



BREAKING EIGHTY

[Silvies Valley Ranch Review: One of the Most Unique Resorts in Golf](#)

[SEAN OGLE](#)

July 23, 2019



I'll forgive you if you've never heard of [Silvies Valley Ranch](#).

I mean, why would you have? It's a 140,000 acre cattle ranch about 3 hours east of Bend, Oregon.

For those of you not familiar with your Pacific Northwest geography, that places Silvies in precisely: the middle of nowhere.

But over the last 5 years, they've been (not so) quietly at work creating a world class golf resort, that happens to be one of the single most unique places I've ever visited.

Think, one of the hardest (and most fun) par 3 courses in the world.

Goat Caddies. Yes, goats that carry your clubs (and beers).

A reversible golf course that truly plays like 2 very different courses.

A place where everything has a story, and where more importantly, an emphasis is placed on fun – more than any resort I've ever seen.

That have your attention?

Good, because in today's recap you're going to learn exactly why I think it should be at the top of your places to visit in the coming months.

HISTORY OF SILVIES RANCH

In the late 19th century, many of the pioneers that made their way out to Oregon found this particular area of Eastern Oregon, just a little bit too rugged to create a life – and they continued on west.

However, a handful of homesteaders made the area in between John Day and Burns, Oregon their homes.

One of those people is Jack Craddock, who began buying up property as the railroad moved in, in the early 20th century.



Looking out on a tiny fraction of the ranch.

By the 1920s, Jack's son Chet started the beginnings of what is now known as Silvies Valley Ranch.

There are countless stories about the land, the owners, and the people who have resided here over the years – and trust me, they're fascinating.

But for the purposes of this review (which I can already tell is going to be quite lengthy), we're going to fast forward to 2006, when Dr. Scott Campbell and his wife Sandy purchased the cattle ranch after selling their business in the veterinary industry.

As it turns out the ranch was in pretty rough shape, lacking infrastructure and deferred maintenance.

But over the course of the last 15 years, they've made the updates to turn it into one of the largest ranches in Oregon.

Being native to the area however, they wanted to do more.

They wanted to create something that had the potential to have an impact on the area in a big way. How could they bring more economic diversity to such a remote place? How could they have a positive effect on the environment? And how could they get tourists to look at the “Frontier” as a spectacular place to visit?

You’ll find the answers to these questions over the course of the rest of this post.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF SILVIES VALLEY RANCH

Let’s not beat around the obvious. Your first impression of Silvies when you’re on the way out there, is in fact, *“wow, we are out here.”*

Like *way* out here.

When you first see the sign driving on the highway from Burns, you may think for a second you’ve arrived!

But no, you’ve just hit the outskirts of the Ranch. You still have another 20 minutes or so before you actually hit the Links and Spa at Silvies.

As you wind through the ranch, you can’t help but notice that some serious thought went into everything about it.

All of the out buildings you pass that have different ranch functions are all emblazoned with the Silvies logo and have matching green roofs.

When you arrive at the Resort you’re buzzed through a gate and you meander another mile on a gravel road before arriving at the Gate House to check in.



Sunset from the Lodge at Silvies Ranch. You’ll see plenty of these.

From the moment you step foot on Silvies property, you feel like family.

People say that about places often, but here, I really truly mean it. I can't think of a place I've been where I've felt so welcomed by the staff,

You can tell everyone enjoys what they do there, and by the end of our 3 days it felt like everyone knew us and would call us by name.

While checking in we were offered some fantastic home baked cookies and home made lemonade, which is exactly what we needed after the 3 or so hour drive from Bend.

You off load your bags and are given your chariot (or, you know, golf cart) that will get you around for the duration of your stay. Once you're on property, you park your car and won't need it again until you leave.

You're given a name badge which does everything from allow you to charge food and drinks, to serve as your room key.

I can't tell you how nice it is to show up and never have to bust out a credit card or my wallet.

Before you arrive at your room, you're also given a radio that has everyone from the golf shop to spa, to an emergency channel – so it's always easy to get ahold of whoever you need.

