

Course Review: Illinois Valley Golf Course

This is one of those sentences that will sound harsher than we mean it to, but here we go anyway: Illinois Valley Golf Course in Cave Junction is an average Oregon 9-hole golf course in almost every possible respect. Please note that we're not saying it's "bad." It's just average — average in design, average in upkeep, average in challenge and includes an average pro shop, average greens and is average priced. Not good, not bad — average.

We played Illinois Valley mid-week of our Golf Week 2008, our ultra-hot tour of Southern Oregon courses where the tee off temperature was well above 100 degrees every single day at every single course. Illinois Valley was no exception in that regard.

Illinois Valley opened in 1977 and is technically a semi-private course. Don't let that distinction concern you; it's not fancy and you can get on. Illinois Valley has only one set of tees for men, though there are blue (front nine) and white (back nine) tee boxes for those wanting to play a "different" 18.

This is not a highly manicured course. The fairways and greens are average — that word again — while the rough was somewhat longer than average on our visit. Generally speaking, trees aren't a huge issue at Illinois Valley. There are some clusters of nice old growth trees, but they are just that — clustered in three main areas and rarely in play. There are no tree-lined fairways, for example, where you've got to knock through a chute of firs or oaks. Conversely, most of the landing areas on the course are very wide open. There is off-the-property OB on a few holes, but generally speaking, if you've got a tree problem at Illinois Valley it's because you've hit a very poor shot.



There is quite a bit of water scattered about Illinois Valley, including a creek that's in play and crosses the fairway on each of the first three holes. In fact, on No. 2 — a dogleg left that's virtually a 90-degree left turn — you cross the creek once as you tee off to an otherwise open landing area, then hit back across the creek again on your second shot. Amazingly, our round at Illinois Valley was dry, and even featured unusual (for us) back-to-back birdies, Don on the 150-yard third hole, Pete more impressively on the 390-yard No. 4, Illinois Valley's No. 1 handicap hole.

Disappointingly, Illinois Valley did not have logo balls for sale. We've waxed on about this in other reviews, but we never know who reads what when. We collect logo balls from each course we play on The Quest, and are always disappointed to find a course without them. Illinois Valley was actually the first "real course" we encountered that just flat out didn't stock logo balls. On this same trip, Applegate River was temporarily out-of-stock (we got those later), and Colonial Valley didn't qualify as a "real" course by most measures. But Illinois Valley was the first place where we were told, "No, we don't have those" at a course where'd you expect them.

Following our round at Illinois Valley, we toiled on down the highway to the Oregon Caves National Monument. Native Montanan Pete had never been there, and he *is* an Oregon earth sciences teacher at Newberg High after all, so it seemed the right thing to do given we were so close. Pete was impressed enough to fork out over \$200 on textbooks in the gift shop. It was a nice diversion to our ultra-hot golf week; it definitely wasn't over 100 degrees down in the caverns!