



Vertical Challenge

By Laurie Lee Dovey

If your legs quake when you stand at the edge of a 300-foot precipice, seek some counseling for your phobia before heading to Colorado's High-Country Golf Mecca, the I-70 corridor from Dillon to Wolcott. If the drive from Denver or Glenwood Springs into the mountains doesn't cause you mental anguish, schwackin' a drive from the tee boxes of many of the courses certainly will.

If your adrenaline rushes at the thought of launching a tee ball from a lofty perch or the challenges presented by a great mix of mountain and valley terrain, you'll get the Rocky Mountain high you're looking for here. A plethora of tracts traverse the high-country and meander the lush valley floors offering players an incredible range of choices, from course to course and hole to hole.

Concentrating on the game, not the views and flora and fauna, is as challenging as the golf. Numerous vistas bring miles of mountain summits into view, delivering the sensation of standing alone on top of the world. Conversely, some holes are so secluded among the natural habitat that an encounter with a coyote, elk or deer shouldn't come as a surprise.

Four of the regions premier offerings are Vail Resorts' properties found at Keystone Resort and Red Sky Golf Club, 25 miles west of Vail at Wolcott. Keystone's River and Ranch courses and the Fazio and Norman designs at Red Sky deliver stark contrasts in design and topography, while offering ample challenges and enjoyable experiences for players of all skill levels.

Keystone Resort

Keystone isn't just for skiers anymore. During the balmy months, the golfer is king, and the world-class ski resort becomes a world-class golf resort. Logdepole pines, the Snake River, sage meadows, blankets of wildflowers and a true-blue Western ranch are combined into an intoxicating golf concoction that results in the most pleasant of hangovers.

Both courses are open to the general public, and golf packages that include lodging and golf are available through the resort. Service at Keystone is top notch – top to bottom.

The River Course at Keystone

Designers: Dana Fry and Michael Hurdzan PhD
Opened 2000, Par 71
5 Tees
Tips 6,886 yards, 70.3/131
Blue 6,507 yards, 68.8/121
Forward 4,762 yards, 64.5/113 Par 70

The River and Ranch courses share the same mountain, but that's where the similarity ends. On the River Course, the younger sibling of the pair, you'll navigate 200 feet of elevation that begins with an environmentally sensitive jaunt through the lush and colorful Snake River valley. From



the first tee, which drops 100 feet to a verdant bluegrass fairway, put on your thinking cap. Although the wide-open fairways offer room for error, a variety of risk-reward scenarios leave players either fist pumping or head shaking. Make sure to stow a fishing rod in your bag for après-golf. After criss-crossing the Snake, a renowned trout fishery, you'll be an angling convert – even if you only attempt to fish for lost golf balls.

The most dramatic elevation change occurs on the back nine as you etch your way upward via an intriguing mix of holes that test tee-to-green skills as much as they do judgment. As you climb the mountain (via cart, walking isn't an option), if you're not awe struck by the views of the Gore Range or Lake Dillon far below, you'll be awed by the dramatic and creative design. The high point of the inward side is in fact the high point – shared by two of the three finishing holes. Sixteen, a 509-yard par 4, features a 194-foot



drop from tee to green, while the breathtaking 18th tumbles from the tee box into a deep valley then rises again, forcing players to navigate through 12 bunkers.

