

Scenery a 'hazard' at Quartz

STORY & PHOTOS BY JENK JONES JR.

If you find yourself playing slowly at Quartz Mountain Golf Course, blame it on ogling the scenery.

Or if you hit a terrible slice on either of two holes, tell your playing partners you were shooting for Old Texas.

The course in far southwestern Oklahoma (17 miles north of Altus) is part of Quartz Mountain State Park. It is flanked by massive granite ridges rising hundreds of feet above the prairie and providing stunning backdrops from the course's tees, fairways and greens.

Two holes flank the North Fork of the Red River, which today separates Kiowa County (in which the course is located) from Greer County (where most park facilities are found).

But a century ago, while the golf course would have been in Oklahoma Territory, the



Mountains provide dramatic setting for course.

land across the stream was part of enormous Greer County, Texas. In 1896 a long dispute was resolved when the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the Prairie Dog Town Fork — not the North Fork — was the Red's main course and hence the boundary. Thus did Oklahoma gain sovereignty over its substantial southwestern corner.

If you can ignore the mountains and the history, you can enjoy an interesting

and often challenging golf course.

A new pro shop will open with ceremonies July 12-14. A driving range and expanded putting clock will become available at the same time. All current holes will adopt different numbers, which are the ones used in this story.

The old course played 34-37 with four par-5s on the back nine and just two par-4s. The front nine was 600-plus yards shorter.

The new lineup plays 35-36. The difference between nines is reduced to less than 400 yards; the course is now 6,595 from the blues, 6,166 from whites and 5,706 from reds, although head pro Gene Abernathy says he may add two tees to boost the championship distance.

Each side has three par-3s under the new alignment. The back nine has three par-5s, one more than the front. The back also has an unusual order — consecutive par-5s at 13 and 14 and par-3s at 16 and 17.

Each hole has a name. These include Crooked, Illusion, Headwind, Blind, Forever and Sunset. One is called Mountain View, but all could claim that. There is just one Dam, but many holes are within sight of the Lake Altus Dam. Bamboo is a slight exaggeration, but that one has several clumps of cane.

"Forever" — No. 5 in the new alignment — is for the unbutton-your-shirt crowd. It plays 600 yards from the tips, 586 from the whites, 532 from the reds. Abernathy notes the fairway squeezes down halfway to the green, challenging bold second shots.

"Sunset" is just that, the 18th hole and headed due west. It is a par-5 of 545 yards from the blues.

"Headwind" is a long par-4 (440 from the blues) into the prevailing southwest breezes.

Several holes are quite tight off the tee. And some have strategic trees in or crowding fairways so golfers have to make over-or-around decisions. The river

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is to the right of Nos. 6 and 7, especially wooing an errant drive on the latter.

Fairways are Bermuda, greens bent grass. The course has an in-ground irrigation system. Fairway markers are 100 and 200 yards from center-green, posts 150. Mounding adds character to a layout that largely is flat.

Even after a severe drought (one inch of rain between September and Memorial Day) the course had plenty of grass for play, with greens in excellent shape. Recent rains have helped. Although the rough is light, trees, bushes and in places underbrush punish strayed shots. The course "only has about eight bunkers" but more will be added.

For a western Oklahoma course, there are many trees. Abernathy says these include cottonwood, American elm, mesquite, cedar, black locust and pine, and he and superintendent Kevin Mallow plan to add more. Wildflowers and desert flora enhance the picture.

Nature also provides wildlife: turkey, deer, quail, rabbits, raccoons, skunks, coyotes, roadrunners.

Abernathy says the new facility, which has large windows for good views of the mountains, is going to let him run a full-service pro shop, with clothing, clubs, bags, hats, shoes and the works. Snacks,



The tree-lined par-5 14th at Quartz Mountain.

drinks and sandwiches are available; a grill will be built "eventually."

The range and putting green serve for lessons and clinics.

Greens fees are \$8 weekdays and \$10.50 weekends and holidays. Gasoline-powered carts are available.

Tee times may be reserved for weekends and holidays (405-563-2520). Some are set aside for persons staying at the park, which has a lodge, cabins, camping and RV sites along or near the lake.

Abernathy, who moved to Quartz in early May, is excited about his new charge. With an expanded lodge due to be built starting next February, he sees substantial growth ahead.

For information and reservations regarding Quartz Mountain State Park, call the state tourism division (1-800-654-8240) or the park direct (405-563-2424).



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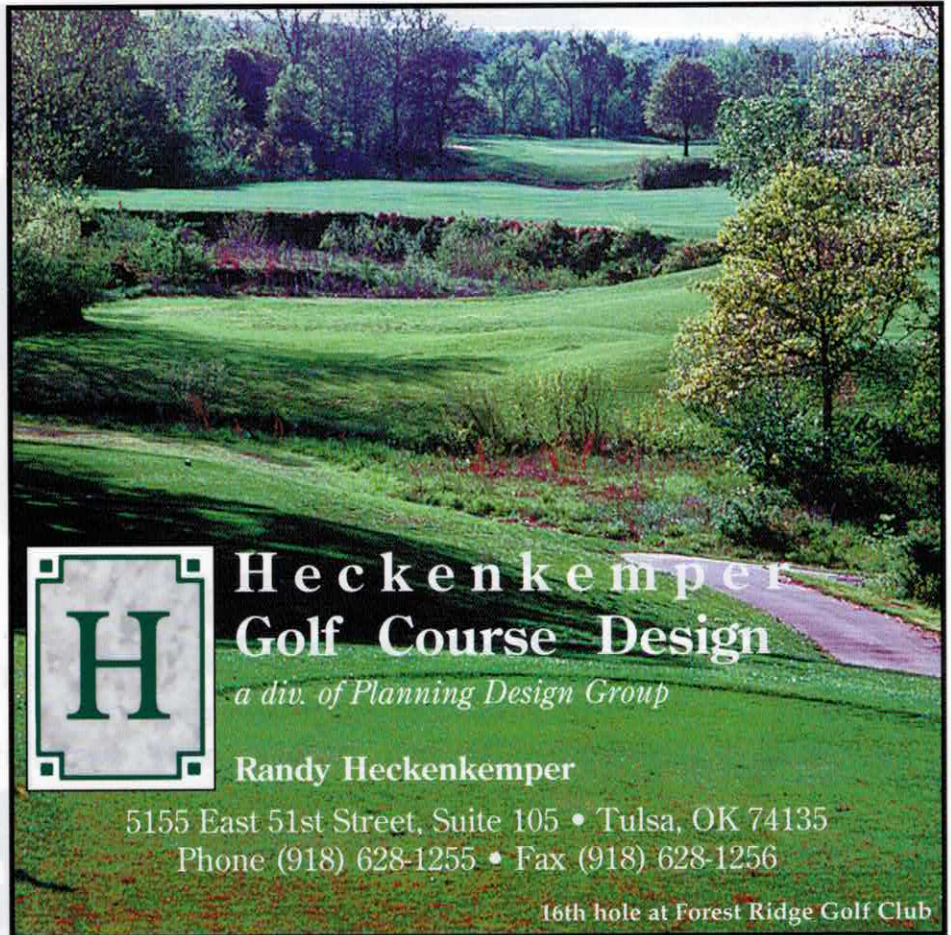
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