

## Back to Bandon Trails

The golf resort at Bandon Dunes to many folks is the ultimate buddy trip, a onetime golf vacation. To folks with the financial ability it becomes a yearly pilgrimage to the world's best golf resort. That said, if you live in Oregon and within a couple hours driving distance from Bandon you are blessed. You're blessed with lower rates from November through April without having to stay on the property. You have the ability go over and see the events there such as the USGA mid-amateur and Curtis Cup, or just drop into the lodge for the wonderful cuisine. Because I live in Medford, Oregon, 2 ½ to 3 hours from Bandon, day trips are not out of the question. Usually I go overnight but this trip had a much smaller time window so a day trip it was.

For most people it takes strategic planning, checking the weather, negotiating for time, booking air travel, and rental cars to make this kind of trip happen. For me it happened like this. On Monday I call my mom Barbara, "hey Mom want to play golf a Bandon Dunes on Saturday?", she says yes. Five minutes later the tee time is made for 11:20 on Bandon Trails, I call mom back, tell her I'll pick her up between 6:30 and 7:00 AM Saturday morning. It's a done deal, never got out of the car while waiting to pick up my daughter from school. That's how a Bandon Dunes trip can be planned when you live here. A longer trip would have required reservations, letting my wife know and my business partner that I would be out of town. So maybe a ½ hour would be needed. The nice part about making the tee times is that you are committed, they are prepaid and you're playing. It gives you something to look forward to all week so by Friday I'm ready to get the gear organized for the trip.

A day trip to Bandon requires loading up various rain gear, coats and hats for the trip. You bring your normal rain pants, rain coats, and rain hat. Your standard good weather gear for Bandon, winds shirt, hat, heavy pants, (note to out of state golfers, leave the shorts at home, we are tired of watching you freeze). The rain pants, rain coat and rain hat all go in the bag in case things change. Bring you sun glasses, sun screen, (helps with wind burn also), don't forget Chap Stick. You may have noticed I didn't say umbrella. If you bring one use it around the lodge or club houses, but don't make your caddie carry it. If it does start raining, it'll start blowing and the best umbrella will be a reversed, broken mess in minutes. Everything is loaded in the car, the alarm is set, it feels like you're a kid waiting to go to Disneyland again.

A 3 hour trip by car and we arrive at the resort. First thing, drive by the Bandon Trails club house, each course has its own clubhouse with the Bandon Dunes club house being beside the lodge. We check in and see what the frost delay brings; our tee time is pushed out by 20 minutes to 11:40. Its only 9:30 so off to the main lodge for breakfast and a trip to the golf and gift shop. A word about food at the resort, if you're looking for high end, modern gourmet cuisine your at the wrong resort. The cuisine fits the clientele; they know who their customers are. Don't think the food isn't gourmet quality cuisine, but at Bandon you'll be having Pan seared elk, fresh Coho salmon, or pan seared sea scallops. You might decide on Grandma's meat loaf, or go to McKee's pub for a huge Rueben sandwich. The food though gourmet is meat and potatoes, with generous portions, a good wine cellar and reasonable prices. No ultra small portions or multiple courses of tiny entrees to experience here, its straight forward high quality food. You've now discovered the first thing about Bandon Dunes Resort. It's all about the golf and golfer everything else comes after those things. Offer the best golf experience to golfers and they will come. Food and amenities matter but golf comes first, so after breakfast it's off to the practice center to get ready to play.

