

Saucon Valley-Old Course  
Bethlehem, PA

Architect: Herbert Strong (1922)

	Par	Rating	Slope	Yardage
Blue	71	73.1	138	6800
White	71	70.7	135	6337

Overview:

Saucon Valley was created as a playground for the wealthy steel guys in the Lehigh Valley section of northeast Pennsylvania. The Old Course is an elegant simple layout designed by British Architect Herbert Strong known for designing courses with little disruption to the land. As a result the course meanders across rolling hills framed by vintage old trees and it looks like it just belongs in the natural surroundings. This course has held six USGA national championships a U.S. Amateur, Senior Amateur, two Senior Opens, and two Women's Opens as well as innumerable regional and local events of importance.

This facility has 54 holes of championship golf, as well as short course for developing players and seniors. A primo golf facility with a long and storied tradition you cannot help but be overwhelmed by the golf pedigree of this place. Walking the locker room or the halls of the clubhouse there are lists and lists of the rosters of championships contested here and plenty of other memorabilia that makes this feel like an ad hoc golf museum. They even have a luxurious 13 room guest house which accommodates guests at the club in a comfortable informal way.

This course is not a beast but it is a stiff challenge that will test all of your skills. To me the bunkering is the most obvious distinguishing characteristic. It is free form-no real patterns to the bunker placements but they are placed in places in the driving areas and the green constellations that make successful play a matter of good strategy and precise execution. The bunkers are very deep-even in the fairways-so there are times you must relent and play a shot that will not get you to the green or at the flagstick.. The greens are very unusual-wide variety of shapes and sizes with plenty of segmentation and slope to keep you honest in your approach shots and approach putts. If they speed them up to 12 on the stimp you are in for a handful.

I just loved the flow of the course. Both nines start out with expansive visual holes that are extremely inviting and are then followed by short technical holes that will demand focus and execution. The stretch from nine to fourteen looks very forgiving on the card but you will be challenged big time through this stretch not to make any unforced errors. Fifteen through seventeen are all long and strong so there is no relief to the end. The finishing hole will grow on you-especially if you make a par-it is short but very demanding-any wayward play on this hole will do damage to your scorecard.

Hole-by-hole:

#### #1 Par 5 558/530 Saddleback

The first hole is a par five that stretches majestically before your eyes from the tee, it is pure eye candy and a wonderful preface about what is to come. You drive to center of a fairway that saddles a hill about 270 out. Your layup second is to around 120 where the fairway starts to narrow. You then have a short one down the hill to a green set to the left. Green is deep but not wide so you have to control your towardness to hit this target.

#### #2 Par 4 426/400 Roadside

Your pulse will pick up in a hurry over the next few holes. This is a long straight one that runs alongside the road coming in. Drive to center over the crest of the hill between the bunkers. You then have a long one to a green that sits precipitously above you-it is a club extra up to the table top. As with many of the greens here this one has a tier across the middle that creates a shelf in the back left corner. The key is getting your approach up into the middle of the green and not facing a third from the base of the hill in front of the green. A par here is a significant accomplishment.

#### #3 Par 4 368/345 Meadows

The next hole is a shortish dogear left that you walked across earlier on your way to the practice range. The tee box sits back in a chute and you have to discipline yourself to pick a club you can hit to right center about 120 from the green. The right rough is a no-no because the long grass there will take away your ability to control the shot into the green. Anything left will require a curve that will controlling the approach difficult as well. Approach shot needs elevation to carry across the creek fronting the green anything short will be back in the hazard. This green with lots of slope and undulations Middle of the green is your target, do not go flag hunting.

#### #4 Par 3 159/140 Knoll

In many ways this next finesse par three represents the challenge of this day. The green is a hanging chad slightly above you that is protected by deep bunkers in front and falloffs to the right. The green has a heel print front right so you can work balls into this area by landing in the center and feeding it back with the slope. The left and back pins are problematic in that if you miss what you are aiming at there is no telling where your ball will end it's journey. The comeback pitches are straight out of the Pelz Short Game School.

#### #5 Par 4 416/496 Cathedral

Despite the straight appearance of this hole the bunkering and the trees make this into a narrow dogleg left. Hit a strong draw off the left bunker and you are still going to have plenty of club into the longest green on the course. The green is narrow as well with a bit of a spine up the center, so don't be surprised if your approach gets wayward on the ground. Par here is likely a good pitch and a putt.

#### #6 Par 5 582/539 Sahara

This is a very fun crescent shaped five par that begins innocuously enough. Drive to left center off the bunker you can see from the tee into a generous landing area. Now you have to hoist a lay up across the edge of the massive waste bunker that gives this hole it's name to about 110 yards from the green. Putting surface sits further to the right and has a some gamey bunkers in front and right you need to avoid. If you are on the green in regulation you should get a scoring opportunity here.

