

Black Diamond Ranch-Quarry Course Lecanto, Florida

Architect: Tom Fazio (1988)

Tees	Par	Yardage	Rating	Slope
Black	72	7159	75.0	137
Dark Gray	72	6496	72.1	131
Green	72	6050	69.7	125

Overview:

It would take celestial intervention to create a golf course with serious topography in Florida and that seems to be what occurred when the golf gods sent a meteor crashing into Florida's Nature Coast a few eons ago to create the limestone quarry that would eventually dominate the back nine of this very atypical Florida course. Then there was the chutzpah of owner Stan Olsen looking Tom Fazio in the eye and saying can you make playable holes out of this troll sanctuary without us having to add a theme park along side to attract interest. Fazio was up to the task and what he created was probably the most memorable course in the state, something very special that will be retained as an indelible impression in your golf psyche long after you are done.

The wow factor on this course is off the charts. It is almost hard to put the camera down long enough to hit the shots required to play the first 12 holes Fazio has orchestrated before you reach his final crescendo in the quarry. From the opening tee shot until you turn the corner to the 13th tee, entering the gateway to troll heaven, the holes meander down and up the gentle tree lined foothills providing stunning views of naturally appointed landing areas and green complexes, slowly building a sense of excitement of what is to come.

It begins on the first tee box staring down a majestic par four unfolding beneath your feet. Throughout the day drive position is critical to getting the proper angle into the crafty green complexes. The first Kodak moment of the day is on the second tee as you look down a pitched fairway split by a deep bunker in the center and a massive sand waste area defining the left. You can just make out the tiny green perched on the hill protected by a lone pot bunker. It won't occur to you yet but the bunkering throughout this course around the green complexes is very selective. In contrast there are a number of the oversized Fazio waste areas cordoning the holes but the greenside bunkering is very tactical and can be avoided by carefully planning the line of approach.

After the stern start, the course takes a decided change in character with a devilishly clever short approach and putt par three at the fourth. From the elevated tee a berm masks the front of the green and makes this a bait and switch pitch since you cannot see the landing surface. Camera time again for the spectacular view off the tee on this next par five. All the three-shot holes at Black Diamond are about shot positioning as the serpentine fairways and the adjacent bunkering and hollows give you plenty of options negotiating a path to the green.

What follows is a couple of Irish hide-and-seek par fours where the creative use of the topography will leave you uncomfortable blind tee shots and approaches that require confident visualization. One of my

favorites of the day is the Redan par three 8th which characteristically calls for right-to-left ground control of your hybrid or long iron after landing on the front of the green to feed to the day's pin. This side closes with a dogleg right par five, similar to the fifth, but the addition of water menacing the tee ball landing area makes the penalty for wayward right flight much more definitive. This is one of only two incidents of water in play all day, a rarity at Florida courses that often feel like Venice.

The inward half starts much like the opening nine with a sweeping downhill tee shot to a generous landing area. The green complex on this par four is very tricky in that it is a wavy low shelf that angles back to the left against your approach line. If you have a soft draw and the confidence to land it short and feed it on this may be the only way to get a ball to stay on this green. The eleventh is one of the coolest holes of the day. A massive ocean of waste sand in the nook of the dogleg suggests you play your tee shot into the wide berth of the left side of the landing area. In reality it is better to hug your tee shot as close to the waste area as you can since there is no angle at the narrow table top green from the left side of the fairway and a deep hollow with two embedded bunkers protects this approach line. One more gentle dogleg right remains. Standing on the 12th green Fazio has lulled you into a sense of nervous security anticipating what is just over the next hill.

As you climb up the stairs from the cart park and step onto the 13th tee an exhilarating rush followed by a sense of vertigo overwhelms you. Standing on the edge of the canyon peering across an 80-foot chasm the sirens are beckoning you to play across to a safe green haven sprawled on the other side. It becomes very clear that the next five holes will be as much a test of emotional control as golf aptitude. There is no choice but to strap on the seat belt, take the loose change out of your pockets, sing the calming lyrics of the Joni Mitchell song, and focus on the grassy patches called landing areas as the next five holes traverse the deep crevices of the limestone quarry.