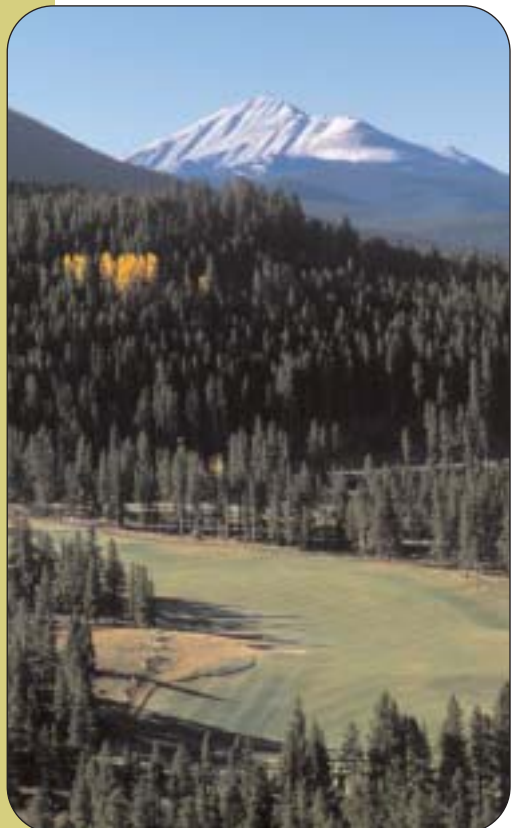
Keystone Ranch Course

Designer Robert Trent Jones, Jr.
Opened 1980
4 Tee Boxes, Par 72
Tips (Blue), 7,090 yards, 71.9/130
White, 6,521 yards, 69.3/126
Forward, 5,532 yards, 69.9/128

From the original homestead that now serves as the Ranch Course clubhouse, it's easy to conjure vivid images of the past – of cattle grazing across the subtly undulating terrain. The sound of the ranch hands' sharp whistles, as they rustled the herd, also seems to linger on the Western breeze.

When your mind clears and reality takes over, Robert Trent Jones, Jr.'s sculptured gem, which offers a formidable challenge, begins to take shape. It's a well-bunkered layout that sits comfortably on the land. Unlike its sister course, the Ranch Course offers minimal elevation changes and couples a links-style front nine with a more traditional





mountain valley arrangement over the back nine. Views of the Continental Divide, Tenmile Range and Buffalo Mountain provide the panoramic contrast and plenty of opportunities to gawk.

You can really settle down and settle into your game on this course, but don't get lazy. Mental lapses will cost you strokes. Errant shots easily can find native meadow grasses, water or the plethora of fairway bunkers. Distance off the tee is critical if you want approach shots that don't tie your stomach into knots. Numerous greens are shrewdly protected by one, two, three, even four bunkers.

Red Sky Golf Club

At Wolcott, another historic Colorado ranch, owned by the Joufflas family, is one of the newest and most exclusive golf communities in the Rocky Mountains. Red Sky Golf Club boasts two world-class courses with amenities of equal stature. Tom Fazio's design, opened in 2002, and Greg Norman's course, his first Colorado offering, opened last summer.

Entree to the Red Sky golf experience is garnered in one of three ways: by becoming a member; receiving an invitation from a member to play; or staying at one of a select group of Vail Resorts' lodging properties.

With exclusivity comes expense, and Red Sky isn't an exception. But, you won't be disappointed.

Red Sky members and guests each enjoy their own clubhouse, and alternate play daily between the Tom Fazio and Greg Norman courses. So, if you're planning to play only one day and think you prefer one course over the other, schedule properly.

The two courses at Red Sky, which are separated by a massive ridge that serves as a wildlife migration corridor for deer and elk, are stunningly different in flow and design, yet equal in quality.

Red Sky Golf Club, Tom Fazio

Designer: Tom Fazio

Opened 2002

5 Tee Boxes, Par 72

Tips 7,113 yards, 72.0/135

Blue 6,813 yards, 70.8/133

Forward 5,26 yards, 68.2/125

As you navigate Red Sky's Fazio course, it's impossible not to ponder the collaboration between the course's two creators – God and Fazio. The layout incorporates all of nature's Western wonders – high-country desert habitat, evergreens complimented by groves of white-barked aspen, sage meadows, rock outcroppings, vibrant wildflowers and a highland lake. Couple these with a panorama of magnificence that stretches 180 degrees from Castle Peak to the west,



to Vail Mountain's celebrated Back Bowls, and you have a rare course indeed – a natural gem.

Playability is a key focus in this design, but players beware. Each hole is a secluded haven where your playing focus is funneled on the task at hand, a task that must include a skillful short game and deft putting touch. The thick greenside rough and testy greens can wreak havoc on your psyche and score. Further, tee shots are target specific.

