

Bedford Springs-Old Course
Bedford, Pennsylvania

Architects: Spencer Oldham (1895), A.W. Tillinghast (1912), Donald Ross (1923), Forse Design (2007)

	Par	Rating	Slope	Yardage
Medal	72	73.4	140	6785
Ross	72	71.9	136	6446
Tillie	72	69.3	130	6023
Oldham	72	69.8	122	5106

Overview:

Established in the late 1800's this place is a small scale version the old line rich man's retreat, on the order of a Homestead or Greenbrier, full service food, accommodations, golf, spa, family recreation, and all. It has a much more casual presentation than those others but that may be a function of the new day more than anything else. A very comfortable atmosphere-well managed-it makes for a perfect two-day getaway from the hub-bub of urban life.

The golf course is quirky but very interesting. It is the result of the efforts of three architects over a thirty year period-and it has been recently updated in 2007 without changing the effective old style character of the links. Spencer Oldham did the original 18 holes in 1895 featuring chocolate drop mounds, geometric S-curve bunkers, and donut bunkers. In 1912 A.W. Tillinghast got his hands on it and scaled it back to a nine-hole course with his own architectural features. In 1923 Donald Ross took it back to a full 18-hole track and you can see raised greens with lots of tiering, artistic bunkering constellations, and, most distinctively, a creative and strategic use of the Shoher's Run that meanders throughout the entire golf course. The renovation work in 2007 was done by Forse Design Company of Pennsylvania who are known for doing period restoration and renovation work throughout the US and Canada-they have recently had their hands in renovation work to the Broadmoor-East Course in Colorado and the Newport Country Club in Rhode Island-sites of recent U.S. Senior Opens and U.S. Women's Opens respectively. They did a wonderful job retaining the characteristics of all three of these fine architects while making it a very playable and a challenging golf experience.

The entire course is in the flood plain of the Shoher Spring Stream and sits nestled between the foothills on either side. There is a good bit of meandering back and forth so the holes do not route in a typical outward and inward loop. For a course set in the foothills there are not that many severe elevation changes on holes and you get surprisingly few side hill or billy goat stances during the round. As with most old style courses the track does not sprawl-the next tee is a few steps from the last green and the round has a tidy-compact feel to it. Green surfaces are totally updated-very quick-lots of pitch and undulation and oddly shaped which makes for really small targets from the fairway. You will do some pitching and chipping to save pars.

The green speed is the course's major defense considering the tiering and undulations you will face. But at the same time these characteristics provide you with a good correction mechanism for your approach shots if you pay attention to green topography and use it accordingly. Big hitters will be frustrated by the many times they cannot just haul off and hit as much as they can-position off the tee is extremely important to getting the best angle of attack into the greens.

The last characteristic worth noting is the balance of the types of holes and the sequencing. Five Par 5's, Five Par 3's, and 8 Par 4's (only one over 400 yards) means you are hitting lots of finesse shots through the day and the mix is pretty random. There is a sequence from 2 to 6 where you play par 3, par 5, par 3, par 5, short par 4-other than the driver on the second par 3 you have no long shots for five holes. From 9 through 14 you have a similar 5-3-4-4-5-3 run but in the midst of this one you have two of the longest holes you play all day. My point is you have to be very mentally agile to play this course effectively-there is no natural rhythm to the course other than the constant sound of the babbling of the ever present Shober's Run.

Hole-by-hole:

#1 Par 4 Spring Ross 300/ Tilly 248 yards

Very cute-very short opening hole. As you stare at this hole from the staging area it looks so much longer than it is-the bunkering in the transition area that bisects the hole and the uphill rise from there to the perched green gives it the appearance of a real classic old design. I have always said that for all the press Ross's domed greens get-his bunkering to me is equally distinctive both in the driving areas and around the greens. The four bunkers cut into the hillside would require a 230 yard carry so your best shot is a 200 yard lay up to about 150 yards. The square raised green is perched on the hilltop in front of you guarded by bunkers front and right-this shape and contour of this green has a Tillinghast touch to it for sure. Green is steep from back to front so you are best working your approach shot in front of the flag.

