

Crooked Cat-Orange County National
Winter Garden, Florida

Architect: Phil Ritson/Dave Harman/Isao Aoki (1997)

	Par	Rating	Slope	Yardage
Green	72	73.7	132	6927
Blue	72	71.4	126	6432
White	72	68.8	122	6020

Overview:

This place is a real golf factory facility with two championship golf courses, a 360 degree grass driving area the size of Nebraska, and a golf shop that will make you feel like you are in Nordstroms. The place has hosted the final stage of the PGA Qualifying School a number of times. Coupled with how many pros and wanna-be pros living in the Orlando area you are going to see lots of sticks out there practicing and honing their games.

The fare is reasonable for a facility of this quality and the golf and related accommodations are very much what you would expect. The golf shop is humongous with every major line of apparel represented-if you cannot find something memorable to add to your wardrobe you are either blind or too picky.

This course is one of two that were designed by the team of Phil Ritson, Dave Harman, and Isao Aoki. They moved a lot of dirt to get the sculpting and landscaping they were after but the result is a course that is very challenging but totally playable. The variety of the holes is it's strong suit. There are the typical Florida holes with adjacent water or environmental areas but there are even a few with an Irish lilt thrown in. The handicapping of the holes is very realistic-three of the five pars are the 16th, 17th, and 18th handicap holes and two of the par threes are the 4th and 5th handicap holes. They put real thought into which holes needed the handicap assistance rather than just looking at length to determine it.

If you look carefully at the GPS images of the holes the lines of play are fairly obvious. Most of the sculpted areas of the fairways are still fairway it is just that hitting from them is a less advantageous place to play from relative to the green. As with most good courses, driving the ball on the proper line and in the short grass is the best way to get aggressive places to play from. The greens are plenty large but segmentation and tiering require proper planning on the approach shots to avoid three putts.

The yardage book in the shop is major old school-hand drawn with lots of particulars. Problem is that it is virtually unreadable to a non-tour mortal so you are better off saving the \$7 and just go with the provided GPS in the cart.

This is a very enjoyable afternoon of golf. As always, play from a tee length with hole distances that are comfortable for you. The challenge you seek is here at whatever length you choose to play at.

Hole-by-hole: (Blue/White)

#1 Par 5 482/470 yards The Wild

Easy opening hole that presents a good scoring opportunity out of the gate. Reachable slight left leaning par 5. Drive to right center to get a clear look at the green around the corner. If you are within range take a shot at the front left corner of the green-this can set up a birdie pitch and putt. School of bunkers up the right the last 125 yards that you should avoid at all costs. The small green is a raised coffee table with a distinct transition from 9 to 3.

#2 Par 4 400/357 Pecan

Great visual medium length par four-real eye candy. Drive from an elevated tee to a lower landing area on the left that is collared by trees. From there you see the green perched up on the hill to the right across a sea o bunkers set into the hill the last 100 yards. These look that the 100 meter hurdles from the starting block-very intimidating. Elevate a long shot into a green with a distinct heel print front left.

#3 Par 4 345/335 Nags

Wonderful short sharp dogear left par four. I like driver off the tee to right center to give a clear site line to the green set to the left beyond the corner pines. Green is fronted by bunkers and has a sharp stepping across the middle but you can use this as a backstop with a spinning short club approach to a front pin.

#4 Par 5 500/445 Tanglewood

Number one handicap hole but I am not sure why. Very straight par five that ramps up from tee to green-cordoned on both sides by trees from tee to green. Drive to center and you have a layup on the left to 100ish. The real challenge here is the green setting. Green is fronted by deep bunker on the right and grass bunkers on the left. The raised front edge means you approach must be elevated into the heart of the green. Distinct low area front right of the green just behind the bunker makes for a nice Clark Kent pin position.

#5 Par 4 374/360 Tidewater

Another shortish par four that is made slightly longer by the incline from tee to green. Drive straight away to left center and you have a look up the hill to a green set above a nasty bunker on the right that must be avoided. Green has a cart girl slot up the center so any center pin will have the ball funnel toward the cup from either side. You should get a chance to improve your scorecard here.

#6 Par 3 165/140 Princeville

Simplest of the par threes. Middle iron approach to a green set slightly above you across a bevy of bunkers. If you elevate into the middle of the green a par should be no problem.

#7 Par 4 389/360 Tarken

Another ramping up par four that has a long series of bunkers flanking the right side of the hole from tee to green. Drive to right center and you have an elevation middle iron to a green set above you. Green is sufficiently deep to accept a ball landing in the front and feeding up to the shelf back left if the pin is there. Otherwise middle of the green and putt to any other position.