Unless, you know you're trying to call from a cell phone. There isn't cell service at Silvies, which I can't tell you how much I appreciated.



Looking out at the living area of our hotel room at Silvies

All the buildings had solid wifi, and once you connect the first time, it would seamlessly connect again no matter where you are on the property.

But on the golf courses or while you're out on the range? No service. And when you come to a place like this, having that time away from technology is even more rejuvenating and enjoyable than I expected.



The range tour included a sweet side by side, and even sweeter high kicks.

I realize this is a golf blog, and I've hardly mentioned the golf yet. But as I've been thinking about my time spent here I've very much come to the realization that it's tough to separate the golf and the whole experience of being on the ranch.

Golf is what will hook people in, and as you'll see, it's *very* good.

But it's the entire experience that truly makes this such a special place, not just in the golf world, but in the world of travel and hospitality as a whole.

But I know you're waiting for it, so we'll revisit the rest of the ranch later, let's talk golf!

SILVIES VALLEY RANCH GOLF

As the ranch got fixed up and the conversation turned to tourism, it was decided that golf had the potential to be a good way to draw people in.

Considering their property is about *double* the size of the city of Bend, space wasn't going to be an issue – but they knew there had to be more than just that to get people to make the trip to such a remote destination.



Looking out at the Hancock/Craddock courses from the Gauntlet

Places like [Bandon Dunes](#) and other clubs in rural Nebraska and Wisconsin have proven that *“if you build it, and build it well, they will come.”*

They enlisted the help of local architect Dan Hixson to help them create something special, which is exactly what they did.

You may not be familiar with Dan if you aren't from the Northwest, but he is the man behind some absolutely fantastic courses like Wine Valley in Walla Walla, and Bandon Crossings which is only 15 minutes from it's more famous neighbor.

It wasn't long before the idea of a reversible course was thrown out there. In the Oregon Frontier it can get hot, harsh, and water can be at a premium.

So the idea of being able to have 2 courses, a unique hook, and half the property to water and maintain was a huge draw.

The courses opened up for play in the Spring of 2018, but why stop at 2 reversible courses?

Let's throw in a 9 hole par 3 course, and while we're at it a 7 hole “Gauntlet” course that will be the most fun round you'll play while absolutely getting your ass kicked!

And that's exactly what they did.

THE HANKINS COURSE AT SILVIES VALLEY RANCH

So unlike The Loop at [Forest Dunes](#), Silvies isn't a pure reversible course with 18 greens.

Rather Dan said he was going to take whatever the land gave him, to create something special.

The two 18s are known as the Hankins and the Craddock courses, named after early homesteaders and notable people who have resided on the property.

There are actually 27 different greens, so each course has a few unique greens of it's own, and the Craddock course actually has a 3 hole section on the far end of the resort property that is devoted just to that.

But everything else follows the same routing, and is something truly special.

We teed it up at the Hankins Course first.

It's about a 5 minute cart ride from the main resort area up to “the Hideout” which serves as the pro shop and restaurant/bar at the course.

And man, I can't tell you how surprised I was when I first walked in.

The Hideout overlooks the 17/18th of Craddock (which is 1 and 2 of Hankins), not to mention miles of ridiculous views beyond.



View from the Hideout

Inside the [Eighty Club](#) we've had a thread going on about the "best hangs in golf". And let me tell you, this is one of the very best. Couple it with the fire pit outside the lodge, and you've got one of the best apres-golf experiences anywhere in the world.

Immediately one of the first things you notice about both courses is how wide the fairways are. On most holes you have plenty of room to spray it a bit, which truly makes for a fun golf experience.



Looking out at the extremely generous fairways of 14 Hankins.

It's crazy to look back from the green and to then be able to visualize what the hole plays like going the other direction on the opposite course.

Hixson used some serious creativity to make some really memorable golf holes.

One of my favorite spots on the Hankins course is when you walk up to the drivable par 4, 11th. You have to drive it up a hill between a pair of trees with a tee shot that has a really cool look to it.



@pjkoenig going for the green on 11 of Hankins.

