

# Silvies Valley Ranch, A Western Treat Of A Retreat

Golf among the Ponderosa Pines and High Alpine Meadows at this award-winning, links-style golf retreat and spa in the heart of the Oregon Frontier.

Golfers looking to go off the grid in search of memorable experiences will undoubtedly find it at Silvies Valley, a working ranch in an area referred to as Frontier Oregon. Located in the eastern part of the state, a couple of hours drive from either Boise (Idaho) and Bend airports, it is one of the least populated areas left in America.

Social distancing is a natural way of life at Silvies and a great opportunity for urbanites to re-connect with nature while enjoying four distinct golf courses laid out among a magnificent landscape that includes high desert alpine meadows, marshlands and a national forest of ponderosa pines at nearly 5,000 feet high.

Named for a French trapper, Antonine Sylvaille, who discovered the valley in the early 1800's, the animals outnumber the humans by a vast, vast margin. Over 4,500 cattle, 3,000 goats, 50 horses and hundreds of other wildlife species, including herds of wild elk and antelope that prance across the plains (and fairways sometimes) as if they own the place. (Silvies is owned by Scott Campbell, a retired veterinarian who turned Portland's Banfield Pet Hospital into a multi-national company with over 800 clinics, many of them in PetSmart stores. Scott grew up in the area and while he's not a dedicated golfer, he knew the sport would help attract tourists to the site.)















Image Courtesy Silvies Valley Ranch

What the golfer soon learns upon arrival, is that not only is the resort very Western in appearance (luxury log cabins, native American and cowboy furnishings and motifs abound) but that in between rounds, they are offered a bevy of throwback activities that include the opportunity of participating in cattle roundups and goat herding; pistol and rifle ranges; horseshoes; fishing; horseback riding, even taking a carriage ride with Clydesdales.

In addition to mountain biking and 60 miles of hiking trails, all that activity combined with golf will be soothed by gourmet dining and a massive (17,000 square foot) state-of-the-art spa.

“Silvies is 150,000 acres or about 225 square miles. It is about the size of Chicago with 32 guest rooms,” said general manager Brooks Bradbury. The G.M. offered a little history of the area.

“On the ranch, which dates to 1883, are the relics of a Native American population that lived here long before first white settlers, and the weathered cabins of homesteaders. Our golf courses are named after the Craddock and Hankins families, both were early homesteaders on the property. Our golf



center is named after Chief Egan, who was the Paiute tribe leader in this territory. “



Image Courtesy Silvies Valley Ranch

## **The Golf Courses**

### **Craddock/Hankins**

Designed by Dan Hixson, traversing the ridges that overlook Silvies Valley, the course direction of Craddock (like Hankins) is reversed each day to create a different layout with a variety of pin placements and tee box options, creating thousands of unique rounds. While the course is free of water hazards, there are over a hundred bunkers incorporated into the course design.

Silvies' Director of Golf, Roger Porzak (who along with Golf Superintendent Sean Hoolehan oversee the entire operation), explains some of the reasons behind why Golf Digest has recognized Hankins Course and the Craddock Course at Silvies Valley Ranch as two of the top four Best New Courses of 2018 including the unique “reversible” aspects they offer.

“We are at 4,500 feet and it is pure links-style golf. There are no water holes on those two championship courses. We are one of just two places in the U.S. that have reversible courses. So we have 27 greens. They share nine greens. And they each have 9 of their own,” explained the veteran golf pro, “Sometimes it is difficult for people to wrap their head around the concept. They are two entirely different courses.”

A veteran of 40 years in golf, Porzak, who also owns a golf academy in San Diego, talks about more distinct aspects of the 18-hole championship courses.

“Undulated greens, hard and firm. And fast and a lot of creativity goes into playing these courses. I like when players come in and say, ‘wow, I had to hit every shot in the bag around the greens.’ There’s just a lot of creativity involved. Lot of bump and runs. There are times you’re hitting that flop shot too. There are also some blind tee shots and elevated tees. The ball flies out here at 4,500 feet. The shared tee complex at No. 7 Hankins and No. 13 Craddock measures 4,887 feet above sea level, is the highest point for golf in Oregon.”

Porzak adds: “The grass is identical to St. Andrews (which is famous for its reversible holes), the fairways are fescue and greens are creeping bentgrass. We try to keep the stimpmeter around 11. If you get above the pin it is like putting on concrete.”



Image Courtesy Silvies Valley Ranch

### **Chief Egan**

As mentioned by Mr. Bradbury, named after the leader of the local Pauite native American tribe, Chief Egan is a mountain meadow 9-hole, Par 3 course.

Goat caddies, born, raised and “educated” about golf on the ranch, are equipped to carry up to six clubs along with balls, tees and more “fun” refreshments if desired. A ranger goes along to help escort the caddies through the round.

