

**Whiskey Creek Golf Club
Ijamsville, Maryland**

Architect: J. Michael Poellot, Ernie Els (2000)

Tee	Yardage	Par	Rating	Slope
Blue	6525	72	72.1	136
White	5979	72	69.3	129

Overview:

At the height of the golf course construction boom in the late 90's there were high end daily fee courses being built all around the Washington, D.C. area. Of all those introduced Whiskey Creek, a collaborative design of J. Michael Poellot and Ernie Els, was probably at the top of that heap. Considerable intellectual and financial capital went into the design and construction of this course on a beautiful piece of rolling farmland in rural Maryland. My bet is that the two of them were awe struck by the natural vistas they found on their first visit to the property. Just looking up at the farm houses on the hills it very obvious how natural and stunning their green constellations could look if they routed this thoughtfully.

The result speaks for itself, an artistically designed course with a wide array of holes sporting traditional tactical design features. No trumped up hazards or artificial challenges-unless you consider a 19th century stone farmhouse in the middle of the 18th fairway artificial. I consider it artistic license and it actually makes the hole tactically interesting. There is generous use of stone and boulders throughout the course to accent the natural presentation of the holes. A sensible use of the natural flow of the topography was employed integrating environmental hazards and water-enough to be challenging without being excessive or punitive.

The greens are large flowing surfaces with lots of facet-you really have to focus on the way the green sits to the fairway approach area to figure how to get it in the right portion of the green. In some ways the green sets have a bit of that Irish/Scottish feel to them-big undulating oceans of green that wave mysteriously among the hills. Most of the greens are approachable without carrying the bunkers and many are actually inviting to bump and run-especially when the pins are in the front. The fairway and greenside are similar to the greens-large deep rambling pits stuck into the hillsides and below the putting surfaces.

Being successful here is about taking the time on each tee to plot a reasonable series of shots based on the wind and pin positions of the day. Sticking to that plan and not trying to overwhelm the challenges with brute strength will reward your scorecard accordingly. Most of the holes you can get a good look at what is in front of you, but many of the putting surfaces are masked from the approach area. As Ernie says in the yardage book, big wide driving areas were provided on most holes but position is still important to get the best angle of approach to the greens. In planning your approach consider everything-the entry openings to the green, the diagonal the green sits to the approach line, the prevailing banking of the green, and the relative punitive payment for missing on the short side of the flag position. Sometimes a uphill pitch and a putt are a better formula to making par than hitting the green in regulation above the flag and having an unmanageable putt down the slope.

The yardage of the course is deceiving-it may be the shortest 6500 yards you will ever see. Most of the long par 4's and the par fives are downhill so they play considerably shorter than the yardage. Many of the shots look much longer than they really are-you have to trust the available yardages and pick the right club accordingly.

The front nine is an interesting ride-plenty of challenge but not overwhelming. The fourth hole is a wonderful uphill par five that scales the terrain to an alcove green set among natural boulder outcroppings. The next hole is a vertigo par four that tumbles down the hill like the final plunge on the log flume ride at Hershey Park. The last two holes on the outward nine are terrific-a swerving par four working down the hill adjacent to number four followed by a tantalizing downhill par five that will tempt you to reach for something extra to end the side with a birdie.

Once you have the dog at the turn the challenge ratchets up. This side begins with a technical hole that will give you heartburn if you are not careful. Eleven is the postcard signature for Whiskey Creek just a thing of beauty that will make your heart race. Starting at the twelfth the challenge heightens considerably with three visually intimidating par fours. These next three are mostly about position off the tee and then resolve on the second into very tight green arrangements. Sixteen through eighteen provide three distinctly different challenges in one of the most unusual finishes you will play in this area. You could just as easily play these three holes two under or six over-it is about managing risk through intelligent decision making.

The clubhouse is a simple wood frame construct that fits into the country theme of the property. A high beamed ceiling and great visibility of nine and eighteen in the grill/lounge area makes for a comfortable atmosphere for watching the action on the course or on Golf Channel with a hearty sandwich and an adult beverage in hand. Food is strong bar food-tasty and satisfying.

What I like most about Whiskey Creek is that for a daily fee course they have figured out a way to meet the maintenance budget with appropriate funds to keep the place in top condition. The fairways are always lush and the greens smooth with pace-more like a country club than a fee course. Kudos to Kemper Sports who operate and manage this fine facility.

Hole-By-Hole Analysis:

#1 Par 4 381/328 Yards

From this first tee you get one of the many panoramic views that reveals the sheer beauty of the rolling countryside on which this course was built. The opening hole presents you with a drive to a landing area that sits above you-it is a much shorter carry than it seems so you do not have to strain yourself. Drive it to left center at the top of the hill, don't miss right in the fairway bunker or below for you cannot see the green from over there. You will have middle iron into a green that is on your level and is set on a diagonal. Bounce it in from the left if the pin is on front or center and feed it to the flag. The bunkers short right are a major no-no. As you come off this green take notice of the 19th century stone barn behind the green. It is part of the original house that was on this property-the other part graces the center of the eighteenth fairway to your right.

