

# Wild Rock site to behold

## High marks for Dells' course

By GARY D'AMATO

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Wisconsin Dells - It's hard to believe as you exit I-94 and pass the water park monstrosities and fast food kitsch on Highway 12/23 that just minutes away a golf course will make you forget you're in the middle of the Dells.

What Wild Rock Golf Club does have in common with the surrounding summer tourist Mecca is that it's an eye-opening experience not soon to be forgotten.

Designed by Michael Hurdzan and Dana Fry, the duo who simultaneously built the acclaimed Erin Hills in the Town of Erin, Wild Rock stimulates the senses, challenges golfers of all abilities and provides Kodak moments on almost every tee.

The 18-hole course, part of the massive Wilderness Resort, opened May 1. It replaced the old Wilderness Woods Golf Club and is much better.

"One of our challenges is letting people know that this is a brand new golf course and it has nothing to do with the old Wilderness Woods," said Chris Goodwick, the general manager.

Wild Rock features extra-wide fairways, so although much of it is cut through hardwoods it doesn't have that hemmed-in feel. The elevation changes are dramatic and the vistas from some tees are jaw-dropping.

With five sets of tees, the course can play from 5,132 yards all the way up to 7,414. We played the Shale (middle) tees and though the score card told us it was 6,393 yards, Wild Rock seemed to play much longer, perhaps because the turf was still soft from a winter that dumped 120 inches of snow on the area.

The greens, seeded with Declaration bentgrass, were a bit slow but I played Wild Rock on a sneak-preview day last fall so I know how fast they can, and will, be. I'm a fan of Hurdzan-Fry green complexes because the architects make great use of tiers, false fronts, run-offs and strategic bunkering.

This is a course that could be set up for a championship so that even-par would be a great score. But it doesn't beat up 20-handicap resort guests if they play from the proper set of tees. You shouldn't lose golf balls at Wild Rock, unless you are really crooked off the tee.

The signature holes are Nos. 6 and 15. The former is a par-5 that features stunning 20-mile views from the elevated tee; the latter is a cool par-3 that requires a knee-knocking tee shot over an old quarry.

A rock-lined stream cascades downhill through Nos. 1, 2 and 3. There are two short par-4s, one on each nine, but the general rule is that the shorter the club in your hands, the smaller the green and the more difficult the approach.

Because it's a resort course that is not intended to be walked, Wild Rock has a continuous concrete cart path. But the architects did a good job hiding the path behind berms and hills so it is rarely visible from the middle of the fairway and is never a distraction.

Golfers could get lost trying to find the first tee from the clubhouse - a 5-minute cart ride - but that will change when a new clubhouse eventually is built and the course routing changes.

Of the 78 courses I have reviewed since 1999, Wild Rock tied for the second-highest point total with the Links Course at Lawsonia and University Ridge. Only Whistling Straits graded higher.

It's not inexpensive, at \$85 weekdays and \$95 weekends (the rates go up to \$99 and \$125 in peak season), but if you're going to play one course in that price range this year, my advice would be to make a tee time at Wild Rock.



### Web site: [WildRockGolf.com](http://WildRockGolf.com)

Location: 511 E. Adams St., Wisconsin Dells.

Telephone: (608) 253-4653.

Green fees: Until July 3, the rates are \$85 weekdays and \$95 weekends; from July 4 to Aug. 24, \$99 and \$125; from Aug. 25 to Sept. 28, \$85 and \$95. All rates include green fees, carts equipped with GPS and use of the practice facility. Wilderness Territory guests receive discounts.

### RATING

The rating is done on a 10-point scale, with 10 being the highest score in each category and 70 the highest possible total:

Overall course conditions: 8

Quality of greens: 8.5

Aesthetics: 10

Playability: 9

Variety of holes: 10

Service: 9.5

Value: 9.5

Total: 64.5

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