

“WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CORI BRETT?”

October 2011

“SCOTTSDALE’S NEWEST COURSE”

I really wanted to talk to Phil Mickelson. When the timing was right, I boldly introduced myself and said, “There aren’t very many women out here today - I wanted to tell you that I played your course, and I loved it.” “That’s just what we want to hear!” he replied.

We were at the Grand Opening of the McDowell Mountain Golf Club in mid-October. Mickelson and Steve Loy, his former golf coach at Arizona State, acquired operating rights this past spring and renovated the course over the summer, with the guidance of the original designer, Randy Heckenkemper.



Hole #17

In what’s being referred to as “the 100-day transformation,” everything changed. They switched the nines, reshaped the course, and changed the name. Formerly Sanctuary Golf Course, the name now reflects the surrounding McDowell Mountain Ranch community. www.mcdowellmountaingc.com

I remembered Sanctuary and wanted to see how the new course would play for women. Like I said, I loved it! Several big changes were immediately apparent. Additional turf has been added to make fairways wider and to connect forward tees to fairways, practically eliminating forced carries. Thank you, Phil! Overgrown vegetation was cleared away, greatly improving visibility, and a number of bunkers were filled in. I’m inclined to spend a little more time on the practice range now. It’s significantly expanded and is partially covered by a new shade canopy.



10th Green

I only lost one ball on this round. New waste bunkers keep balls from rolling into the desert areas. Even the desert areas are more forgiving, all cleaned up and enhanced with new decomposed granite ground cover. Beautiful hand-stacked rock walls line cart paths and define newly landscaped areas. Occasionally, I spotted deer grazing under a tree or near a pond. On second glance, they were actually bronze sculptures!

Overall, I found the renovated course more enjoyable - not necessarily easier, but just more fun to play. There are four tees. Red (4,880 yards) and white (5,724 yards) are both rated for women. I was hoping for a combo tee somewhere in between.

My playing partners, former college golf team stars, were thrilled to see new back tees on many of the holes, which lengthened the course to 7,072 yards. I loved watching them hit those power drives, and seeing the course from the tips was impressive. All the changes really opened up the views. They saved the best for last. From tee to green on No. 18, the 360-degree view is a show-stopper.

I was impressed with Mickelson's sincerity in wanting to create an enjoyable, affordable place for families to play golf. "It's my goal to grow the game of golf. We want kids to learn at a young age." He talked about providing a "Kids Club" on site, where children can be entertained and play games under supervision – even take golf lessons – while parents enjoy a round of golf. It's a huge step for golf to even entertain the idea of child care, although gyms like LA Fitness and others have offered it for years.



McDowell Mountain Golf Club is the first step in a multi-club golf membership program for Arizona that Mickelson and Loy plan to launch in early November. “The M Club is Coming” was the refrain of the day. So far, Palm Valley in Goodyear and Chaparral Pines and The Rim Golf Club in Payson will be included, with others to be announced. Mickelson told us “The M Club” will initially operate from the offices of Gaylord Sports Management, where Loy serves as CEO.

Green fees at McDowell Mountain range from \$55 to \$99 weekdays and \$65 to \$109 weekends. Peak season rates start at \$70, up to \$145 on weekends. “M Club” members and McDowell Mountain Players Club members receive preferred pricing and other privileges.

My favorite hole for purely personal reasons was par-3 No. 3. I hit a 6-iron that soared in a perfect arc straight for the pin. The ball rolled slowly toward the hole until we couldn’t see it any more --could it possibly have gone in??? Fingers crossed, we approached the green only to find my ball just inches from the pin. As they say, close but no cigar. I’m determined to go back and try again.

*“Escape with Cori” on assignment to exotic and fun golf destinations. First-hand impressions from an experienced golf travel writer and AWGA member. www.coribrett.com
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