



View from the 17th tee box with the clubhouse on the far right, Silvies Valley Ranch, Seneca

PHOTO BY ANDREW HARPER EDITOR

An Unforgettable Oregon Golf Odyssey

LINKS-STYLE COURSES FROM THE BLUE MOUNTAINS TO THE SHORE OF THE PACIFIC

With more than 200 golf courses to choose from in Oregon, many award-winning, it was not an easy task to whittle them down to just three. The purpose of our planned trip, though, was to test our skills on links-style courses, as well as to review the associated lodgings and restaurants. So, eventually, we made our selection and plotted a route from eastern Oregon to the coast, with an average drive time of three and a half hours between stays.

We had read many favorable reviews in golf magazines of our first stop, **Silvies Valley Ranch**. Located in central Oregon, the ranch dates to 1883 and was purchased in 2007 by Scott Campbell, a successful veterinarian with deep local roots. He and his family restored the property to health after years of misuse, and it is now a 140,000-acre working ranch specializing in organic beef and goat. In 2017, the Campbells decided to add a resort and built 34 cabins and lodge rooms. In addition to the usual dude-

ranch activities, Silvies has a large spa and four golf courses.

The drive to Seneca from the Boise, Idaho, airport takes slightly over three hours, and en route the landscape changes from desert to a mix of sagebrush and ponderosa pines. (Private aircraft can also fly in and out of the resort's paved airfield.) On arrival, we exchanged our car for a fancy golf cart with camouflage paintwork. The package we booked included unlimited golf, spa access and meals (to which a 20 percent service charge is added to discourage tipping). Check-in was rather chaotic, as new staff were being trained, but eventually we were provided with laminated ID tags on lanyards and instructed to leave our luggage on the sidewalk near the lobby. We then loaded our cart with golf gear and headed straight to the clubhouse.

Perched high on a hill, it proved to be a beautifully designed barnlike structure, with a spacious bar and a terrace affording glorious views over

the remote surrounding landscape. (There is no cell service — although Wi-Fi is available in the rooms — and walkie-talkies are provided for those who require them.) At the clubhouse, a friendly golf pro explained our options: a rare reversible course (that is, a layout that can be played in either direction on alternating days) with two 18-hole tracks, called Hankins and Craddock; Chief Egan, a nine-hole, par-3 course; and McVeigh's Gauntlet, a fun seven holes that run through the hills, on which you have the option to be assisted by goat caddies.



That day, the main reversible course was set in the Hankins direction. The links-inspired tracks share 16 fairways and 27 greens and are the work of Dan Hixson, best known as the creator of the Bandon Crossings course in Oregon and the Wine Valley Golf Club in Washington. While Hankins was designed to require placement shots, most of the tee boxes were high enough for a confident swing, and the fairways were wide enough for my alternating slices and draws. However, the large greens were fast, which ultimately added several strokes to my score. And there were, it seemed, a hundred sand traps to avoid (though no water hazards). The last hole has markers to measure your drive, and thanks to a high tee box, a wide downhill fairway and an elevation of 4,500 feet, it provided a feel-good end to the round.

Back at the resort, we plugged our cart into an outdoor socket and discovered our luggage in the entryway to our Luxury Cabin Suite (there are eight). Constructed with log and wood paneling and a stone floor, our accommodations featured a great room with floor-to-ceiling windows, through which several pronghorn antelope could be seen grazing in a meadow below. The décor was Western throughout, with Native American blankets and antler chandeliers. In addition to casual leather seating around a stone fireplace, a more formal couch and armchairs faced the landscape, while a third area contained a six-person dining table. A fully equipped mini-kitchen came with a Keurig coffee machine and a stocked wine cabinet. The two bedrooms provided king-size beds and modern

baths with copper faucets and rainfall showers. Outside was a small deck with a two-person hot tub. The resort also offers 18 Ranch House rooms, which are attractive but lack uninterrupted views.

Dinner is served in the Lodge promptly at 7 p.m. The evening begins with guests gathering at the long bar, where shelves are stocked with every spirit imaginable. We found our designated table and, famished after a day outdoors, headed immediately to the buffet. Although the presentation is informal, and the dishes little more than elevated comfort food, the quality was impressive. We enjoyed a delicious meal of barley-vegetable soup, smoked chevon (goat), carne asada, garlic roasted potatoes, a freshly baked sourdough loaf with rosemary and olives, and housemade huckleberry ice cream and oatmeal cookies. Afterward,

Clockwise from top left: Cabins on the pond; golf course; bedroom and living area of a Luxury Cabin Suite, Silvies Valley Ranch





Hot tub in the Rocking Heart Spa, the saloon and bar in the Lodge, Silvie Valley Ranch

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we retired to an adjacent saloon with a pool table, a seating area with a large stone fireplace and a terrace with a fire pit and lounge chairs.

The following morning, we awoke to pouring rain, but since wildfires were still burning elsewhere in Oregon, we felt quite relieved. Also, it would likely mean smoke-free skies for the rest of our trip. We thoroughly enjoyed a substantial breakfast of Herder’s Rancheros with chorizo sausage and slices of Silvie’s steak. Suitably fortified, we headed out to play the reverse course, Craddock, this time in full rain gear. After nine holes, the sun struggled out and we were greeted by a double rainbow. Even though we had covered exactly the same tract of land the day before, the experience felt entirely different: There were only two instances where we were able to recognize the hole in the reverse direction.

Our exercise accomplished, we headed to the new 17,000-square-foot Rocking Heart Spa building. No one was at the front desk when we arrived for our appointment, so we explored on our own. The impressive facility features a lengthy lap pool, a rock-climbing wall and ample locker rooms with saunas. Back at the lobby, we found the manager. Our spa experiences were uneven. One stone massage was very good, if a tad vigorous, while the other was rather clumsy, with a cold face towel not being replaced even after a specific request.

Fortunately, we had other opportunities to relieve some stress. One afternoon, we took a scenic 15-minute ride through the working side of the ranch to the gun range. There, we tested our skills with Japanese ninja throwing stars, axes and pistols, including a 9 mm, a .357 and a Colt 45, along with a .50-caliber handgun. The experience was safe and surprisingly exhilarating. A long-rifle range will open soon.

On our last morning, we were greeted by sunshine and elk in the meadow below our cabin. Before checkout, we had plenty of time to take on the short Gauntlet course. The goats (accompanied by guides) that serve as caddies can carry only seven clubs — and a few drinks. It proved to be an absurdly challenging par-3

course with one long putting hole and lots of hunting in the sagebrush for lost balls. To be honest, talking to the two guides and feeding peanuts to the goats provided the real charm.

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Central Oregon has so many golf courses that the city of Bend has been dubbed “the Palm Springs of the North.” A few years ago, we enjoyed the remote Crosswater course, with its bentgrass fairways threaded by the Deschutes and Little Deschutes rivers, and other well-maintained courses like Meadows and Woodlands. The highest-ranked track in the area is the Jack Nicklaus course at Pronghorn Resort, which features steep canyons, as well as views of the Cascades from fairways lined by lava rocks and juniper trees. However, sticking with our links-style theme, we headed to Tetherow, designed by David McLay Kidd, whose other links courses include the Castle Course at St. Andrews and Machrihanish Dunes, both in Scotland, and the original track at Bandon Dunes.

Located 4 miles outside Bend, Tetherow has 50 rooms divided between two three-story lodges that flank its clubhouse, plus several private lodging options. Overall, it feels more like a residential golf community than a traditional hotel. Check-in took place

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