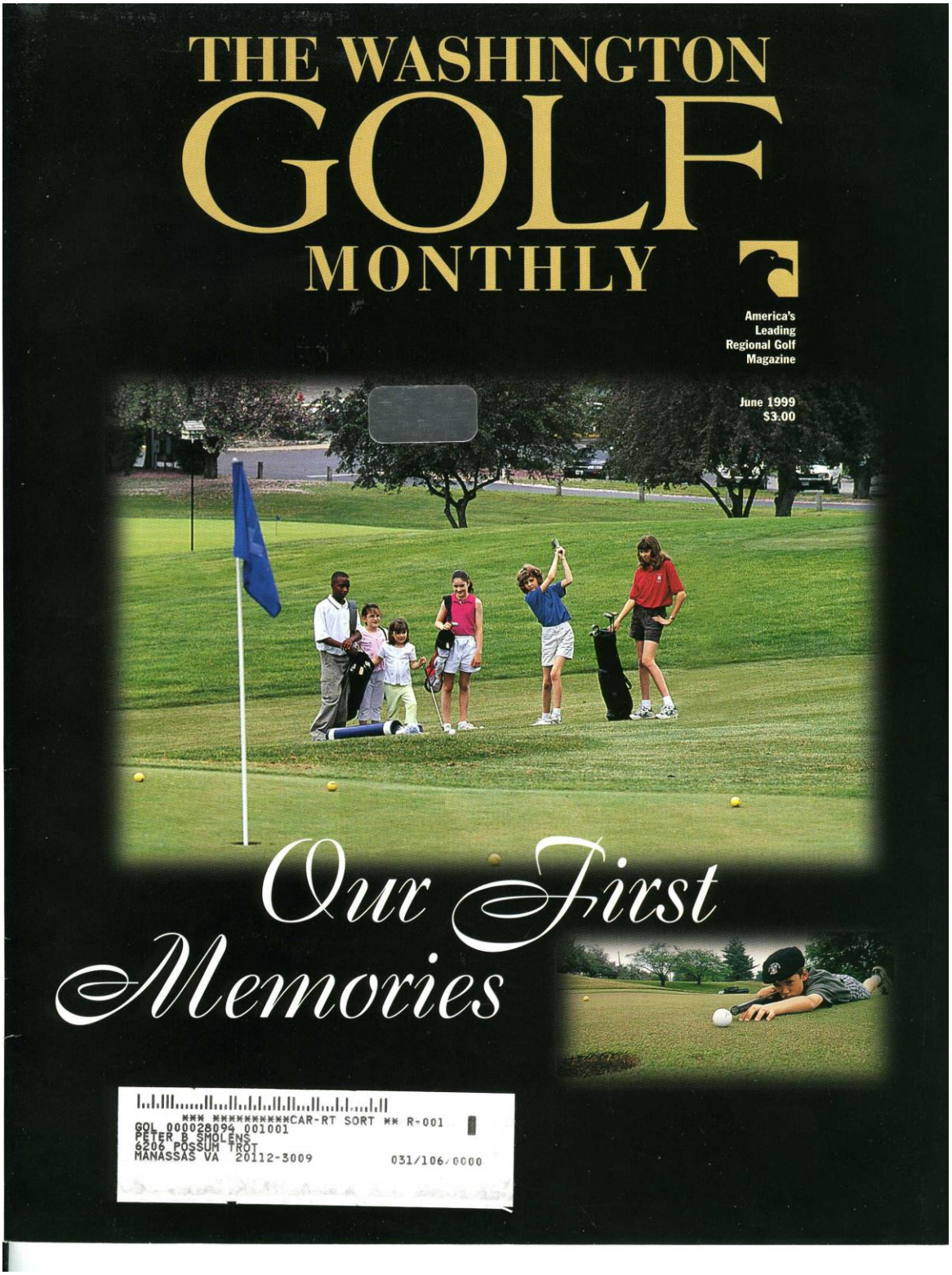
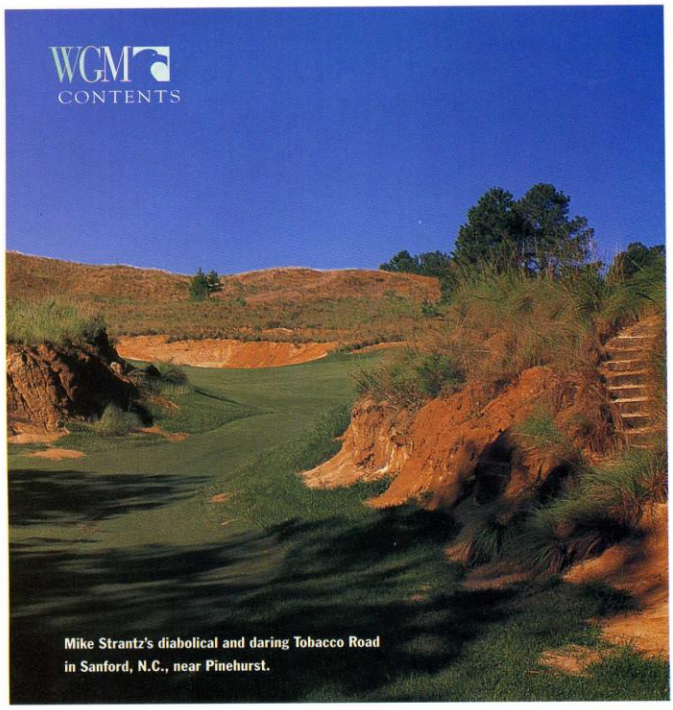
Cacapon Golf Courses Washington Golf Monthly June 1999



