

Course Review: Buffalo Peak Golf Course

One of the best surprises of “Golf Week 2009” in Eastern Oregon was discovering Buffalo Peak Golf Course in Union. Union is located some 16 miles southeast of La Grande, and Buffalo Peak — opened in 2000 and owned and operated by Union County — serves as the public course for greater La Grande, as La Grande proper has only the private, 9-hole La Grande Country Club.

Buffalo Peak is set in Northeast Oregon’s Grande Ronde Valley and features gorgeous views of the Blue and Wallowa mountains. It’s an 18-hole links style course that offers something for everyone: elevated tees, undulating landscape, water here and there in the form of both lakes and a stream ... and, apparently, rattlesnakes.

We arrived at about 10 a.m. on a weekday, and were the third and fourth people to head out that day. This was August, but the morning air was still plenty chilly. Our clubhouse check-in included the following exchange ...

Don: “I’m a valley kid. This looks like the kind of place in Eastern Oregon where I’d imagine to find rattlesnakes.”

Friendly Female Clubhouse Attendant: “Oh yeah, we’ve got rattlers out here. It’s cold, so they may be sunning themselves this morning on a rock. If you hit your ball off the fairway quite a ways, when you’re looking for it, just kind of stomp your feet a little, or clap, or yell ‘woo-hoo’ or something to let them know you’re coming.”

Don: “Ma’am, I have no golf balls *that* valuable. I’ll just be dropping another one.”

Buffalo Peak offers three sets of tees for men. We opted for the shorter, white tees, so we played at about 5700 yards. The blues are 6100 and the golds about 6500.

Hole No. 1 serves as a perfect introduction to Buffalo Peak. From the whites it’s only a 273-yard par 4, but it’s a sharp dogleg right and the green is distinctly downhill from the fairway level. On Hole 2, you’ll be shooting to an elevated green. Ditto No. 3.



And so on.

You’ll encounter greenside bunkers on almost every hole at Buffalo Peak; fairway sands traps are out there, but much more occasional. Everything at the course was exceptionally well groomed. The greens were in perfect condition and quite quick, but they were consistent and rolled true.

Hole No. 12 is fun. You’re shooting from atop a bluff on a par 3 that’s 200 yards from the white tees, and as much as 238 from the tips. There are grass bunkers on either side of the green and sand in back. But the exaggerated elevation can throw you off, and you need at least one less club than you think or you’ll whack it right into one of those hazards.

For our money, No. 16 is the most difficult hole (the second handicap hole). A par 5, from the whites it’s 478 yards and a hard dogleg right. Uphill all the way and completely unreachable in two for we mortals, you’re trying to set up your third shot up to the green. The green is a narrow but wide target; the good news is that a steep hillside behind the green will stop your errant shot if you’ve got a little too much mustard on it.

This is a great test of golf that challenges the Wild Horse resort course in Pendleton for the title of “best course” in what Don and Pete term “Nearer Eastern Oregon.” Do not miss Buffalo Peak if you’re in the area.