

Course Review: Laurel Hill Golf Course

Part of the mystique, so to speak, of both The Quest in general and our annual golf weeks in particular is simply the allure of the unknown. We knew that Laurel Hill Golf Course in Gold Hill was part of our Golf Week 2008 agenda, for example, but we didn't know a darn thing about it. Cow pasture? Unknown best course in Oregon? That intrigue is part of what makes this adventure so much fun.

Laurel Hill, it turns out, is far from a cow pasture, and it's not Oregon's best course. It's a short (1915 yards from the one set of men's tees) executive course carved out of a grove of huge trees. Oaks and firs to be sure, and, we assume, some laurels. Check your driver at the clubhouse door.

People often mistake the phrase "executive course" to mean "beginner's course," and frequently that's *not* the case. Laurel Hill is Exhibit "A." Laurel Hill's proprietors like to compare their track to a regulation course "with the drives removed." That's an apt description. You have to be accurate with both direction and distance to play Laurel Hill well; the ability to shape your shots left or right off the tee is imperative if you don't want to be constantly laying up.

Overall we found the greens at Laurel Hill average to smallish in size. They were in good shape, not great, but rolled consistently. They are not as quick as most of their Southern Oregon counterparts.

Different courses have their own sounds. Some are quiet and pastoral. Play any number of the Portland courses located near PDX and you'll spend the day listening to jet engines during your backswing. At Laurel Hill, no exaggeration, the predominant sound is the tat-tat-tat of golf balls ricocheting off trees. Or a



woodpecker convention. There really are *that many* trees, and people are hitting them constantly. Part of the reason, aside from bad swings, is that there's virtually no rough at Laurel Hill — you're either in the fairway, or you're in the trees.

Even for an executive course, the Laurel Hill layout is quirky. There are five par 3s and four par 4s, but after an opening par 4 (265-yards with a small creek crossing the fairway at about 100 yards) you encounter all five of the par 3s all in succession. The four par 4s are in the 275- to 300-yard range, but because of the tree-lined doglegs they generally require two good iron shots to reach the green. No. 8, the second of back-to-back 310-yard par 4s, has some big trees in the *middle* of the fairway. No. 9, measuring 280, is a dogleg left with a pond square in the middle of the landing area. If you can't hit a controlled hook off the tee, you've got no choice but to hit short and lay up for your second shot.

On the par 3s, there actually are two holes that only have trees lining one side of the fairway. However, the good news ends quickly, as No. 2 (170 yards) and No. 3 (150) are guarded by a steep ravine thick with blackberries, and beyond those, a creek. No relief there — heck, there's always the chance you'll get a *good* bounce off a tree; little dimpled balls don't bounce off of blackberry bushes. No. 4 is Laurel Hill's easiest hole, straight and just 110 yards. No. 5 (145 yards) and No. 6 (175) are also straight, but feature very small greens; you have to factor a sloping green into the mix on No. 6 as well.

Laurel Hill was very reasonably priced, the pro shop (pictured left) folks were extremely friendly, and they had logo balls. It was a great Golf Week 2008 stop.

