

Torrey Pines-South Course
La Jolla, California

Designers: William F. Bell (1957) and Rees Jones (2001)

Tees	Par	Yardage	Rating	Slope
Blue	72	7051	75.3	137
White	72	6628	73.1	133
Gold	72	6153	70.7	129

Overview:

There is something extra special about a public golf facility that has held a major championship. It is the almost counter intuitive combination of a quality golf facility and the lack of the pomp and circumstance of an exclusive private country club. Seeing a driving range full of regular Joes and pull carts being tugged around the fairways remind you that golf is a game of all the people not just the privileged ones. At a place like this you see that money invested wisely can pull off first rate venue that can be enjoyed by anyone who is up for the challenge without asking them to sacrifice the monthly mortgage payment.

Torrey Pines has 36 wonderful holes originally designed by William Bell but it is the South Course 18 that was renovated by Rees Jones in 2001 that brought this up to a standard to allow it to play host to the memorable 2008 U.S. Open duel between Tiger and Rocco. The changes Jones made to the course are mostly in the fairway and greenside bunkering and the refinement of the green complexes. This is not a course with signature holes you cannot forget. But because we see it on TV as the host to what is now the Farmers Insurance Open, there are images seared in our mind of stunning seaside vistas and colorful hang gliding parachutes over the rocky cliffs of La Jolla.

The course meanders back and forth atop those rocky cliffs on the coast of Southern California and is dominated by a large rock and scrub canyon in the middle of the property. The canyon is not in play that often but it's presence, much like the every present seaside breeze, influences your judgment every time you see it. The course is lush so there is not much roll out and the prevailing wind makes any hole with the ocean on your left play considerably longer than the number on the scorecard. Most of the holes run quasi-parallel to the cliffs so the directional influence of the wind on most holes is clearly discernable. It is the intensity of the wind on any given shot that is the enigma. There will be many times where the final resting place of your approach a club long or a club short will have you scratching your head in bewilderment.

Jones flanked most of the driving areas with bunkers on both sides which suggest a preferred shape to your tee ball to get to the most advantageous position for your attack at the greens. The new green complexes give this course it's strategic character. Most have flanking bunkers to negotiate, but there is generally an opening in front with the green raised slightly from the fairway, so bouncing it in is rarely an option.

For me this is a walkers course, if you don't want to lug your carry bag then take them up on the pull cart option. There are a few cardiac walks from green to the next tee but for the most part the holes have fairly gentle ramping and the scenic views are much better appreciated during a walk in the center of the fairway than from a hurtling cart cascading up the path.

I would be remiss if I did not emphasize how unique and cool the hang gliding is to this golf course. When you get to the seaside holes you may be standing over an approach shot and on your second and final look up at the target you are startled by the sudden appearance of two rugby stripe parachutes jettisoned from nowhere into your visual screen from behind the green. The coolest part, when you get closer to the cliffs, is to realize that these folks are like the dogs running on the beach, they are having the time of their lives just hovering like marionettes over the beach tugging their lines to find the next wind gust to take them up another ten floors. The hooting and hollering is infectious.

The fee for playing is totally reasonable. As an out of state resident you can actually reserve a tee time over a month in advance. They only take Visa and Mastercard for the green fees so don't try and ply your Platinum Amex or you will be reaching back in your pocket for cash before you get on the course.

The golf shop at Torrey Pines is one to die for. Just endless selections of everything you could want in clothing and accessories with their cool logo. Best part is that the prices are unbelievably reasonable for everything. This is the biggest golf store in La Jolla and they have it priced like a warehouse outlet to attract the minions. There is also a nice food service option across the lawn at the back of the lodge-wood framed patio that overlooks the 18th green and the visual scenery beyond. Great place for an after round snack.

From the standpoint of design, this is not the most memorable golf course you will ever play, but it is a wonderful day of scenic views, perfect weather, and a fine golf challenge that you need to experience. America needs more of these top line public golf venues that can brag that a major was played there and so did you.

Hole-By-Hole Analysis: (White/Gold)

#1 Par 4 419/373 yards

The beginning seems quite simple but making a par on the this sneaky long hole is a chore. The hole ramps up before you from the tee to a landing area with bunkers on either side. Power fade fits the lean of the dogleg. Likely still have a fairly long club up the rest of the ramp to a pinched opening to a green that is tipped toward you. Pitch and a putt for par is the likely scenario.

#2 Par 4 329/319

There is a great mix of short and long par fours peppering this course and this hole is a good example of how you do not need length to make the hole challenging. Drive it left center just off the bunker at about 230 and you are looking down to the green set to the right. Stepped green sits on a diagonal from front right to back left with bunkers flanking both sides. Because of the levels in the green you have to elevate your approach all the way to the tier with the flag.