The practice center at the resort is a 30 acre area with driving ranges, a huge putting green, and a practice course with greens, bunkers and complete holes. We spend about 45 minute honing our swings, in my case just slapping balls around with no idea of an actual ending locations. This is a good place to talk about the kind of

golf you'll be playing at Bandon. The courses are all constructed over sandy soil; there are fescue grasses on the fairways and greens. You will discover the meaning of 'tight lie' at the resort because all the lies are tight. The fescue grasses are very short; there is no ½ inch cushion under your ball like rye or bents grasses. A scooping golf swing will produce nothing but fat shots, your caddy will tell you to: "take a divot, hit down on the ball". What should you be practicing before a trip to Bandon? Work on tight lies, knock down shots, and fairway woods. The tight lies are just a function of the links style courses you'll be playing, hitting the ball first and pinching it off the turf will let you hit crisp shots. Knock down shots let you work the fairways here and get a ball under the wind. At Bandon a thin hit knock down shot travels farther, runs and lets you play the ground game that you may not be used to on your home course. Solid fairway woods are needed because these courses have some very long par 4's and 5's and even par 3's. You're going to hit a lot of fairway wood shots if your tee ball is less than 270 yards. It also helps to have hybrids in your bag or to be very proficient with long irons. The course we played this Saturday morning is probably the hardest but most under rated at the resort, Bandon Trails by Ben Crenshaw and Bill Coore.

We arrive at the course 20 minutes before our tee time and spend time putting on the upper practice green. The caddies say the upper green more closely resembles to greens on the course. Randy the caddie coordinator for trails that day brought our caddies over. Dressed in the all black, Bandon Logo rain gear our 2 young caddies arrived. Cam and Bucky were friends since childhood and had come to the west coast from Michigan and Ohio respectively. They are 25 years old and roommates who live in Bandon but rarely get to loop together. We move up to the starter and find out we are going to get to play as a twosome as the other twosome for our time has not shown up. The day is working out fine, almost no wind, the sun is out and the first tee ball is about to be struck.

The first tee at Bandon Trails sits atop high dunes, to the west there are gorse filled dunes leading down to the distant ocean. To the North you can see the Bandon Dunes course and even further north Pacific Dunes. The first hole lies below you threading its way between the dunes to an elevated sloping green. The fairway grass is so short that the transition between fairway and the green is almost undetectable. The 2<sup>nd</sup> hole a more challenging little par 3 to a large green sitting beside huge blown out sand dunes finishes your admittance to the Bandon Trails course. This will be the last dune grass ocean view hole until you climb up to the 18<sup>th</sup> fairway. You have entered the Oregon course at Bandon Dunes golf resort. The saying at the resort is that the Bandon Dunes course is like a Scottish links course. The Pacific Dunes course is like an Irish links course. But Bandon Trails is pure Oregon Coast.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> hole is a wide par 5 where the men's tee shot is actually hit across the access road. The fairways are very forgiving except for the large bunkers in the middle and edges. The sides of the hole are lined with madrone, manzanita, hemlock, white fir, and cedar trees. Wild rhododendrons and brush make staying in the fairway essential to playing a good round here. I could take you around the course at this point, hole by hole. I think you would be better served going to Bandon Dunes website and looking at the course hole by hole. I want to give the flavor of the layout though. You'll continue up and down the hills and wandering through meadows to large undulating unusual greens. There will be water off to side, short par 4s, a 3 shot par 5, a 240 yard par 3. You'll travel upward until the 14<sup>th</sup> hole. Here you will be at the top Bandon Trails facing a tough, short par 4. Every second throughout your first round you will be staring with your mouth open at the beauty and natural brutality of the course.

At the 18<sup>th</sup> hole you emerge from the coastal woodlands to an uphill into the wind dune grass par 4. You're back in the crumpled sand dunes going to elevated green with huge fall offs front and right. The round is over and I'm sad that it came to an end. The children, as my mom and I called our caddies, are paid. Cam and Bucky have

been some of the most enjoyable caddies I have ever had. The pockets emptied of tees, balls, markers, repair tools, glove. These essentials tucked away in the golf bag, keys and wallet back in my pocket we are off to have dinner at the main lodge, then the drive home. It's been a great day, the foursome in front of us played slow, (it was almost a 5 hour round), and we had the good and the bad. It keeps reinforcing the thought I always have when I'm at Bandon Dunes. It may be rainy, windy days here, or I may not have played my best or even remembered what my best looked like that day. It was still one of my best golfing days. As we start home the first rain drops hit the car window.

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