#8 Par 3 173/166 The Pit

Gets its name from a very nasty bunker that corrals the front of this green. Plays half a club less down from the tee to the green below but the green has a distinct transition from the front third going back so the back pins are full carries across the front bunker. Cannot say that missing long into the left bunkers is any piece of cake since you will be pitching out of the sand into the downslope-it will be very hard to control the roll out of this pitch.

#9 Par 4 365/320 Bend Lake

Completely absurd finishing hole from the inward half. Very visual from the tee-drive from high tee ground across a long bunker on the left into an Oreo landing area where the fairway is collared by 10 bunkers set into the hill on the right. The stupidity is the second shot. Shortish iron to a green set majestically on top of a hill to the left-but between you and the green are three plumes of 25 foot high bamboo pungie sticks sprouting in the middle of the fairway. A ridiculous and out of place looking obstacle makes this hole a real candidate for lampooning and four letter words.

#10 Par 4 382/339 Sunrise

Back nine opens with a picturesque dogleg left. The drive landing area is framed by two large spread trees on either side of the fairway. Drive at the stake to land right center of the fairway around 150 out. The hole turns left here and the second is across a dip in the fairway to a green perched up above a steep bank. Deepish bunkers either side. Green has mild stepping and falls from back to front.

#11 Par 4 380/370 East Way

This is a fairly straight hole with a step down transition at about 135 from the green. Drive to center to about 150 and hit a shortish iron to a very narrow long green set up from the fairway-deep bunker right and grass bunkers right. If pin is in the back be aggressive to the flag.

#12 Par 4 379/350 Sweep

Signature hole for me of this fine course-the number two handicap hole for a reason. The view from the high tee shows marsh all the way up the hole on the right and crossing the fairway at about 125 from the green. Drive it to the left side of the fairway to get the best angle back to the green set across the marsh to the right. The green is a narrow and long undulating shoe tongue-best shot lands on the front and feeds up the green to the pin of the day. Good transition in the center of the green will slow most shots down but the green does tip toward the back from there so be dexterous.

#13 Par 3 163/152 Land O Lake

This is the number four handicap hole-so as a par three it is fraught with trouble. Shot plays about one club longer across the pond to a rectangular putting surface that has a bunker collar all the way across the front between the water and the green. There is a bit of a bail out area back left but the chips back down the slope of the green from 10 to 4 are a bit dicey. Pick enough club to hit the middle of this green. Bunkers left and right are an invitation to double.

#14 Par 5 465/460 Pine Lake

Par five-number 18 handicap hole-so you should get a scoring chance here. Drive to center of the ramped fairway in front of you. Now you can layup to about 75 yards on the left for a good angle of attack into this green with a clear path of the stack of bunkers on the right. If you are approaching from the right note it is a good 10 yard additional carry since the green front is a 45 degree diagonal to the hitting position. Green slopes from right to left.

#15 Par 3 183/159 Lilly Pond

Very visual and difficult par three. Green is an anvil shape and sits a 1/2 a club less below you. One lonely hurdle bunker across the front center. Deep grass bunker short and left and the lilly pond hugging the right side of the green and pinching the back. Any back pin is suicidal-landing it on the front third and putt from there to the back pins. Front left pin is one you can go after.

#16 Par 4 405/379 Saddle Hill

Very Irish double blind par four-requires real visualization and focus on shot intent. Drive to the center of the hill in front of you to a landing area you cannot see. From there the second is blinded by the next crown of a hill to a green that raised on top a steep hill with a very nasty deep bunker on the left. Green is stepped with a diagonal transition from 10 to 4-it is important to try to get you ball to settle in the segment with the flag to avoid the three putt. Green is 42 yards deep so you have lots of green to work with.

#17 Par 5 480/470 Windy Ridge

Sharp dogear right truncated par five that is reachable. Drive to the center of the left fairway to get a clear look around the pines that define the corner of the dogleg behind a nest of bunkers. Now you can lay up to 100 yards on the left across a sculpted transition area or take a poke at the green if you feel strong. The green is a 40 yard deep reverse anvil shape with serious stepping across the center.

#18 Par 4 402/388 Grey Mule

Another sort of Irish hole to finish. Drive to center to a narrowing landing area. The left side of the hole is strewn with small grass bunkers from about 200 yards all the way to the putting surface. Small bunkers both sides set about 75 yards from the green. Big green side bunker on the right and a low fall off area on the left that will collect balls with a right to left predilection.

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