WGM CONTENTS



Mike Strantz's diabolical and daring Tobacco Road in Sanford, N.C., near Pinehurst.

32 GOLFISMS
You can't play golf for 20 years, without learning a few things.

40 OUT OF BOUNDS
A different look at husbands and wives on the golf course.

80 FATHER'S DAY
A tribute to fathers and sons and fathers and daughters.

83 U.S. OPEN
The national championship returns to the Middle Atlantic, this time to Pinehurst, N.C.

98 COVER STORY
We all have fond memories of our first encounter with the game.

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY JOHN HARRINGTON

DEPARTMENTS

6 EDITOR'S LETTER
10 MIDDLE ATLANTIC DIGEST
24 PRIVATE MATTERS
28 PLAYING THE GAME
36 GOOD LIVING, GOOD GOLF
44 DESTINATION
54 INSTRUCTION
62 DESTINATION
88 PLAYING THE GAME
90 PLAYING THE GAME
124 CROWN ROYAL OPEN
128 ESSAY

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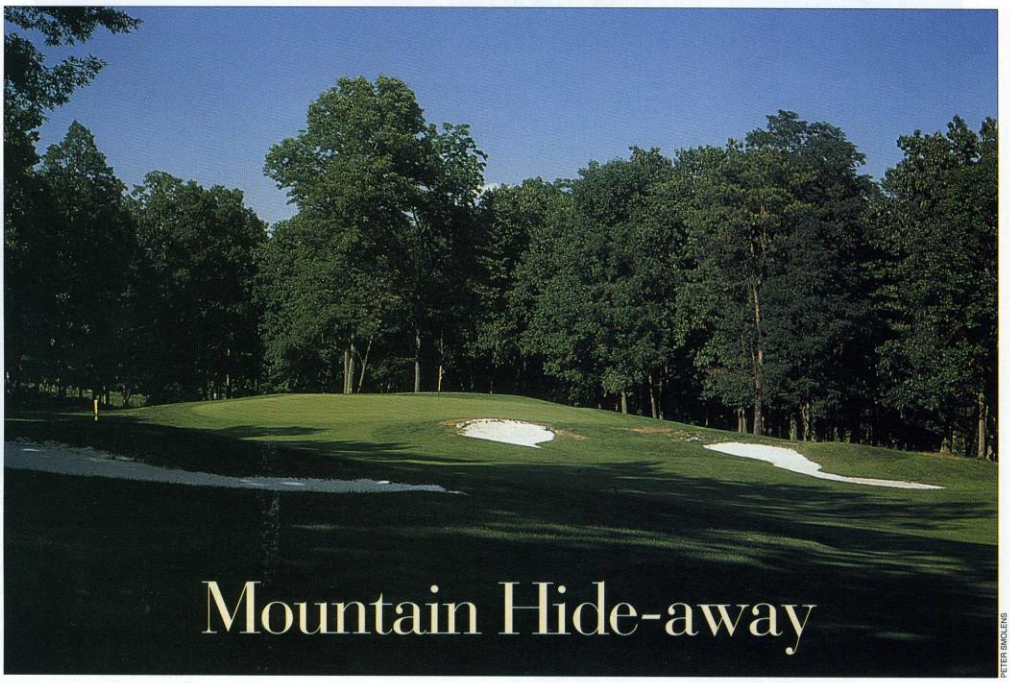
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BPA INTERNATIONAL



Mountain Hide-away

PETER SMOLENS

Hey. What's wrong with this? Some clean West Virginia mountain air. A Robert Trent Jones Sr.-designed golf course. A place to put your head for an overnight visit (although the trip to Berkeley Springs and back is very doable in a day) and a price far less than your typical upscale public course.