Since the rotation around, into, and out of the quarry is counter clockwise it would seem to favor right-to-left ball flight. You can then aim over land and turn the ball back into the approach areas, but overcooking any shot means more fodder for the trolls below so give yourself a wee bit more on the right as you plot your shot lines.

The tee shot on the 13th is probably the easiest play you will have to make over these next five holes. The carry should not be more than 150 yards and if you can find the center spine of the hour glass shaped green there is 54 yards of depth to work with. The par five that follows begins a corkscrew path across the top rim of the quarry and drops considerably on the approach shot to a green complex hanging on the edge. Long or left is no good.

From the 15th tee you get the full drama of this celestial depression peering down a tapered fairway wending it's way to the canyon floor where the green seems to shimmer next to crystal blue Black Diamond Lake. There is no room for error on either side of his hole from tee to green. It may occur to you after putting out that the last two holes simulate the reverse flush vortex of toilets from Down Under.

That was the easy part because the last two of the quarry holes are really difficult. Hauled back up to a tee box about two stories below the canyon rim and your task is to bite off as much as you can chew with a drive that must carry across the emptiness and clear the edge of the quarry wall on the other side. From there it is a long tightrope walk approach to a 53-yard sliver of a green dangling over the abyss. The last par three is excruciatingly difficult as you carry a fairway metal from a perch tee box across the troll terrarium to an anvil

shaped green wedged into a squash court with stone walls about 50 feet below. Any tee shot off line faces an ignominious fate and your scorecard will suffer accordingly.

Once you emerge from the canyon to the 18th tee you feel like you exited the decompression chamber. The final challenge of the day is a wrap around par five that requires your full attention. Once your drive is in play carefully consider where the second shot has to land among an array of grass moguls and sandy depressions. Be aggressive, you want a short club in hand for the approach into a tiny green with serious undulations. Putting out for a par will render a deep sigh of relief considering the exhilarating joy ride you have been through the last hour or so.

The Quarry Course is not an easy one to get on since it is part of a private 45-hole golf facility, the centerpiece of an expensive housing development. If it takes some arm twisting to get access to the place it is well worth it to get a chance to play one of Tom Fazio's most original creations described in detail in the hole-by-hole descriptive below.

Hole-By-Hole: (Dark Gray/Green)

#1 Par 4 382/366 yards

The first of many Wows of the day. This dogleg par four tumbles below your feet from the high teeing ground sweeping down to the landing area on the right and then back up the hill to a green tucked to the left. The optimum position is right center at the base of the upslope looking back to the left. Missing left off this tee puts you in a grass depression just left of the fairway with limited visibility of the green. The narrow putting surface is perched on top of the hill with a couple of bunkers protecting the front left. If you bail to the right coming in there are grassy hollows off the right of the green. Left and long are mortuary city.

#2 Par 4 367/345

Wow again-another stunning visual size par four that drops from the high tee to landing areas on either side of a large bunker in the center of the fairway. The view from the tee is dominated by a massive sand waste areas well left of the fairway that should not be in play for anything but a snapping turtle hook. I like the left side of the center bunker to a flat landing area that is the shortest route to the green-there is another set of grass depressions off the left of the fairway that will make the approach very challenging if you miss the fairway. The right side of the landing area is a longer carry and gives you a side hill lie for your second shot-that is no bargain. Shot up the hill is all carry to a small green set on a 4 to 10 diagonal behind one deep pot bunker buried in the face of the front left hill that holds the green. The approach sets up for a nice draw aimed at the front right edge and working to the left on the ground. Looking back up the hole from the green makes you appreciate the artistry of this design.

#3 Par 4 422/400

If you have survived the opening holes with confidence it is about to be tested here. This is the hardest hole on this side and will demand judgment and patience to delimit any damage. The drive seems simple enough-aim to center between the bunkers up the hill. First bunker on the right is reachable so a nice draw should move you off that trouble. The second is straight up the hill to a bunkerless shallow tiered green. You are hitting a long club so pick plenty of stick to handle the elevation change and reach the putting surface in the air. Once on the green be aware of the steep pitch from back to front-you want to avoid the indignity of a three putt because your first putt may be for par.