#2 Par 3 Spencer Oldham 195/160 yards

This is an original from the 1895 design-a flatish green sits adjacent to a wide stretch of the wetlands from Shober's run on the left. Depending on the wind direction, you can actually shape this approach from the right curving back up the line of the green or from the left across the hazard toward a bail-out area on the right. The area in front of the green is very flat so fairway metal or utility should feed onto the green if you come in short. The look from the tee is far more intimidating than the reality here.

#3 Par 5 Steeplechase 568/516 yards

The name of this hole is derived from the series of hurdle bunkers Oldham originally designed into this hole. He also has a donut shaped and an S-curved fairway bunker up the left-so you get his full inventory of geometric elements. A wide driving area pound it to center. Now you lay up to about 100 to 120 and you are looking at a typical segmented Ross type of green. Front is fairly flat and accessible but it contours up a steep tier to the small plateau section on the right with a back run off swale to the left. If the pin is there you have to hit one with no spin to the front and let it run up onto the back tier.

#4 Par 3 Volcano 196/140 yards

The one hole all day that crosses the line from Classic to Quirky. This is a severe elevation change from the low tee to the two-tier green that is set on the top of a 10 story office building. You can pound a fairway wood into the hill and hope it hops up on the green-more likely you have an elevation pitch up onto the precipice green. Missing right will put you in a bunker a good 20 feet below the putting surface-this will challenge your confidence in the loft of your steepest wedge. The green is a bear-two tiers with a good three foot elevation change. A four here is a very good score.

#5 Par 5 Oaks 555/513 yards

Another beautiful Ross creation, sewn around the dense trees on the right, this double dog leg challenges you to hit it far enough from the tee to get a clear look down the hole. The big oaks and sycamores on the corner will cut off your line if you don't carry it far enough. The lay-up area is wide open but pay attention to the location of the flag to favor the side of the landing area with the best access to the pin. The raised green is bunkered around and has another Ross transition that is pretty manageable from the center rear toward the front.

#6 Par 4 Ross Cathedral 325/270 yards

This is aptly named because it is a visual testimony to the genius of the architect. A real jaw dropper from the tee the hole drops from the teeing ground as it crosses Shuber's Babble at about 175 yards out and then gently rises from there to a beautiful green setting on the hill. Totally lined by trees on both sides gives it a hollowed out cathedral feeling. There are a series of playable fairway bunkers up the left-the real challenge here is getting the ball to the right tier on this two-tier green. Pins in the front can be played just short of the tier transition in the middle which should contain them, but if it is on the back tier you will have to fly it all the way there.

#7 Par 4 Shober's Run 375/341 yards

The stream runs diagonally across this fairway and then up the right side of the hole adjacent to the putting surface. The more you keep your drive to the left and close to the stream the better your angle of attack-the right side of the driving area is more generous but leaves you with the ball slightly above your feet and makes the opening to the green very narrow from that angle. This is a true Ross green-mounds surround it and the create these creased fall offs to all sides. The front of the green is banked from center to front so this is the most receptive pin placement on the green.

#8 Par 4 Overbrook 329/310 yards

The shortest four par of the day calls for a drive over the reedy marsh of Shober's Run but the carry is not as much as it seems from the tee. The landing area is pretty wide so I like driver here to give you the shortest club you can have in you hand for the second. This is the smallest green you will ever see outside of a pitch and putt-raised up from the fairway and encircled by deep face bunkers. Forget pin positions, anything on the green is a 25 footer or less.

#9 Par 5 Meadow 501/458 yards

A fairly mild end to the outward nine. The driving area on the hole is wide open. You then lay up with a middle iron to a flat area at 100 yards. The real challenge on this hole is putting the three sectioned green-three distinct plateaus where managing the transitions on the putts is a major task.

#10 Par 3 Gulley 122/111 yards

OK, we are getting quirky again. The tee is tee and green are perched on the opposite side of a steep gulley-the green is slightly higher than the tee so there is an increment of elevation in the club choice. The green is a two-tier job cut into the hillside-anything that misses short or right is tumbling into the grassy oblivion. It is a short club so the challenge should be doable-but you have to pick a club you can hit hard-anything played gently is looking for the trouble.

