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**COURSE REVIEW**

**Grand Bear golf course still one of Biloxi's star attractions for golfers**

By [Tim McDonald](#),  
National Golf Editor,  
Golf Publisher Syndications

SAUCIER, Miss. (June 1, 2007) — When the [Grand Bear golf course](#) opened in November of last year, more than a year after [Hurricane Katrina](#) barreled through, playing conditions were fine. All the debris had been cleared, the re-sodding was complete and there was nothing to prevent playing some small-ball.

The problem was there was no one to play it. The tourists weren't coming around, many of them mistakenly believing [Biloxi](#) was blown off the map.

So, Grand Bear lowered the green fees and opened the gates.

"A lot of locals played, and construction workers," Grand Bear Head Professional Mike Buckley said. "It was a lot of fun."

I'll tell you what else is a lot of fun: Playing Grand Bear on a Monday, when hardly anyone else is around. The course is currently open Wednesdays through Sundays because of the lingering, economic aftereffects of the storm, though officials hope that will change soon.

"There are only about 6,000 hotel rooms on the coast," said Buckley, who added business was picking up in the upcoming months. "We need about twice that. But, we're gaining on it."

Grand Bear is one of Biloxi's star attractions. It may not have the novelty of the [Mississippi Gulf Coast's](#) two, glitzy new openings, [Fallen Oak](#) and [The Preserve](#), or the history of [Great Southern](#), but this will always be a favorite of those who travel and play golf regularly in Biloxi, including myself.



Tim McDonald/GolfPublisher.com

The Biloxi Rivers make cameo appearances at Grand Bear from time to time.

water offset by sandy beaches.

The course itself takes up about 600 acres, with many of the fairways banked and with large surrounds around the greens, amidst the 1,750 acres of deep woods surrounding it.



Tim McDonald/GolfPublisher.com

Some of Grand Bear's bunkers are deep and penal.

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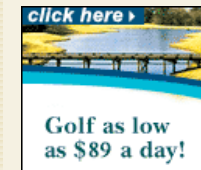
First of all, there's the setting. Grand Bear is about a 30- to 40-minute drive from the casinos and the crowds they attract. It's a lovely drive through the Mississippi back roads, and when you hit State Road 49, you still have a winding, six-mile drive through the Southern woods.

It's bordered by the DeSoto National Forest, so only the deer and turkey and occasional wild pig are there to laugh at your chili-dips. Instead of condos and homes, you have the truly lovely Biloxi River making cameo appearances, with its dark, flowing

"When they built it, they told [\(Jack\)](#)

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**Nicklaus**, "We've got 1,700 acres, take what you want," Buckley said. "And he did."

He chose wisely. The course rolls and dips, with swales and hollows, and has some decent elevation changes, atypical for this part of the world. It's an idyllic setting, with excellent movement on the

course which plays through pine and hardwood. There is water, but not a ton of it.

The fairways are tree-lined and wide, showing off one of Nicklaus' favorite themes: multiple routes to the green.

### The verdict on Grand Bear

I played the course with Buckley and two other assistant pros, Jeremy Davis and Ian Kahn. They marveled at the way Nicklaus could take a seemingly easy hole and make it subtly difficult — like the way some greens run away from you behind a greenside bunker.

Physically, there are few signs of the hurricane.

"With the exception of one or two holes, the course is in better shape than before Katrina hit," Buckley said.

One of those holes is No. 2, which used to sport a tree in the middle of the fairway; Katrina took care of that.

"When Nicklaus was here, he said: 'Leave that tree right there, it'll die soon anyway,'" Buckley said. "Well, it did, but it took seven years."



Grand Bear is bordered by the DeSoto National Forest, a world away from the busy Biloxi casinos.

Grand Bear is one of Nicklaus' better, more playable layouts. It's 7,204 yards from back there where Jack himself would play it. Many of the bunkers are deep and penal, but the packed, pine needle rough will keep you in most holes.

### Biloxi hotels

The Island View Casino and Resort opened in September of 2006, not even a month after Hurricane Katrina hit, with a temporary casino at the former site of the Grand Casino Gulfport.

The Island View has one of the best views in Gulfport, overlooking the Gulf of Mexico and Cat Island, part of an expansive national park.

The hotel has more than 500 newly designed rooms, with Gulf views. There's also a 83,000-square-foot gaming floor.

The casino has a 350-seat buffet, with one of the better dessert bars in the Biloxi area.

*Any opinions expressed above are those of the writer and do not necessarily represent the views of the management. The information in this story was accurate at the time of publication. All contact information, directions and prices should be confirmed directly with the golf course or resort before making reservations and/or travel plans.*

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