

Nebraska



Dismal River

Nebraska. In the minds of many golfers thinking about ‘must visit’ locales it likely has the same general appeal as Alaska.

This mindset was prevalent (and rightly so) two decades ago. But with the advent of Sand Hills Golf Club back in 1995, the magnificent (and ultra-private) Ben Crenshaw/Bill Coore creation in Mullen, just a wide spot in the road well north of I-80, those who love the game and its special venues have been beating a path to the heartland. The ‘build it and they will come’ mentality has spawned a number of compelling destinations far from the madding crowd, and for that matter, any sizeable interstate or airport.



Signature Cabin via [Dismal River](#)

But there is good news for the traveling golfer: the memorably named [Dismal River Golf Club](#), a rustic and unique 36-hole facility on 3,000 acres, also in Mullen, welcomes guests on a one-time-only basis. In fact, this private club encourages visitors to not only play both courses (the original Jack Nicklaus, and it's younger sibling, designed by Tom Doak) but to spend a night or two in one of its fifty-six finely appointed cabins. This way the visiting golfer enjoys the sum total of the Dismal (and by no means dismal) experience. Not to mention the venue is too far afield for anyone outside of North Platte, a town of 25,000 souls roughly in the west-central area of the Cornhusker State, to consider as a day trip.

Most golfers have never experienced a full six or eight minute ride to the first tee, nearly a mile from the clubhouse to the course's starting points. But that's the epic grandeur and the vastness of property that are hallmarks of golf in the sand hills area of Nebraska.

Chris Johnston is the majority shareholder and CEO of Dismal River, and has held the reins for about seven years. "Part of our appeal, and also the challenge, is we are located about five hours drive from Omaha, and almost that distance from the Denver Airport." North Platte, which offers connecting flights from Denver, is about ninety minutes drive.

The appeal of this remote area comes down to two main factors: The rolling, endless nature of the magnificent prairie land, stretching untold miles in virtually every direction, and the amazing quality of the soil. It is firm, quick draining, and ideal terrain for golf. In fact, the naturally occurring sub strata of the soil in the sand hills area is practically identical to USGA-specified greens mix.



The White Course via [Dismal River](#)

The White Course, a decade old and designed by Jack Nicklaus, is a real roller coaster ride, according to Johnston. The golf course is rugged, lots of elevation change, with natural looking bunkers, tall fescue roughs and dramatic green contours all in keeping with the vastness of the surrounding landscape. The course also features defunct windmills and cattle rubs, hearkening back to the property's ranchland roots. "It is an epic experience, playing through and across some very hardy terrain," offers Johnston. "More than a few people have remarked it reminds them of Royal County Down in Ireland, which is generally regarded as one of the world's best courses."



The Red Course via [Dismal River](#)

The Red Course, designed by Tom Doak, is still a toddler at three years old. Playing from a high point on the property down about three hundred feet to the namesake river, the course features generously proportioned fairways, and is routed on gentler terrain than its older sibling. The concluding holes are framed by three hundred foot bluffs as it winds towards the river, then back up towards the rustic

clubhouse. “For those who have never seen or visited a golf facility like ours, I would say it’s one of the coolest and most unforgettable inland golf experiences imaginable,” concludes Johnston. “This is a ‘bucket list,’ or connoisseur’s destination. Few who come are disappointed, and no one will forget it.”



via [Wildhorse Golf Club](#)

For those whose travel schedule doesn’t permit a foray to the sand hills, another fine option is [Wild Horse Golf Club](#) in Gothenburg, which is just off Interstate 80, about 180 miles west of Omaha. A fixture on many “best you can play” lists (as opposed to the private venues that dominate so many ‘best of’ lists) Wild Horse is a pleasantly arid experience, routed on mostly flattish terrain. (Not a water feature to be found, but the fairways are lined with unforgiving prairie grasses.) The steer skulls that serve as 150-yard markers remind golfers this minute outpost in the middle of the heartland was once the gateway to the west’s wide open spaces.