

GolfNationUSA

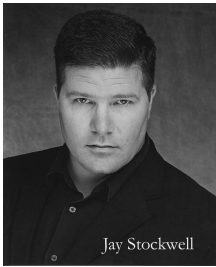
DISMAL RIVER GOLF COURSE, MULLEN NEBRASKA

Designer: Jack Nicklaus

Rating: 77 Slope: 149 Distances at Tips: 7457 Yards

DISMAL DAZZLES UNDER NEW OWNERSHIP

Mullen, Nebraska, June 6th 2010. I have just departed one of the most unique places on earth! The Dismal River Golf Club in Mullen, Nebraska. I know, I know, where the heck is Mullen Nebraska? I can promise you it's not easy to find. I grew up in Nebraska and it took me a few minutes to find it on a map. Here is a hint, find North Platte on a map. Push your finger due north until you find Hooker County. Then you will see two tiny fingers of the river called the Dismal River. You are there. Here is an aerial view: <http://tiny.cc/Oe46x>



GolfNationUSA

Official Course Review

By Jay Stockwell

Founder, GolfNationUSA

stockwell.jay@gmail.com

Overall Rating:



I was invited by new owners Dick and Chris Johnston, a Jackson Hole, Wyoming based father/son team. My first question at dinner with Chris was: Why would you buy a golf course in the middle of nowhere in the worst economic recession in 75 years? His response: "Ask me that question again in 24 hours" and then he held forth with one of the most compelling dissertations on what a real golf experience means, loaded with insight and understanding of real golfers and how to make a project of this type work. I will try to convey his insight by sharing my own experience, but I can tell you now: DISMAL DAZZLES UNDER NEW OWNERSHIP.

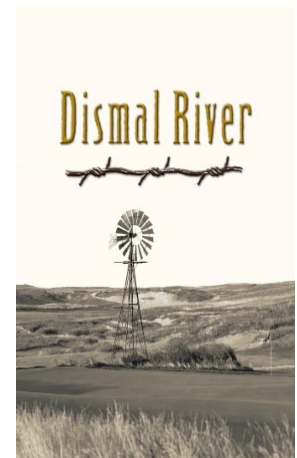
GETTING THERE AND ARRIVAL

Fly in is either Denver or North Platte, but either way there is a bit of a drive. But the drive is the first part of the experience. My brother, Guy Stockwell of Denver, joined me for the trip. We drove up I-76, then I-80 and proceeded north up Highway 92 to the legendary Highway 2 into Mullen. From Ogallala to Mullen is one of the most beautiful drives in America.

The rolling Sand Hills of western Nebraska are a grass and sand covered moonscape shrouded in the biggest sky you have ever seen. Remember to wave at passing cars. Everyone waves in Nebraska. Then, thinking you are there when you arrive in Mullen, you learn that you still have another 17 miles to go into the hinterland. You will doubt yourself as you drive the one lane 17 mile county road despite the fact that you may have as many as two GPS units telling you that you are on the right track. Eventually you breathe a sigh of relief (as you have been out of cell coverage for 30 minutes) as the clubhouse rises out of the moonscape.

If you have a small private aircraft there is a grass strip within seven miles of the clubhouse. Larger private aircraft can be accommodated in North Platte. The club also provides references for private aviation services.

When you arrive you are greeted by PGA Professional Greg Dennis. Greg is an affable smart pro who is most concerned with enabling a wonderful golf experience. Any time a group is gathered Greg is there, gently getting the group moving in the right direction. The check-in is painless and you get your first look at an amazing clubhouse. You are immediately issued a cart for the duration of your visit and dispatched to deposit your personal effects in your lodge, which is at once rugged and luxurious. Clubs stay at the clubhouse. From that moment on the staff knows who you are. The feeling you come away with is unpretentious and relaxed.



DINNER AND CLUBHOUSE TOUR

The clubhouse was described as the “ultimate man cave.” The large dining room is surrounded by a member bar, huge theatre room with 12 full recliners (great for watching the weekend tournament after your round), billiard room, card room and a large patio with a statement fire pit.

This event was a member guest event. Each member had his own designated table with his friends. After dinner, members adjourned to the bar and patio; they both teamed with activity and conversation as members shared stories of the day. Dress code is very relaxed. Whether a member was a CEO or professional athlete all mixed easily as they shared their common passion for the game and this particular course.

One key ingredient to a successful venue of this type is great food. After two dinners, lunches and breakfasts I can tell you Chef Michael and his team did not disappoint. Each meal had a western element but the common thread was outstanding food and very good service. Someone looking carefully would have been able to point out evidence that the team was in its 10th day of the season as service kinks were being managed on the fly, but the average guest was happy as a clam about both the clubhouse and the food and wouldn't have noticed.

THE COURSE, AH THE COURSE

The luxurious accommodations, the clubhouse, the camaraderie and the food are all wonderful, but make no mistake - the experience at Dismal River is about the course.

I believe this golf course has the potential to be considered a top ten course in the world. This is links golf at its finest.

The course is as challenging as it is beautiful.

You start by wondering if you are lost again, because the course is over a mile away from the clubhouse. There is a remote clubhouse called Jack's Shack



after its designer Jack Nicklaus. At times Nicklaus seems diabolical or genius in his design with your view varying as a function of your handicap. Any play outside the first cut can be punitive. Invest in the forecaddie and caddie. It makes an otherwise potentially frustrating round tolerable for a high handicapper like me.

Getting on the green in regulation makes one feel a strong sense of accomplishment and the occasional birdie leaves one feeling 10 years younger. I experienced both despite the howling wind.



Its length, long carries, tight fairways, ever changing elevations, waste bunkers that are bigger than some states and wind that pierces the newly acquired Dismal windbreaker rendering it useless, combined to make the player genuflect to the game they love so much. But that humbling experience is offset by the pure beauty of a stunning golf course carved into the shifting sands of western Nebraska.

The Nicklaus greens were in great shape and equally challenging thanks to superintendant Jagger Mandrell, a humble Kansas State perfectionist. Experienced players used the contours to their advantage. Less experienced players struggled to navigate a par three green with a bunker in the middle. I had a 60 foot lag that fell a foot short of the steep drop that likely would have ended with the ball off the green even if I had hit the shelf at the perfect speed. Did I mention diabolical?

Some green side bunkers are three stories deep. I did everything possible to avoid them.

I will not disclose my score - writer's prerogative. But I can tell you that the consensus was that in the wind the course was bearing all of its teeth.

Gone to the Dogs

One absolutely unique facet of the trip was playing golf with two Bernese Mountain Dogs: Lydia and Pollux. Owner of the course and the dogs five handicapper Chris Johnston loves five things in life: 1) Lydia; 2) Pollox; 3) The Game of Golf; 4) Chef Michael ;and 5) Notre Dame. You can see why at right.



Answering My Own Question

My opening question to Chris is now clear, I get it. The Dismal River Golf Club is one of the most unique golf experiences in the world. Now that I am tucked into my San Clemente, California home I can feel the tug of the Dismal River experience

How Best to Enjoy

Your first trip to Dismal should be a guy's trip if your wife or partner is not a golfer. While the accommodations will satisfy the most discerning palette, there is little to do for those not engaged in golf. There is no spa, pool or tennis court. This is a golf resort. However, I will, over time, bring my wife so she too can experience the sheer beauty of the place.

If you are a golfer and you have ever done a golf trip you must add the Dismal River Golf Course to the list of your destinations. For information on memberships and opportunities to play please contact PGA Professional Greg Dennis at greg@dismalriver.com