On Craddock, this same fairway serves as the tee box for the 7th hole which plays down to the 10th green of Hankins.



The reverse of 11 on Hankins is a par 3 that plays down to 10 green of Hankins.

When you think reversible course, you might be thinking that your approach shots are just completely reversed on each course – and you'd be wrong.

In many instances on the course, you're coming in at greens from a completely different angle, which truly does make it feel like a different golf experience.

Most of the greens are large with a ton of movement, and so when you factor in that there is 27 of them you don't run much risk of things feeling too repetitive.

We walked both of the courses, and after our first round said to Randall in the pro shop, *"I bet 80-90% of people probably ride here, don't they?"*

"More like 95%."

But the good news, is you have options. Despite a lot of elevation changes, both courses are totally walkable – although, you'll definitely be feeling it by the end of the round.

After the downhill opening tee shot on Hankins, you feel like you're steadily going up hill for the next 5 holes.

By the time we reached the 6th green we were starting to wonder how much higher we could go!

What this elevation does do is give you a *ton* of shot variety, which makes both courses very fun and replayable.

FAVORITE HOLES ON HANKINS COURSE

PAR 3, 2ND HOLE



The par 3, 2nd on Hankins

The first par 3 is a downhill shot that is carved into a giant hillside, it makes for a fun shot, and is unique in the way it's tucked into the land next to the opening hole.

PAR 4, 8TH HOLE



The downhill 8th tee shot on Hankins

The 8th is a dogleg right that gives you a choice on how much of the corner you want to take on. The view is also spectacular and you can see 4 different fairways running in a cool parallel way from each other.

PAR 4, 10TH HOLE



Check out that giant right to left fairway...

The fairway on 10 is one of my favorites on the course with the right side being substantially higher than the left. It makes for a cool look and has an interesting green as well.

PAR 4, 11TH HOLE



The 11th is probably my favorite tee shot on Hankins

This is the hole I mentioned above with the cool tee shot through the trees. Apparently there is another tee box above us that we didn't know about, that is supposed to be even more impressive.

PAR 5, 14TH HOLE



The 14th from the back tees.

Another elevated tee shot that plays straight downhill. This is a very reachable par 5 with a massively wide fairway, so it's one of the best places on the course to swing away.

PAR 3, 15TH HOLE



The par 3, 15th on Hankins

Quite possibly my favorite par 3 at Silvies, you have to play a smart shot over a canyon, that can be quite perilous depending on wind and tee position.

PAR 5, 18TH HOLE – NAILED IT



The Nailed it Hole – 18 on Hankins

The 18th on Hankins is a downhill par 5, and it sums up one of the main reasons that Silvies Ranch is so great.

Why is that?

THE NAILED IT HOLE.

Hixon specifically designed the 18th on Hankins to give you your best possible shot at hitting the longest drive of your life.

It even lists the “legal advantages” the hole gives you.



Your advantages on the Nailed It Hole at Silvie's.

But the bottom line is it's downhill, downwind, funnels everything towards the fairway – and more, to help you hit one of the most fun tee shots of your life.

But even better, if you can say you hit the longest drive of your life (Scouts Honor, this is a Gentleman's game), then you get to sign the "Book of Winners" listing your approximate distance and immortalizing yourself in Silvie's History.

Not only that, but they also give you a custom flask filled with their very own Rye whiskey. It might be the coolest parting gift I've ever received in a golf course.



Nailed it flask.

Even more surprising, Patrick and I both crushed our drivers. We kept trying to think back to a time where we had a longer drive, but alas, we truly think we hit the longest drives of our life on the 18th at Hankins.

His measured in at 366, with mine just behind at 358.



Me, having no idea I was about to hit the longest drive of my life.

If that doesn't epitomize the idea of "fun golf" I'm not sure what does.

THE CRADDOCK COURSE AT SILVIES RANCH

If you've ever been to Bandon Dunes, you know one of the great things about it is you can debate which courses are the best, and always get a different answer depending on who you ask.

You'll find the same thing at Silvies.

