

## **Pacific Dunes Golf Course Bandon, Oregon**

Architect: Tom Doak (2001)

Tee	Par	Rating	Slope	Yardage
Black	71	73	142	6633
Green	71	70.7	133	6142
Orange	71	69.8	128	5088

### Overview:

It was Mike Keiser's intention to provide a visitor to Bandon the full monty of the British Isles links experience. In the designs of Bandon Dunes and Old Macdonald the Scottish flavor of links golf is well served. At Pacific Dunes Tom Doak has composed a more Irish feel with bold topographical holes accented with dramatic bunkering of Royal Country Down and more subtle craggy wind-affected holes like Ballybunion. Doak is a true student of the links tradition and brought the full force of his knowledge and talent to the creation of Pacific Dunes. It stands by itself as an original collection of imaginative links challenges specifically suited to the seaside tract he had to work with at Bandon.

The links formula of high tees set in the dunes hitting to low landing valleys and then back up to greens perched on ridges of the dunes makes each hole a defined envelope, almost a world of it's own. This is not a cloistered feeling of playing in alcoves like at Waterville, Portrush, or Lahinch just holes visually defined where the strategic options are right in front of you. Tall dunes faced in gorse, sea grass, and trees fill the canvas, firm bouncy turf allow roll out under the wind, harrowing blow-out bunkers define playing lines, and large contoured greens facilitate effective ground management of approach shots. The firm turf and wind effect, probably the most pronounced of the courses of Bandon, put a premium on managing your trajectory and roll out to get around with your scorecard in tact. If the wind is up I would go for the 133 slope for the day-the challenge will be sufficient I can assure you.

Besides the wind the most talked about feature at Pacific Dunes has to be the fierce bunkering. It may seem hard to believe but the depth and severity of the bunkering you see now is not what was originally intended. As Doak operatives will tell you, once the bunkering is done on a seaside venue like this with battering winds almost every day, nature will have it's way and the bunkering contours will take on the natural shape and severity of the dunes around them. Best advice is plan to play the gaps between the bunkers and be cognizant of the prevailing roll out which may feed a ball without firm intent into their grasp.

Much like all the courses at Bandon, the use of fescue grasses in high concentration on fairways and greens makes it extremely difficult to make the visual distinction of where the fairway ends and the green begins. But this facilitates the use of low running pitches and the Irish wedge, putting from well off the green, which will be valuable tools in your arsenal out here. Familiar to those who have played links courses across the Atlantic, the large and flowing contours of these greens help the green staff set up the course for the prevailing wind of the day. If the hole is downwind they will tend to give you a deep pin and plenty of green to temper your approach. In the upwind condition front pins and interior backstops in the green are useful. The

most important is to listen to your caddie on how to use the ground contours to your advantage. It is often the case that a diversionary line is the best way to get it close to your target.

The coolest part of this design has to be the unusual balance of holes and the hole sequencing, Doak was not bound to any normal formula we are used to. The par is 36 on the front with just one par three and one par five. The par 35 on the back nine starts with back-to-back three pars and then followed by two more par threes and three par fives in the next seven holes. There are only two par fours on the inward nine so without a normal hole balance you are jumping from pillar to post the whole way home.

The opening holes are a quick introduction to the strategic genius of this design. The first three holes make it clear that you will get no slow build up to the challenge-you have choices of playing lines that require confident decisions and competent execution right out of the gate. As you climb the hill to the third green the immensity of the effects of the sea are cascading from over the back edge. Walking to the back of this green the panoramic view of coast of Oregon is unveiled and it is nothing short of overwhelming. Full coastal distractions affect the play on four as you tight rope walk the cliffs on one of the hardest par fours of the day. The short fifth has Royal County Down written all over it with a hidden landing area and deep greenside bunkers with eyebrows.

The ensuing inland holes might be considered a wee bit of a rest if they weren't so hard. You are in for a bit of North Carolina with a tree lined hallway fairway on seven and a crowned green on eight. After a blind tee shot over the dune ridge at the ninth what unfolds is the dramatic walk back to the edge of the world. The hint is evident standing on the ninth green that things are about to change again.

He must have had a bit of Cypress Point in mind as the back side begins with two very difficult seaside par threes. Carding a total of eight strokes between them is no embarrassment. Ten through thirteen you will need to be lashed to the mast to survive. An alcove wind greets you on the tenth tee and will have it's way with your tee ball if you don't control your trajectory and turn it into the breeze. The eleventh is one of the most rigorous short pitch three pars you will ever play-a teenie putting surface surrounded by furry looking mounds and sand pits full of disaster. A brief respite on twelve but thirteen is probably as fierce a seaside par four as you will ever play, especially into the prevailing breeze. The scale of the dunes to the right of this green dwarf the playing area-it is hard to focus on the task at hand with that looking over your shoulder.

