



Postcards from *Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa* Speed Bumps, Hymns, and Moonlight Graham

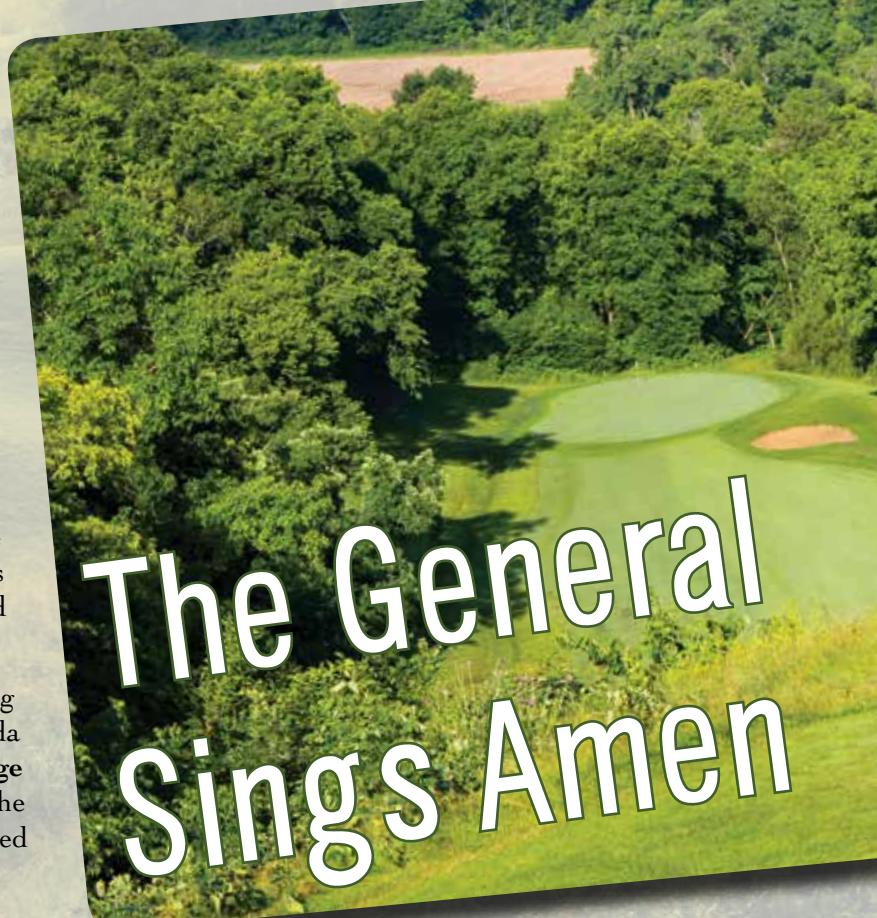
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They call it the "Driftless" Area, which really just means there is plenty of unspoiled beauty ahead. After all, Mother Nature, by golf or general landscape, is the usually the best creator.

To delve deeper, however, might give even a better appreciation. That this focal point can offer the best of the "Driftless," otherwise known as an area of the Midwest left unharmed by the glaciers during the ice age, makes it feel like a pure experience. On a drive in from all points surrounding – Dubuque, southeast Minnesota and southwest Wisconsin – the stage is set. Sweeping hills and valleys by prairie or farmland, exposed rock ridges and bluffs and the mighty Mississippi River are just a few of the wonders to behold.

Galena, Illinois is a nationally-registered historic little town. Civil War generals and U.S. presidents have roots there. A house nearly 200 years old still stands there. And not many towns can combine antiques with ice cream quite like Galena. The preservation of the downtown area not only attracts tourists and outdoor enthusiasts but also Hollywood filmmakers, too.

For a most recent visit by Midwest Golfing Magazine (MGM), golf, of course, was on the agenda as the main event. The destination was **Eagle Ridge Resort & Spa** (www.eagleridge.com), one of the publication's favorite spots and a highly-regarded regional golf destination for several decades.



The General Sings Amen

There are several outdoor public stairways in downtown Galena including one with 143 steps that is not for the faint of heart. Main Street Galena and the Galena River sit at the base of a hillside, and as a result, it feels like some of the neighborhoods there exist on levels. The stairs, therefore, offer a different type of around-the-block exercise, if not adding some curiosity. What lies around that corner? Or at the top of those stairs? What might the view be like up there?



The golf courses at Eagle Ridge - there are four of them (63 holes total) - have a similar feeling. They act as representations of the "Driftless," and more specifically, the 6,800-acre Galena Territory. The best example of this is the **General Course** (1997, Andy North and Roger Packard) where the signature hole exists. From the overhead satellite view on Google Maps, No. 5 on the General looks like a fairly straight-forward, short par-4. But a closer look at the winding cart path off the tee, which bends like Lombard Street in San Francisco, begins to tell a different story.

At least two courses at Eagle Ridge require golfers to sign a waiver to use a cart. It is easy to see why after experiencing some of the attentive and cautious driving needed at several spots - no more than coming down the ridge at No. 5. The tee shot sits some 180 feet above and from there the fairway and green look completely blind. Just pick out a tree branch or something much further in the distance (maybe miles away on the horizon?) as the target line. With either an iron or driver in hand, the tee shot feels exhilarating if not unsettling at the same time.

