



My Drift

Title: Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail

Written By: Jerry D. Petersen

Date: 10 Sep 2024

Article Number: (470-2024-29)



The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail is a collection of championship caliber golf courses, designed by Robert Trent Jones, Sr., distributed across the state of Alabama, as part of investments by the Retirement Systems of Alabama. The Trail started with 378 holes at eight sites throughout the state but has grown to 468 holes at eleven sites.

Championship 18 Hole Green Fees Start at \$65 plus tax (prices vary by Trail site and season) Cart Fees (Per Person, Per Round) 18 Holes Championship - \$20.00 All prices are subject to change without notice. Listed prices do not include tax.

Some General Alabama Info

Largest cities: Alabama has 3 cities with a population over 100,000. They are: Birmingham (Pop. 198,000) is in the north central region of Alabama.

Mobile (Pop. 185,000) is a port city on Alabama's Gulf Coast.

Tuscaloosa (Pop. 111,000) is in west-central Alabama. This is home to the University of Alabama – You know the one that has a great football team every year.

Airports: Alabama has 2 international airports and several regional airports.

- Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport.
- Huntsville International Airport.
- Mobile Regional Airport.
- Montgomery Regional Airport.
- Dothan Regional Airport.
- Northwest Alabama Regional Airport

Plan to play at all 11 sites on The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail

Well, if you are coming from Hawaii, you will need to plan on a two- week trip because there are other things to do besides play golf. Need to fly into the Birmingham-Shuttlesworth International Airport because it is the most centrally located airport. Recommend starting on the north end of Alabama and working your way south to Mobile where you might want to stay an extra day or two to visit the casinos and beaches on the Gulf of Mexico.

You can fly out of Mobile to a major airport where you can get a flight back to Hawaii.

Have fun!

Courses and locations

The Shoals (Muscle Shoals/Florence)

The Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail at The Shoals is home to two 18-hole championship courses and sits high above Wilson Lake on the Tennessee River.

The Fighting Joe course at The Shoals was the first Trail course to break 8,000 yards, measuring some 8,092 yards from the black tees. Travel + Leisure Golf named Fighting Joe one of the top new courses in 2004 for good reason. Long-hitters here will experience a test of champions, but from the correct tee box, all players will enjoy world-class golf.

The second course, the Schoolmaster (named for President Woodrow Wilson, who was responsible for getting Wilson Dam built and was also known as "The Schoolmaster" of politics), opened in 2005. It's hard to beat the beauty that the 18th hole holds on the high bluffs over the river, but the waterfall guarding the 2nd green sure comes close.



The Shoals

Hampton Cove (Huntsville)

The Northern gateway to the Trail is Hampton Cove in Huntsville, a 54-hole facility with terrain that drastically changes from one side of the property to the other.

The Highlands Course is one of the most picturesque and playable courses on the Trail. Long, waving grasses frame dramatically, rolling terrain and beautiful bent grass greens.

Completely different from the Highlands is the River Course, the only Robert Trent Jones layout in the world designed without a single bunker. The River Course is a throwback to the way courses were built long ago, where dirt was merely pushed up to create the greens and tees, leaving all else, including massive oak trees, as is.

The Short Course is open and links-like, with water in play on 11 holes. It is a great venue for golfers of all skill levels and alternating tees allow golfers to hit every club in their bag.



Hampton Cove

Silver Lakes (Gadsden/Anniston)

Relax in the beauty of Northeast Alabama's stunning landscape as you explore 36 holes of forests, wetlands, grasslands and dramatic elevation changes at Silver Lakes. The Heartbreaker, Backbreaker, Mindbreaker, and Short Course provide challenging and scenic varieties of holes to play.

Surrounded by the Appalachian foothills and Lee's Lake, Silver Lakes features the most unique and aptly named courses on The Trail and all 36 greens boast beautiful and lightning-quick Champion Ultradwarf putting surfaces.

The Backbreaker nine features wide fairways, demanding greens and spectacular views of the surrounding foothills.

The Heartbreaker nine provides a unique mix of great golf holes and unequaled character. The final three holes showcase elevation changes and dramatic lake vistas.

The Mindbreaker is an unforgettable blend of shorter, elusive holes set in a beautiful sanctuary of woods, water, and wetlands.

The Short Course provides stunning vistas along a relaxing, yet sometimes demanding, trip around Lee's Lake.



Silver Lakes

Oxmoor Valley (Birmingham)

Centrally located in the state and just minutes from the newly revitalized downtown Birmingham area, the Oxmoor Valley facility was built on former mining land owned by U.S. Steel. Sculpted from the peaks and valleys of the Appalachians, the courses (two 18-holes and one 9-holes) offer scenic forests, numerous creeks, and challenging elevation changes.

The Ridge course offers numerous elevation changes, heavy tree cover, and is incredibly photogenic. As a tribute to the area's mining past, the green at the par-5 3rd hole is buttressed by a shelf of exposed shale rock.