#2 Par 4 363/321

This is another topographical par four-a stunning hole that climbs the hill to a green perched on top. Drive it left center of the landing area below close to the bunkers to get the best angle at the green. Avoid losing it right and being blocked out by some tall trees that populate the right edge of the fairway at about 120. The green is a full extra club above you and sits at a 7 to 1 angle so a fade will work nicely up into the opening of the green. Steep hill covets the back of the green-a long approach may feed back onto the surface. Deep bunker protects front right and this is really not a place to miss without paying a price.

#3 Par 3 169/137

This first par three is a bit of a blind man's bluff. The green sits well above the tee-about a one club increment-and you cannot see the surface at all because it is masked by the high front edge. This green is set on a diagonal and does not give you much depth to shoot at. It is well guarded by a deep bunker flanking the right and back with some nasty swales on the left. A straight shot at the front left will run off the side into the grassy hollows. Fade a confident middle iron up into the heart of this green that banks back to front.

#4 Par 5 532/486

Quite a visual here-looks like a painting-you can really appreciate the artistry these guys brought to this design. From the high tee you look across at a landing area on level to the tee-just off the bunkers on the right. From there the hole majestically ramps up the incline and starts to twist to the left. Your lay up shot needs to be to about 120 on the right edge of the fairway to get the best look at the green tucked well to the left. Anything on the left side will have no view of the alcove green setting above. This green is narrow and long, ramps precipitously up from front to back so you have to be aggressive and get your ball up into the right portion of the putting surface. Love the look of the boulders on the right framing the green setting.

#5 Par 4 371/360

Another breath taking view looking down a sweeping plunging short par four as it wraps around the corner of the tree line on the left to the green 100 feet below. 220 yard shot from the precipice teeing area lodged in front of a huge boulder outcropping should be aimed at the bunker on the right and turned back to center. You want to lay the ball between the fairway bunkers and well down the hill to get a look around the corner at the green tucked to the left. Hitting off a down slope, even with a short club in your hand this will be a tough green to hold-it is shallow front to back and sloped away from you to boot. You might bounce it in from the right front edge to the center and right pins. The left pin is a bother to get at and keep your ball on the green-defer to center for that pin position.

#6 Par 4 323/297

Almost the opposite of what you just played this is the shortest par four of the day but plays longer than it's measure as it runs back up the steep hill you just came down-an aerobic challenge for sure. Drive it to a slight up ramp-best right center to get a look at the green set up the mountain behind some nasty face bunkers. Green sits on a diagonal from 4 to 10 so your second shot is a draw starting at the right front edge and working up the slope of the green. You can miss long and center but you will have your work cut out to get down in two from the hill behind the hole.

#7 Par 3 134/108

A very nice short hole with plenty of nuance. This has a clove shaped putting surface that wraps around a bunker on the front and one on the left side. The pins on the right are very accessible no more than 9 iron to the front and 8 iron to the middle. The back left pins are the hardest here because the green falls off back and left. You almost have to get at these by landing the approach in the back center and letting it do a ground hook to get to the hole. You may find yourself pitching back if you are a bit too strong. Good scoring chance here.

#8 Par 4 359/319

From here in it gets interesting in a hurry. This hole shows the importance of proportion on a technical hole. Not long on the card but very difficult-takes two technically perfect swings. Drive it over the right edge of bunker on the corner and turn it down the fairway to get the best angle of approach to the green that is set on 7 to 1 diagonal to the fairway. Deep bunkers protects the front right flank of the green your second will be a short shot but you have to strike it true to get to the correct portion of the green. Best approach will be left of the hole and leave you with an uphill putt. There is a birdie opportunity if you play it with precision.

#9 Par 5 509/478

The finishing holes on each side are just drop dead gorgeous. What a beautiful driving hole-driving area looks like a framed landscape over the fireplace. Going left of the tall tree in the frame will leave you a longer lay up shot and bring the left rough into play. Rather you need to split the uprights across the waste area and your drive will start tumbling toward the green. If you hit it really good you might have a shot at a green tucked into mounds with bunkers blocking the left front approach. Otherwise, depending on where the pin is today, you lay up left or right of the bunker in the center of the fairway about 60 yards from the green. Front and right pins you can get at-though the green actually falls away from you on that side so don't be surprised if a spinning approach still meanders away from the flag. Back left pin is very inaccessible-play to center and putt across. Dog at the turn is high quality-get some nourishment since the next nine holes will test your physical and mental stamina.

#10 Par 4 364/323

The back nine begins with a hole that will get your pulse going. This is not an in your face challenge much more subtle than that. A sweeping uphill par four that dogears left around a waste area and a deep fairway bunker. Drive is straight ahead just off the right side of the bunker and turn it up the hole. If you let this drive drift right the shot up the hill is much longer and has to take on the big bad bunker just short of the right side of the green. The next shot is a club and change more for the hill so club accordingly. Green is set 8 to 2 and is very steep in the 2 direction. If the pin is on the front take dead aim but if it is middle or back the safest approach will be center of the green and putt up to the hole.

