



## Rock Harbor Golf Course ~ Riding Out the Storm

Nick Ciattei



It was pretty much a normal Friday at Rock Harbor Golf Course in Winchester, VA. July 22nd was the date, the course had daily fee players on the Boulder Course, and the Rock Course was hosting the annual Round Hill Fire & Rescue golf event. This large fundraiser for the local fire department is one of the better benefit outings in that region. Between the two courses about 250 golfers were out on the course that day. It was a typical hot and humid summer day, one that has isolated thunderstorms forecasted for the afternoon. Here's where I start sounding like TWC's Jim Cantore. Rock Harbor officials noticed a nasty blob on the radar heading across Frederick County. Marshals scurried players as quickly as they could to safe locations. What happened next not even the weather service could have predicted. A wet microburst formed right over the area. You will

have to Google this meteorological phenomenon to understand it. Strong winds (up to 70 mph) tore the roof off of the cart shed where hundreds of golfers were taking shelter two floors below. Hundreds of trees were uprooted or damaged. Rock Harbor owner Denny Perry says "We were very lucky no one was hurt seriously." One of my best friends, Bill Hearne, was playing in the event. He told me, "Nick, I've never seen anything that scary in my life." That came from a man who has seen my golf swing! Flying debris caused some minor injuries, which were attended to by members of the rescue squad that were there for the event. Perry wanted to let *The Golf Guide* know how taken aback he was when the next day dozens of members and non-members were out with chain saws and ready to help with the cleanup. "That next day made us all feel a whole lot better," added Perry.



It was business as usual at Rock Harbor rather quickly with all of the additional help. Since opening in 2003, Rock Harbor has become a regional favorite known for Perry's creative design and outstanding daily conditions. Just last year, the facility introduced "The Boulder" course along with new holes added to "The Rock" course. The latter is the one with which golfers are most familiar and starts out relatively calm compared to the onslaught that follows. Have your game in gear by the fourth hole, a tough, dogleg left par 4 that plays uphill to a two-tiered green. The par 5 fifth blends rocks and water and is a real assault when played from the 620-yard black tees. Several holes at Rock play along this amphitheater

of H<sub>2</sub>O and mortar, and none are more memorable than the par 3 seventh island green. The back nine on “The Rock” now mixes in seven of those aforementioned new holes beginning with the twelfth. This tornado of a par 5 starts with a daunting tee shot over water and ends with what can only be described as a boomerang green. The thirteenth is a par 3 that plays to an enormous green shared with another hole on “The Boulder.” The par 5 fifteenth is a classic risk–reward tempest that has an option for your second shot. One choice is the conservative longer route or you could take the shorter distance through and over a boulder field. Rock on! The sixteenth is one of my favorite short par 4’s at Rock



Rock Hole 7



Boulder Castle Hole

Harbor. A cavernous gorge consumes any missed hits when attempting to drive the green. A 100–foot drop from the tee to a heart-shaped green puts the seventeenth in a class by itself.

“The Boulder” course incorporates six of Rock Harbor’s original eighteen,

while fusing in several unique new holes. Having only eleven holes total takes nothing away from this course, and a couple of different tee boxes also keeps it interesting on holes you play twice during your loop. Much like when Perry introduced his Island Green to us, his Castle Hole is another of his singular creations. A fifteen foot wall of rock protects the green on this hole. This is one of those that you play twice, so you’ll get a second chance to slay the Castle. We still have some time to wait before “The Boulder” course is complete, but what is offered is plenty tasty for most golfers. Rock Harbor has always promoted the sport for every level of player. Six tee boxes on each course make play comfortably for all, even with all the bells and whistles the clever designer throws at you.

Every golf course at one time or another is going to have a bad storm like the one that Rock Harbor had that July afternoon. We are just so grateful that no one was seriously hurt and the damage was repairable. Like one of the long time workers at Rock Harbor told me “That was a day of miracles.” 🍷

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