Sean, the Golf Superintendent, prefers Craddock. Others we talked to like Hankins. I'm legitimately pretty torn, as they both have some incredible holes on them.

The Craddock starts out right where you finished, traversing back up the "Nailed it" hole, for solid par 5 opener that lets you get your feet under you.

Similar to Hankins you'll have a bit of both uphill and downhill walking, but the last 4 or 5 holes on Craddock lead you down a nice steady decline which can feel like a great reprieve.

FAVORITE HOLES ON CRADDOCK COURSE

PAR 4, 3RD HOLE



The 3rd on the Craddock

A sweeping par 4, dogleg left with a cool green complex that forces you to think about how best to approach the green after you bomb a drive.

PAR 4, 8TH HOLE



One of my favorite approaches on the course.

Playing down the same fairway with the giant slope as 10 Hankins, you still get the same crazy movement, but then your approach is into the 9th green on Hankins which is one of my favorites on the course.

PAR 5, 13TH HOLE



The par 5, 13th on Craddock. Playing back over 6 green of Hankins.

A fantastic par 5, where you hit back over the 6th green on Hankins (which isn't used on the Craddock course). You have to be deliberate with every shot on this hole, and it marks the first in an excellent closing stretch of holes.

PAR 5, 14TH HOLE



Tee shot on 14 Craddock

Similar to 14 on Hankins in the sense it's a massive fairway with an elevated tee shot. Don't be fooled on your layup shot though, you may have tons of room to layup to, but think about positioning for your approach.

PAR 4, 16TH HOLE



15th green on Craddock

A drivable par 4 that may be one of my favorite holes at Silvies. You can basically hit any club off the tee, and the green is undulating and interesting.

PAR 4, 17TH



17 Craddock, 1 Hankins

Another elevated tee and wide fairway, but the bunkers are strategically positioned to foil your drive if you aren't careful with your placement.

Overall, both of the 18 hole courses at Silvies Ranch are *very good*. Considering your at just a touch over 5,000 feet elevation, the balls *fly* and off the tee you truly feel better than you

probably really are

One of my only real recommendations for the course would be to add in a few sets of combo tees (which it sounds like they're doing soon).

Both courses only have 3 sets of tees, with the back tees being 7100 and the middle tees coming in around 6300.

That's a pretty steep difference. And granted due to elevation and a lot of downhill shots, playing the course from the back tees doesn't *feel* like 7100 yards, but something in the 6600-6700 would have been very welcome, since our crew was made up of a 2, a 10, and a 16ish handicap.

Both days we kind of played our own combo and mostly just played up on the longest of par 4s.

THE CRADDOCK "LAST CHALLENGE"

While you have the "Nailed It" challenge on Hankins, the Craddock course has a special ending of itself, and it's called the "Last Challenge".

If someone in your foursome can one putt each of the last 4 holes, then the entire foursome gets a round of the Silvie's signature cocktail the "Horseshoe Nail" up at the Hideout.



Craddock Last Challenge

It's a really fun challenge that we had a blast attempting to partake in.

And for those of you like us who didn't even get close, there is a "Very Last" challenge, where anyone in the group who one putts the 18th, gets a Horseshoe Nail to themselves.

We almost had a pair of zero putts on 18.

Patrick holed out from off the green, and then I almost matched him after I hit the pin and stopped 3 inches away – for my easy tap in one putt.



The famous horseshoe nail.

We thoroughly enjoyed our Horseshoe Nail, which I've gotta say is actually really quite good. It's a combo of rye whiskey, Drambuie, and a pickled crab apple from the sole fruit tree on the ranch. I had at least 3 of these while at Silvies, and as somewhat of a cocktail connoisseur, I can say it is far better than your typical "signature drink" at places like this.

CHIEF EGAN PAR 3 COURSE

One of my favorite trends of destination clubs over the last 10 years has been the par 3 course.

Bandon has one. Ballyneal has one. And Silvies has one.

The place you can head out as an 8 some, with some beers, and just have a blast with your friends after a full round of 18 – and the Chief Egan par 3 course is PERFECT for this.



The Chief Egan Course with the Hideout in the distance.

