

Andrew Rich
"frolfing" at
Alton Baker Park

URBAN DISC

Alton Baker Park blazes the disc golf trail in Eugene By Alex Notman

PHOTO BY TODD COOPER

"Golf is a good walk spoiled," Mark Twain once said. In that vein, I would add that disc golf is a good walk enhanced. On several Sundays this spring, my partner and I have filled a bag with the candy-colored rubbery discs — drivers, putters, mid-rangers — and headed down to Alton Baker Park's new course. After purchasing a \$3 pass at the pro shop, we spend the next two hours on a leisurely amble through the course's 18 holes, following arrows that point across sunlit fields and deep into cool, shady groves, and, of course, stopping every couple dozen or a hundred yards to pick up a disc and line-up a shot. We were not alone; dozens of groups spread out throughout the park sailing discs into the chain-link nets.

Disc golf is the perfect sport for Eugene: It's outdoors, accessible, cheap (or free) and environmentally friendly. But for 25 years, the city only had one option, the relatively small nine-hole Westmoreland course. "Frolfers" seeking

longer courses and more challenging holes would have to schlep their discs to Dexter Park or Cottage Grove (18 holes each). Alton Baker, which opened in April, is now filling that void. The course's operator Andrew Rich says that in April, the Alton Baker course averaged 390 rounds a day, peaking with 640 rounds in one day. They also sold 250 memberships in the first month of operation.

Eugene Disc Golf Club (EDGC) member and officer-at-large Matt Benotsch says the course has exceeded expectations. "Alton Baker is ultimately the only good thing that happened to us in the past 25 years," he says of the local disc golf community. Piggy-backing on the course's success, Benotsch thinks that Eugene could easily incorporate and support two to three more courses, and he has one site in particular in mind: Stewart Pond in west Eugene. Benotsch and the EDGC have submitted a proposal — including layout and maintenance — for a free 18-hole course at the west Eugene seasonal wetland

to the Bureau of Land Management; the proposal went through the public comment stage and made it into the draft plan. Benotsch expects a decision by the end of the summer.

"It would complement Alton Baker really well," Benotsch says, describing the site as having a large hill with open areas and densely wooded spots. Benotsch notes that the site has been examined and that a new course would fit into the environment quite seamlessly, emphasizing that there are no "sensitive species" that would be harmed or disrupted. If the city approves, a Stewart Pond course could open as soon as 2014, but for now Benotsch knows that Alton Baker itself was a victory.

"For those of us who have been trying to convince the city for so long that people really want to play, it's been really vindicating to see the mass of people roll through that place," he says. "There's way more people playing disc golf than running on Pre's Trail." ■

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