The combination is something only a state park can deliver, and Cacapon State Park delivers. Just 35 miles west of Winchester, Va., the mountain park has one of the Middle Atlantic's hidden gems.

The golf course is carved on the eastern slope of the 2,340-foot Cacapon (an Indian word meaning "medicine waters") Mountain. The course rolls over plateaus and into the valley. The park covers 6,000 acres and is built on land where small farms died during the Depression. Few reminders of those hard times remain. The most dramatic is the stone fireplace in the putting green. The fireplace is what remains of a family farmhouse. Another farmhouse, still largely in tact, sits to the left of the 15th green.

The park was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps and opened in 1937. The golf craze of the 1960s convinced the Department of Commerce to build a golf course. Cacapon was the first of several courses built on state park land.

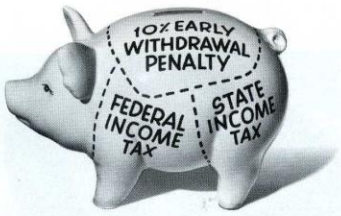
Now the emerald of the Eastern Panhandle is one of the state's finest offerings, and part of West Virginia's Legends Trail, a string of golf courses designed by some of the golf course architecture fraternity's biggest names.

Unlike many new golf courses that have a "constructed" feel, Cacapon flows easily with the parkland. There is a soothingly natural feel to the course. Nothing feels forced or contrived. But then that's the nature of most of RTJ's golf courses.

The course opened in 1974, and in the 25 years since, little has been changed. Pro Charlie Fields says many of the 73 bunkers were rebuilt to reduce damage during the harsh West Virginia winters, but the biggest change was reversing the nines. That little has been found wrong with a design a quarter of a century old is a tribute to RTJ's talent.

Today's front nine plays largely in the valley at the base of Cacapon Mountain. The most memorable part

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Cacapon

Par 72	6,940 yards	74.4	121
Par 72	6,410 yards	70.0	121
Par 72	5,510 yards	72.1	116

Location: Berekley Springs, W.Va.
Architect: Robert Trent Jones
Director of golf: Charlie Fields
Fees: Monday - Thursday $20; Friday - Sunday and holidays $24; carts $20
Spike policy: Non-metal
Tee times: (304) 258-1022 ext. 165
Directions: Take I-270 north to I-70 west. Stay on I-70 to Exit 1B (Rt. 522) in Hancock, Md. Follow Rt. 522 south for 16 miles. The park is on the right, nine miles south of Berkeley Springs.

of the course is the 100-yard-wide double green, which accommodates both of the par 3s on the side.

Being carved out of the side of the mountain means many holes on the back nine are on rolling plateaus that slope down toward the valley. This bit of local knowledge will help you read your putts on Cacapon's undulating greens: The grain of the green flows downhill.

As with any true mountain venue, the holes at Cacapon are largely lined with dense forests. Through the years, the underbrush has been cleared so you can find your wayward shot more easily than 20 years ago.

Playing to almost 7,000 yards, Cacapon has some very difficult holes if you challenge the course from the back tees. The scorecard will tell you that No. 7 is the most difficult, but really it is typical of many Cacapon holes. This one doglegs to the left, goes slightly up hill and has a fairway lined with trees on both sides. With an imposing trap at the corner crest, the second shot is slightly downhill to a small green.

But RTJ has a knack for making even short holes difficult. Nearly every hole at Cacapon can lure you into double bogey. But then again, many are susceptible to birdies.

The closing holes start with the most beautiful hole on the course. The view from the 15th tee is worth dealing with the difficulties of the hole. With the backdrop of another mountain range, this par 3 plays straight downhill to a well bunkered green.

At Cacapon State Park, rates are extremely reasonable. The course always gets high marks in surveys of the nation's best golf values. Which makes it a great day trip or a pleasant weekend away from the city. ◆

— Peter Smolens