

## It Was Wagons East for this Beer Cowboy

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While Wyatt went south and stayed west, it was wagons east for me. And my trip to the eastern US this summer presented an array of great scenery and a tasty host of beer offerings.

Was my impression of the beer enhanced by the holiday factor? Gotta figure that factored in. For sure, it didn't hurt that one special location in Norwalk, Connecticut included several sips from complimentary chalices of beer, courtesy of my Connecticut-living cousin Graham. His pull at a certain bar he tends at was a sure-fire treat for my brother Dave and I. It's a great restaurant, too – BJ Ryan's BANC House – and it doubles as a beauty of a bourbon bar, a fact thoroughly appreciated by my happy-sipping sibling, who was treated to flights of his favourite whisky, in addition to a slick bottle of *Angel's Envy* – liquor from Louisville, Kentucky - to take all the way home.

We couldn't get a drink in any Hartford store the day before, a Sunday, but the dry spell was broken at our hotel lounge (while breaking bread). The locked coolers of the Hartford grocery stores faded from mind as I scrolled through a generous list of session ales and full IPAs from Connecticut and Vermont, with a few from Delaware, Pennsylvania and Missouri sprinkled in, as our location had us in relative proximity to many states and places. I favoured the Thimble Island Session 45 IPA (out of Branford, Connecticut), and chose not to quibble over some of the confusing wording on the sheets handed to us, especially knowing the lounge list always loses to the actual labels. This is a good beer, I concluded quickly (and repeatedly). Basically, I'm a sucker for a light-hitting and citrus-kissed IPA. A thirst-quenching beverage on a summer Sunday after two plane rides... yup, a bad choice would have been tough to make.

North of there, the next afternoon, we stopped to consult the map during a pub-lunch pitstop, anchored by a draft summer pour – the perfect choice on this hot day – Leinie's Summer Shandy, to be specific. The session ale the night before was good, but this big glass of citrus-laced love was great! Truth be told, it's from a brewery in Wisconsin, but I drank it while my feet were planted in the east, so there. Honourable mentions that day go to Jack's Abby Craft Lagers – brew products from Framingham, Massachusetts – and also to Sea Hag IPA, from the New England Brewing Company of Connecticut, if only for the name alone. For the record, I'll still let a little lager into my travel samplings,

but the preference gap between ales and lagers is decidedly massive in favour of the former.

Scarcity of time prevented me from investigating the veracity of local opinions that Black Hog Brewing out of Oxford, Connecticut is clearly one of that state's best. On this night, instead, I enjoyed a Fairway IPA by Thomas Hooker Brewing Company out of Bloomfield, Connecticut. Damn fine, and surely a happy hoppy addition to a thirsty golfer's cart as a game-ready necessity.

The trip was fairly light on beer overall. Yes, really. We managed to tour around Martha's Vineyard for a full day with a mere 10-minute beer break (having just one unremarkable beer apiece). In breathtakingly beautiful North Falmouth the day before, I opted to point a piña colada toward the sun in preference to a pint. I did, however, make time for a fruit beer in our most northern stop. It was a Sea Dog Blue Paw Wild Blueberry, brewed right where we were in Portland, Maine – the one most worthy of a mention from the few local products I tried.

The brew most memorable was one I had in Boston on our last night of the trip. It turned my tongue green, a development I wasn't warned about when I ordered this Green Monsta IPA. Inspired by the famous Green Monster wall in left field at famed Fenway Park, the beer wasn't bad, but the mark it left was too much, a fact that didn't leave those nearby green with envy over my decision to order it. Not sure if this brew is the pride of Westminister, Massachusetts and the Wachusett Brewing Company operating there, but it is a beast all its own, just like the imposing extra tall wall that inspired its creators. Fortunately, the beer went down after we took in the Boston Red Sox's defeat over the Chicago White Sox, a game that featured a pair of two-run hometown homers, a pair of great double-plays and a crafty pickoff at first base, close to where we were seated. The beer at the ballpark wasn't memorable, but having it, a hotdog and a bag of peanuts alongside my brother Dave made it a memorable evening, for certain. It was surely the perfect nightcap to a superb trip. **V**

NOTE: For an entirely different angle on this recent trip, check out our feature entry (as published in this edition of *the Verdict*) *American Museum of Tort Law: An Important Showcase - Landmark Tort Cases Highlighted in Little Connecticut*.