As you traverse the dune ridge to the fourteenth tee you are afforded some protection from the breezes but the inland finish is very strong all the way to the house and will test your patience until the last putt falls. On fifteen and sixteen he used the topography to throw you off balance. The sixteenth is played over a fairway with heaves and plunges that will make you think you are in a Herman Melville novel. The green sits like a plank jutting off the bow of the ship, getting it on there and keeping it there is a tall order. If you are lucky enough to play in the spring an amphitheater of blooming gorse awaits you on the Redan style seventeenth. Don't be too distracted by the floral backdrop because the golf challenge is once again very real.

Much like the opening holes the finishing hole speaks to the genius of the Doak design team. What should be a manageable serpentine five par is fraught with sand pitfalls and gnarly vegetation. Picking good lines and hitting articulate shots make it a routine three-shot hole but any wayward sway of the ball can bring a bad aftertaste to the beer awaiting above the 18<sup>th</sup> green.

In a place where every element of the golf inventory is first rate this one probably has the hallowed place at the top of the pile. As with all of these links courses the medal score is tertiary to sporting a good match and enjoying the glorious surroundings that Doak has enhanced with his clever design.

*Hole-By-Hole Analysis (Black/Green):*

#1 Par 4 370/304 yards

They start you with a beautiful and mysterious short hole. There is a sliver of a fairway visible on the crest of a hill and the rest of what is to come is hidden from view. Generally played into the wind the best line is up the left-trouble lurks to the right in the form of sand, gorse, and trees. From the left side the green seems on a diagonal to you flanked by a bunker left and behind. The green is a narrow bowl contour with a funnel opening up the front and high walls on the back. Balls hit without conviction will be rejected but you can use the small backstop back right as a safe aiming point for back pins.

#2 Par 4 368/335

After a winding stroll to the second tee through the fescue and over a ridge you will step into your first Alice In Wonderland view of the day. All the splendid elements of this course are now in front of you-dunes, sea grass, pines, fringed bunkers, and an undulating fairway-it is breathtaking. It is not like Doak to give you much peace of mind early and he does not do it here-this hole is hard and has character. The prominent feature in the driving area is "Shoe Bunker" in the center which was the hand crafted contribution of Bob Gaspar one of Tom Doak's long time shapers. If you cannot fly it you are best down the left to get an unobstructed view of the green but the bunker through the fairway on the left is the dark corner on the hole-you don't want to venture there. If you go down the left pick your teeing club carefully to leave yourself at 150 and short of the disaster. Up the right is OK but you end up with a blind approach to the green complex and must take on the two deep bunkers that front the right side. Putting area is long and diagonally set to the right with a slight lift on the back left that will help hold an approach shot.

#3 Par 5 499/476

The view from the third tee is spectacular as the hole stretches out before you all the way to the sea. The wind is likely coming at you so it will play longer than the card measure. A wide driving area sits in a valley below but I like a landing spot on the right of the center fairway bunker to give you an angle to the preferred lay up approach area on the left. From right center you can hit it about 180 to 200 just off the fairway bunker that skirts the lay up area. The green sits well above you and will require a carry shot to the surface. The proximity of these next three greens to the ocean makes them crusty and firm so expect your ball to run out after it lands. A nasty deep sand pit haunts the front right so you need to hold your approach to the left front and let it do its thing on the ground. Anything long right is gone so don't be challenging a back right hole location. The first full ocean view is off the back of this green so stroll on back to acclimate yourself before heading to the next tee. The palm trees you can make out on the horizon are Honolulu.

#4 Par 4 463/449

Tom's got you in full adrenaline rush mode now with another drop dead par four. The ocean is lurking over the cliff all the way to the green so you are in for a two to three shot tight rope walk. This is a long one but good news is that it plays downwind most days. The difficulty is that your eye keeps being drawn to the ocean view but at no time during this hole do you want to miss right-the cliff is just as close at it seems-so you have to keep your aiming focus up the left off the tee. The second shot will be a long club into the green that sits uncomfortably between a sand ridge of the left and the cliffs on the right. It sets up for a running right to left approach careening off the left hump just beyond the bunker 50 yards short the green that will feed up the throat of this 50 yard narrow rock-hard green. Five on this hole is a fine result.