Completely renovated in 2021, the Valley course features new tees, bunkers, and beautiful TifEagle greens. For those who have played the Valley in the past, there are also a few new surprises with complete redesigns on a few holes, including the previously notorious 18th hole.

The Backyard Course is meant to be played in about an hour by a foursome, the nine par 3 holes can play as short as 59 yards, with the longest at 132 yards. The Back Yard is a walking only golf course designed with no water hazards and just a handful of bunkers so that even the most novice golfer will enjoy their experience. Yes, it's a golf course, but nothing like anything we've ever built in over 30 years on Alabama's Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail.



Oxmoor Valley

Ross Bridge (Hoover/Birmingham)

Beautifully carved into the rolling terrain of Shannon Valley, the scope of this property will amaze even the most-traveled golfer. Ross Bridge was named one of the top golf resorts in North America by GOLF Magazine in 2019 and has been a favorite of Golf Digest editors for the past four years.

The course meanders through indigenous landscape and around the 259-room Renaissance Birmingham Ross Bridge Golf Resort & Spa. Ross Bridge is the fifth-longest course in the world but offers multiple tees for golfers of all levels. Symbolic of an old parkland-style course, ten holes play along the banks of two significant lakes connected by a spectacular waterfall dropping 80 feet between the 9th and 18th greens. A gristmill added to the waterfall reflects the history of this old mining site. The beauty and challenge of each hole leads many to believe there is not one signature hole but possibly eighteen.

From multiple high points on the course, you can see the picturesque view of the 9th and 18th holes with a waterfall tumbling between. The 7th hole offers a par five that traverses a ridge high above the rest of the course. The 9th will leave you speechless as it is time to decide how daring you are off the tee. A split fairway allows for either a short challenging route along the water's edge or opt for safer play leaving a longer, more difficult approach to the green. Regardless if it is a par 3, 4, or 5, Ross Bridge stands ready for your game!



Ross Bridge

Capitol Hill (Prattville/Montgomery)

Named the #2 public golf facility (three 18-hole courses) in the country by Golf World readers, Capitol Hill continues to get praise from golfers and golf writers alike. GOLF Magazine called the Judge course one of the 10 public courses in America worthy of hosting the U.S. Open. The Senator was named among the Top 10 New Courses in the nation by GOLF Magazine and hosts the LPGA's Epson Tour Guardian Championship each September.

The Judge offers stunning vistas along 200-acres amongst the backwaters of the Alabama River. The first tee lies 200 feet above the fairway overlooking the river and the Montgomery skyline. With 14 holes adjoining the water and a bulkheaded island green, the Judge is described as simply magnificent.

The Legislator, a more traditional course, plays in and out of pine trees and along a bluff overlooking the Alabama River. Enjoy the view riding down the "Sky Bridge" for six holes laid out in a native cypress swamp as you are led back up the bluff to finish the course.

The Senator, a Scottish-Links style course, holds more than 140 pot-hole bunkers and mounds 20 to 40 feet in height, hiding the cart path or any other hole from view. New TifEagle Ultradwarf greens were installed on the Senator Course in 2020.



Capitol Hill

Grand National (Auburn/Opelika)

Voted the #1 public golf facility in America by the readers of Golf World, The Grand National could be the single greatest natural site for golf in the U.S. Grand National is built on 600-acre Lake Saugahatchee with 32 of the 54 holes draped along its filigreed shores. National Village, a golfing community on the Trail, is adjacent to these courses.

Grand National stands out as perhaps the only property in the country to host the following events and tours: NCAA D1 Men's and Women's National Championships; LPGA Tour; Symetra Tour (LPGA); Korn Ferry Tour (PGA TOUR); PGA TOUR.

With 12 holes hugging the shore, Grand National's Lake course is every bit as scenic as the Links. Not only is the quartet of par threes on the Lake as good as any in the nation, the 230-yard, island green 15th may be the single prettiest hole on the Trail.

The cornerstone of the complex is the Links course. Featuring new tees, bunkers, and the very best TifEagle Ultradwarf greens, the Links is a definite must-play along the Trail. The par-4 18th is without a doubt the strongest finishing hole on the Trail. The drive must carry a corner of the lake, while the approach is played to a shallow pedestal green shored up by massive boulders.

The Short Course, not to be overshadowed by the two championship 18's, is a thing of beauty, with more than half the holes touching the lake. This 18-hole course of par 3's might be the finest anywhere in the country.



Grand National

Cambrian Ridge (Greenville)

Known by avid golfers as one of the most beautiful and challenging stops on the Trail, Cambrian Ridge in Greenville lies just 40 miles from Montgomery. It is well worth the ride for any golfer looking for 27 holes of jaw-dropping golf.