#4 Par 3 132/112

From here through nine you are now getting to the technical part of the course and it can be a place where you make some good scores and store some provisions for the impending winter on the back nine. A wonderful short pitch par three to a semi-blind green below you-seems so simple yet..... The two bunkers on the right are mostly distraction in that they are no where near the front edge of the green. You have to visualize the landing area since there is a berm that runs across the foot of the hill and masks the front of the green. One club less for the elevation change into this very small green that is surrounded by not so subtle swales. Three is a must here so just pick the center distance and trust your judgment.

#5 Par 5 522/496

Third Wow in the first five holes, this par five is a jaw dropper from the tee. The landing area below is much more generous than it appears and it leans hard from the left so it will feed most drives to the right edge of the fairway adjacent to the first long bunker you see on the right. From there you hit it about 190 up the hill to a landing area at 110 wedged between a ferocious bunker on the right and a major grass depression on the left. It is essential to be on flat short grass for the approach. A lawn dart is required to hold this putting surface so you want a short club and a clean lie to play into this green. This is a teeny table top green raised from the chipping area to the left and fronted by a deep pot bunker in the face of the hill short right. First of two very good birdie opportunities in the next three holes so take the opportunity if it presents itself.

#6 Par 4 429/390

Hitch up the trousers you need a full carry on this tee ball to clear the hill and get a look at the this green. Anything shorter will be a blind shot to a very undulating reverse kidney-shaped green protected by a deep grass bunker front right. There is a chipping area left of the green that looks up the fall line so that is the place to miss on the approach. Making par here is a chore-most likely to happen because of an adept pitch and a putt.

#7 Par 4 309/270

This is my favorite hole on the front side-the distance is enticing but you have to be very precise on both shots to get a good scoring chance. Another visual with lots of distractions. I like driver on this tee aimed just over the edge of the tree line that hides the bunker on the right. This should leave you inside 75 yards looking a green with a serious tilt toward you surrounded by six very punishing bunkers. A little hook pitch checking into

the slope of the green and turning left toward the day's pin is what the doctor prescribes. A very fun hole that will drive big hitters batty.

#8 Par 3 195/172

A spectacular unbalanced visual from a high tee across a low area flanked by a waste bunker on the left to a green slightly below the teeing ground. It does not seem to play any shorter as a result of the elevation change. Two very deep bunkers on the front left are an unforced error. The proper shot is a gentle draw starting at the right edge of this wavy potato chip and working up the slope. How this can be handicapped the third easiest hole on this side seems inconceivable to me.

#9 Par 5 484/429

Standing on the tee of the home hole of this side will make your knees quiver. A dramatic par five unfolds in front of you with a very intimidating tee shot followed by a huge climb from the landing area to the green. Hit a surgical tee shot down the left edge of a generous landing area below. The lay up shot is about 200 to your choice of fairways-the one on the right is framed by a long diagonal bunker beginning at about 80 yards. This gives you a longer shot but a much better angle to a 44 yard deep green set on a 4 to 10 diagonal to the fairway. From the left fairway you have to hoist a four story blind short iron over hill on the left and a couple of pot bunkers you cannot see. This shallow green has serious slope in it working down the diagonal so leave it below the hole and take two putts and run. Take a few minutes for some meditation before you head to the back side-this was just a preamble to the real drama of the day.

#10 Par 4 435/409

The back nine begins with a good bit of challenge-two of the first three holes on this side are among the three highest ranked handicap holes on this nine. As you can tell by the distance this is a full measure challenge so you are going to have to hit it solid on two shots to have any chance at a par to open this side. You want to hit your tee ball to the center of the driving area adjacent to the large bunker set in the corner of this dogleg right. The landing area tilts to the left which is good because anything too tight to the right and short will have the stand of trees on the corner of the dogleg blocking the path to the green set to the right. Because it is a long club in they wisely give you an open access in front of this narrow wavy hourglass green that is protected on the right by a deep bunker and left by a serious grass depression. If your angle allows I like a draw off the right edge of the green feeding up the opening. This is a very difficult par to make.

#11 Par 4 356/340

Another Wow here-kind of the flipped evil twin sister to #2. Visually this hole is an eye full-very dramatic. The huge sand waste area on the right is intimidating-you need to concentrate on hitting your drive at the second bunker on the left with a slight fade to follow the line of the fairway. That would leave a short club left into a narrow ribbon of a green that sits perched astride two strip pot bunkers on the left. Only play in is a draw at the right edge turning up the green that says out of those pots. Just a very cool hole to play.

