

OCEAN COURSE-KIAWAH ISLAND

Kiawah Island, South Carolina

Architect: Pete Dye (1991)

Tee	Par	Rating	Slope	Yardage
Tournament	72	77.2	144	7356
Ocean	72	73.6	138	6779
Dye	72	72	134	6475

OVERVIEW:

Simply put this is Dante's Inferno above ground. Pete Dye has tried and succeeded in producing the most diabolical compilation of golf holes he could conceive with the sole purpose being to humiliate the pros and mere mortals alike. It is safe to say that this course is truly unfair, almost unplayable, and just not a lot of fun. It would be better to buy the 1991 Ryder Cup tape on video and enjoy the train wrecks from the comfort of your own home.

Not so much a real test of golf-it is more like an inquisition-meant to break your spirit and mind and bring you to your knees. It amply achieves all of this by the fifth tee. You will notice by the time you are done that all the people in front of you and behind you are trudging slowly like lemmings through the waste areas, head down, shoulders slumped, resigned to their sentence in this demonic golf hell. This is not an experience for the faint of heart.

The course is routed in an S-hook shape which means the first four and last five holes are in the same wind direction and the middle nine are in the opposite direction. The problem here is that if the middle nine are all upwind you will need a medvac helicopter by the fourteenth tee. Since the entire track is totally exposed to the ocean you will get ferocious winds on days that are calm back at the condo. Determining required distance and club selection are a major problem all day long. You can get real tired of hitting your 3-wood 175 into the prevailing breeze.

Pete and Alice pulled out all the stops on this one. You have your massive waste areas like TPC Sawgrass, your signature Dye railroad ties hardening the edges of the hazards, and Alice even raised the fairways on the inland leg of holes adjacent to the ocean to make sure you get the full brunt of the wind effect all day. Much like his other "made to humiliate the pros" tracks at Sawgrass and PGA West, this one is pure punitive target golf. Every tee shot or shot at a green is a forced carry or to a confined arrangement that has a penalty shot or an impossible recovery tied to your lack of success. Some of the adjacent waste areas run the entire length of the hole-and most are from five to eight feet below the playing area-making your extrication from same seriously problematic. Nothing is "kept" here-it is all raw and natural-that presents a beautiful esthetic background to enjoy if you were not in such physical and emotional agony.

I have great respect for Pete Dye as an innovative designer who successfully broke the mold of his predecessors Robert Trent Jones and Dick Wilson of designing long, boring heroic courses. But Pete might

have slipped over the edge on this one. There are interesting tactical elements with risk/reward decisions attached but the ever presence of stiff Atlantic breezes make it far too punitive to enjoy. As a result, it seems to me that he ended up with a course that is nothing but a scenic and perverse marketing ploy meant to attract the "grip it and rip it" crowd in the golf demographic.

HOLE-BY-HOLE ANALYSIS (Ocean/Dye):

#1 Par 4 375/365

Not a real difficult opening hole-probably meant to insure you don't ask for a refund in the prescribed 30 minute grace period. Drive it straight to left center and stay out of the waste bunker that runs the whole right side of the hole. Lift a short iron to a slightly raised green set to right center field. Green is somewhat narrow-and, as it will be all day, hard to hold because it is windblown and hard.

#2 Par 5 528/501

This is a double hop scotch par five that dog ears sharply to the left after the tee shot. You drive across an environmental chasm to a landing area that is above you sandwiched by bunkers. The landing area here is one of the more generous you will see all day. Now you lay up to 130 in front of a piece of intruding marsh which leaves you with an elevation iron to a raised plateau green well above you. If the pin is left you cannot hold the green which is tiny on that side-you would be best to play to center and putt across. This green arrangement is typical of what you will see all day-very elevated from the immediate surrounding giving you a table top to land your ball on which the wind had dried out and made unreceptive to anything but a lofted club. When your ball tumbles off on of the side you are left without good options. You cannot run one up the steep bank to slow down your approach you have to plop an L club into a very tight pin area.

#3 Par 4 367/319

This is almost a good hole if you were not playing in a hurricane. Real short real demanding. Hit a 3 wood squarely over the hill and try to get it to stop on the higher left side of the fairway to have the most reasonable elevation change for your approach. What is left is sand iron range at another precipice green arrangement without a single bunker for protection but the howling wind will make this approach very challenging. You will have to elevate the approach to clear a tree he left in the center of the fairway. Don't miss left because the marsh lurks on that side of the green. If you manage to get it to stay on the green you can make par here.

#4 Par 4 432/401

Now this starts to be work. This is a truncated par four of considerable length where you have to traverse the marsh twice along the way. Drive it hard to center and you will end up in front of the second transition area that crosses the fairway. You will elevate a long club uphill into another tight green arrangement that is bordered by sand dunes. There is a bail out area short and left of the green that can prove functional. This is a pretty hole to look at.

#5 Par 3 185/177

The course now takes a right turn to the west and begins this section with a technical par three. This is a four to five iron across a large ash tray to a 50 yard long green that sits on a 5 to 11 angle the sand. You have to pick your crossing spot carefully and hit a sharply struck ball to the area of the pin or you will have to deal with a three county putt across a Mason-Dixon hump between you and the hole.

