

**Hidden Creek Golf Club**  
**Egg Harbour Township, NJ**

Architect: Bill Coore/Ben Crenshaw (2002)

Tee	Par	Yardage	Rating	Slope
Championship	71	7023	73.5	136
Member	71	6562	71.6	131
Forward	72	5486	72.3	127

Overview:

Bill Coore was asked by a wealthy New Jersey real estate developer, Roger Hansen, to create distinctive golf course on 750 acres of sandy rolling pine barren woodlands he acquired outside of Atlantic City. He had in mind a golf club in the Pine Valley tradition-a private haven where wealthy people with presence in this area could entertain their friends and colleagues with the highest standard of golf, food, and accommodations in a casual environment without pretense.

Coore spent a considerable amount of time walking the ground before a contract was prepared and determined it offered an opportunity to create rustic walking course with a character unique to this region. There was enough elevation change in the property to make holes with distinct topological interest and plenty of natural vegetation to provide the look and feel of an old English heathland course.

What he came up with was an old style walking course, short walks from greens to tees, that clings to the upland part of the property. With a minimal amount of dirt being moved, it would have the raw and natural looking hazards of mounding, deep bunkers, and long fescue grasses you might see at a course like Sunningdale outside of London. There would be no paved cart paths, no houses interrupting the landscape, just natural delight as far as the eye can see. Coore said of the project, "The Hidden Creek site required very little alteration to the landscape. The holes lay on the ground pretty much the way we found it."

Coore and Crenshaw embrace the old style principles of great designers of the golden age providing plenty of room to play the course and generous access to the greens. There may be ferocious bunkering on one side of a fairway or green but you will rarely see both sides cordoned by trouble. This makes the play much more enjoyable for the recreational player who does not want to take on the macho challenge. Like many of the great courses of that period, playing this course well is about thoughtful tactical intention with adept execution of the shots required.

They created big set backs for the holes from the existing trees-this makes for an enhanced canvas on which to present the holes. Lush bent fairways throughout set against gold fescue grasses make for a beautiful presentation. The most distinctive characteristic is the seemingly random mounding and bunkering that provide most of the hazards. There is no water in play on the course-they did not route any of the holes through the wetlands that take up almost half of the property. The randomness of the placement of the hazards defies the symmetrical look of so many modern designers and it makes the playing lines infinitely more interesting to discern as you plan your shots.

There are over 100 bunkers on the course and they often have eyebrows of natural long fescue reminiscent of Royal County Down-this makes them very intimidating looking from afar as well as difficult from which to extricate yourself if you are too close to the front of the bunkers. Pay particular attention to the relative position of the hazards to the landing areas and greens. With some optical trickery they can seem more imposing than they really are-there is often more wiggle room in the formula than meets the eye.

I found the mystery of the greens particularly intriguing. These are big, sprawling oceans of green with pitch and undulations that will confound you both on your approach shots and your putting. Local advice is essential until your personal knowledge of the greens is up to speed. These guys have real genius giving you plenty of room to approach but giving you little room to approach successfully. You can hit what seems like a wonderful shot that seems to randomly separate from the hole against all your intentions. The greens roll very nicely and have lots of speed, especially down hill. This is not really a set of greens that call for a nickel defense but you have to be careful when the speed conditions of a particular putt are at the optimum.

What is an architectural accomplishment of no small order, given that the property itself does not have inherent dramatic topography, is no two holes on the course look remotely similar. You cannot anticipate what is coming next because there is no pattern to the sequence or the hole designs. The sequencing of the holes is brilliant, you might have a monstrously long par four followed by a short pitch par three or a reachable par five. This keeps the player off balance because the challenges vary dramatically from hole to hole.

The entire facility is top notch. The locker room, eating facility, and practice facilities are as good as any high end club you will visit. Like you would see at Pine Valley or Caves Valley they built a very nice lodge to accommodate out of town guests in for a multi-day visit to the club. You are going to need an invite to get here but if you can find one you will not be disappointed in what they have created.

#### Hole-by-Hole Analysis:

##### #1 Par 4 392 yards

You start with a wide berth on the first hole-a big driving area on a slight dog leg left-just across an sea of wispy fescue grass. Best position off the tee is right center. With all the room hit it hard to give yourself the shortest club you can for a second. Like many you will see today, the green is very large and wavy and without a bunker to frame the undulations for you. Listen to your caddie for the preferred approach angle to the day's pin to avoid an early three putt.

