

Stoneleigh Golf Club: Where Stone Walls Are Battle Tested

By *Jeffrey A. Rendall, Contributor*

Round Hill, VA - Manassas National Battlefield has an equestrian statue of Stonewall Jackson placed near the spot where he reportedly was standing when he received his famous nickname during the First Battle of Manassas/Bull Run. Near the statue itself is a granite monument marking the piece of ground where General Bernard Bee gave Jackson the legendary name, shouting to his troops during a crucial point in the battle "There stands Jackson like a stone wall! Rally 'round the Virginians!"

Stoneleigh Golf Club, in Round Hill Virginia, isn't real proximate to the previously referenced spot of earth. But there's something about the place that brings about the same line of thought-when it comes to stone walls, or standing like one-then Stoneleigh's the place.



Stoneleigh's Northern Virginia hunt country cousins, Raspberry Falls and Lansdowne, both offer stone walls in the tradition of old-style British seaside links golf courses. Both have incorporated the walls into the theme of their courses. But Stoneleigh goes beyond mere theme-its stone walls are part of the course. And part of its charm. They're not there just for show-they come into play on any number of holes.

Stone walls in the Scottish birthplace of golf were part of the course because the game itself was played in open grazing pastures. You had the walls there to keep one farmer's sheep from going on to the land of another-there were practical reasons for having them. The same is true when it comes to the land that Stoneleigh is part of-which dates back to the early 1700's in terms of 'new world' settlement.

History-the game's and otherwise-is a big part of what Stoneleigh is about. From the first tee, you can see a stone house off to the left that is an original dwelling, built in 1750.



Further, the stone walls that are so much a part of the course today served a similar purpose to those in the old times across the sea-to demarcate property and contain livestock. Now, however, they make a terrific addition to a charming golf course.

The property's history and stone walls, along with the topography of the land and surrounding vivid scenery make up the unique aspects of the golf club.

Set in the rolling countryside west of Leesburg, the course takes all the spectacular local color into account and gives you a remarkably challenging layout. The track is laid amongst an unobtrusive upscale housing complex, but has a distinct private club setting. Very quiet and very 'country' in feel.

The course prides itself on its difficulty as well as its beauty, proudly proclaiming that its 141 slope from the back tees (6,707 yards) is the third highest in the state-trailing only Royal New Kent and the Robert Trent Jones Golf Club, where the President's Cup takes place.

Much of the difficulty is due to the layout, which incorporates the existing conditions of the ground on which it is placed. The course architect, Canadian Lisa Maki, made no attempts to exclude tricky natural features from the design of the course. The result is a target layout that calls for precise club selection and leaves little room for error in many places.

Adding to the challenge-especially for first-timers, is that several of the tee shots are blind. Throw in some of the most severely undulating and tiered greens that I've ever seen, and you've got quite a witch's brew of difficulty. Most courses have defenses in the form of tight fairway layouts or tricky greens. Stoneleigh has both. Anyone who likes to challenge the fates of golf should make this course a priority.

Stoneleigh's Assistant Golf Professional, Mark Lammi, strongly suggested hitting the ball close to the pin to make putting more manageable. On this course, it's more than common sense: "Our greens are probably more sloped and tiered than what you're used to-and whenever you can determine it, try and hit it onto the same level as the pin. Otherwise, you'll leave yourself with a pretty difficult two-putt."

Garnering the appropriate speed on putts is essential to short game success here. The greens weren't glassy fast, but the slopes often left putts struck a tad too hard several feet past the hole.

Turning to the course itself, there are many holes that deserve special note. The second is probably the most notorious hole on the course, only because it would be hard to find another quite like it. It only plays to 336 yards from the back tees-but the real question should be how many yards up does it play.

You'll hit your drive up the slope to several different tiers for landing areas. Second shots are also straight up, with Lammi's advice of "two extra clubs" well necessary. The approach shot is blind, since a stone wall lies before the green, and only the top of the flagstick is visible. Once you're up there, the green is severely sloped and tiered. Lammi says that they're developing a system to mark the day's pin placements for players-and this hole is a great example of why it's needed.



The seventh is another short par four, 342 yards from the back. Unlike the second, the tee shot is all downhill to a well-defined target landing area, and requires only a long iron or three wood for proper distance. The second shot must carry large bunkers and mounds to an elevated green.

It's redundant to say that the putting slope is severe, but it is. Only at Stoneleigh could you have a hole that plays 3 iron - 9 iron that is this difficult. If you miss the green, it'll put all of your chipping skills to the test to try and leave yourself a makeable par putt. Another example of how club selection is vital here.

The back nine is just as varied and difficult as the front. The twelfth is Stoneleigh's #1 handicap hole, and could possibly take top honors as the state's most difficult hole. 422 yards from the back, uphill tee shots must avoid certain death from thick vegetation and a creek on the left, and out of bounds over a stonewall to the right.



Should you manage to hit safely, you'll still leave a long iron or fairway wood into the green, because it's tucked in between trees and about 50 feet above the landing area. The approach is blind, of course, and the green is no picnic.

Thirteen is a very picturesque par three that calls for a slightly downhill tee ball over two terraced stonewalls to a tiered green. In between the walls is a historic road that dates back to colonial times-it's said that

George Washington once traveled on the road, and that it was in major use during the Civil War for Confederate force movements and supply.

The hole itself features the characteristic Stoneleigh green contours-if you're on the wrong level, it'll be hard to leave a gimme putt.

Fourteen is a 457 yard par four with quite a dramatic elevation drop off the tee and again for the approach. A stone wall and creek are placed thirty yards before the green-mostly for show unless you hit left and the trees stop your ball. One of the more level greens on the course, but still slopes considerably from back to front.

Eighteen is a reachable par five at 478 yards. The tee shot will test you-a forced carry over a lake, a creek to the left once it's cleared, and out of bounds on the right. Layup shots will require a short to mid iron over a creek that runs through the fairway, and will leave a short iron approach for the third. Going at it in two will call for a fairway wood hit high over a stone lined creek to an elevated green. There is a little room to the right to miss-just don't go left, or short!

Once the round is done, it's a good idea to visit the quaint tavern on site for a cool one and a chance to reflect on the day's events. Thinking about it, it's probably easier to see how Stoneleigh got its name as opposed to Stonewall Jackson. The whole experience will make you want to make a trip to the nearest home improvement store to start building your own stone walls!