“The goat caddies are great. They never give “baahhd” advice. They are the best employees I’ve ever had. They never talk back, never insist on what club to use and work for peanuts,” notes Porzak.



Image Courtesy Silvie Valley Ranch

### **McVeigh's Gauntlet**

"It is pure target golf. Nothing but tee boxes and greens. Holes range from 247 to 77 yards," notes Porzak.

It was voted the Best New Golf Experience by GOLF Magazine, the 7-hole ridge course has distinctive characteristics that include a strategically-placed "beer tree" with a well-stocked cooler that can be happened upon after a particularly steep climb.

"After the 3rd hole, you reach the Beer Hole," points out Porzak. "It's 50 yards, just a long green, so you have a choice of putting or try to flop it up there. It is in addition to the 7 holes, but comes after the 3rd hole."

With all the greens being sloped, tiny, and elevated onto hill tops, the course is designed to be so difficult that it's fun. If you miss your target even slightly, you will face a tough up and down from a potentially precarious situation, so even par 2s are not easy to come by.

Silvies is open year-round and though the golf season runs generally from mid-May through October, they just recently launched a new winter golf experience for its guests called Cool Golf where on the Chief Egan course, they enlarge the holes and you play with tennis balls.



Image Courtesy Silvies Valley Ranch

### **Hankins Course**

- Dan Hixson-designed Championship 18-hole course
- 7075 yards
- Played odd # days

### **Craddock Course**

- Dan Hixson-designed Championship 18-hole course
- 7035 yards
- Played even # days

### **Chief Egan Course**

- Par 3 golf course
- 9 holes, 875 yards
- Goat Caddies available

**McVeigh's Gauntlet**

- Challenging executive course (par 2's 3's and 4's)
- 7 holes, 1177 yards
- Goat Caddies available









Image Courtesy Silvies Valley Ranch

The Food

Breeding prize-winning cattle and developing a meat goat – the American Range Goat, Silvies’ gourmet menu features a lot of their home-grown livestock raised from its certified-organic meadows.

“I’m proud the Campbells have given me the opportunity to prepare menus and dining experiences that showcase our organic grass finished meats, ranch-grown herbs and microgreens, and locally sourced produce in a creative and flexible way,” Mike Wilson, the Executive Chef said.

One of Wilson’s prized skills is a special way to prepare a main course using Sous vide — French for “under-vacuum” — which is an innovative cooking technique in which food is vacuum-sealed and slow-cooked in water at precise constant temperatures until it’s perfectly cooked.

Wilson works with Scott’s brother Jeff in taking advantage of all the natural resources found on the ranch.

“We also do a fair amount of foraging when we can, accessing a lot of natural range of mushrooms that grow on the property from late spring to early fall. We harvest at various times, elderberries, rose hips, any of those type of things can find their way to the kitchen table around here,” said Jeff Campbell. “There’s also a native trout fish that lives here. If the guest catches one we take it right to the kitchen and prepare it for them.”

Campbell, an immunologist who studied at Stanford and also conducts a popular sourdough-bread making class, oversees a massive bar that features over 220 different types of wine from across the Pacific Northwest, California, and Europe and also boasts the most extensive Scotch collection in the region with over 110 different varieties.





Image Courtesy Silvies Valley Ranch

**The Spa**

One option of working off meals are to access the gym, an indoor rock-climbing wall and the Olympic-quality swimming pool at the 17,000 square foot state-of-the-art Rocking Heart Spa.

Facilities there also include a sauna, whirlpool, indoor and outdoor hot tubs, manicure and pedicure and a wide range of massages, many of which are designed to look after the golfer looking for some rejuvenation between rounds.

“We spend more time getting behind those golf clubs and golf balls (personally) to better understand the biomechanics of the swing such as how the pelvic area how that affects the hamstrings, glutes, hips as well as how that corkscrew turn affects the upper body. Elbows in particular. So rather than working laterals on outside edge of the arms, we are going to be turning inward,” explained Cindy Qual, the spa director.

One thing is clear, golfers will be turning westward as word gets out about what this working ranch offers largely as a result of its remoteness. Unless they fly in by private aircraft, golfers will spend up to 3½ hours on isolated stretches of road from commercial airports to get to the resort (and best to arrive before dark), however they will be rewarded with a unique golf experience.

There’s a reason why Golf Digest, Golf Magazine and Golfweek have all ranked Silvies regularly in their Top Ten lists.

While the air is pristine and views of The Milky Way unprecedented, add in the bonus of increased distance on your tee shot (being over 4,000 feet high), it is a landscape and ecosystem that most people simply have not experienced before.

“You create something to draw attention to what’s still very much a frontier, and golf has shown that it can be a magnet that gets people to go just about anywhere in the world,” states Bradbury.