#12 Par 4 417/378

Last hole before you enter the troll sanctuary so focus and make a par here. The driving area is slightly below you so hit a hard one up the left center and watch it tumble a bit right when it gets on the ground. The second is a fade into a green set slightly to the right above a couple of clinging bunkers. Green is deep enough to handle an approach shot with some roll out.

#13 Par 3 183/168

Like the back nine at Tralee you are about to enter the mystical beyond so tighten your seat belt and your resolve. Standing at the edge of the quarry on this tee box you get a sense of vertigo.....let it pass with a few deep breaths. The carry across the 80 foot chasm looks ominous but this is actually the easiest shot you will hit in the next five holes. The bunkers that frame this deep hourglass green help delineate the target. The green is on level to the tee so if there is no wind pick a club for the distance, aim at the left edge of the green and trust your swing. You really have to stub your toe big time to end up below. Probably the biggest challenge on this hole is two putting the 54 yard deep bit of short grass. Make a par here to start the quarry romp and you will feel good about yourself.

#14 Par 5 469/444

This boomerang around the quarry is in the risk reward category but I am shying away from the risks which can be terminal. A slight draw, emphasis on slight since less than slight is troll food, aimed at the bunker set into the hill on the right will leave you with a look up the hole. Now about 190ish aimed at the rock on the right will leave you on a plateau with about a 110 yard look down to the green below set on the canyon's edge. From there you get a great opportunity to throw a lawn dart at the target below for a chance at a birdie.

#15 Par 4 350/314

The pressure ratchets up over the next three-little or no room for error on any shot if you are going to maintain your scorecard. The Joni Mitchell hole, from a high tee you will plunge into the canyon, dropping one from the sky to the canyon floor below. In spite of what looks like a narrow landing area I like the driver aimed at the bunker in the hillside on the right with a draw that will work it's way well up the hole leaving a short club into a cape style green. The green sits on a 4 to 10 angle edged with rocks and protective bunkering between the green and the water on the left. Missing long or right is no bargain so you have to play this approach with conviction working it in from the right to the pin of the day.

#16 Par 4 341/321

This one is literally like living on the edge-a very narrow four par that hugs the cliff line all the way around. There is no way to really play safe so you have to pick a shot line with enough club to carry and trust it. The drive is from a tee box below the edge of the canyon wall so you have to hoist one over the bunker you see in the face of the wall to a landing area just inside 170 yards. Good news is that the landing area above widens and is receptive to your ball, the bad news is anything short is either embedded in the bunker or repelled to the canyon floor. If you have succeeded on the first shot you now have a very delicate play at a 53 yard long ribbon of tightly mowed grass that hangs precipitously above the canyon. There is a big hill just right of the green that will attract your attention as an aiming point-a draw off of that will work nicely up the green.

Leaving it on that hill is another story. Much like #13 the trick is to two-putt once you are on the putting surface. It can be a couple of zip codes to traverse.

#17 Par 3 204/191

The last one in the quarry section is a dilly. Your tee box is adjacent to the 13th green so it is along the top edge of the quarry. The green is below you, though I did not sense the club is any less than the distance, and wedged into the side of the canyon wall on the left. Besides carrying the abyss there are a couple of nasty grass depressions short and right of the green from which an up and down is impossible. This is a draw starting over those depressions turning into the wall of the canyon. Green is a the shape of a bicycle seat widening as it goes deep. It has a spine across the center and rolls away from you toward the back as a result. This is a fantastic shot to watch as it drops from the high tee to the green below.

#18 Par 5 476/450

Don't let your guard down just because the trolls are now behind you. There is work to do to get to the house without any further damage. Drive is straight away on this narrow dogleg left par five-beware the houses on the left of the driving area are OB. Your second shot is the technical one you have to hit a long club into the dogleg left across a sand transition to a landing area buffeted by a long sandy waste area up the left. The green is another narrow one set on a 4 to 10 diagonal just above the back end of the waste area. Bunkers to the right of the green are no bargain either. The only safe miss is long leaving a pitch from a grassy area back down the green.