

Course Review: Echo Hills Golf Course

Echo Hills Golf Course is a 9-hole municipal course located in the little historic burg of Echo, about a mile south of I-84, eight miles south of Hermiston and 20 miles west of Pendleton. The course is situated on rolling hill terrain just up from “downtown Echo,” so to speak. Small but mighty, the course includes a pro shop, driving range and snack bar.

Echo Hills overlooks the Umatilla River Valley, which provides a distinct green scenery break from the usual brown Eastern Oregon desert. The course first opened in 1940, and features both bent grass fairways and greens.

We visited Echo Hills as part of our epic Golf Week 2009, based in Pendleton and playing about a dozen far-flung courses throughout “Nearer Eastern Oregon,” as we began to call it (with an eye on a future Golf Week that would need to entail Baker City, Ontario, Burns and such).

Echo Hills features white and blue tees for men — and yellow rather than red for women. The whites are 2884 yards, the blue tees 2983, so locals playing 18 get an additional 100 yards on their “back nine.” While the course is hilly, it’s not too hilly to walk. You’ll find the Echo Hills greens to be medium speed but very consistent.

You begin your round with a 455-yard par 5 that is straight as an arrow from tee to green. A series of large evergreen trees lines the fairway, but if you hit the ball relatively straight they’re not an issue.

The hole routing is sometimes a bit curious at Echo Hills, and you get an introduction to that right away. No. 5 is a virtually identical hole to No. 1 and runs parallel to it on the right. Once you putt out on 1, your inclination is to go left to the next tee box you



see. Nope, that’s No. 6. You have to loop around the adjacent No. 5 green on the right to find the second tee. Once there, you’re faced with a short, 274-yard par 4 that features a small pond on the left about 70 yards out — the only water hazard on the course — and a green guarded by two bunkers. Still, it’s short enough that any sort of decent drive leaves you a middling pitch shot that should avoid any trouble.

No. 3 is another short par 4 (298) followed by the 162-yard, par 3 fourth. That brings you back to No. 5, previously discussed, which is a clone of No. 1 with an extra 30 yards. Then, from the fifth green, you mosey back past the No. 1 dance floor to get back to the No. 6 tee box you thought was No. 2 an hour earlier. The sixth hole is easily Echo Hills’ toughest, a 418-yard par 4 that bends a little to the left, but is basically straight.

If you look at a course map of Echo Hills, you sort of get the feeling that the designer got to No. 7 and realized, “Uh-oh, we’re out of room.” Holes 7-8-9 are bang-bang-bang all parallel to each other, with No. 7 oddly the middle of the three. They take up virtually the same amount of space, although No. 7 (282 yards) and No. 9 (330 yards) are par 4s, while No. 8 is a 181-yard par 3.

Update note — We made a point to eat at the historic Echo Hotel Restaurant on our trip. Alas, it’s now closed; it was a great place. The building, the Arlington House, dates back to the 1880s and is on the National Register of Historic Places.