

# Course Review: Heron Lakes (Greenback)

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.

## Greenback Course

The Greenback Course opened in 1972 and features a traditional, park-like design. You'll encounter large, elevated greens, many tree-lined fairways, six ponds and almost 90 sand traps. The white tees measure about 5950 yards, the blues are 6615, so there's a definite difference. The Greenback Course is often unfairly characterized as the "lesser" course — it's simply different than its counterpart. It's also inaccurately referred to as an "easy" course. Easier than the Great Blue, to be sure, but there are still enough trees, bunkers and water hazards to bite you.

Said hazards are, however, generally counterbalanced by wide landing areas off the tees. You've got to whack it pretty poorly to have serious tree trouble on the Greenback; you're more likely to have water or sand issues. Many of the par 4s are on the shorter side and tempt you with possible shortcuts, but do so at your own risk. Once you do approach a dance floor, you'll find them larger-than-average and fast — really fast in the summer, faster than you'd expect in the winter.

The Greenback's four par 3s are a particular collective challenge. Three of the four have serious water issues, and the one sans water (No. 7) is 178 yards from the whites and features a green ringed by traps.