

## River's Edge

### Bend course's hilly lies and blind shots can thrill some, frustrate others

By Zack Hall / *The Bulletin*

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**Editor's note:** This is another in a seasonlong series visiting each public and semiprivate golf course in Central Oregon.

Staring down the fairway from the first tee box at Bend's River's Edge Golf Course offers little hint as to the optimal shot to be played.

No first tee in Central Oregon prepares a golfer more for what lies ahead than No. 1 at River's Edge.

The 400-yard par 4 slopes severely downhill, and at about 200 yards down, the fairway turns left behind a rock outcropping that completely blocks the view of the green.

In other words, the first hole is a leap of faith — something not uncommon at River's Edge, where negotiating blind shots and hillside lies are mandatory to achieve a good score.

Nestled on the northeast side of Awbrey Butte, River's Edge is unlike any other course in Central Oregon. Depending on what kind of golf you like to play, that might be a good or bad thing.

River's Edge can be brutally difficult, especially for golfers who struggle with accuracy, are overly aggressive, or lack the skill to play from a limitless variety of hillside lies.

On the other hand, the course is usually well taken care of. The undulating greens generally roll true, and some holes, such as the straight-downhill par-3 16th hole — offer some amazing views of Bend — all while the course tests a golfer with every kind of shot imaginable.

And River's Edge is accommodating.



Pete Erickson / The Bulletin

The hilly first hole at River's Edge Golf Course offers a link of what's to come at the Bend course.



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## Breaking down the course

A closer look at River's Edge. For more information on the items below, see Sports.e\_SCIB

*Difficulty*

Take my recent round there. I was playing with a friend, and we walked into the clubhouse with no tee time. And though it was a moderately busy weekday afternoon, we asked the man at the desk if we could get out.

"How's 20 minutes from now work?" he asked.

And before we knew it, he launched us off the back side.

In a way, we were lucky to start on the 10th hole, which deferred the treacherous first hole until a point in our round at which we were already settled in.

Even after playing nine holes before it, the first hole can still be tricky.

My partner tanked his first shot on the first, but somehow he got a favorable bounce off a rock and into the middle of the fairway about 150 yards from the green. On the other hand, I drilled a hybrid with a little draw. The ball drifted farther left than I planned, but still, I felt it would be safe.

I walked past the outcropping, opening a view of the fairway, and my ball was nowhere to be found. It was lost for good. Meanwhile, my buddy took advantage of his good fortune, hitting a strong approach and converting his par.

I guess the right bounces can make all the difference at River's Edge.

#### *Difficulty of course*

Golfers who have trouble hitting targets will struggle at River's Edge. Built on the slopes of Awbrey Butte, the hilly golf course is characterized by frequent elevation changes, and the course offers little room to miss right or left.

Accurate golfers will find a course that can be had at 6,683 yards from the back tees, which is relatively short. But golfers who are uncomfortable playing from hillside lies will spend much of the day digging out of rough — or worse: juniper or ponderosa pines.

The back nine, with more generous landing areas and more subtle elevation changes — the exception being the par-3 16th hole, which dives downhill more than 100 feet from tee to green — is a bit more forgiving than the front. But the backside is also some 400 yards longer.

River's Edge can be difficult, especially for those golfers who struggle to hit their targets consistently. Novices will be challenged, too, though at 5,340 yards from the red tees, distance will not be much of an issue. The course's greens are hilly, but they roll true.e\_SCIB

#### *Strategy*

Golfers would be wise to play the front nine with caution. Play River's Edge like a target course early, aiming for the 150-yard markers from the tees to set up manageable approach shots. On the longer and more generous back nine, golfers can be more aggressive.e\_SCIB

#### *Extras*

No clubhouse in Central Oregon offers a more spectacular view than the one at River's Edge, where much of Bend can be seen from the back patio. The facility also offers a full-size driving range and a large practice putting green between the clubhouse and the first tee.

