

# Course Review: Milton-Freewater Golf Course

It feels as though we've used the word "unique" many times in our Don and Pete Golf Oregon course reviews, and we don't want to dilute the meaning of the word. That said, there is something about the Milton-Freewater Municipal Golf Course that truly characterizes it as a unique experience. Alas, unique isn't necessarily a synonym for good.

At Milton-Freewater, it's all about the nines. Most of us are familiar with the idea of the "front nine" and the "back nine." At Milton-Freewater, you more literally play a "bottom nine" and an "upper nine." More on that soon.

We played Milton-Freewater Golf Course as part of Golf Week 2009. The course, owned and operated by the city, opened in 1974. Located right off of downtown, the back/upper nine offers spectacular views of the Walla Walla Valley. It's an executive course: 12 par 3s and 6 par 4s, for a par total of 60. There are two sets of tees, "men's" and "ladies." The men's tees check in at 3346 yards.

The par 3s are legitimate. Out of the chute you've got 168 and 167 yards to negotiate on Holes 1 and 2, then No. 3 checks in at a robust 207 yards. There are four shorties in the 120s, including three on the back side, but this isn't a pitch and putt track, they're real golf holes. It's the par 4s that take away from Milton-Freewater's overall appeal. The longest par 4 measures a meager 299; the shortest is just 222. Obviously, you're not using your driver much, even if you're Joe Average Golfer. Sure, you can say it's a good place to work on your short game, but Milton-Freewater is a bit off the beaten track for most Oregonians.

For a hot August summer afternoon, the course was in good shape and green. The putting surfaces were a little slow and bumpy here and there. There are not a lot of traps.

OK, about those nines. We walked the course, which was easy enough save one aspect: getting to the back nine. The first nine holes are at street/clubhouse level. While hole No. 9 delivers you adjacent to the clubhouse as you'd expect, from there you're off on a trek back out between Holes 3 and 4 to be



greeted by a steep gravel path straight uphill. We're not sure how far up it is, a couple hundred feet at least. It's a tough climb, and you arrive at an upper level fresh out of breath. The first thing you notice up top is the City of Milton-Freewater's water tower, which dominates the immediate area. You then notice the aforementioned panoramic views of the Walla Walla Valley.

You play the entire back/upper nine on the bluff. It's pretty compact: two par 3s of 122 and another of 121 are included. The longest par 4 is 249. Oddly enough, No. 13 is a 195-yard par 3, followed by a 194-yard par 4 on No. 14. You don't see that everywhere. And they're both straight-ahead holes. You do finish nicely, as the No. 18 tee overlooks a finishing green that's back downhill at "sea level," so to speak, plus the green is protected by a large retention pond, the only water on the course (it comes into play on No. 5 as well). You whack it down there, traverse back down the hill end up in the middle of the course, well away from the clubhouse.

If you've read between the lines, this isn't the best course ever. It was also relatively expensive, especially for what it is. And — no logo balls (and a phone check four years later revealed still no logo balls). All was not lost, however, as Pete's mom lived in Milton-Freewater at that time, so we left a mediocre golf course for an excellent homemade dinner.