## New Finds from Old Haunts – Uncovering Treasures at a West Coast Beer Festival

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Although Ben's trip east left me feeling jealous for a longer vacation, a combination of work and family commitments didn't allow me to squeeze in any cross-continental travel this summer. Instead, I was left to manufacture several shorter "international" jaunts to our neighbour down south. One of these trips led to some interesting new beer discoveries, and provided me with a reminder of how even a well-worn trail can offer fresh discoveries if you view the scenery with the right kind of eyes...

Due to the combined effects of industry and sloth (not usually in tandem, since they cancel each other out like waves), it had been 17 years since I had last attended the largest and oldest microbrew themed event in Portland, the Oregon Brewer's Festival (OBF). Celebrating its 30th anniversary, the OBF has been a fixture at Tom McCall Waterfront Park along the Willamette River for almost as long as there's been a craft beer industry in the Pacific Northwest. As an inland destination, Portland is not a place you'd want to leave Victoria or Vancouver for in the last week of July – the weather isn't humid but it can get oppressively hot, even with a cold beverage in your hand. However, this summer left me with both free time and a target weekend with temperatures in the high 20s, creating the perfect circumstances for a trip south to see what all might have changed with Oregon's premier beer festival during the years I'd been away.

One observation that struck me as I looked over the festival program was that the lineup of participating brewers, while heavily weighted to local Oregon options, still had that nationwide feel that I had remembered from past events back in the 90s. To be sure, Washington state was well represented (particularly the areas north of the Columbia River and within a 100 km radius of greater Portland). California had multiple entrants. But alongside the strong representation of the regional brewers were participants from as far afield as Florida, New York and Tennessee. Of course, there's nothing more deflating than trying something great from across the country that you know you'll never find in a local pub or package store (although your discovery might suggest the contours of your next vacation). Still, the OBF manages to strike a balance between promoting local industry and showcasing national excellence – an approach that the better and more-established festivals typically strive to emulate.

Another nice touch which I believe has been added to the OBF since its early days is the decision to create a "specialty tent" for

limited release beers separate from the main pavilion. Participating brewers strive to bring enough of their "main entry" to last the entirety of the five-day festival. The specialty tent provides a venue for the locals who want to show off a bit, with one-off releases and experimental beers that last only until the keg runs dry. The OBF thus offers two festival experiences in one – a pre-set "menu" of entries, accessible online, that participants can scan before arriving at the park, as well as a centralized place where attendees can go to look for surprises and unique finds.

Even though the weather wasn't too punishing, I had no urge for imperial IPAs or other high-test offerings on what was still a bright and sunny summer Saturday. I decided to stick closely to sour offerings in the main pavilion (a style of beer I'll return to in depth in a future column). On the whole, I left the OBF wishing that some British Columbia brewers had crossed the border to participate in this great regional event – because I genuinely believe that many of the sour ales produced here would have stacked up well against the southern competition.

As with any festival, I had a couple of simply dreadful pours. I have one tasting note from the product of an established and well-respected Washington brewery whose submission, in my humble opinion, smelled like ketchup and tasted like pickles – and no, I had not hit the food pavilion for a burger before filling my glass. Yet hidden within the ranks of the uninspiring brews were some surprising gems, including a few close enough for a quick road trip from BC. One of my favourite finds was Aslan Brewing's *Disco Lemonade* (4.5% ABV), a tart Berliner Weisse which packed more pucker than most of the other sours I tasted over the course of the afternoon. A relatively fresh entrant to Washington's craft beer scene (the brewery opened in 2013), I found Aslan's offering at the OBF good enough to justify a stop for lunch at their downtown Bellingham pub and restaurant on my return trip to Canada a few days post-festival. The far better than average pub fare was nicely complemented by an intriguing lineup of those cloudy, juicy "East Coast style" IPAs that have enjoyed a recent boomlet of popularity. All in all, my OBF experience led me east without taking me far away from home. Bellingham may lack a Green Monster – but you can reach it from Vancouver on a weekend afternoon. V