

<https://www.golfdigest.com/story/silvies-valley-ranch-retreat-and-links-prepare-to-be-fascinated-by-a-remote-oregon-golf-course-and-its-not-bandon-dunes>

# Golf Digest

## **This remote Oregon golf course will fascinate you (Psst: And no, it's not Bandon Dunes)**

You hear 'reversible' golf course and you think gimmick. But picturesque Silvies Valley Ranch and Links is anything but that

By [Curt Sampson](#) | November, 14, 2017

Oregon's well-earned status in the new century as a golf mecca should be enhanced by its latest golf resort, which debuted in July and re-opens for play in May 2018 in the state's vast desert interior. Silvies Valley Ranch Retreat and Links ain't no links, but it definitely lives up to the retreat part of its name.

It's a five-hour drive southeast from Portland, three hours due west from Boise. The ride is spectacularly scenic, with so much desiccated geological splendor outside your window that you can't help but slow down to regard with awe the cathedrals of stone and the painted hills. The reward at the end of the trek includes silence so deep you can hear your heart beat, a golf course by Bandon Crossings architect Dan Hixson, and an audience with Dr. Scott Campbell, the founder of Silvies Valley Ranch, who is either a visionary or way ahead of his time.

I mean: a par 2?

Yes, Campbell is outside the box. But at a time when golf is trying hard to attract and retain converts, perhaps it's time to listen to fresh perspectives from innovators in other fields. The 59-year-old retired veterinarian, who resembles a young Warren Buffett, is not steeped in the game. But he's very good at boiling complex problems down to their essence, and after assessing the current landscape of golf he offers three words that, while not original, further validate the advice of other smart folks: "Make it fun



***SVR owner Scott Campbell and his wife, Sandy.***

We'd heard you could play his new course clockwise one day (called the Craddock course), and counter-clockwise (the Hankins course) the next. So, like my rain jacket and the Old Course, it's reversible! There were also whispers that Campbell and architect Hixson (who recently designed Wine Valley Golf Club in Walla Walla, Wash.), had contrived a spare nine holes so wacky it looked like the work of fantasy golf-hole artist Bud Chapman. And the Silvies Valley Ranch signature drink, the Horseshoe Nail, allegedly garnished with a crabapple skewered by said non-rusty nail. We had to see.

Campbell's name may ring a bell. He's the vet with the best ideas yet for taking care of your pet. "How many dogs do you own, Dr. Campbell?" I asked, the get-to-know-you cocktail-hour question I'd devised on the drive in from Bend with "Tin Cup" screenwriter John Norville.

"Five thousand," he said. "And it's Scott."

I'd heard correctly. His clinics lease dogs and cats. The nominal owners pay a monthly fee for grooming and shots and so on, but Campbell retains the title to Toto. Two of his other genius ideas were arranging to place mini-clinics in many Petsmart stores; and animal health insurance, a program that took off like a spaniel after a squirrel.

Since Campbell graduated from vet school at Oregon State, and bought the practice of a retiring Portland veterinarian in 1986, his innovation and careful execution led to the creation of 750 Banfield Animal Hospitals, which treat 100,000 patients a week, he says, and employ 250 veterinarians.

His stunning success allowed Campbell to return home, back over the Cascades, to arid, lonely, beautiful Eastern Oregon, and to establish a profitable cattle-and-goat operation on a 140,000-acre home on the range near Burns, where he grew up. That's 218 square miles, so big that a herd of 600 elk wanders unnoticed through the rugged dreamscape like a dull-witted motorcycle gang. And so big that it wasn't hard to find 600 acres for a golf resort that wouldn't interfere with the raisin' and grazin'.



***The flexibility of Silvie Valley Ranch is seen here with the 15th green on the Hankins course (center), the third on the Craddock course (right) and the fourth on the Craddock (left) all in close proximity.***

“Tonight our chef has paired an Italian technique to our Pacific Halibut, and rewritten Bourguignon to an Oregon tune,” announced a slip of a girl named Anna Rose. She and the rest of the wait staff wore the SVR uniform of head-to-toe Carhartt, looking like they could toss a bale of hay after they tossed the salad, which, this night, was a “reimagined” version of the classic Warm Bacon and Spinach.

And it was good. Since everyone who will visit has been on a significant journey, step one for SVR was exceptional food and hostelry. Check and double check. Norville and I stayed in The Beaver, one the luxurious log cabins. (There are 36 rooms on-site, which start at \$310 for the ranch house and \$350 for lake log cabins.) Netflix is on the tube, because no TV (or cellphone microwaves) could touch our isolation. A spa—“a nice one,” said Campbell—will open next year.

Over chevon—which is to goat what steak is to cow—Campbell talked about how and why he did what he did at SVR and what we’d find when we teed it up the next morning.



***The 18th green on the Hankins course.***

The reversibility thing was Hixson's idea. But Campbell, a lousy golfer ("My handicap's 50—per hole," he said) quickly embraced it, perceiving a way to double the golf fun. The two 18-hole routings use 27 greens, and wide, wide fairways. Greens fees are \$225 for resort guests and \$260 for walk-up play. Does it work? Yes and no. The courses accomplish the variety mission, but I'd like to see them distill the thing to the 18 best. Four or five of the artistic Hixson's holes I'd like to play again and again. Capital G golfers prize quality and memorability over quantity.

But if you want memorable ... here are five elements of the experience at SVR I will never forget:

- **Handgun Golf (my name, not theirs)** You may not drink before or during this game. SVR staffer Colby Marshall drove us in a Polaris RZR four-wheeler over a couple of miles of dusty trails—we mingled with three cowboys and 450 bovines in a cattle drive on the way—to a secluded canyon inside a secluded canyon. At the range, after a crash course in safety, I rapid fired an Ace .22 caliber semi-automatic at a paper target depicting the outlines of three golf holes. Shot one over par.

- **20-mile Downhill Walk with a Goat** I didn't actually do this one, but I will next time. Someone takes you to a distant hill top, and you and a goat disembark. Said very tame, very trained hircine carries the food and drink, and guides you gently but firmly back to the barn. Humans at HQ use satellite technology to track your trip, and you've got a radio in case of emergency, such as an urgent desire to have Horseshoe Nails and Horseradish and Goat Cheese Puree waiting for you when you get back.

- **The Hideaway** The clubhouse, which is a three-quarters-of-a-mile ride from the Lodge, has a tree-house feel. With its epic views and its friendly staff, it may be the golf universe's best spot for a drink.