#3 Par 3 149/142

If there is a signature hole here it is-pure golfer eye candy. They even provide a credit card access tourist camera adjacent to the tee box for those group shots for the office wall. The downhill plus a wind that is likely at your back makes this a tough club to pull. The shallow green drapes over the top of a big bunker across the front and there is nothing but snake wilderness left and long. He provides a little bail out chipping

area front right and a touch of extra green space back left but it is still a very precise shot to play here. If you somehow made a bogie and two pars walking to the fourth tee you are ahead of the game.

#4 Par 4 448/423

You now turn 180 degrees and with the ocean on your left so you are probably playing into a headwind. This is unfortunate since at 423 you were already borderline for getting there in two, now it is clearly a three-shot hole. Drive it hard up the hill to the area adjacent to the two fairway bunkers. For the second you will notice the fairway tips left toward the one greenside bunker. Since you should probably be laying up for position hit a low stinger up the right to get a good peek up to a green that is set 5 to 11 and banks toward you. This way you can hit an aggressive pitch up the slope and have a sniff at a par. Playing these last two holes you can appreciate the genius of holes parallel to the shore giving you some magnificent views of the La Jolla coastline and a good bit of breeze to factor into your playing strategy.

#5 Par 4 394/382

You are turning back where you just came from so this is a scoring opportunity. I like a draw here working down the left to give you a good view at the green set on an angle to the right. This green falls off to the back right into a heel print so something too aggressive will drift way to the right. The basic look of this green complex is something you will see over and over today.

#6 Par 5 499/452

Second scoring opportunity in a row if you are careful to not to do the Limbaugh wander. Shortish par five with the canyon on the right. The driving area is narrow the first 200 yards so you have to respect the corner unless you are feeling particularly bold. I like a slider at the second bunker from the left. This is where the hole turns to the right and then straightens out all the way to the green. Hit a long club as far down as you can to set up a short pitch to a narrow green raised from the fairway with bunkers on both sides. This green has three distinct tiers and ramps at you so focus on a precise yardage and elevate your approach to the section with the pin.

#7 Par 4 424/387

Turning back in the direction of the ocean again, this is the number one handicap hole on the course and there is good reason for it. The hole wraps around the canyon on the right and tightens considerably the closer you get to the green. You want to drive to left center to get a good look around the corner-the trees on the right will block your sight and flight line if you end up in the right rough. The fairway narrows the last 100 yards as it leads up to a green that is nestled against the canyon on the right and behind. One huge bunker skirts the entire right side of the green which is good because it probably keeps some wayward shots out of the ice plant. The green sits on a 7 to 1 diagonal and is tipped back to you on that line. The shot into this green is a fade for sure starting left of the green and working up. Taking it over the canyon and turning back into what is a pretty narrow green over the yawning bunker does not seem high percentage. Five is a very acceptable score on this hole.

#8 Par 3 155/146

Good things can happen to your scorecard in the next three holes so try to focus. All the three pars on this course are interesting and that is because no two are remotely alike. After that visual postcard experience on three you have a totally blind, visualize and trust requirement here. Same distance as the earlier one, entirely different executable. The hole plays slightly uphill which may add some distance but not much. The green is shallow so you have no latitude of error front to back and the green is sandwiched between a small deep bunker behind and a humongous cavernous sand pit in front. If you end up in the front bunker you may have doubts that the 60 degrees of your steepest wedge will be enough to clear the Mt. Rushmore front face of the bunker. This is all about visualization and trust-imagine the shot, pick the club for that distance, and trust your swing. All you want is a three from 145 yards, does not seem that difficult but this hole will test that theory.

#9 Par 5 510/459

The par fives are the best scoring opportunities of the day so you better take advantage here. This is a straight away path from tee to green between a series of bunker arrangements that will capture wayward shots. Drive it hard to center between the bunkers that start at around 230. From there hit it to about 100 yards-the next set of bunkers begin on the right at 130-and you should have a routine pitch into a very narrow green sandwiched between some nasty bunkers. The green has the tiered stepping from front right to back left and, given the diagonal set of the green, you do not get a whole bunch of depth to work with. With short club in your hand a birdie opportunity is a realistic possibility.

#10 Par 4 348/311

Switch gears again, another short technical par four that will reward control and accuracy. You hit your drive to left center at the bunker on the left that seems to impinge the driving area. From there you have a wedge in your hand at another tight green setting set to the left between bunkers. This green has a ridge across the center that will roll balls back to the front left or off the back right so plan your approach accordingly.

#11 Par 3 187/167

Those of us who know Torrey Pines from the annual PGA event or the 2008 U.S. Open always associate it with the colorful hang gliders that work the cliffs above the beach next to the course. You are now entering the hang gliding zone, try not to be too distracted by people bobbing up and down from under the adjacent cliffs into your sight line. My advice is take a few pictures from the back of the twelfth green and be done with it.

This is an awesome mid-range par three that plays slightly downhill from the tee to a narrow green set into the hill below you. The wind will likely offset the slightly shorter flight time created by the downhill so I would pick a club for the normal distance and trust it. The green is narrow and stepped so even a long club landing in the middle of the putting surface has a backstop to keep it on the lower level. The green wraps around the left bunkers so the back left pin is a bit of a phone booth job. Neat juxtaposition of your ball floating down the hill to the green with a couple of air junkies watching it from the other side suspended under a piece of colorful silk. You don't get this visual opportunity on a tennis court.

