

Featured Golf News

Golf in North-Central Wyoming is Sky-High

By: [Steve Habel](#)

The towns of Sheridan and Buffalo, Wyoming are a long way from just about anywhere. But they're at the center of everything if you are looking for great golf in the Equality State.

This area with a population of less than 25,000 boasts four golf courses, including two of the state's best municipal facilities, each with its own flair and appeal and all with stunning views of the Big Horn Mountains.

At the heart of Western "vacation land," Sheridan is found near to Montana when traveling north, four hours west of South Dakota's Black Hills and about six hours east of Yellowstone National Park.

Sheridan, elevation 3,700 feet, lies in the valley of the Little and Big Goose Creeks, once the prized hunting grounds of the Plains Indians - the Crow, Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Lakota (Sioux) - and where Indian leaders Red Cloud and Crazy Horse took a final stand to keep the white man from their last and best hunting grounds, the valley below the Big Horn Mountains.

With its location on the Bozeman Trail, on which many settlers traveled north to the rich gold fields of Montana, Sheridan was the center of turbulent 1800's westward-expansion history. No less than eight Indian war and battles sites are within a 35-mile radius of the city, and the Little Bighorn Battlefield is just 90 miles north of Sheridan.

Its sister city to the south, Buffalo, is nestled in Big Horn Mountains' foothills about 35 miles from Sheridan at the intersections of Interstates 25 and 90. Wyoming State Highway 16, on its way from Mount Rushmore to the east and Yellowstone west, runs through the northern limits of town, and Buffalo's main street has more than a dozen historic buildings, including the Occidental Hotel, where Owen Wister's Virginian finally "got his man."

The infamous "Hole in the Wall," the hideout used by Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid along with the rest of their "Wild Bunch," is just a short drive from Buffalo.

A trip to this part of the western U.S. allows you to get back to nature, and gives you an little taste - even when driving on an Interstate Highway at 80 miles-per-hour - of the amazing challenges settlers faced when moving to or through what would become Wyoming.

On each side of the road, you'll see distant mountains bordering miles and miles of rolling golden-grassed fields and prairies. You almost feel as if a huge herd of buffalo chased by Indian hunters on horseback might be just over the next hill or around the next bend.

Even with all their other great attractions, I had ventured to Sheridan and Buffalo to sample their golf courses, and that I did during a stunning three-day trip to the two towns.



Kendrick Golf Course

Up & Down at Kendrick Golf Course

Designed by Edward A. Hunnicutt and opened in 1932 on land donated to the City of Sheridan by its namesake, Wyoming Governor and United States Senator John B. Kendrick, Kendrick Golf Course offers views of both the mountains to the west and Sheridan to the east. When the gift was made in 1930, the Sheridan Press noted, "With a plentiful supply of water, it is expected that the new golf course will have grass greens, which, added to its beautiful location, will make it one of the finest courses in the West."

Yes, the course still has grass putting surfaces, which have plenty of subtle breaks to make your time on them very interesting. With rolling hills and plenty of challenges fairways bordered by water and high native grasses, and a handful of greatly elevated tee boxes, Kendrick asks for your best game.

The par-72 course plays to a seemingly friendly 6,667 yards from the tips, but it's constantly buffeted by strong winds from off the mountains. Its seemingly docile rating of 71.6 and slope of 123 quickly increases as the wind beats on your ball and gets in your head.



Tongue River in the Big Horn Mountains

Kendrick was renovated in 1980 by Carl Theussen and Frank Hummel and the routing is a strong one. Both the par-5s on the front side, the 475-yard first hole and the 509-yard ninth, are reachable in two shots, though one is always into the wind and the other has the wind at your back. The 299-yard par-4 fifth, which plays severely downhill and turns hard right to left, can also be broached in less than regulation, but there is danger aplenty in the attack.

The back nine at Kendrick is - by far - the tougher side, thanks to moe challenging par-4s (where the front nine has only one two-shotter - the 432-yard second - at 400 yards or more, the inward nine has three) and two demanding par-5s. The 513-yard 11th (the No. 1 handicap hole) has a huge lake that must be crossed on the approach (best to do so with a short iron than an attacking wood from long range). The twice-turning 17th, the longest hole on the course at 585 yards, is perhaps Kendrick GC's best offering.

Kendrick is an absolutely beautiful course, with tree-lined fairways and a great variety in holes, most of which are kept in fine condition and played in relative isolation. It's has been rated as one of the state's top-five courses by Golf Digest and is worth the high regard. For further details, visit www.city-sheridan-wy.com/info/kgc/index.php.



From the 5th Tee at Buffalo Golf Club

Buffalo GC is Golf Nirvana

Smack dab in the middle of Buffalo sits the stunningly green and deceptively difficult Buffalo Golf Course, a testy par-71 that plays just 6,556 yards from the back tees. Opened for play in 1928 and later renovated in 1980 by Hummel and Bill Poirot (who still runs the course), Buffalo GC features multiple elevation changes, with a lake and bunkers stoking its difficulty, and large cottonwood trees, evergreens and aspens adding to its beauty. Water comes into play on 11 holes, thanks mostly to the stream that winds its way through the compact property.

The venue (with a rating of just 69.8 and a slope of 116) boasts incredibly scenic views of the Big Horns to the west, and - despite its locale in the middle of town - the homes of the surrounding neighborhood do nothing to distract from a round.

The front nine has three par-3s, and that is not the only aspect of the course that is unusual. The par-3 second, already a challenge at 191 yards, must be played through a narrow evergreen-squeezed opening that guards the green from about 50 yards off the tee box. The 148-yard par-3 fourth is played off an elevated tee to a green some 75 feet below, and then there's the dogleg-right, 456-yard fifth - the No. 1 handicap hole on the course and its longest par-4.

Try to recoup a few strokes on the two par-5s that end the front side - the 516-yard seventh and 520-yard ninth. The stream comes into play on both holes (on the third shot at No. 7 and off the tee at No. 9), so play smart for the birdie chances.



Buffalo Golf Club

The back nine at Buffalo features its shortest (the 133-yard 10th) and longest (the 237-yard 15th) par-3s. Both are tough if the pins are cut close to the danger. The two par-5s on this side can also be attacked, especially the straight-as-a-string closer, which winds 525 yards uphill toward a deep green backed by a huge bunker.

According to Poirot, people travel from far and wide to golf at Buffalo GC, and in a single season the pros see players from nearly every state and a dozen foreign countries. "It seems everyone hears about the course through word of mouth," Poirot said. "But, having opened in 1928, Buffalo Golf Course has had a few years to generate a buzz."

In 1994, Golf Digest chose Buffalo Golf Course as one of the best places in Wyoming to play and, last August, the magazine ranked it as the best municipal facility in the state. Recently, Buffalo GC received a rating of four out of five stars from Golf Digest and was featured in USA Today.

To this traveling golfer, Buffalo Golf Club is one of the best courses around; it's like a Nirvana. For more information, visit www.buffalowygolf.com.

Steve Habel is one of Cybergolf's national correspondents, contributing news stories, features, equipment and book reviews and personality profiles from his base in Central Texas. He is also the managing editor for Texas CEO Magazine and works as a contributing editor for Horns Illustrated magazine, a publication focusing on University of Texas sports. He also writes a blog (www.shotoverthegreen.blogspot.com), which features news on golf and the Longhorns, and another (www.checkinginandplayingthrough.blogspot.com) on his many travels, which took him across the nation and to 105 different golf courses in 2009. Habel is a member of the Golf Writers Association of America and the Texas Golf Writers Association.