

Course Review: St. Helens Golf Course

Following a Dec. 31 morning nine at the Vernonia Golf Club and a not-as-quick-as-hoped-for lunch in a local restaurant, Don and Pete negotiated the windy 25-mile drive through Columbia County hinterland to the St. Helens Golf Course. The course, located several miles from St. Helens proper, plays to a par 36 and comes in just under 3,000 yards from the white tees.

St. Helens is a fairly pedestrian layout. There's a small winter creek running through the property, though it doesn't come into play much. The most unique aspect of playing at St. Helens is the layout itself. Hole No. 1 is also the No. 1 handicap hole: 523 yards, par 5. Hole No. 2 is a pretty routine 150-yard par 3. After that, you encounter seven consecutive par 4s, ranging in length from 250 yards to 409. Correspondingly, some holes offer greater challenges than others simply based on the length, but again, overall it's a so-so layout. While there are some trees here and there, most of the holes are pretty wide open unless you hook or slice pretty severely.

The greens at St. Helens were in good shape for Dec. 31, slightly better than their counterparts at Vernonia earlier that day. The bulk of the course was slightly wetter than Vernonia. The creek that runs through the layout implies a fairly low water table, and that was evident in several places. There were some mushy spots, nothing too severe, but it's been an exceptionally dry winter to date. You could tell that St. Helens is typically a pretty wet play in the wintertime.

This could be the circumstance of playing on a holiday-week weekday, but SHCC appears to cater to a largely senior clientele. Nothing wrong with that, of course, and again, we did arrive at 2 p.m. on a Tuesday. Indeed, the proprietor seemed initially taken aback by our 2 o'clock arrival. Friendly throughout, he was heartened to find out we had brought our own pull carts, as "we generally close up around 3." No problem, the occupants of a neighboring home would close and lock the gate to the clubhouse driveway behind us.



Two other notes. First, St. Helens Golf Course does have logo balls, always a plus. But the logo on the ball isn't the same as the one on the clubhouse signage, which is too bad. While both logos include the mountain in the background, the simple black and white ball logo pales in comparison to the signage logo, which shows St. Helens blowing her top circa 1980. (Native Oregonian Don watched the volcano erupt from his family's front yard back in the day.) The signage logo would be a much better ball logo.

Second, we did have a Don and Pete first while approaching the 8th green. The green was adjacent to a road, and right across the road was a large field full of geese. The field owner apparently wasn't happy with the geese's presence, and just as we were about to putt a series of extremely loud rat-tat-tats sent several hundred flying. Someone used some type of semi-automatic weapon to scare them off, hopefully shooting blanks. Although frankly, we were less concerned about miscellaneous shrapnel than we were about being bombed from overhead, if you catch our meaning. Fortunately, the flock took a turn to our left and we escaped unscathed.