Before teeing off, spend some time at the driving range to get warmed up because the front nine, which circles the high-country desert terrain, includes two enormous par 5's, notably the 606-yard 5th. The back nine digs deeper into the mountain and the timber. It starts with a long par 3 complimented by an intricate sculpture of bunker



art, and closes with a par 5 that provides one last glimpse at a view you won't soon forget.

See the Fazio course, via a virtual tour, at Red Sky's Golf Club's Web site.

Red Sky Golf Club, Greg Norman

Designer: Greg Norman

Opened: 2003

5 Tee Boxes, Par 72

Tips 7,580 yards, 74.2, 144

Blue 6,989 yards, 71.4/139

Forward 5,269 yards, 68.5/124

The stark contrast between Norman's and Fazio's designs is evident from the first tee. Norman's course routing and land use are opposite Fazio's, but the tract is equally as beautiful. The open design allows players wide vistas of the course, which traverses the mountainside, back and forth, rather than flow in a figure-eight pattern. Players will also note the increased number of elevated tees.

The tighter appearance of the course is deceiving. It's actually more forgiving tee to green. Most holes offer choices from the tee box, so you're not forced into aiming shots. On many holes an errant drive is also still playable. Several substantial forced carries, however, can cause players to ponder mistakes. The shaved areas around the greens pardon many approach shots that miss the

mark. In some instances, the turf is so closely cut that a putt from five or six yards off the green is possible. Norman expects you to stretch out though. The course is 400 yards longer than Fazio's, and plays it.

The first glimpse of severe elevation is experienced on No. 4. The drop from the back tees makes the 225-yard forced carry play about 180 yards. As you traverse the expanse of holes from 13 through 15, you're playing the top of the course and will feel like you're on the top of the world. Then, when you stand on the 16th tee, you realize the magnitude of the elevation you've traveled. The sheer drop from tee to green on the par 3 is worthy of th, "Wow," that's sure to cross your lips.

As you must on each of these Colorado wonders, take a few moments to soak in the views of craggy rock outcroppings, twisted



knots of scrub oak, rugged gulches, near-psychedelic wildflower meadows and mountain scenery. They are all part of what make this excursion a truly unusual golf experience.

Courses Locations, Fees, Contact Info

[fees subject to change]

- Keystone Resort is located 90 minutes west of the Denver International Airport. Take I-70 West to exit 205 (Dillon).

- Red Sky Golf Club (Wolcott) is a 90-minute drive from Keystone and just 25 miles west of Vail. From Denver or Keystone, travel West on I-70 to exit 157 (Wolcott).

The River Course at Keystone

155 River Course Dr. Keystone, CO 80435

970-496-4444

keystonegolf@vailresorts.com

www.vailresorts.com

Peak Season • June 1 – September 30

Low Season • Late May & October

*Opening and closing dates vary based on weather

The Keystone Ranch Course

1239 Keystone Ranch Rd. Keystone, CO 80435

970-496-4250

keystonegolf@vailresorts.com

www.vailresorts.com

Peak Season • June 1 – September 30

Low Season • Late May & October

*Opening and closing dates vary based on weather

Red Sky Golf Club

P.O. Box 430 • 376 Red Sky Rd. Wolcott, CO 81655

866-873-3759 or 970-477-8400

www.redskygolfclub.com

Peak Season • June 1 – September 30

Low Season • Late May & October

*Opening and closing dates vary based on weather

For More Information:

The meshing of world-class resorts with Mother Nature's finest creations results in a staggering cacophony of outdoor, cultural, gourmet and shopping opportunities. For more information on Colorado High-Country excursions, contact:

Colorado Travel and Tourism Authority,
800-COLORADO, www.colorado.com

Vail Valley Tourism Bureau,
800-525-3875, www.visitvailvalley.com

Colorado Golf Association,
303-366-4653, www.golfhousecolorado.org

Summit County Chamber of Commerce,
800-530-3099, www.summitchamber.org

Vail Resorts, Sales & Reservations,
888-222 9324, www.snow.com,
www.vailresorts.com

Additional Online Resources,
www.golfcolorado.com,
www.experiencegolf.com