#11 Par 3 173/141

The signature hole of the day is next-a real travel brochure par three-spectacular hole cut out of a forest of pines will please the eye and challenge your shot acumen. Plays anywhere from 170 to 190 depending on the tee and pin arrangement. A very long ribbon shaped green shoved into the hill on the left and flanked by a bolder trimmed oblivion bunker all along it's right side. The bunker on the left-set into the hill-is an aiming tool but you do not want to end up there. This green setup shapes for a full carry fade that starts at the front of the green and works up just as far as the pin is set. There is no bail out on this hole-it is tee and green and nothing else that is playable.

#12 Par 4 413/397

Protect your kishkas because they are truly in peril on the next three holes. You drive from a high tee across a chasm to a landing area about the same height as the tee on the other side. The hole does a 30 meter dive to the left at about 150 so you have to be deft off the tee and not carry it too far or you will tumble to the bottom of the hill and have no shot at the green. From the tee it seems you can hit your tee shot well right and be safe, but from there you will have a very difficult angle and a shot that is 15% longer on a hole where every club higher has a geometric effect on the difficulty of the approach shot. Aim right center with a little draw you should manage to hold your ball on the flats at about 180. This leaves you with an equally spectacular carry across another abyss to a long green hanging off the side of a hill with deep and nasty bunkers below it to the left. The green sets up for a draw in-which is clearly the safe shot-and you want to work the ball up that line into a green that ramps a bit to the left. Back left is a ludicrous sucker pin since if you miss long you are probably three exits down I-270 South. Spectacular golf hole.

#13 Par 4 398/383

Tame compared to what you just played and what you will play right after, but no easy par by any stretch of the imagination. Drive right center into a landing area slightly above you. The ball will feed to center off the 15 foot high mounds that collars the right of the driving area. What is left is a full carry long club up a steady ramp to a green raised from the fairway so you carry it all the way to get it on the surface. It is accessible to a fade shape but bunkers on right and left will eat wayward approaches. This is another very long green tilted back to front but you must end up below the hole. Putting from beyond this hole is like having the rip cord break off in your hand and realizing they forgot to pack the safety chute.

#14 Par 4 417/382

Truly one of the most visual par four holes in Montgomery County-full 270 view of the up county area. Mid length par four spills out below the elevated tee with a canal flanking the left all the way to the green. The water pinches the driving area slightly and the green slightly more but you have to really pull it hard to end up wet off the tee. Perfect drive is a hard slider starting at the bunker on the left and working its way up the hole. Drives on the right court the tree line and leave you with a side hill stance that will influence second shots towards the water. From the center you now have a diagonal green set 5 to 11 with a mean face bunker hovering short left. You can really feel the shape of this second shot from the fairway-nice draw starting at the front edge turning up the green will do fine. If the pin is front right you can bail short and right for an easy uphill pitch at the hole.

#15 Par 3 191/166

A seemingly basic middle sized par three-but a brilliant job of masking the green from a tee puts real doubt in your mind about your club selection as you are about to swing. It is a forced carry from the right and an 80% hit will fail to carry. Green sets on the 8 to 2 with bunkers between the green and the water on the right and a bail out area short and left. If you end up left you will have one of the Scottish roll em and run approaches. I like a little fade here working up the angle of the green setting. Don't be surprised if you find yourself putting from the back fringe-it is a shallow target that is not very generous to a ball not crisply struck.

#16 Par 5 516/482

This one has a bit of Ireland written all over it. Mid-sized par 5 that is not reachable at all because of the fortress green arrangement. Big hitters will hate this hole because it takes away any advantage they think they have on the five pars. Drive it straight away-bunker on the right is in play off the tee. Now hit the lay up as far as you care because the shorter the wedge in the better. The third is to a medieval castle-replete with moats, burning oil, and nasty gnomes-perched up on the hill above an array of bunkers you do not want to visit. Good news is the green is very deep and leans at you. If you can figure out where the pin is set be aggressive to that distance.

#17 Par 4 402/387

This is the twin brother to two just a tinch longer-runs the same path and has similar shape and challenge though I think it is considerably harder because the rise to the green on the second shot is more severe and the greenside bunkers are extremely penal. Drive to left center-off the bunkers. Now club one more to the green wedged into the hill above you-do not miss left those bunkers are the pits. The green is 2 ½ tiers so you must get your approach to the right level. The ½ is the false front that will reject balls that do not carry onto the first third of the green. Many scratch your head bogies will be made here.

#18 Par 5 516/484

It is not like having a 19th century stone house in the center of your driving area should seem odd or bothersome-it just clearly defines your alternative approaches to this par five. I personally like the choice to the right of the house-hit it as far as you can into the wide driving area on that side. Now have to choose one of three alternatives-lay up further down the right to the edge of the Whiskey Creek, lay up across to the creek to the safe haven about 80 yards from the green, or play macho Schwartnagger fool and try to carry a big one right across it all at the green. I prefer the middle option leaving a short pitch up the length of the green This is a finishing hole you will argue about all the way home in the car.