#5 Par 3 199/181

You are now turning inland for what you think is a respite but don't get cocky. This has a real Royal County Down look to it-a peek-a-boo par three sporting bunkers with eye brows. You cannot see the front left of the green from the tee but this is your aiming line. Hit the ball at the center of the bunker on the left and the ground on the other side of the mound will cascade your ball to the right spilling it onto the green. The green is a long and narrow two-tier affair, squeezed between the Groucho bunkers, with lots of putting challenge to it. If you have somehow made it to the sixth tee with your scorecard in tact you have a chance to make a decent score on the front side.

#6 Par 4 316/288

Another original Irish short par four has you heading inland. Drive needs to carry the bunker on the right to give you a short pitch up the slope to a very slender green perched up on a ledge above a couple of apartment building sized bunkers. These were put there to catch the drive of the macho man who had silly aspirations of making eagle. If you visit these bunkers you are catching an up escalator or hitting it out sideways. The green has a steep lean to the right so don't be surprised if your approach starts slipping off the counter top to a steep drop off to the right of the putting surface. The recovery pitch from there will be a dilly.

#7 Par 4 464/436

Stepping on to the next tee you feel like you have been dropped into North Carolina as the entire hole is ensconced by tall trees giving it a real hallway effect the last 200 yards. This is the number one handicap hole on the course-a beast of a four par that demands you be bold or smart-it is up to you. Driving area is generous but I like left center for the best angle back at the green. From there you have to decide to go for the green or layup to about 95 yards to avoid the mishigas of seven blowout bunkers on the left and furry burial mounds in the center and right. This array creates a welcoming foyer into a deep and narrowing green complex. Even a hundred yard pitch will give you a pause for concern so making a par here is a major accomplishment.

#8 Par 4 400/369

The next two are a couple of inland switchback holes to get you back to the sea. The first has a very wide driving area with lots of interior contour. Aim up the left center at the right edge of the stand of trees on the left. This gives the best angle to a crowned green sandwiched between one bunker front right and another long and left. Your target is a diagonally set thin ribbon of a green leaning from the right with a steep false

front so you can fade the approach into that slope. The narrowness of the landing area will result in some interesting green side recovery shots with a Pinehurst flavor to them. You are on your way out of North Carolina now and headed back to Ireland.

#9 Par 4 406/379

This is a pure hide and seek RCD links hole with a blind drive from a low tee over the edge of a dune to the landing area above much like the Sahara third at Old Macdonald. There are two greens and a split fairway so you need some forethought on the tee before plotting your way. From the tee the landing area is masked by a bluff that slants away from you. If the green is on the left you want to hit it down the left to filter down to the bottom of the hill for a look at the green nestled below between the center ridge of the fairway and some bunkers on the left. This green has a large mound in the center that will have it's way with weak approach shots. If it is the green on the right aim at the tallest mound you see and try to hold your tee ball on the right of the fairway. The green sits above and beyond the furry bunkers that mark the top of the ridge you are now facing. This right green is long and firm running away from you so plan to land it on the front third and feed to center. Your brain will be tired after all the decision making you have to make on this hole.

#10 Par 3 206/163

As was mentioned in the overview Doak was not held to convention and let the existing land dictate the sequence of holes he designed for the back side. You will play four par threes, three par fives, and only two par fours making it extremely difficult to develop a playing rhythm on the inward half. The first four holes run along the shore line and will bring the full brunt of the wind influence back into play. So tighten your adjustable hat and be prepared to play some creative links golf.

Your journey begins with a bit of Cypress Point-two visual cliff side par threes in a row. A big wind is likely in your face so the problem on these holes is club selection. With the ocean immediately behind the green and an elevation change across some distracting tall grass it is best to hit a controlled low trajectory bullet at the foot of the dune right of the green turning toward the ocean breeze. Anything hit high will be snagged like a kite in the breeze and end up very short and very right. There is a gorse laden dune hiding the area left of the green that has nasty rough you would prefer to stay out of. The long green has no bunkers and sits in a natural bowl so it should be receptive to a shot working it's way up the front on to the putting surface.

#11 Par 3 148/131

The next one is my favorite short hole in Bandon-a true post card print I would like hanging over my desk at work. This presents an exhilarating short uphill pitch to a green tucked on a shelf surrounded by dunes with beach grass, blow-out bunkers, and some gorse for good measure. Anything missed left of this green will end up sunning on the beach. The front of the green is masked by the furry brow of the intimidating front bunker set into tall mound so the landing area is quasi-blind. With the wind howling at you and from the left, it is an Irish low punch over that brow into the smallest green you will see all day. Do not go pin hunting here, anything on the center of this green is a wonderful shot.

