

Course Review: Heron Lakes (Great Blue)

Heron Lakes Golf Club is one of the primary reasons that Portland boasts some of the best sets of municipal golf courses anywhere. With two distinct 18-hole championship courses to choose from, Heron Lakes offers the perfect combination of quality, variety and affordability. We'll start the Heron Lakes' reviews with some mutual thoughts about the courses in general, then split off into some specifics.

Both courses were designed by renowned golf architect Robert Trent Jones, Jr., which tells you a lot right there. Both Heron Lakes courses make dramatic use of their surrounding landscape. While Heron Lakes is a city-owned complex (managed by a private vendor), the courses aren't like typical "munis" in some places where that word means "cutting corners." The Heron Lakes courses are typically maintained extremely well. If they're short on mowing time it's the roughs that suffer; occasionally you'll find them overlong on both courses, though the fairways and greens always seem consistent. The Greenback does not drain as well as the newer Great Blue, so it can be a little soggy at times in the winter, but it's still a playable off-season track.

The Heron Lakes complex is a complete golf facility, offering grass tees on the driving range, big practice greens, a separate chipping green, and a decent retail and restaurant inside the pro shop. The food, in fact, is very good.

The biggest issue at Heron Lakes is parking. The surface lot was not expanded when the Great Blue opened, so on busy days parking spaces are at a premium. If you do find one, you're likely crammed right next to someone and in danger of a door ding.



Otherwise, you're scrambling to create a space, most commonly secured along the inbound driveway parallel to the driving range ... well, you can imagine that's not the safest place either.

Great Blue Course

The Great Blue Course opened in 1992, 20 years after its older sister course. The course gets its name from the native great blue herons, and you will see some — there most definitely *are herons* at Heron Lakes. It's certainly more decorated than the Greenback, having been highly ranked in numerous "best public courses" lists by *Golf Digest* and *GolfWorld* magazines, among others. This is a links-style layout featuring small, undulating greens. The fairways are mounded in the Scottish tradition. If you're in the short grass, it's fescue, not something you see much in Oregon. If you're off the fairway you're in any number of local long grasses, weeds or reedy marshes, so stick to the fescue if you can.

The Great Blue Course is definitely geared for lower-handicap golfers and offers three sets of tees. The whites are just 6000 yards, the blues are 6500 and the black tees jump to over 6900. You'll encounter plenty of water and around 80 bunkers.

Fairways on the Great Blue tend to narrow as you approach greens. Again, this is a links-style course, so trees aren't much of an issue. But the rolling, mounded contour will leave you with some uneven shots to what are purposefully small, uneven greens. You've got to pay attention to pin placement of the Great Blue, as the quick greens are rarely flat.