

# Course Review: Big River Golf Course

Not far from McNary Dam on flat river-bottom land adjacent to the Columbia River in Umatilla you'll find Big River Golf Course. Originally known as simply Umatilla Golf Course when it opened in 1968, Big River looked to be in the midst of changes for the better when the Don and Pete Golf Oregon tour stopped by as part of Golf Week 2009.

Don had golfed at Big River one time, several years before Don and Pete invaded the course as part of The Quest, and Don could easily notice some general sprucing up about the place. The friendly pro shop staff said more changes were to come. (*Update: We understand the course now includes some new tee boxes on several holes, so please understand that some of the following hole descriptions may have changed somewhat.*)

Big River is a bit of a hodge-podge in design, though we don't mean that to sound too negatively. It's a very flat course, you can certainly walk it if you'd like. Some holes are wide open, others have a few trees, a few have lots of trees. Some sections of Big River have mature flowering cherry blossom trees, which are beautiful when in season. The flip side of that, as anyone who's ever had flowering cherries knows, is that those pretty blooms eventually fall to the ground and cover everything. That's especially problematic when you're looking for a golf ball! There's sand here and there, ditto water — neither come into play a lot.

Apart from some very scenic views of the Columbia River Gorge, Big River offers a fairly pedestrian layout. When we played in 2009, there were basically



two sets of tees, and the men's tees were relatively short: 6070 yards, playing to a par of 70. It's not often that you begin your round on a regulation course with three consecutive par 3s, but that's the case at Big River. They clocked in at 170, 185 and 145 yards, respectively.

However, those three par 3s get you warmed up for No. 4, a 525-yard par 5, followed by a 480-yard par 5 on No. 5. So you're on the sixth hole before you see a par 4, when you get three in a row, the longest being No. 7 at 375 yards. You finish the front side with another par 3.

The back nine starts with another par 5, followed by a par 3. So after 11 holes, we'd only played three par 4s, and all of those in a row. That's a little unusual, to say the least. You do get five par 4s on the back, and three of them measure over 400 yards. No. 12 is 435 yards, No. 16 is 425 and No. 17 is 426. No. 16 is a slight dogleg right, but it's protected by a large lake. No. 17 is a severe dogleg left that you can shortcut by crowding the No. 18 tee box.

Big River has very good greens that are well-kept. They are not overly fast, but they run smooth and are very consistent. You can get in a nice putting groove during your Big River round.

Big River is a nice community golf course and they host a number of local events, many involving kids. It's not the greatest challenge ever, but you can generally play in four hours or even less, and you'll have had a nice day on a nice course.