

The Elkridge Club  
Baltimore, Maryland

Architect: Seth Raynor (1925)

	Par	Rating	Slope	Yardage
Black	71	70.9	124	6465
Blue	71	69.7	122	6194

Overview:

The original Elkridge Club was established in the late 1800's as a golf and hunting club in what was probably the wealthy developing side of Baltimore. It's membership grew to 400 and in 1925 they acquired more land to meet their growing need and sought the guidance of Seth Raynor to build the course you see today. As recently as 2003 the club hired Brian Silva an architect who has a reputation for doing work on Seth Raynor courses to do a total renovation of the course and bring it back to Seth Raynor's original design. To those who have played them, The Washington Golf Club in Arlington and Bedford Springs Golf Resort in Pennsylvania this will have a familiar look and feel.

To say this is an old style course is a major understatement-it is a period piece. Suffice it to say that there are design features in this course that you would never see created today. Rectangular shaped putting surfaces, super dramatic uphill driving carries, greens with almost arbitrary undulations, three steps between green and the next tee, fairway bunkering that seems random, and hole sequencing that has all to do with the god delivered shape of the property. With modern green construction this becomes a throw back golf experience with today's gratifications. The words "fair" and "unfair" have no place in this design-it is just "wow" or "you must be kidding". Leave your modern ego at home and just put on a pair of plus fours and bring out the hickory shaft mentality-this is quite an experience to the sophisticated golf historian.

The length of the course-especially the differential between Blue and Black Tees-is almost deluding. The course is so tightly ensconced by the trees that "towardness" is the only thing that matters here. You have to hit it Freddie Funk straight and have Justin Leonard restraint for over-reaching on any particular challenge. One bounce on the wrong side of a ridge will change your fate on an individual hole dramatically. For the most part the holes do not have severe turns in them-they all look right in front of you off the teeing ground. But the overhanging old hardwoods and the steep drop-offs mean you have to be very directive in your line of play.

Greens are terrific. Very smooth-reasonably fast-especially downhill and down grain. But if you can play your approaches and pitches beneath the hole you can be pretty aggressive into the hole.

The Elkridge Club experience is something out of a different time and it reminds us that golf courses were not always designed for those who think hitting it long is what it is all about. The shots you hit in a round at Elkridge will remind you how important creativity and finesse can be in an enjoyable round of golf.

Hole-by-hole:

#1 Par 4 Bendelow 337/326

The opening hole is typical of these old courses-tee is four feet from the pro shop and the opening drive is straight up a sherpa climb to a driving area tightly pinched by trees. Drive it into the face of the hill and you have a short iron to a long square green that tips toward you atop of the hill above. You will note right here that all the bunkering-fairway and greenside-is very flat, very geometric, with no dramatic lips to carry. This style was pervasive I assume in a time when steep faced sand irons had not been invented yet.

#2 Par 4 Thumbprint 363/357

This looks like your conventional challenge from the tee. Somewhat confined driving area but a very straight away hole. The real challenge is the green itself which literally has an ogre's thumbprint in the center of the putting surface that gives this hole it's name. A pin position and ball position on either side of this dent makes for a very creative putting effort.

#3 Par 5 Alps 571/568

Both five pars on this side are relatively short to play. This one you drive from a tee slightly below the fairway to a landing area that is pretty generous. From here the hole plays dramatically downhill to a green setting below-this shortens the hole by a good 10%. The hole narrows considerably the closer you get to the green but you have the use of a large mound-actually a hill-about 50 yards short and right of the green-which can be strategically applied to the ground end of your approach shot to feed your ball onto the green. This green is large front to back so you can end up with some long putts

#4 Par 3 Eden 191/161

May be Eden but there are some snakes lurking. Most of the par three's have a similar perched tee to perched green look about them and they are all very challenging. Missing the second perch puts real onus on saving pars. This looks slightly downhill from tee to green but it really does not play any less club. The green is very shallow-which belies what your eye sees-and you just have to aim center-center and putt from there. The back of the green is very steep so any putt coming back to a front cup will be warp speed.

#5 Par 4 Fade 297/280

The first of many "are you kiddings" that will come to your lips on the course. This is a drivable short par four that requires a driver to carry the big chasm between the tee and the landing area. The name of the hole comes from the fact that the green is tucked up and to the right around some large old hardwood trees. It takes a power fade to keep the ball in the fairway and have a look up the putting surface. Green is very deep and pitched back to front so be aggressive with your approach to where the pin is cut.

#6 Par 4 Cochran's Pond 376/364

The "are you kidding" here comes on the second shot-this is one piece of terrorizing eye candy if I have ever seen one. The drive should be around 210 to a very narrow landing area that pitches down the hill and toward the rest of the hole. If you are still alive you probably have about 150 left to a green set well below you across a waste area adjacent to a large pond. This green sits on a 7 to 1 diagonal and is very long indeed. Aim at the front left and deal with the cross county putt. On any shot on this hole-if you are in doubt about being able to pull off the line or the carry then defensively pitch it to a safer area and avoid the high number that is lurking. This is the signature hole if they bothered to consider it.