#12 Par 5 529/507

Maybe the last chance to catch a breath coming in but this is really no bargain. Fairly straight par five with a little lean to the left at the green. Drive at the cross bunker you see in the center of the fairway in the distance. On your second make sure your lay up club can clear this same bunker at 150 or otherwise avoid it by staying further back. The green is set on a diagonal and beveled to the bottom of a tall dune with long grass which encroaches the center of the green. The green seems pretty flat but it has some twist to it so read it carefully. If you hit your target areas you should get a scoring chance here. The snack bar is on the way to the next tee, I would get an Fig Newton and a Powerade as the challenge is about to ratchet up again.

#13 Par 4 444/390

With the Pacific on your left from tee to green this is another scenic golf experience. You may note over the cliffs to your left a bevy of colorful silk chutes bobbing up and down-this beach is a favorite playground for kite surfers. Playing into the prevailing wind it very well may be a three-shot par four. There is much more room off the tee to the right so use it-aim your tee ball at the right edge of the green. A huge dune the size of a low income housing project in NY towers over the right side of this hole though it is really not in play. Since the wind is so influential here the green is one of the longest on the course. You won't be able to get a clear view of the stick so you have to trust you caddy's advice. From you approach angle the back of this green looks like one of those endless pools just dropping off into the horizon. As he is apt to do, Doak is playing with your mind. This is a very difficult hole and you need to defend yourself against a round wrecking number.

#14 Par 3 145/128

This is another links pitch and putt that can confound you with it's subtle difficulty. This is a long green vice gripped by really bad sand pits on either side. The front of the green is slightly blind and there are falloffs on both sides that lead to sand weariness. Play the front of the green yardage because the hole tends to be downwind and the ball should release to the middle of the green. It is all about towardness here, pick a line and hold that line. If you don't hold a good line recovery shots will be very difficult.

#15 Par 5 539/504

You are officially moving away from the ocean the rest of the way so theoretically you should get some relief. Don't count on it. This next one is a technical five par with real character. You fall asleep on any shot on this hole and you will be kicking yourself for the unwanted score that will result. The driving area is plenty generous and you are likely downwind so make a big swing and set it out there deep to give yourself a chance to reach in two. The green is set up from the fairway without any bunker protection, but then again it does not need any. The shot into this green needs to be very articulate and working in from the left. A knob on the right creates a steep false side that will throw a ball on a right center line to a low area where an up and down is very unlikely. The visual quotient on this hole is not large but the challenge to make a par is very real.

#### #16 Par 4 338/338

It's all gut checks from here-warding off the high scores coming in will take full concentration. This section begins with a short hole but it requires absolute control of your flight line to not get sucked into the vortex that dominates the right side of this hole from tee to green. The fairway is a tempest of waves so you can count on some funny bounces and an awkward stance for your second. Best drive is left center at the second bunker on the left. If you hold that line on the hill you get a look at a sliver of a green diagonally draped across a sand hill with a stern grassy drop off short and right. If you miss any shot to the right on this hole you must play safely back to the left to avoid the evil decree. Two large dunes, one with grass the other with gorse, make an imposing backdrop to your approach shot. The hole tends to play downwind and the green slopes front to back so it feels like you are playing down a playground sliding board, controlling your run out on the approach is a real challenge. There is a runway runoff on the back right just below the second dune and this can be valuable. The two bunkers on the back of this green, on either side of the runoff, are very deep and will show no mercy.

#### #17 Par 3 208/189

The last of the three pars is a real Redan challenge in the tradition of North Berwick. As Doak will tell you the difference is the prevailing wind is not at your back. The entire hole is surrounded by a huge sand dune smothered with gorse. If you are playing in the Spring when the gorse is in bloom the blanket of yellow flowers provide quite a stunning background. The massive green sits on a diagonal to the teeing area wrapping around a steep faced super-sized bunker. Missing left into the bunker is a sure double or worse so you must favor a right to left approach feeding onto the green and following the prevailing slope to the left. Once on the green the putting surface is sprawling so you must concentrate on managing your distance control on the first putt.

#### #18 Par 5 591/575

The finishing hole is one final visual gem that befits all the challenges you have experience today. A long three-shot hole so you will have to hit it strong and pick good lines to avoid the trouble. Humongous waste bunker dominates the left side of the hole off the tee, your drive needs to favor the right of the sloping fairway to avoid the gravitational tendency toward sand created by the slope. Aim at the clump of trees right of the clubhouse and hit it strong and straight. From there your lay up is to the left to avoid high grass on the side hills that frame the right. The final approach is into a bowl shaped putting surface-the hills across the front lean to the right and will feed balls to the middle. Another narrow green sandwiched by deep bunkers you must avoid if you want to end the round with a smile on your face.