#11 Par 4 Lang Dale 443/429

One of the most scenic views you get all day-the tee is on top of the highest point of the golf course and you hit your drive over the top of a hill sending it careening to a landing area far below. Ignore the distance on the card-two well struck shots get to this green easily. From the bottom of the hill you have about 200 yards across a tributary of Shober's to an accessible green. There are grassy mounds down the left to the green which is pinched by bunkers on both sides. This green has a serious transition leaning from back to front so you do not want to pass the flag on your approach. An excellent par 4-making a par here is a gratifying experience.

#12 Par 4 Sweetroot 376/339 yards

This is a subtle hole with lots of angulation in the landing area and the green itself. The green tilts feeding the ball toward the bunkers set by Ross into the hillside on the left of the driving area about 225 yards out. From there you have about 125 to 150 into a green that has a bunker on the left and a series of tall mounds on the right. The green has another steep transition from the front to the back-the back right is well above the front so putts up to that section will be slow. He stuck a retention bunker behind the green that captures balls hit with too much enthusiasm at the back pin.

#13 Par 5 Long 596/555 yards

As the name says it is long-full sized three-shotter here. You drive to center-adjacent to some furry bunkers on the left. Now hit as much as you can to the landing area below you-mindful that the bunker on the left at about 150 is full of nasty trolls. The green sits slightly below there-framed on the left by The Run and the right by a bunker. This green has a distinct tilt from right to left so a left pin is approachable by the ground correction of a shot to the right-back of the green is distinctly raised as well and will contain most approaches.

#14 Par 3 Tiny Tim 128/117 yards

This was the cute little downhill pitch hole you were tempted to mistakenly play coming off the first green. An original Tilly concept the elevated tee provides a big elevation change to the green below set on the other side of a small lake created by the run. It is a good club and a half adjustment for the elevation to a green that has sand on two sides and a series of Hershey's Kiss mounds short and left. You will really enjoy watching the flight of this ball dropping out of the sky-especially if it hits the green below-a stunning view to behold.

#15 Par 4 Bunker Hill 335/324 yards

Of all the holes you play today, this one demands some restraint off the tee to be successful. The tee is well below the diagonally rising fairway from the right-three bunkers are set in the ridge of the hillside-the carry over the center one is about 180-and it gets gradually longer the more you try to cut off the dogleg to the left. I like a three-wood with a bit of a draw over the center bunker-this will set up an approach inside 150 yards. A drive through this fairway will present you with no clear path to the putting surface-trees on the right of this fairway obscure that approach. This is one of the trickiest greens you will play all day-big mound on the left creates a big pitch to the right and back, but a shot into the center of the green on the right will run through into the low containment area behind the green. Putting on this green is a major challenge.

#16 Par 5 Hole O'Cross 578/503 yards

A scenic, tumbling par five that falls from the tee to a tilted landing area below. Cross bunkers frame the driving area on the left and then again the line for the lay-up shot on the left. Your second will cross that bunker and should be firm to the left to avoid pitching back to the right side of the fairway where a large tree can block your approach. Long bunker is well short of the green on the right but this green is shaped like a cross with a high back and a very narrow center and it slopes away on all sides. You want a very short club in your hand for your approach if you expect to get a good putting chance here.

#17 Par 3 Ronnie 157/146 yards

Another rebuilt original Tilly this hole from the tee is a sight to behold and a bear to play. A middle to shortish iron across a piece of the wetlands the green is stuck into a hillside on the right and drops off sharply to two deep-deep bunkers-one short left and the other long left. The right hillside and the front bunker create a narrow but widening approach to the green from the right-you can play a ball off the hill and it will feed onto the green if the golf gods are with you. A sweet looking draw working up the shape of the green can be a very gratifying play. Love the look of this hole-it is a postcard.

#18 Par 4 Home 352/327

This is a short finishing hole but it is extremely technical and you have to hit two very articulate shots to be successful here. The fairway runs like an S and is bordered by three bunkers on the left and another bunker on the right-so it takes a distinct draw shape to work the tee ball down toward the green. From there you have a short shot across a pair of cross bunkers set into the hill to a green perched on the hill above. The front of this green is a tight anvil shape but it has a distinct rise in the center that will hold a well struck ball to the tight front pin. The back of the green widens considerably and is protected by a berm on the left and deep bunkering on the right. If you were lucky enough to take today's bet treat yourself to the Frothy Root Beer Float in the Tavern-it is a signature offering that should not be missed.