#7 Par 5 Lion's Mouth 480/472

As the name indicates you are about to step into it. A drive from a low tee box into the face of a steep hill that rises before you. If you can hit it to center the green is reachable with a Betsy Ross thread the needle long shot up the hill into the Lion's Chops. In doubt, hit it about 175 yards just as accurately to right center and you have a pitch across a bunker embedded into the first third of the green that creates the gaping mouth appearance. A drive, a safe layup, a simple pitch and the cat is purring and you are alive. Anything else and it is full Tweety and Sylvester.

#8 Par 3 Short 164/159

Similar to #4 but a tinch shorter. This tee is well above the green-full club less-but the green is stepped and you must get the ball to carry into the proper tier to have a birdie opportunity. Do not miss right or long because it is an office building pitch back up to the surface from there.

#9 Par 4 Road 414/381

Just a strong and long four par to finish the outward half. Drive from the raised tee up the gut of the fairway below. Green is set slightly above you just short of the entrance road-tucked behind a guarding bunker on the left. Keep your towardness on line and this is a simple hole.

#10 Par 4 Sycamore 358/353

Very straight off the tee but some kind of arbitrary fairway bunkering poking in from both sides. Pick a line and a carry distance and stay on grass. The green is slightly above you-very long and rectangular-tipped back to front. If you have a short iron in your hand this is a birdie opportunity.

#11 Par 4 Double Plateau 382/367

Not sure if the name comes from the fairway landing area arrangement, the green arrangement, or both. Looks similar to the opening hole at Woodholme. Drive it to center on top of the first plateau off the bunker on the left. Now a shortish club up the hill to a very deep green that has some bunker protection on the left. This is another hole you should take advantage of. Your opportunities to take advantage are about to run out.

#12 Par 4 Long 440/433

This plays parallel to the five par #3 but on the ridge above so there is no downhill increment to shorten the play of the hole. Drive it straight and true and you have a very long shot that is unlikely to reach the green sitting across a substantial dip on level to your drive landing area. This green is very deep with a number of segments so pitching and putting may be the most difficult part of the hole. There is a large cement something about fifty yards right of the green that whose origin or purpose we could not determine. My guess is they sacrifice a virgin once a month as penance for bad play by the members.

#13 Par 3 Biarritz 240/221 or 209/190

Now there are Biarritz's and there are Biarritz's-this one is with a capital B. Standing on the tee you will have to catch your jaw with a first baseman's glove-the visual is totally disarming. It looks like the room service lady is unfurling the top sheet on a king size bed. The cavernous gully that bisects this green makes for two entirely different but equally difficult challenges. Pin on the front seems slightly easier until you step onto the green and realize it has roller coaster undulation in the front half. The back half is very generous but hitting long means you are playing your second from the pool deck and hitting short means you are putting through the Grand Canyon toward Vegas. Walk away with a four and accept the indignity.

#14 Par 4 Knoll 309/284

This is the meek sister to #5 but it is pretty sinister by itself. Same driver carry on a drivable par four-this time up the right side of the mountainous hill in front of you. Leaves a short pitch to a green protected by shallow gully and a deep bunker set into the front right side of the green. Another green that pitches sharply back to front so be aggressive to the hole location.

#15 Par 4 Punchbowl 388/382

This should have been name the Road Hole since you actually cross the road on your approach into the 14,000 square foot punch bowl green. Similar tee shot to the one you hit on #9 that is just to your left. From there pick the club for the distance-do not add anything for the uphill-and just whack it at the flag fluttering above you across the entrance drive. Most everything ends up on the green but the length of breadth of this putting surface makes two putting a chore.

#16 Par 4 Maiden 385/357

Similar to #10 drive at the arbitrary bunkering in front of you and find grass. Short iron to a green sandwiched by rectangular flat bunkers. Very steep back to front-but you should get a good scoring opportunity here.

#17 Par 3 Redan 180/157

A tame version of a Redan hole but Redan all the same. From the high tee the green below looks wide but it is not. A rectangular shape again-have not done this much geometry since high school-it is set on the 5 to 11 angle pitched away from you adjacent to a long bunker on the left. Landing it on the front third with a little draw spin will feed it to the middle or back. Any front pin is impossible so my guess is they rarely put it there.

#18 Par 4 Home 590/572

Longest hole of the day by far but fairly rudimentary until you get to the putting. Drive it hard to center and you are looking down the hill at the full length of the hole. Quite a sight-green sits adjacent to the old southern style clubhouse with the wrap around porch and there is one very large, lonely hardwood tree that blocks the right side of the hole the last 125 yards or so. The second would be all you got to the bottom left side of the last quarter of the hole. From there it is an elevation short or medium iron to a green that is set slightly above the fairway. The approach needs to stay in front of the hole-any putt from back to front will be bullet train fast and is a sure three putt.