#### #7 Par 4 430/410 Plains

Another straight long one coming up. Drive to center between two bunkers on the left and one on the right. Then let it rip at this green with a long club. The green has a large source of bacon buried in the middle which makes controlling your approach results difficult. Even the pitching and putting is a challenge. This is a difficult par.

#### #8 Par 4 387/365 Evergreen

Probably one of the coolest holes all day for me. This sharp dogear left has the driving area oreoed by bunkering so you need to shape a draw to follow the line of the hole and remain on short grass in the landing area. The green sits below you but propped up on a mound with some guarding bunkers in front. The shot in must have spin because the green falls away from you at the back and good shots can end up in bad places as a result. This is another strong Strong green complex, it takes real shot articulation to be successful here.

#### #9 Par 3 180/157 Creek

This side ends with another pretty technical short hole where green undulations present the biggest challenge. The carry across the fronting creek is not the big problem but the bunkers that pinch the green tightly are your real forced carry. Green has good slope from back left to front so be aggressive to your perceived pin position. Time for a cool one before taking on the inward half.

#### #10 Par 4 387/371 Lookout

The second nine opens with another very visual hole that sits invitingly in front of you and then winds it's way up the hill to the right. If you drive strong to center you have a short iron up the hill to a teenie green sitting above you protected by deep sand in front. Probably an extra club up to the green that is pitched toward you so take enough club to carry into the heart of the green

#### #11 Par 3 172/146 Turtle

This is a very tantalizing par three that has a very small green surrounded by seven bunkers playing about a half a club less than the distance. The flight of this tee shot is something to savor as it just seems to hang forever before finding a place to land. Green is banked right to left and front to back so it is a real challenge to get your ball to stop where you want it to. You need to hit a lawn dart here to have a putting chance.

#12 Par 4 412/388 Dog Leg

Much like number 8 this hole will keep your attention. You drive across to the top of the hill where this hole turns sharply left back towards the clubhouse. From there the green sits slightly below you wedged between hollows and bunkers. Some very tricky pitches if you miss on either side. The target is narrow and has a two foot swale in the front that makes getting your ball to the flag level of the green very difficult. Putting across this transition is a sure three putt.

#13 Par 4 338/326 Buttonwood

You travel back around the club house to play a hole that parallels number 10. Considerably shorter but the same eye appeal. Drive to center between a school of bunkers on both sides of the landing area. The green sits slightly above you and is on a 5 to 11 diagonal which narrows your landing target considerably. This green has lots of slope again so keeping the approach close to the hole is a task.

#14 Par 3 195/177 Plateau

A very old school par three-they don't design this way anymore. Accessible green sits way up a steep hill and is flanked by two bunkers on either side. This putting surface banked steeply front to back though you cannot distinguish this from the tee so the ball will run once it clears the front edge. The key here is don't miss the putting surface because recovery pitches are extremely dicey. Any downhill require full velcro on the ball.

#15 Par 5 589/544 Surprise

This next par five is a side slinging downhill dogleg left that will startle you. Hit a strong draw off the high tee ground and let it feed well down the hill to the left. Your lay up is across the corner of a bunker on the left at about 120 to an area in the center of the fairway just short of a bunker in the center of the fairway about 60 yards out. This green is a dogleg right of its own that wraps around one of the four greenside bunkers on the right. There is a dent in the front left of the green as the surface works its way uphill and to the right. Right pins are real suckers because over right is no bargain.

#16 Par 4 434/380 Narrows

This is a long and narrowing par four as you work your way from tee to green. Drive to center and then your long approach needs to turn from the left and work up the green. Saucon Creek flanks the left as you approach so hooks do not work here. Green has a good elevation change in it so be aggressive on your approach.

#17 Par 4 422/397 Willows

This dog ear works down along Saucon Creek on the left. Best drive is right center of the narrow fairway to get a look at the green sitting to the left. The creek crosses the fairway about 50 yards short of the green. Green has a couple of bunkers in front so you have to elevate the approach all the way to the surface.

#18 Par 4 345/326 Pond

Very technical short finishing hole that gives you plenty of opportunity to ruin your scorecard. Drive straight away, no wander will be tolerated because there are four bunkers on the left and water to the right. You will have a short club in your hand and a four story elevation change to a green set up on top of the hill to the left. Two pots set into the front and one more bunker on the left make this an approach shot that has to be very accurate. When you get to the green take a look back and you will realize how difficult an approach you just played. Fun finish to a very interesting old course.

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