



# THE RIDGE

## GOLF COURSE

BARDEN RIDGE • NSW

IT HAS BEEN 10 YEARS IN THE MAKING SO IT'S NO SURPRISE THE OPENING OF THIS NEW COURSE HAS BEEN GREETED WITH OPEN ARMS BY GOLFERS IN SYDNEY'S SOUTHERN SUBURBS.

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: **BRENDAN JAMES**

Golfers in Sydney's southern suburbs, particularly those in and around the famous Sutherland Shire, have yearned for more golfing facilities for as long as this writer can remember. Golfers west, south-west, north and east of the city have had the lion's share for a long time, with more courses per head of population in those areas.

Courses like Woolooware, Cronulla and Kareela have been shouldering the load for decades, with the other option for Shire golfers being to try their luck at a tee-time south in the Illawarra region.

The conundrum facing any possible golf course development in the south has always been the availability of suitable golfing land, with the region bounded by the Royal National Park to the south, steep terrain sloping down to the Woronora River, and high-end real estate pushed to the edges of the Georges River.

So the official opening of The Ridge Golf Course earlier this year has, not surprisingly, seen big numbers of golfers flocking to the layout.

The evolution of the course has covered 10 years from initial construction on the site to the opening of the back nine to complete the 18-hole layout.

As mentioned, with land for golf courses and sporting facilities in general being at a premium, the Sutherland Shire Council and Waste Service NSW undertook the redevelopment of an old tip site at Barden Ridge, about 10 minutes' drive west of Sutherland, into a major regional sporting facility covering 104 hectares.

This state-of-the-art sporting facility has been developed on treated and compacted land with 850,000 tonnes of clean fill. Work commenced in 2000 and includes six playing fields, 12 netball courts, an athletics track as well as award-winning The Ridge driving range.

Lying at the heart of the development now is The Ridge golf course designed by James Wilcher, who includes a number of highly-ranked courses on his resume, including The Cut in Western Australia and Pacific Dunes, near Port Stephens in New South Wales.

He says The Ridge was the most difficult project he has ever been involved with due to the technical aspects involved in getting a

MAIN: The massive 45-metre long green that awaits at the end of the impressive par-5 10th hole. BELOW LEFT: The approach to the green on the par-4 2nd is short but it must be accurate. BELOW RIGHT: The long par-4 7th hole demands long, accurate hitting.







The green of the par-3 11th hole sits above the eye line and makes club selection difficult.

The short uphill par-4 12th features plenty of sand which is always best avoided.

canvas on which to create the layout. “It was a difficult technical job as it required a substantial bridging layer to separate the landfill from the golf course,” he said. “This took about 1.8 million cubic metres of mainly crushed sandstone, mined from a new landfill operation up the road. The topsoil was also manufactured at the new landfill station from green waste and crushed sandstone.”

Once this layer was bedded down, Wilcher was able to outline his plan for the course, which is a par-72 that measures 6,106 metres off the back markers.

The first nine holes opened in 2009 and at the time it was the first course of any size to open in the Sydney metropolitan area in five years. The second nine holes opened on February 2 this year and more than 600 golfers tackled the layout in its first weekend of play. The quality of the layout has seen plenty of return business to the public course, with more than 5,000 rounds being played per month since all 18 holes were opened for play.

“The Ridge has been very popular, which is great,” Wilcher says. “And we haven’t really seen the course at its absolute best yet. The course is still maturing and will take some time to reach its potential but it is still a great course and is getting better and better all the time. It still hasn’t had a full summer growing season so there are even better playing surfaces to come.”

Wilcher added that The Ridge, on top of presenting a golfing challenge to players of all standards, is also an attractive place to play. “One feature that makes this course stand out is its environmentally friendly credentials,” he said. “It features a state-of-the-art watering system, which is supplied by a 46-megalitre dam constructed on site. The dam also supplies the water hazards.

“The mix of native trees and plants in the landscaping right across the layout also makes it an attractive and environmentally friendly place to play.”

