

# Course Review: John Day Golf Club

The John Day Golf Club is a 9-hole, semi-private course that may not quite reach “hidden gem” status, but it’s close. We played John Day as part of Golf Week 2015, a somewhat ill-fated seven days that saw us scampering across Eastern Oregon, hitting far-flung courses while trying to stay one step ahead of forest fires. In John Day, it was nip-and-tuck just getting out of Dodge.

The Canyon Creek Complex was really taking off as we rolled into town that August. The day we arrived, you could see some just over the hills from town. By the time we left 24 hours later, west toward Prineville was the only route out of John Day. Roads were closed to the north, east and south due to the fire. That Highway 395 South was closed was significant, given we had come up it the previous day after playing the Valley (Hines) and Bear Valley Meadows (Seneca) courses. Literally, from Baker City two days earlier and on, we had forest fires nipping at our heels the entire week. The Canyon Creek Complex eventually ignited even more, and took out 36 homes in rural John Day the week after we left.

That said, despite some significant black smoke nearby, we had a great round at John Day Golf Club. In fact, we enjoyed the course so much that we did something we rarely do at 9-hole settings: we paid and played again. Granted, part of that was due to the fact we had nowhere else to play that day. Just that morning, we heard from a local that the South Fork course in Dayville had been closed for a year. (We confirmed that going through.)



Open since 1953, as noted John Day Golf Club is semi-private, but that only means there are certain tee time blocks always reserved for “members.” Anyone from the public can play at John Day at almost any time. The white tees measure 2930 yards. The clubhouse sits on the crest of a hill. The first hole takes you down to the course level, probably 50 feet or so below the pro shop. You play the next seven holes on relatively flat land, then No. 9 brings you back up.

John Day was in excellent shape, nicely watered with quick, consistent greens. Many of the fairways ran parallel and offered the opportunity to recover from errant tee shots right or left. There are trees at John Day, but they look to have been planted 20-25 years ago, they aren’t old growth. The greens are average to slightly smaller than average in size, so accurate shot-making is a must on approach shots.

One thing to watch out for: Hole No. 2 actually has two greens, one for when you’re playing it as No. 2, the other when it’s No. 11 if you’re playing 18. We realized on our second time around that we’d played the wrong green the first time, so we played them in reverse order. Lots of 9-hole courses have two sets of tees, not many have an “extra” green.

Finally, we got a kick out of the cartoon rattlesnake logo the course uses. It’s on their logo balls as well as the hole flags. It serves as a friendly, not-too-scary reminder that this is Eastern Oregon, and there are rattlers on that side of the Cascades. Fortunately, the only ones we saw were on the flags.