#### *The basics*

General information about River's Edge Golf Course

Number of holes: 18

Status: Open year-round, weather permitting

Location: 400 Pro Shop Drive, Bend

Tee times: 541-389-2828

Course stats: Par 72, 6,683 yards

Green fees: Through Sept. 18, Mon.-Thur.: \$59, after 3 p.m., \$39; Fri.-Sun.: \$68, after 3 p.m. \$48; Sept. 19-Oct. 30, \$47 daily; Oct. 31-March 12, 2012, \$39

Power cart: \$16

Head golf professional: Troy Eckberg

Course designer: Robert Muir Graves (1988, original nine; 1992, second nine)

Extras: Driving range, putting green, chipping area, pro shop, restaurant

Website: [www.riverhouse.com](http://www.riverhouse.com).

River's Edge Golf Course

#### **SCORECARD**

Hole Par Yardage

No. 1 Par 4 400 yards

No. 2 Par 4 325 yards

No. 3 Par 4 421 yards

No. 4 Par 3 163 yards

No. 5 Par 5 530 yards

No. 6 Par 3 344 yards

No. 7 Par 3 183 yards

No. 8 Par 4 333 yards

No. 9 Par 4 465 yards

Out Par 36 3,164 yards

No. 10 Par 4 414 yards

No. 11 Par 5 524 yards

No. 12 Par 4 409 yards

River's Edge is not for the faint of heart. But novices looking to expand their games will have an opportunity at the Bend course, which will force most golfers to hit just about every kind of shot.

*Favorite hole*

The par-4 sixth hole is the signature hole River's Edge, and it is picturesque, especially on the approach over water.

No. 13 Par 4 393 yards
No. 14 Par 3 187 yards
No. 15 Par 4 461 yards
No. 16 Par 3 216 yards
No. 17 Par 5 515 yards
No. 18 Par 4 400 yards
In Par 36 3,519 yards
*All distances from back tees
River's Edge

But the most enjoyable golf hole is the par-4 third hole, which plays much shorter than its listed 421 yards. From the severely elevated tee box, longer hitters will find a tough risk/reward hole that doglegs left and allows them to nuzzle a ball close to the green with a draw from the tee.

However, long drives hit straight will venture through the fairway and into trouble. Shots hit right will leave a long approach shot into a green that is well-protected by trees.

Shorter hitters and more conservative golfers will drive the ball to the 150-yard marker to set up their approach shots.

*Strategy*

Play River's Edge almost as two different golf courses.

Playing cautiously will take some of the bite out of the front nine, where balls can trickle to all sorts of unintended locations. Play the front side as a target course, aiming for the 150-yard markers and trying to score with a short iron.

But on the backside, which plays some 400 yards longer, golfers will be better served by being aggressive and taking advantage of the generous fairways.

Hills can make as much as a two-club difference on the back nine, so be sure to lock in your distances because gauging the yardage on uphill and downhill approach shots can be tricky.

*Extras*

The clubhouse at River's Edge is rather nondescript from the front. It offers an average-sized pro shop, and a snack bar and meeting area nearby. But the back patio, which includes a handful of tables and chairs, opens up to a panoramic view of Bend.

The driving range, which is across a bridge from the clubhouse, offers ample room for golfers to practice. The practice putting green just below the clubhouse patio is large and hilly, providing the right practice conditions for the round to follow.

The practice green is large enough for a golfer to work on his or her chipping.

*Value*

At \$68 during weekends, River's Edge is relatively pricey, especially considering that the green fee does not include the use of a cart, which is not a bad idea on such a hilly track. However, at \$59, a better deal can be had from Monday through Thursday.

River's Edge does offer a reasonable twilight rate: \$39 after 3 p.m. during weekdays and \$48 after 3 p.m. on weekends.

Golfers who want to play River's Edge more frequently can join the River's Edge Club for \$59. Club members can play the course for \$41, even during peak times.

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