The course isn't long, and you only need a few clubs to play it. But there are some unique shots, fun bunkering and mounding, and it's very easy to walk.

We had an epic match that came down to the last hole, and had a blast.



One more on the Chief Egan

MCVEIGH'S GAUNTLET

I can only think of one course out there that has the reputation of being *“so hard, it's fun.”*

And that's the Bad Little Nine par 3 at Scottsdale National, and considering how private the club is, most of us will never get to play it.

Well, there's a new game in town, and I'd venture to say it's just as fun, if not even more unique than the course down south: McVeigh's Gauntlet at Silvies Valley Ranch.

Built on top of a ridge above the other courses, the Gauntlet is meant to be hard, but what's most impressive is just how much fun they make it to get your ass kicked.

It's a 7 hole (with one bonus hole) course that plays to a par of 23.

When you arrive at the first tee, which is straight uphill, all carry 145, to a tiny green, you know you're in for it.



First hole of the Gauntlet

But at this point, you've probably got your goat caddie already and don't care!

Yes, more on that soon.

But to give you another idea of what to expect, take this aerial photo:



#2 green, and #3 on McVeigh's Gauntlet. This gives you an idea of just what to expect.

The bottom green is the 2nd, and to reach it you have to play 140 over a canyon all carry.

The teebox is just off the green, and on hole 3 you have two options. Bomb it 197 over the tree to the green on the left, or layup to the precarious layup area on the right to give yourself a clear view and a sand wedge in.

Even with all of us having perfect layups, no one hit the green

So how do you make a brutally hard course, fun (aside from the obvious use of furry animals that carry your clubs)?

Well first off, you give the golfers a challenge.



Lucky 7

In the case of the Gauntlet, it's called the "Lucky 7." And if you can do all of the things required on the Lucky 7 and shoot under a 27?

Well then you get a t-shirt or a hat, a horseshoe nail, and to sign the Book of Winners.

Do all these things while shooting a 17 or better? Free green fees for the next year (but good luck doing that...I can't imagine anyone has yet).

So what do you have to do? Well some of them are pretty easy like drink less than 7 beers, or complete the course in less than 77 minutes.

Others? Like lose less than 7 balls, might be tougher than you think.

And once again, in the spirit of fun, Silvie's has added a par 2 bonus hole, right by the beer tree.



The Beer Tree, with the Bonus Par 2 hole in the background.

Yes, it's a tree, with beer. A free cooler of Bud Heavys to be precise.

And on the par 2 bonus hole that you play after grabbing your tree beer, if you make it in the 7.7 inch hole, then you're able to move the ball 7.7 inches one time later in the round.

I sense a theme going on here with the 7s...

But this is *exactly* what makes Silvies so great! If you're someone who doesn't take golf (or life) too seriously, it's impossible not to have fun here.

THE GOAT CADDIES AT SILVIES VALLEY RANCH

I realize that I'm now 3,000 words into my recap of Silvies, and I have hardly mentoined the one thing you probably are the most interested in at the ranch: the goat caddies.

Yes, there are indeed goat caddies, and yes they do carry your clubs, and *yes they are awesome.*



Meet Bruce.

Currently there are two goats pulling caddie duties (Bruce and Mike), with three more that are in training.

You take the goat caddies along with a handler who helps them navigate the course (shoutout to Hadley, who was fantastic in putting up with countless photos, videos, and some entirely mediocre golf!)



Bruce and Hadley admiring Patrick's shot on 7 at the Gauntlet.

We took Bruce out on the Gauntlet and had a blast. The custom bag saddle designed by our friends at Seamus golf is truly a sight to behold. Not only is it beautifully made, but it holds

everything from clubs, to balls, to beers, to peanuts for Bruce



"Seamus Golf Goat Division"

So much has been made about the goat caddies at Silvies, that they are what has tended to get all the press.



And if you just HAVE to take Bruce home with you? Well, you can.

And they're cool, they're unique, and taking one is a must do. But also, I think one of my biggest surprises about our experience is the fact that the goat caddies are such a small part of how great the whole experience is.

