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Baylands Golf Links resurrects golf in Palo Alto!

In the day of losing golf courses it is heartening to see the opening of a new one. And when the opening is the resurrection of an out-dated municipal, it's all the better.

Such is the case with the recent opening of the Baylands Golf Links in Palo Alto.

Previously known as Palo Alto Muni, the only similarity between the two courses is that they roughly inhabit the same space.

The reconstruction of the course began in July of 2016 when golf course architect Forrest Richardson and his team started work on the original William Bell design that opened in 1956.

Part of the work included the removal of 400 non-native trees. The loss was offset by the planting of 300 native trees. It is all about incorporating the natural beauty of the native land by the San Francisco Bay.

"The idea behind Baylands Golf Links was to create a natural landscape that blends and works with the environment that the city has taken such care to preserve," said Richardson.

The result is spectacular. It plays like a true links course and is very fair. The landing areas are ample, and the greens are big, but don't for a minute think the greens are easy.



All photos courtesy Forrest Richardson and Associates. Photo by Dave Sansom.

Huge greens with a multitude of undulations make for some anxious moments putting. When we played the course, the greens were a tad on the slow side- Richardson was quick to point out they will be faster – but with the undulations, speed is not necessary- or practical.

“I didn’t want to come in and have greens that rolled over 10,” said Richardson. “You can’t have the undulations with greens that fast.”

There is also little or no rough on the course, save for the native wetlands.

The course plays to the following ratings and slopes: Black (72.4/129), Blue (70.1/118), White (67.0/114), Green (63.3/114). The distances range from 6,680 yards down to 4,821 yards.

On paper, it doesn’t look overwhelmingly tough – very few municipal courses are- but the greens more than make up for the lack of distance.

“Golf is supposed to be fun,” said Richardson. “At Baylands the goal is not just about length, but about planning shots and being clever. When you figure out the puzzle, you will score well.”



15th hole

The course is very walkable, but there is distance between greens and the next tees, so be aware, there will be some extra walking.

The first hole is a good indicator for the course. A 464-yard, par 5 has a wide-open fairway, an easy approach into the green and then has work to do on the green.

The second hole also allows the golfer to ease into the course as the par 4 plays 364 yards with wide open landing areas.

No. 3 is the first of the “fun” holes, with the par 5 playing 500 yards, with the hole going out 400 yards, then turning right. There are three bunkers in the landing areas. If you avoid them, the fairway narrows as the native grass comes in to play.

The 4th is a 140-yard, par 3 with a big bunker covering the front left of the green that is only 36-feet deep.

There are fun, risk and reward holes throughout the course. The 5th plays only 304 yards, but there is wetlands 250 yards off the tee, forcing the layup or the risk of letting the big dog eat.

The 6th plays right along side the runway of the Palo Alto Airport. The slight dogleg right hole plays 399 yards.

No. 7 plays only 297 yards, but with wetlands running most of the way down the right side it makes cutting the corner on the dogleg right hole impossible. A drive of 250 yards is safe, leaving an approach over the trap to the hole.

As short as the 7th is, the 8th takes it all back as the 193-yard par 3 plays right into the wind. A huge trap guards the front right, making the tee shot even more imposing.

The closing hole on the front side is also a beast, playing 531 yards, and into the wind. The hole is wide open – you could land an airplane from the neighboring airport in the fairway – but the length, combined with the wind, makes it one tough par.



18th green

The back nine starts with another risk and reward hole, with the par 4 playing 380 yards. The catch – the wetlands cut through the fairway 276 yards out, making laying up necessary. Running it up to the edge leaves an approach of 140 yards.

After a breather at the 11th, No. 12 is a fun little par 3, featuring a pot bunker right in front of the green. Wetlands surround the green, leaving a visual that the green is much smaller than the reality.

After playing some holes into the wind, the 13th gives the golfer a chance to cash in with the wind at their back. The par 5 plays only 489 and with a strong wind at your back, if you can avoid the bunkers on each side the range from 257 yards (right side) to 281 (left side), getting home in two is a realistic option.

The 14th has interesting feature – two greens. The par 4 plays 368 yards, with the tougher of the two greens being the left one as wetlands run the length of the hole to the left. While the right green is not as protected, it is smaller and somewhat hidden behind mounds.

The 15th is a tidy little par 3 – 118 yards – but the green has more ups and downs than a roller coaster – making it a test.

The 16th is another wide-open hole save for the two smaller bunkers about 280 out. The 17th is the last of the five par 3's on the course and might be the toughest. Playing 200 yards and into the wind, there are also mounds in front and to the side of the green, keeping the golfer from seeing the bottom of the flag stick.

If you have read reviews of mine before, you know I feel that to be a great closing hole, the 18th must be a hole where a match can be easily won or lost because the hole plays tough.

Richardson hit a hole in one here!

Playing 489 yards, the par 5 goes out about 280 yards before taking a right turn and heading toward the green. Cutting the corner is an option as the wind can be at your back, but you are going to have to carry the ball about 280 yards off the green to get over the native grass.

Once approaching the green, the fairway narrows and is framed by a pair of trees. Once again, an undulating green awaits to make getting out with the lead a daunting task.

I thoroughly enjoyed my round and would highly recommend a trip to Palo Alto to give the course a spin. It's the second Richardson re-do I have played in the last year – Berkeley Country Club is the other – and once again, he has done a wonderful job.

For more information or to make reservations, please go to www.baylandsgolflinks.com (<http://www.baylandsgolflinks.com>).

By Dennis Miller

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