##### #2 Par 4 374

On this hole that there is a preferred line for aggressive play but not without an accompanying risk. This is a shorter hole than the first but requires a bit more acumen off the tee box. Drive it over the fescue on the right to a position off the edge of the bunker on the right to get a look at the green tucked to the right behind a bunker and a big mound with more tall grass. The green has lots of undulation so you need seeing eye help again to know how to place your approach.

### #3 Par 5 501

One more relatively manageable hole before the pace of your heart quickens. Drive to right center and avoid the bunker on the left-it seems to have tentacles. From there you probably have a poke at the green if you are far enough down the landing area. A huge quarry waste bunker down the right dominates the last 160 yards and makes the carry very intimidating so the shot shape in is a fade off the greenside bunker on the left. . If the prudent decision is to lay up the landing area is between 130 and 115 yards. Green has a bit of a false front so you have to carry your ball into the heart of the green in the air to be putting.

### #4 Par 3 202

Kick on the defibrillator it is time to start paying real attention. In my estimation the coolest hole on the course and that is saying something. From an elevated tee you take in a majestic green slightly below you draped around a face bunker. They carved out the tree line behind this 9,400 square foot green to provide a dramatic setback. The green is almost a Redan style with a distinct drop from front right to the back left as it crosses a ridge. Framed by a bunker on the right side which defines the high side of the green and the nasty one in front where the green falls to the left behind it, the required shot is a slinging draw that lands in the front right and feeds to the left on it's own. The elevation change does not seem to lessen the club required-it is a full carry to the surface or you will be pitching. Watching this ball fly down to the target and then work it's own magic is something special to behold.

### #5 Par 4 381

The next two holes are a bit minimalist in their presentation but don't be fooled, there are high scores lurking if you get careless. The drive is center at the furry mound through the fairway the slope of the landing area will feed your ball to the left. The hole bends left but beware of trying to hit it too close to the turn-the fall off from the fairway is to double bogie land. Access to the green from the left side can be blocked by sentinel pines just short of the green on that side. The bunkerless green is framed by these pines on the left and the large mound on the right that is well short of the putting surface. The front of this 50 yard long green leans toward you but there is a ridge across the putting surface about a third in that will feed overanxious shots all the way to the back. Just a wonderfully balanced hole that looks like it was placed by nature.

### #6 Par 4 426

If you liked that one you will love the next one. Hardest rated hole on this side and it is not just the yardage. This landing area is framed by trees on both sides, no wandering off the tee will be tolerated. Aim at the right edge of the green side bunker on the left to leave a good look at the green which is set slightly to the right. The bunker on the right appears to be at the edge of the green but it is actually set well forward so there is plenty of room to hit a long approach safely to a pitching area they left front right of the green if you need it. This massive green leans back to front and sits up from the fairway so you have to elevate your approach all the way to the surface to be on in regulation. Great design, the proportion of the playing parameters of this hole just seem right.

#### #7 Par 3 161

Maybe a bit of a breather in this shortish three par. Green is slightly above the tee with a pot bunker protecting the front right and two pots just off the front left. Play the shot into the middle of the green and putt back to take the sand game out of play.

#### #8 Par 4 273

A very strategic short par four where the pin position of the day will dictate which side of the target bunker in the center of the driving area you want to play. I like a 210 club off the tee just off the side of the day. If the hole is left take the left side of the bunker, if it is on the right then the right side is preferred. This leaves 90 to 100 to a green with an elephant cheek in the center which can do arbitrary things to a ball coming in. Alternatively if you feel super strong and maybe the wind is at your back you could take on the green from the tee but once it disappears from site over the center bunker you won't know your fate until you walk the first two thirds of the hole. Just the right mix of mystery and existential fate make this a really fun hole to play.

#### #9 Par 5 551

The final hole on this side is a strategically bland three shotter but it has it's features. Drive it at the center of the bunker constellation in front of you, be long off this tee as the hole doglegs around the bunkers and you need to be far enough to take them out of consideration on your next shot . Hit a left to right lay up following the shape of the hole to about 100 yards. There is more sand and grassy static down the right side of the hole the last 100 yards. The look of the green setting against the back drop of the clubhouse adorned with flowers, shrubs, and a huge clock on the wall is resplendent. This would make a very distinguished looking finishing image on TV.