Twenty-two speed bumps interrupt the entire cart path route on the General Course accompanied by 24 "Caution: Slippery When Wet" signs. There

Golfers can see 40 miles into Iowa when standing on the 14th tee at The General.

are also several "Caution: Steep Grade" signs, eight bridges and two tunnels to navigate which should give an indication of what an adventure the General can be. The different tee boxes are appropriately indicated by one-, two-, three-, and four-stars. No less than at least six holes have a legitimate WOW factor off the tee including Nos. 1 and 18.

Hole No. 8 is another one of those holes. It features a slithering, uphill fairway made to look even thinner by the risen tee boxes. On this trip, a moment of catharsis comes just before the fairway shot to that eighth green. Against a late afternoon blue sky, a hawk soars high above. Just then a smooth, yet booming voice sings from off the fairway. At first, it sounds like a recording. But after a few more seconds it becomes clear - the voice is live from one of the residential homes buried in the dense forest. The song is rhythmically slow and beautiful with refrains of "Amen! Amen! Amen!" that match the setting perfectly. If only the approach shot just after had been as beautiful or memorable.



Day One

Golfers will occasionally see hot-air balloons when playing The North course.

Appetite for a Full Day

Playing 36 holes in a day can be exhausting. But somehow, Eagle Ridge has a way of making it feel a little more relaxing. Maybe a visit to the spa in between rounds, or in this case, a quick bite to eat and a refreshment at the new general store on the grounds put the day at ease. There is no need to be in a hurry or to go hungry "on campus" at Eagle Ridge with everything just a short drive away and so many options available.

This past summer the General Course unveiled its new pro shop, the aforementioned general store, **Highlands Restaurant and Lounge 289**. The Lounge number refers to the distance in feet between the highest and lowest tee boxes on the course. And the Highlands menu reads like a regional party with its selections - The Silo, The Shulls-Burger, The Royal Sconnie, Bourbon Burnt Ends and Les Harber's Lake Galena Shore Lunch to name a few. The outdoor terrace, a popular option to wine or dine (or both) during these pandemic times, features a cantilever deck that overlooks the 10th and 18th holes on the General.

Save the big meal for after the 36 holes to prevent a food coma by the afternoon 18. Because playing the original course at Eagle Ridge, the **North** (1977), is a savory delight in itself. Take time to examine the mature oaks, take in the sweeping vistas of the countryside and remember those few snapshots of Lake Galena on the outward nine.

Hole No. 11, a sliver of a par-5 from its launching pad above, features an old barn closer to the green. Hundreds of barn swallows are flying in and out of its cracks and weathered planks. What could be a distraction amidst the dew and low sun is far enough away to provide for some ambient noise when the read on a 60-footer for birdie is probably pointless.

That moment provided the first mystical experience on the trip (not three-way of doing that in different settings. Kind of like the magic of film).



Day Two

The 18th hole at The South course features an upward climb toward the putting surface.

In the blockbuster movie Field of Dreams, Ray Kinsella's baseball field in the middle of an Iowa cornfield provides "Moonlight" Graham his wish. The flashback scenes where the two talk about that wish - in a fictitious Chisholm, Minnesota - were actually shot in Galena. Included in the movie was the previously-mentioned outdoor stairway.

The anticipation of visiting those locations in the film is high on the morning of the final day of MGM's visit. That type of energy seems to be evident even in a socially-distanced setting just off the screen porch overlooking Lake Galena at Eagle Ridge's Woodlands Restaurant.

Only a handful of guests are eating breakfast in a quiet setting. One table is talking about politics. The other two at different times chat about golf and what the day might bring on a Chamber of Commerce day - 75 degrees, no wind and all sun. The restaurant host engages them by talking about his favorite course at Eagle Ridge - the South Course - which he says may be the most exacting course of the four. More exacting than the General?

His assessment is a fair one. *The South* (1984) is the busiest of the courses on the trip with groups of seniors, ladies, a college golf team and at least one regional golf writer on the tee sheet. The setting through a wooded valley makes accuracy a premium and plays to irons off some tees for placement over distance. A creek runs through the property on 11 of 18 holes.

The stretch from Nos. 8-10 can make or break a round with its unique features. The creek runs straight down the right side on the short par-4 eighth before shooting in front of the green while a couple of large trees hang over the landing area. The ninth feels like a mini double dog leg (par-4). And No. 10, a longer par-4, has a creek depression that bisects the fairway at an angle. Get through those three holes with a par or two and confidence just might build for the second nine.

The last hole at the South is a fitting end to the trip providing a great final snapshot. The sharp downhill tee shot, a layup in front of the creek for most, gives a view of the entire par-4 hole and the clubhouse behind. Like much of the South Course, it is a tight shot. But no one ever said golf was easy.



Day Three



Day Three

Go the Distance



Too bad the nine-hole East Course is closed for bridge repair because every trip at Eagle Ridge should "go the distance" as the mysterious voice in Field of Dreams said. But if not a home run this time at bat, then a triple will suffice.

After all, a triple is exactly what "Moonlight" Graham played out in his wish to Kinsella.