

Course Review: Pumpkin Ridge (Ghost Creek)

If you're a relative newcomer to Oregon, or a newcomer to golf in Oregon, you may not know that BBD (before Bandon Dunes), Pumpkin Ridge Golf Club near North Plains was the cat's pajamas in the state. Pumpkin Ridge has a distinguished, albeit short, history, opening in 1992 to much acclaim, including Ghost Creek being named the nation's No. 1 new public course that year by *Golf Digest*. The place really shot to fame in 1996, when Tiger Woods won his third consecutive U.S. Amateur championship at Pumpkin Ridge (and soon thereafter turned pro).

There are two championship courses at Pumpkin Ridge, the private Witch Hollow and the public Ghost Creek. This review focuses on Ghost Creek. Where did that name come from? At first, a sliver of man-made water that crosses the fairways of both No. 1 and No. 10 right off of the tee boxes (not in play unless you absolutely duff it) was dubbed Ghost Creek by the course. But in 2011, a native, unnamed stream that flows from Pumpkin Ridge north into McKay Creek was officially named Ghost Creek by the agencies that do such things, so there is a "real" Ghost Creek now.

Designed by noted golf course architect Robert Cupp, Ghost Creek maintains most of its natural setting, save the added tee boxes, fairways and greens, of course; Ghost Creek is set in a natural wetlands area. Cupp's stated desire was to build a course that had the feel of playing in England and Scotland. As of yet, there is no *Don and Pete Golf Europe*, so we can't comment much on that. We can tell you that Ghost Creek is a high-end, extremely well manicured course that feels like a resort.

We, as always, played the white tees, about 6000 yards. The blues are another 400, and the blacks some 400 more again. One of the best aspects of Ghost Creek is that each hole is truly unique — it's a golf course that will test your overall skills, you don't have to mash it 300 yards off the tee to score well. In fact, we'll say something here that may surprise many: if you can keep your ball in the fairway at Ghost Creek, it isn't *that difficult*. It's challenging, but keep it in or near the short grass, and it's very playable. When you do find the rough, however, be prepared, it's lush and dense.



Trouble comes in the usual form: trees, water, sand. Generally speaking, there are more trees on the front nine than the back. Bunkers are everywhere. Par at Ghost Creek is 71, and there are 72 bunkers, many of them fairway bunkers, they are not all greenside traps here. But many of them are clustered — a group of four fairway bunkers on No. 10; seven traps ring the green on No. 16 — so it's not like you're hitting into a beach on every shot.

One thing to debate while playing Ghost Creek is No. 14. It's a long, downhill par 3 measuring 201 yards from the white tees, 219/234 from the blues and blacks, respectively. A national publication has deemed it one of the 100 toughest holes in America. It's not easy, but it doesn't seem *that* hard.

Ghost Creek includes a lot of elevation changes, so it's a difficult walk. One of the reasons the course stays so pristine is that carts must stay on the cart paths year round, so the fairway grass is never driven on. (*Update: In 2013, Ghost Creek began allowing carts on the fairways, as sort of an experiment to see how it goes.*)

Most of the greens at Ghost Creek are decent sized, but they change in relation to the hole. The aforementioned No. 16, for example, is only 113 yards from the white tees, but the green is small and surrounded by seven bunkers. Longer holes have larger greens. Most have some slope but it's readable slope. You'll likely figure out the breaks before you do the speed, they putt quickly for a westside Oregon layout. But they roll very smoothly and consistently, and you can get the hang of them.