

Black Mesa Golf Club: Astounding high desert layout thrilling, humbling



Senior Writer

LA MESILLA, N.M. -- From atop one of the many bluffs and buttes traversing Black Mesa Golf Club, superintendent Pat Brockwell is attempting to keep a lone golfer dry -- the first to tee off on this beautiful New Mexico morning.

Brockwell has a 360-degree panorama of the surrounding holes, void of any on-course homes, and is controlling the state-of-the-art irrigation system that is spraying this stunning, arid landscape. Just as the golfer reaches his ball with water flying, Brockwell commands the flood to stop.

It's the least of the issues this golfer has to deal with.

Black Mesa Golf Club is beautiful, but deadly. A sign in the pro shop gives you a hint about this Santa Clara Pueblo offering -- Big Course, Big Medicine -- it will kick your butt.

At every turn on this brand-new 7,307-yard course just north of Santa Fe, mental strategy is paramount.

After several months of play, the course record is still 71, just 1-under par. That's a testament to the fact that there are no opportunities to let your mind wander -- just being in the fairway isn't enough. You have pinpoint your placement, and learn where to position yourself to conquer the next blind shot to an elevated green.



No. 13 at Black Mesa Golf Club



And then there you are, a nice approach has placed you on the green in regulation, only to see several dead elephants buried in your pathway to a birdie. Take the three-putt and register a humbling bogey.

"Students of the game and better golfers are tickled about the challenge,"

said Brockwell, who is a partner in the ownership along with Eddie Peck and the Pueblo. "This course makes me focus on my approach. You have to think about strategy and that means you can't always aim at the flag. You must leave approach shots in the right spots.

"Some golfers think that every putt should be possible, but is that the case at Augusta National or at Royal St. George's where they played the British Open this year?" he questions. "I have sunk some of the wildest putts you can imagine on this golf course, and I find it very satisfying when I see a putt take a 90-degree turn, break two more directions, then head for the cup."

Naturally, some high-handicappers are going to find Black Mesa too much to handle. But not every green here will frustrate you, some were toned down before the final routing was completed, Brockwell said.

Black Mesa is the most recent in a string of compelling New Mexico public-access courses that are bringing praise to this friendly, culturally-rich and affordable golf destination. The beauty of the "Land of Enchantment" is just as awesome as desert layouts in Arizona and with a much lower price tag.

And there's one design firm, Finger Dye and Spann, Inc. of Houston, that has cornered a major piece of this improved New Mexico market. Black Mesa was designed by Baxter Spann, who also authored nearby Marty Sanchez Links de Santa Fe, an excellent municipal.

The firm's Ken Dye designed Piñon Hills in Farmington (No. 45 on *Golf Magazine's* Top 100 You Can Play List) that has long been known as the world's finest dirt-cheap municipal. He also built the state's best course -- [Paa-Ko Ridge](#), No. 43 on the same *Golf Magazine* ranking. It is also a must-play in the foothills of the Sandia Mountains above Albuquerque.



No. 14 at Black Mesa Golf Club



No. 4 at Black Mesa Golf Club

While Black Mesa Golf Club is walkable, GPS carts will help with the strategic moves you will need on your first round. Be sure and read the "Pro's Tips."

But more than likely you will be eye-balling the scenery. Black Mesa, held sacred by the tribe, is framed perfectly down the 10th fairway. Sandstone spires rise from the green fairways, deep bunkers tantalize you, native arroyos funnel your ball to their depths, and the nature of the land is the layout's best feature.

It's a vast landscape with views of the Jemez and Sangre de Cristo Mountains in the distance. And it can be wind-blown, giving it even more challenges. An Aero-Motor windmill greets you behind the 18th green and

gives one a glance to the past of this land.

The elevation is 5,400 feet with changes of 125 feet and 12 of the holes play slightly downhill.

"I have been designing courses for more than 20 years," said Spann.

"More than any other project, I eagerly anticipated every trip I made to this course, always knowing I would find something new to experience."

Spann says one recurring theme is the increase in difficulty of the angle of approach to the fairway as you progress from the forward to the back tees.

"The second hole, a 404-yard par-4, illustrates this concept," Spann said.

"The tee shot from the back tees points to a landing area on a diagonal line, while the forward tees approach it more straight on. The green is



positioned in a saddle between two high peaks on both sides. The putting surface is deceptively deep and it is difficult to get the second shot to a back pin setting, with a fall away to a collection area immediately behind the elevated back shelf."

You get the idea.

No. 16 is an uphill par-5 of 536 yards with an ominous tag -- Stairway to Seven.

The back tee is positioned on a high point with a substantial carry over an arroyo to the uphill fairway. From here hang on, keep it in the narrow neck of the fairway and deal with the deep bunker on the left. You can run your approach up, but anything right will kick left.



Black Mesa Golf Club

"The green itself is probably the most severely contoured of any on the course and the surrounds fall away sharply on the left side and in back," Spann said. Find yourself in the wrong spot and it's an easy three-putt, hard two-putt.

"Our design concept was to create as wide a variety of holes as possible, with each having its own memorable features," Spann said. "Wind is a major influence on this site, and we wanted a course that would be fun and challenging in calm conditions, but yet not impossibly difficult on the frequent days when it is blowing 30 or 40 miles an hour."

One thing is certain when you play Black Mesa. You won't be bored. Your senses will perk up admiring the beauty and the Wild West ruggedness.

But if you want to avoid a butt-kicking you must pay attention to golf first and scenery second.

Where to stay

Bishop's Lodge Resort
Bishop's Lodge Road
Santa Fe, N.M. 87501
(505) 983-6377 or (800) 732 2240 bishopsloodge.com

When you come to the Santa Fe area to play Black Mesa be sure and stay at Bishop's Lodge Resort and Spa. Located in the foothills of the majestic Sangre de Cristo Mountains. The resort is minutes from the world-famous Santa Fe Plaza, but is outside of town, offering a natural setting for an invigorating getaway.

Log on to the Web site for spa packages that include hot stone and aromatherapy massage, ayurvedic and watsu pool treatments are offered at the newly opened ShaNáh Spa and Wellness Center.



No. 9 at Black Mesa Golf Club

Where to dine

Las Fuentes at Bishop's Lodge features unique Nuevo Latino Cuisine -- this is a conglomeration of all Latin cuisines and features the foods of Cuba (tostones, mariquitas, fufu de platino and ropa vieja), Puerto Rico (tomato sauce), Argentina (chimichurri), El Salvador (pupusas), Colombia (aropas), Mexico (flautas) and other countries of Central and South America and the Caribbean.

Enjoy the Black Mesa Grill at the golf course. It offers typical tasty eat-on-the-run foods next to the territorial-styled tin-roof clubhouse.

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