

Airway offers real challenge

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If you enjoy playing a unique golf course and ducking airplanes -- only kidding -- at the same time, Airway Meadows Golf Club is the place for you.

Located at 262 Brownville Road in Gansevoort, about seven miles from Exit 15 of the Adirondack Northway, Airway Meadows is quite different than most other Capital Region layouts.

First of all, there is an airway strip on the course that is still used, and you must avoid the runway on two of the holes or you will be out of bounds. Every once in a while, you can even see an airplane taking off or landing right over your head.

Secondly, you must play this course several times before you can really appreciate it -- or have any reasonable chance of scoring. During my vacation this week, I played the course for the third time, and although the course won the battle, my playing group chopped off several strokes on many of the holes because of experience.

Many of the holes have blind

approach shots, and unless you know where you are going, you can put up some big numbers.

The par-5 first hole is an excellent example. The 517-yard dogleg-left hole is plenty long enough, especsofthyphenially for an opener, but you need to keep your tee shot and your second shot in the fairway to be able to see the green.

Another blind shot occurs on the 292-yard, par-4 fourth hole. A prudent shot is to use a 3-wood or a rescue club when you tee off from the bottom of a hill. That strategy should leave you some kind of wedge to the green, which is a dogleg-right and guarded by a small pond.

The 502-yard, par-5 eighth hole features a demanding tee shot over a small ravine, but until you play the course a few times, you don't realize that the green is situated at a 90-degree turn from the fairway. You need to hit your approach shot over a small gully to get to the green.

Even the par-3s are tricky. On both the 165-yard third hole and the 163-yard 11th, players must hit their tee shots over small ravines, and those shots are all carry. The 11th hole even features a small

retaining wall in front of the green. If you are a little short -- and I was this week -- you might be faced with a flip shot over the wall to get to the green.

After the tricky 530-yard, par-5

10th hole, where keeping your ball in the fairway is again a must, the holes become much shorter and tighter on the back nine. My

playing group did well unless our tee shots landed behind one of the many trees that guard both sides of the fairways.

I enjoyed the strong finishing hole, a 520-yard par-5 that includes a forced carry of about 200 to 210 yards just to get to the fairway.

The greens at Airway Meadows are pristine, and they rolled perfectly. You can make up plenty of strokes there if you have any kind of putting stroke. And the restaurant is outstanding, with an excellent menu and ambiance.

I still found Airway Meadows a tough challenge, but my scores dropped a good 10 strokes from the last time I played there about three years ago, and that's exactly what owner Joan Heber predicted. If you've never played there before, don't expect instant gratification, but this exquisitely manicured course will definitely grow on you.