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The Retreat & Links at Silvies Valley Ranch provides a full experience under a wide open sky

BY TONY DEAR



IT WAS OVER SCOTCH on Sunday afternoons in Portland that Scott Campbell and golf course architect Dan Hixson decided the golf course at Silvies Valley Ranch would be reversible.

"I visited Dr. Campbell at his home three or four times to discuss my ideas," says Hixson. "As I was looking at certain holes in the plan, I just kept thinking how good they looked going the other way too, so I suggested making the middle six holes reversible. Scott was intrigued by the concept and asked why we

shouldn't just do the whole thing as a reversible layout."

Silvies Valley Ranch is a 140,000-acre property in eastern Oregon (130 miles east of Bend) that Campbell purchased in 2007. It was first homesteaded in 1883, but fell into disrepair after a series of ownership changes.

Campbell, who had grown up in Burns, 40 miles away, and seen the area's logging and ranching industries virtually disappear, was determined to show the world what a beautiful place this remote outpost was, and generate new jobs by resurrecting the old ranch operation and creating a rustic retreat.

The former owner and CEO of Banfield Pet Hospital, which now has over 800 clinics in PetSmart stores, Campbell didn't play golf, but he had a number of friends who did. They told him his faraway

refuge should definitely have a golf course or two.

Hixson got the nod to build it (them) over five other big-name candidates for a number of reasons. First, he was a fellow Oregonian. Second, his track record, though considerably shorter than that of the competition, did include a couple of very highly regarded courses – Bandon Crossings and Wine Valley.

Third, and most importantly, he could build his own design and would be on the property most of the time.

"I didn't want to hire someone just for the name recognition," says Campbell. "A couple of the others' contracts said they would make one visit at the start to route the course, another during construction to ensure it was going to plan, and a third on opening day to hit a ceremonial drive. I didn't

want that. I knew dozens of important decisions would need to be made every day, so I wanted someone who would be here."

The result is exceptional.

Named after two of the original families who homesteaded the area, the Craddock and Hankins courses cover almost 600 acres and provide continuous entertainment whichever direction you take.

Silvies Valley does not possess 36 holes with 18 fairways and 18 greens. Rather, the elaborate routing has 36 holes, 27 greens, and 16 fairways.

Unless you have a freakishly efficient and disciplined mind, it will take you a few trips around to know exactly where on the property you are, which hole from the course you played the day before plays to the green





you're currently approaching, and which green-fairway combination you play to next.

Don't let it trouble you, though. Just follow the signs to ensure you're playing the right hole, and enjoy the intriguing strategy and tranquil serenity of it all.

There are numerous great moments, but few better than the first hole of the Hankins Course, which plays to a 240-yard-wide fairway, shared with the 17th and 18th on the Craddock Course. The 17th on Craddock plays to the same green as the first on Hankins, while the 18th on Craddock plays to a separate green just below the clubhouse.

We're guessing you don't live nearby, so you'll need to overnight at the ranch in order to experience both courses (as well as the fun, short, nine-hole Chief Egan Course and McVeigh's Gauntlet, the

7-hole challenge course) on consecutive days.

The eight delightful cabins overlooking a small lake in the far Northwest of the property are configured such that couples, families, and golf groups all fit perfectly (there will be 36 rooms eventually).

In addition to the golf, you can take a tour of the ranch on a Polaris RZR, hike, bike, fish, and there are three shooting ranges down in one of the ranch's many valleys. A spa is currently being built, and will open later in 2018.

You can also drive the ranch's cattle, and herd its goats. The American Range Goat was first bred at Silvies Valley Ranch in 2012 for its meat but also for its ability to clear brush which degrades the water table, chokes quality trees and grass, and adds fuel to wildfires.

According to Dr. Campbell,

the main (or only) source of red meat for 75 percent of the world's population is goat. I ordered chevon (goat meat) four meals in a row (steak, burger, braised, omelet) and devoured each one.

Wash it down around the patio fire with the Retreat's signature drink – the Horseshoe Nail, a delicious mix of Drambuie and whisky topped with a crabapple from the ranch's one crabapple tree.

Sit, sip, relax, toast Dr. Campbell's foresight, and ponder how on earth Dan Hixson ever dreamt up his wild, reversible adventure.

Originally from England, Tony Dear is an award-winning golf writer now living in Bellingham, Wash. He contributes to numerous publications on both sides of the Atlantic, and has authored four books on golf.

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