#### #10 Par 4 447

The hole sequencing on the first three holes of the inward half is very intriguing. Two monster par fours with the cream filling of a pitch and putt par three in between. This is a big hole that dogears left, you want your drive with a draw down the right center just off the two bunkers on the right. If you get it far enough there is a down slope that will kick it forward and shorten your shot to the green. Your second is over an approach muddled by random bunkers and mounds. The unreceptive green is rather long and runs away from you so you have to hit this long approach shot very dexterously to control where it ends up.

#### #11 Par 3 117

Hide and seek on this very short uphill pitch to a ping pong table covered with grass. This green is the smallest on the course so you have to be very precise with a spinning pitch. The two furry bunkers that guard the left create the peek-a-boo effect. You really have to aim to center and putt from there because the green falls off to the left into a very hairy low area from which no saves will be found. Just love what they are asking you to do after you just played that behemoth last hole.

#### #12 Par 4 450

OK we are back to large again. This is the number 1 handicap hole on the course with a Wow factor of about 8. You drive from the crest of a small knob to a landing area on the wide crest of another. Drive it right center at the right edge of the bunker constellation. Now you will see a bevy of bunkers short and left of the green. You need to slide a long club into the landing area just right of the bevy. The green has a false front to it so you are likely looking at a pitch and a putt par at best. A very difficult hole where you do not want to take on any extra risk-a five is a fine score here.

#### #13 Par 4 374

The next two holes are on much flatter terrain. On this one, without the topography, they left trees in the playing area and around the green complex to define the hole. There are 11 bunkers on this hole so proper placement of your shots is crucial. A dogleg right where best positioning is a drive that carries the bunker in the middle of the fairway and ends up right center off the left edge of the right bunker. Bunch of bunkers defining the outside corner of the dogleg on the left give a great visual parameter. Green leans to back right and sits up slightly favoring a right to left approach avoiding the bunker on the right of the green.

#### #14 Par 3 182

Another piece of flat terrain they made this an on level three par that has a bit of green lean to the left and a large chipping area short and left. The visual flatness of the green complex makes it extremely difficult for a player to discern from the tee exactly where the putting surface begins. This creates doubt in the mind of the player as to his club and shot selection as he stands over the ball. The green has a kidney shape that surrounds the chipping area. Play a running type shot off the bunker on the right, the back bunker frames the look of the shot for you. As with many approach shots at Hidden Creek the ground can be your ally.

#### #15 Par 4 391

This is an old fashioned hard dogleg left. Your tee shot is a draw at the left edge of the bunker through the fairway to get a look around the corner to the green set above you and to the left. Middle iron should be a fade over a line of furry stuff up the right to a bunkerless green with a large hurdle bump in front. If you have a long club in your hand you can bounce your ball on that bump and help control the run out of your approach. This is a simple hole but a challenging par.

#### #16 Par 4 450

A strong finish in the works for you now. This long par four is the #3 handicap hole and it is plays it's full measure and difficulty. The hole is truncated from the tee by a line of grassy mounds about 300 yards out. The drive line is to right center and long. Now you elevate a long shot over a transition to a green set up to the left and framed by a bunker on the left. There is a long bunker that cordons the right side of the hole from about 120 yards in. The furry stuff throughout the hole is visually intimidating and must be avoided or you are looking at a major cha-ching on your scorecard.

#17 Par 5 488

A tantalizing teaser here-great beauty and subtle lurking dangers. Tactically they are giving you a reachable par five late in the round as an opportunity to repair a broken scorecard. But you have to take on that opportunity with great care. Drive to center between the bunkers. Open access to the long green so if you think you can reach in two you might take a shot at it-just don't make a misguided approach or you are making a double. Lay up is across the bunkers to about 100 yards right center. From there you have a straight pitch up the green with bunkers flanking both sides.

#18 Par 4 402

The game ends with a swinging dogear right that sweeps over a hill and back to the right toward the clubhouse. Just screams for a Calc power fade off this tee. If you end up right center over the top of the hill you have a look across a cache of bunkers on the left well short of the green to a raised putting surface protected by a mean face bunker on the right. This one has a serious false front so anything timid will start moving back at you once it lands.