#12 Par 4 443/413

Back to harsh reality. Much like number four this is one of the longest holes on the course playing up the shoreline directly into the prevailing wind. You drive it to right center up a ramped landing area with bunkers on either side. The second is across a bit of a dip to a green that is set up on the hill backed up against the cliffs. Once again the green has lots of slope from back to front so you need to be aggressive to a back pin. The best hang gliding photo opps of the day are behind this green.

#13 Par 5 504/488

Other than the drop to the sea on three this is the most topographically interesting hole of the day. This is a very precarious hole that plays along the central canyon on the left and narrows considerably the closer you get to the green. Hit a strong draw off the right bunker that will settle in the center of the fairway. Take a minute to appreciate the Harry Potter Fortress green setting in the distance, it will make it evident to you why the lay up is the most important shot on this hole. The face bunkering in that hill is particularly artistic. You will send your second over the edge of the hill in front of you trying to get it to rest at about 110 from the fortress mount at the bottom of the hill. Now you elevate a short club to the top of the troll turret-the green is much deeper than it appears from where you are so be bold on your club selection. Only difficulty here is the green has some good slope in it so making a putt over fifteen feet is unlikely.

#14 Par 4 391/359

From here to the end is a real trajectory control test because you will feel the wind influence and the holes are very confined from the sides. This par four turns back toward the ocean which means the wind will make it longer than the measured number. The hole doglegs left around the canyon so take your driver at the edge of the right rough and turn it back toward the bunker on the left. The canyon impinges the fairway approach and the green considerably as you work up to the hole. Raised up on a mound with bunkers left and right-the opening in front of the green is your target. The green sits on a diagonal back to the right so the back pin position behind the bunker is not very accessible. Missing long and left is in the ice plant.

#15 Par 4 359/334

Continuing in the same direction this next hole is like playing up the long hallway heading to the gym in high school. The left side is dominated by four very tall, very sinewy looking trees that will get in your way if you miss into the left rough. Hit it to right center over the lone short tree framing the right side of the fairway. This green is another long diagonal ramped affair from 7 to 1. The front right bunker is screaming for a fade shape for your approach shot. Missing short left there is a grassy retention depression short of the left bunker. A pitch from there is right up the fall line of the green.

#16 Par 3 178/151

Turn left off the fifteenth green and you are going to play one of the truly memorable holes from the 2008 Open. For us it is a middle sized par three with a carry across a slight dip in the fairway to a green on level to the tee. The one Torrey Pine that frames the back of the green to the endless horizon in the distance gives this hole a very serene look. Two deep bunkers menace the left and one on the right of a small, small green that is banked toward you. For the Open Rees created another back tee well to the left of the one you will play from, this made the hole play longer and directly into the prevailing breeze, and in a total forced carry over the canyon left of this hole. I remember late in the one of the last two rounds they had placed the flag tight to the back left of the green and Rocco hit a laser long iron into an area the size of a queen sized blanket. An amazing play considering the pressure of leading a major was weighing on him. This is just a magnificent seaside hole-you could image it on Pebble Beach in a minute.

#17 Par 4 400/378

This is the second hardest hole on this side and it is definitely a place where a good score can meet disaster if you are wayward left on any shot on the hole. The canyon is on your left so the best drive is a draw at the constellation of sand on the right. If you turn it over you end up around 160 adjacent to the bunkers. The approach shot is to another raised green complex which is fronted by two deep bunkers. The green tips to the back and left where it looks like an elephant had his foot impressioned for an orthotic, so don't be surprised if your ball gravitates to this area.

#18 Par 5 498/467

Not sure where this hole comes from because it is totally out of character for the rest of the day's offerings. This is the only water hazard on the course with a pond heckling the green just to make your third shot more intriguing. A very straight hole that is almost the opposite sister to number nine right behind it. You drive straight away and must keep the ball in the fairway to give you control of your second shot. Most people will simply lay up to a comfortable distance around 100 yards-the pond does not start until about 70 from the green. This green is easily the biggest of the day-it sprawls on the hill just above the pond. There is a dent in the front left of the green that you should remember from TV-if they put the pin front left the pros will hit a high spinner well past the hole and zip it back to the front left edge for an uphill putt. There are bunkers back right and left that are not much in play and visually bracket the target for you. Back right is a little high shelf of it's own, maybe the hardest piece of green to get to and stay on. This is a relatively easy par to finish with.

Before you walk off this green walk down front and hit the putt from the final round that preceded the fist pump, that led to the playoff for Tiger and Rocco back in 2008. It was about a fifteen footer from the front the right edge of the green to the pin down front-simple downhill putt with about 4 inches of break to the left. Just get it started and about anyone could make that one-but maybe not on a broken leg.

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