When I've been talking about my experience I mention them, but I'm just as excited about the "Nailed It" whole, the reversible concept, the 7 course communal dinner, the signature "horseshoe nails", and the wonderful nature of the service that left me feeling like family.

So while the goat caddies may be what gets you out here, rest assured, there is *plenty* more to experience and discover at Silvies Valley Ranch.

ROOMS AT SILVIES VALLEY RANCH

One thing that I should mention about Silvies, is that it's not inexpensive to come out here. This really is a luxury resort, and with room prices in the \$300/night range, it is on par with some of the nicer golf resorts around the world.

But the rooms are *nice*.

My friend Jamie and I shared one of their standard hotel style rooms, and they were fantastic. 2 king beds, a nice living room, automatic curtains, full mini bar, coffee. and a massive shower.



King size bed at Silvies



A hotel room at Silvies Valley Ranch

Not to mention preferred parking for your golf cart

There are also cabins available, but I didn't get a chance to take a look at one, although it's a pretty safe bet they are very nice.

FOOD AT SILVIES VALLEY RANCH

One thing I wasn't prepared for was just how good the food would be at the ranch – it is *fantastic*.

Being a ranch that has an eye on sustainability, all of the meat is organic, and I am amazed at how fresh the produce is given their location in the high desert.



Just one out of 7 courses at the Lodge at Silvie's Ranch

Many of the dishes feature Chevon (goat), considering that is one of the main facets of the ranch outside of the cattle.

The first night we were there, Jamie said “*goat really isn't my thing.*”

By the end of the trip he had tried it 6 different ways, and is now a full convert.

A couple times a week they do a 7 course tasting menu that is *phenomenal*. Not just the food and drinks, but the whole vibe. It's hosted by one of the prominent members of the ranch (in our case the General Manager one night, and the Golf Superintendent the next), and you get a chance to talk to other golfers from all over the country about their experiences.



Communal dinner at the Lodge

Afterwards there is a gorgeous fire pit with complimentary s'mores.

Bottom line, you won't go hungry out there.

ROCKING HEART SPA AT SILVIES RANCH

The Rocking Heart Spa at Silvies was completed this past January, and is beautiful. The spa facility features a nice gym, two lane 25 meter pool, rock climbing wall, and beautiful locker rooms with a hot tub and sauna.



The spa at Silvies

We partook in the sauna and hot tub each day we were there, and enjoyed every second of it.

The only major complaints would be that it closes at 5, so trying to get a soak in after an afternoon round isn't possible. And there's also no outdoor pool to relax by and cool off in.

FINAL THOUGHTS ON SILVIES VALLEY RANCH

Clearly I enjoyed my time at Silvies Ranch.

In fact, I'm not sure there are many golf resorts I can say that I enjoyed *more* than being out there.

Over the last few months I've been fairly stressed out, and if I'm being honest, the collective 12 hours of driving from Portland and very full days at the resort had me a little on edge.

But as we were pulling out of the ranch, I turned to Jamie and mentioned, *"I can't believe how rejuvenated I feel right now."*



A full moon, fire, scotch, s'mores...what more can you ask for?

I left excited to go back to work, and get back to the real world.

Time at Silvies doesn't feel like real life. Maybe it's due to the lack of cell service, the totally unique approach to golf, or the fact that the frontier is so different from anything most of know – but it is 100% a place I will revisit again – probably many times.

Earlier I mentioned that it's the golf that will bring people in, but it's everything else that will bring them back – and I really believe that to be true.

I can't wait to play the courses again and to see my new friend Bruce another time, but I'm equally as excited to talk to golfers from around the world at dinner, take another tour of the property in a sweet side by side, roast s'mores after dinner, and have a dram of world class whiskey against a ridiculous backdrop.



Our ride for the ranch tour we went on.

As you're considering where your golf travels will take you this next year, I 100% can't recommend Silvies Valley Ranch more highly. It is truly one of the highlights I've had since jumping into the world of golf and this blog 8 years ago.

You can learn more about Silvies Valley Ranch on their website [here](#).