

Course Review: Oak Knoll (Independence)

Oak Knoll Golf Course in Independence (sort of) is one of two Oregon courses bearing the name Oak Knoll; the other is in Ashland. This Oak Knoll has an Independence address, but it's right on Highway 22 about eight miles west of Salem.

We played Oak Knoll on Jan. 3, 2013. It was still below freezing when we arrived at 10, and we had to wait awhile for the greens to thaw. We were to be the first two out that day, although we were walking so eventually deferred to a pair of locals heading out in a cart.

Oak Knoll is an 18-hole course, although the back nine (which opened in 1979) is much newer than the front, which opened in 1926. They are two distinct nines, and you'd have to be pretty unobservant not to notice. The original nine is cut out of a grove of beautiful, mature oak trees (duh!) and features fairways lined with said trees. The second nine skirts outside the original layout and is much more open; several holes have no trees at all.

Oak Knoll has a reputation, deservedly so, for not draining particularly well. That made a frozen day a pretty good option for a winter round there, or so we thought. Oak Knoll is fairly short; the longest tees only measure 6200 yards. Despite the trees, most fairways have some leeway to bump right or left, then the back is pretty open, so the thing that prevents everyone from shooting their best round ever is Oak Knoll's greens. They are relatively small and many, especially those on the original nine, are crowned, some severely.

As you might imagine, frozen crowned greens don't



hold approach shots very well. From the whites, Holes 1 and 2 are short (328 and 349 yards, respectively) par 4s. On both holes, Don's drives ended up exactly 150 yards out — hey, you try swinging with five layers and double gloves. But on both occasions, he hit perfect high, arching 7-irons that hit dead center of the greens. And on both occasions, Don's ball went *Boing!* like a SuperBall and bounded some 20 yards over. Hey, it was Jan. 3 and we weren't trying to score. It was funny.

We tried to adjust, but there was a problem. While the dance floors were still frozen, the landing areas immediately adjacent to the greens were not — they were thawing and mushy. So hit it short and plug greenside, or hit the green and bounce over. That was our choice for most of the front side. Again, fortunately this wasn't a day we were overly concerned about our scores. It warmed up enough on the back nine that things were pretty squishy in general; to be fair, Oak Knoll is hardly the only course where that would be the case on Jan. 3.

Drainage issues aside, there's quite a bit of planned water at Oak Knoll as well, in the form of both ponds and a small stream that wanders about the course. There are also some bunkers scattered here and there, though there aren't a ton of them. As noted above, the greens are fairly small and several are crowned. They putted pretty slowly when we played, obviously that's hardly surprising given the circumstances. They did roll consistently, we assume a good sign that they do so in better weather.