

Course Review: The Highlands Golf Club

The Highlands Golf Club in Gearhart is a little bit of a secret. Overshadowed by the neighboring (literally) Gearhart Golf Links, The Highlands is perfectly capable of standing on its own for what it is: a meticulously well maintained executive course that offers the only ocean view holes on the Northern Oregon Coast.

Let's be clear, The Highlands is no Bandon Dunes. They play up the "only ocean view" card for all they can, which is fine, but the reality is you can see Gearhart Beach and the Pacific well only once — atop a bluff on the No. 5 tee — and you get some glimpses of it elsewhere after that. The entrance to the course is a mile or so north of the entrance to Gearhart Golf Links along Highway 101, and the course itself is nestled both on and between rugged sand dunes. Much of the course borders an adjacent neighborhood, with portions of the track sculpted out of a hillside.

Open since 1987, The Highlands is not a difficult golf course, but it's not easy, either. Don and Pete played The Highlands on a glorious May afternoon — glorious for several reasons: it was a warm and sunny weekday and we played hooky from work, we played 27 holes (Manzanita and Seaside in addition to The Highlands) and we had a great seafood lunch at Dooger's.

As a golf challenge, The Highlands offers a little something for everyone; there's a nice variety of holes. Beginners can play the course; advanced golfers won't face great challenges but will stay interested. You'll encounter some coastal pine trees, nice-rolling greens of a variety of sizes, coastal scrub brush, bunkers-but-no-water and, frequently, deer. The course plays completely differently if winds are blowing off the Pacific; that adds another degree of difficulty. Note that The Highlands is a *walking only* course, you've either got to bring your pull cart or rent one of theirs (or actually *carry* your bag, something neither Don's nor Pete's back has been capable of doing in years). Par is 31; white tees measure 1552, blue tees exactly 300 yards longer.

Holes 1 and 2 are good warm-ups for your round, a short par 4 and a short par 3, respectively, with



little trouble. No. 3 is both The Highlands' longest and most difficult hole. Only 358 even from the blue tees, it plays longer. You're going somewhat uphill. You need to stay right of center, because the fairway drops off to the left like a big gully. Too far right, though, and you're in somebody's backyard. But left of center and you'll tumble down the gully — still in the fairway, mind you — with an uneven lie and a blind shot to the green. Oh, and hook it big-time off the tee and you're OB over a fence.

Look forward and left on both Nos. 3 and 4 and you'll see the Gearhart Golf Links. From the fourth green you go on a bit of a hike, through the neighborhood then up a hill to a small bluff looking down on the fifth green, less than 100 yards away but maybe 75-80 feet down (pictured above). Here's your best view of the Pacific Ocean, but you've got to pay attention to your shot as well. The green is ringed by a street with houses on the other side, and hit your ball too well (or blade it) and you're in someone's front yard. More common, amazingly, is how many people are *short* on this hole. Yes, it's short *and* downhill. You'll want to either under-club or swing easy, but not both.

The last four holes run north, parallel to the ocean, but are down in the dunes so you get no more than a glimpse or two of the sea until you climb an elevated tee for the par 3 finishing hole. which plays way different from the blues (203) than the whites (143). At that point we're convinced you'll be very pleased with your reasonably priced Highlands round.