Since being named by Golf Digest as the third best new public course in America in 1994, Cambrian Ridge has not rested on its laurels. 2016 saw the culmination of a three-year total renovation of the original 27 championship holes set upon the most spectacular setting for golf in the state of Alabama.

The Canyon nine, carved from former hunting grounds where deer blinds remain nailed to the hardwood, is a thrilling stretch of target-style golf.

The Loblolly nine, with its gently rolling fairways, massive bunkers, cathedral-like pines and water-fronted greens, exudes a stately, Augusta-like quality.

The Sherling nine starts at the highest point in Butler County and drops to play along Sherling Lake before culminating with a dramatic climb on the final hole.



Cambrian Ridge

Highland Oaks (Dothan)

Located in the southeast corner of Alabama, Highland Oaks offers three 9-hole championship courses as well as the 9-hole Short Course. This 36-hole complex features some of the longest and most classically designed holes on the Trail. The regressing of the championship nines with TifEagle Ultradwarf greens was completed in 2020, as was the redesign of the practice area with new short game and putting greens. Each nine has a different personality.

The Highlands course is the core nine at Highland Oaks and is relatively open with several lakes in play on four of the nine holes, including a peninsula green.

The Magnolia nine is well-named: specimen magnolia trees dot the higher ground, which is reached via a 1,000-foot-long wooden bridge spanning a marsh.

Marshwood has been made famous (or notorious) by its behemoth par-5 sixth, which stretches to 701 yards from the tips.

The Short Course, a nine-hole par 3 designed to accommodate players of all levels, winds through massive pines and features 3 holes with water.



Highland Oaks

Magnolia Grove (Mobile)

The new Magnolia Grove features two renovated golf courses plus a short course. Each championship course received extensive upgrades in recent years. Golfers will find more "player friendly" qualities without compromising the integrity of Robert Trent Jones' original design.

Magnolia Grove was recently named one of the "Top 50 Public Courses" by Golf World Magazine readers. The Crossings and Falls courses are also listed in Golf Digest's "Places to Play" as two of the nation's Great Value courses and as "America's Top 50 Affordable Courses." The topography at Magnolia Grove features creeks, marshland, and lakes with each of the 54 holes carved through indigenous hardwood and pine.

The Crossings course, which has hosted both the LPGA Tour and the Korn Ferry Tour Championship, provides an open, parkland-type ambiance. Several water features and crushed oyster shell waste areas were added to provide an exciting new look. All holes feature the acclaimed Mini Verde Ultradwarf greens.

The renovated Falls Course reopened in October 2010, as the only par-71 golf course on the Trail. The Falls is characterized by large, liberally contoured Mini Verde greens and massive cloverleaf bunkers.

Golf Digest has named the Short Course at Magnolia Grove as the best par-3 course in America.



Magnolia Grove

Lakewood Club (Point Clear)

Lakewood Club's Dogwood and Azalea Courses at the Grand Hotel Golf Resort & Spa reflect the historic nature of the hotel property itself.

The Lakewood Club at the Grand Hotel enjoys breezes from the adjacent Mobile Bay while showcasing fairways winding through stands of towering Southern Pine and 200-year-old Live Oaks. The varying degree of difficulty promises a memorable golf experience for both the novice and the experienced golfer alike. With five sets of tees per hole, you can enjoy the beauty and challenge of Lakewood, regardless of your skill level.

The Dogwood course, which recently hosted the 59th U.S. Women's Senior Amateur Championship, was completely renovated in 2018, while the Azalea course was renovated and reopened in November 2019. The Lakewood Club has been named several times to GOLF Magazine's "Best Golf Resorts in America." Proper golf attire (collared shirts, dress pants or other appropriate apparel) is required at Lakewood Club. No jeans or t-shirts.

The Azalea course gets its name from the azalea bushes that line many of the course's fairways. The 15th hole is a beautiful par-3 with a carry over water framed by ancient live oak trees.

The Dogwood course winds in and around marshes and features a spectacular collection of par-3 holes. The green on the seventeenth hole is surrounded by water on three sides, so the tee shot must find the green.



Lakewood Club

Well, that's the 11 sites on the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail. You real golfers are probably on your cell phones making travel arrangements right now. If I was a better golfer and much younger, I would like to go play golf there - it sounds like a beautiful place and a lot of fun.

Bigdrifter44@gmail.com

Bigdrifter.com

NOTE:

Back in 2006 when I started writing these articles one of my goals was to write something about all 50 states – General information, a city, an event, or maybe about a scenic site. Well, 18 years later with my 470th article, I have completed that task. I might have a few bad habits, but you can't say I'm not persistent. The two states I have written about the most as you can probably guess are Hawaii with 36 articles and Utah with 18 articles.

I have also been tracking major Hawaii Headlines for the entire 18 years.

My current project is to read the Bible (it's about time don't you think?) and write something about each of the 39 books in the Old Testament and the 27 books in the New Testament.