I really liked The Ridge. The bentgrass greens, even the much

younger surfaces of the greens on the back nine holes, are simply superb. As Wilcher has suggested, the Windsor green fairways will certainly benefit from growth during this upcoming summer but overall they remain quite good. The rough here is kept relatively short, making it less penal for the casual golfer, and it presents a different colour and look to the fairways as it is couch oversown with rye grass.

The course opens gently with three short par-4s. The fairways of this trio are generously wide and for the accomplished player there is a real opportunity to set the platform for a good round.

The Ridge starts to show its teeth at the 361-metre par-4 4th. This is a great hole where you are faced with a blind drive to a fairway that lies much lower than the tee. There is a bunker on the right edge of the fairway in the driving zone, while native bushland flanks the left edge of the hole and wraps around the back of the green. Bunkers either side of the putting surface are best avoided and, given the dramatic slope of the green, try to find the low side of the flag with your approach.

For mine, the best holes at The Ridge are on the back nine, with the 10th, 12th, 13th, 14th and 16th holes all worthy of note.

The hole that will long be remembered by most visitors is the 528-metre par-5 10th. This is not only a fantastic looking hole, it is also an exciting hole to play with plenty of playing options available to secure your par ... or better. From the elevated tee, everything is

laid out before you and off in the distance lies the massive green just beyond an equally sizeable lake. The driving zone for most players is wide enough, although a bunker to the left makes par a tough ask if your drive ends up here. Only the longest hitters will toy with the idea of reaching the green in two, which requires a second shot to make a long carry over the lake, left of the fairway and short of the green. The lake also comes into play for those trying to find a good lay-up position. The best strategy is to steer clear of the water and leave a slightly longer third shot straight up the green, which measures 45 metres from front to back, making it one of the largest single putting surfaces in Sydney.

Perhaps the most talked about hole in years to come will be the 373-metre par-4 14th, which marks the start of a very strong finish to The Ridge layout. Again, an elevated tee offers a good view of the fairway in front, and the lake that bounds the right side. The fairway turns sharply right around the edge of the water and climbs steeply to the green, which sits more than 20 metres above the lowest point of the fairway and presents one of the most demanding shots during the round here. A good tip is to take note of the pin position when playing the 13th hole because you cannot see the bottom of the flag when hitting your second shot here.

The Ridge was a joy and will only get better, and more popular, as it matures.



The 8th hole is arguably the best of the par-3s at The Ridge.



The final approach, taking the direct route, to the 10th green.

Fact File

### THE COURSE

**LOCATION:** Recreation Drive, off New Illawarra Rd, Barden Ridge. About 10 minutes' drive west of Sutherland via the Bangor by-pass.

**CONTACT:** (02) 9541 4960.

**WEBSITE:** [www.theridgegolf.com.au](http://www.theridgegolf.com.au)

**DESIGNER:** James Wilcher (2013).

**PLAYING SURFACES:** Bentgrass (greens); Windsor Green couch (fairways); Santa Ana couch (tees); Couch oversown with rye grass (short rough).

**PGA PROS:** Kurt Stegbauer and Gary Booby.

**GREEN FEES:** \$33 (18 holes); \$23 (seniors and juniors under 18).

**THE CLUB**

**MEMBERSHIPS:** Sutherland Shire Council is reviewing existing club structures to ensure the direction for The Ridge will be sustainable. Therefore, the council does not envisage club membership being available until some time during 2014. You can register your interest at [www.theridgegolf.com.au](http://www.theridgegolf.com.au)

**COACHING:** Gary Booby and former Teacher of the

Year, Kurt Stegbauer, head the teaching team of the on-site Sutherland Shire Golf Academy, which has been behind the creation of the largest junior program in NSW.

The Academy operates a state-of-the-art coaching studio in air-conditioned comfort, where you can have your swing digitally filmed from all angles and then receive detailed computer analysis / instruction from any of the seven PGA golf professionals on site.