

Henbury – A Country Golf Course

Leaving a wretchedly wet and soaking Sydney behind, I have set out for a drier West to find a golf course that is nearly always (I saw flood photos here once) playable.

Golf writers often refer to courses they love as hidden gems. Henbury, at Kandos, on the way to Mudgee, is the whole treasure box for me. Designed by Arthur East in the early 30's it is worthy of heritage status in my book.

The layout at the foot of the Coomber Melon Range gives the golfer all the challenges, scenic delights and sheer variety they could wish. The sandstone bluffs of the Range overlook some of the holes in a truly inspiring fashion, and catch the moods of the passing hours in colour and shadow.

The first three holes complete what is a gentle promise of what is to come. Two are doglegs requiring some precision in your driving. An uphill 207 metre Par 3 tests your accuracy and your power. You know you're playing a real golf course around here.

The fourth takes off across some low dips and rising ground in a completely new direction. This is one of the delights of this course – you are led to find the holes; they are not at all apparent at first glance.

This is never more true of the fifth that introduces you to a totally different aspect of the layout. It is another blind tee shot to a curving fairway set in its own little valley and the hole tucked away down in its farthest reaches.

The next two Par 3 holes assert their own selves in the whole scheme. One is 195 metres to a ledge cut into a hill side; the other at 123 metres is pure fun. From an elevated tee you hit out into space and watch more or less breathlessly as your ball reaches its apex to begin its plummet. The answer to all your questions about club selection and shot making hangs in the balance. The result is dramatically delivered as ball and earth resoundingly meet.

The eighth, a demanding Par 5 that requires a drive well to the right but not too far lest trees or hazard interfere with your second, curves around a central hill which you have just negotiated in the previous three holes. It is also a favourite haunt of the kangaroos which breakfast and dinner on the fairways. A bounding roo is always an exciting bonus in a game of golf.

The ninth is set up as a strong drive right once again, this time to an elevated green that rejects everything less than an exact trajectory to its surface. Ten expects you to have your game sorted and does not tolerate anything less than a well-positioned drive to open up the green away from the left dogleg.

Eleven races away beside the Kandos-Rylstone Road with a glorious gum guarding the left. A low straight running drive is the ideal to a green that seems smaller than most. The twelfth is an uphill Par 3 followed by two parallel but very different Par fours that have their fair share of rolling slopes and ridges.

The grand-daddy of them all has been awaiting you at the fifteenth. This Par 5 plays far longer than its already substantial 544 metres because most of its fairway is forever

ascending to a dramatic peak that finally overlooks the green nestled below in a grove. Apart from its continual rising, this fairway also turns in an elongated bend to the right. It is a beauty!! Rarely will you get to sight the green for your third shot approach. Fortunately, no desperate rough threatens as you thread your shot over the skyline to where you think that flag resides.

Sixteen and seventeen maintain an intense pressure on your game playing over more undulating ground to pin point greens. The eighteenth brings you back to the clubhouse with, unusually, the green totally visible from the tee.

As a layout, Henbury will exceed your expectations because it takes you over such interesting terrain with a real regard for the rhythm of a golf round. Starting mildly, it has every intention of giving you a ride to remember which it delivers. You really need to keep thinking and use the chances to relax, as they present themselves. Pacing yourself was never more true than here.

The lovely trees on the course are worth observing. Weather-beaten pines, ancient and thriving gums, casuarinas and others all define the fairways and the central forested hill that the holes encircle. It is often totally soundless on this course because of its location off the beaten track. Golf in these surroundings on this course takes on that timelessness that is so rare these days.

All of this is the more remarkable when one understands that this club is almost entirely run by volunteers. The local veterans have a treasure here that they care for with a passion that is resilient and enduring. They deserve our deepest appreciation.

Peter Hume
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