#6 Par 4 377/345

This is another long par four-much longer if you have just turned into the breeze. Hit a draw at the center of three lone oaks you see that frame the hole in the distance. You are left with a mid to long iron at a really long green pinched by sand. From here out-it is fairway and greens or lots of time in the painful waste areas.

#7 Par 5 505/493

This hole plays very different depending on the wind direction. You have to make a decision off the tee to try to carry the dune on the right or play left of it. Unless you have the wind at your back do not try to cut off the corner. Now hit a three wood long to center and you will have a mid-iron to a raised funky green-looks like a catchers mitt turned 90 degrees to the right. This could be a scoring opportunity for you if the wind is favoring.

#8 Par 3 170/166

Next is a shortish par 3 that is pretty much circumscribed by a waste area. It is totally exposed to the breeze so club selection is difficult and there is reason to try to keep the shot down to reduce wind influence. The green is deeper on the left than right so I think the shot is to the left side of the green no matter where the flag is. There is a step down in the back right corner of about 3 feet which is a real sucker position.

#9 Par 4 415/406

Another stiff par four to end the outward nine. Slight dogear back to the left is looking for a drive to left center. You now get a good look up a long offset green slanted back to front. This is probably one of the only ones you can bounce it in to-so you might consider that to defeat the wind. Missing left or right leaves a very tricky up and down because of the array of swales and sand challenges on either side of the green.

#10 Par 4 378/360

From the elevated tee you get a panoramic view of most of the back nine. This is the first of a string of really tough holes. Drive it to left center at the crest of the hill and you get a look at a green set in the dunes below. You have a mid to long iron to a raised green tucked slightly to the left that is protected by a flanking waste area along that side.

#11 Par 5 521/506

This is a long serpentine par 5 that winds its way right and back to the left between a series of severe waste areas that flank both sides of the fairway all the way to the green. The drive is fairly simple-left center to get an angle for a lay up. Now you must put your layup out to the right to look back at a plateau green set to the left and fronted by a really deep waste bunker in front. If your lay up ends up in the waste area to the left the 120 to 160 yard shot across the balance of the waste bunker may not be intelligent. You are probably best to take a hit and pitch back to the fairway so that you can hit an approach with some conviction.

#12 Par 4 420/412

One of the better holes on the course. This is a very wide driving area but you cannot afford to miss it because nasty consequences await if you do. You drive to the left center and you will be standing at the top of a hill looking down at a narrow green that is tightly gripped by a canal on the right-railroad ties and all and dunes with native grasses on the left. This green is about 40 feet below you so it should shorten the shot considerably. There is a collection area provided short and left of the green but the up and downs are no bargain. The view down to the green is beautiful and its beauty is only beat by the look back up the hill from the green when you get there. This hole has real character.

#13 Par 4 371/364

This hole is longer than the card says so check your distance marker on the tee. The incongruity in this hole is that with the canal pervasive up the entire right side of the hole you think you should play your drive to the left, but there are two very nasty pot bunkers lurking through the driving area on that side that will leave you little possibility of going to the green on your second. You really must try to drive the ball down the hole toward the green but the canal that flanks the right makes that a tough option to take. The cape style green complex hangs over the canal and has bunkering left of the green as well. This can be a place where you scorecard ends up in the trash bin if you are not careful.

#14 Par 3 171/161

The top of the S hook-the course turns back east toward the club house. This par 3 is quite difficult. You need a medium iron to carry across a waste area to Mt. Rainier green arrangement that is protected front left by a deep grass depression in the face of the hill. If you miss right or over you go down 20 feet to the bottom of a swale and have that absurd elevation pitch shot into a swirling wind. If you hit this green you are likely to have a long undulating putt. The green works back and down from 5 to 11.

#15 Par 4 391/381

The first of four absolutely difficult finishing holes is really quite interesting. Drive it to left center over a hill and you will be looking downhill at a narrow green arrangement that leans away from you set amongst an amphitheater of hills. You need to land this approach on the front of the green and have it feed to the pin. This is quite a nice look going into the green.

#16 Par 5 555/540

Much like the previous par 5 on this side you want to drive to a safe area on the right center otherwise you end up with a blind lay up shot for your second. You must finesse a layup as far up the hole as possible without engaging the ferocious waste area down the entire right side of the hole from about 200 yards in. Again if you happen to miss there-pitch left back into the fairway before you try to take a shot at the green. This green sits up from the fairway with another deep waste bunker protecting the left side coming in so it will take a precise short club to get on the green.

#17 Par 3 197/180

The famous "Calc" hole that claimed his soul and three years of his career with his Ryder Cup shank. From your tees it is just a hard as hell forced carry over an enormous pond to a green shaped like Africa-narrow in the front widening considerably past half way. You will have to be precise on this tee ball to avoid the hazard right-but do not miss left because the pot pit left is a bitch. Anything on land is acceptable and a bogey will not be a disappointment here.

#18 Par 4 421/396

The Langer looper is a difficult long par 4. Drive it over the hill and try to end up on the right side of the fairway close to the adjacent sand. This gives you the best angle to the green set to the right. You will have a downhill lie off of which to hit a medium to long iron across the elbow of the waste area on the left to at an uphill green set. The green is step tiered-the back tier being the smallest. You do not want to try to negotiate a putt that must traverse tiers-just ask Bernard. The best thing about this hole is that it is the last, the self flagellation is finally over, and it is time for a couple of Bud Lights.....each.