

Summer 2006  
Boston Beer Trip DBG Newsletter Article  
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My adventuresome bride Kathy and I were in the Boston area this summer for a cousin's wedding and were able to work a beer stop or two in to the trip. Kathy's not usually a beer fan (she prefers wine and mead) but was quite the trooper and tried many sampler racks, and even found a few surprises!



Getting into the city by boat is much more fun, just as fast, and cheaper than driving. There are commuter boats that drop you off right downtown near the Aquarium subway station, and from there, the city is yours. Use the mass transit and don't try to drive and park – you will have a much less stressful visit and also have time to let the beers wear off before you drive the final leg home from the boat dock.

There are lots of great beer stops in Boston, but given the time available we had to pick and choose. With a pub list and a subway map, we charted out our course. Up the Red line to the north, up near Harvard and M.I.T. are Cambridge Brewing Co with its nice outdoor patio, and one location of the ubiquitous John Harvard's Brew House chain. Down the Yellow line to the south lies Boston Beer Company who makes the well known Sam Adams line, but I was not much in the mood for a large industrial brewery tour, so that left the Green line to the west. That choice made, we bought our tokens and headed on our way.

Our first stop out the Green line was in the Theater district at Boylston Street where we expected to find **Rock Bottom Brewery**.

Although Rock Bottom is a large-ish chain that would normally not interest me on a short trip like this, they do support homebrewing through the AHA, so I wanted to make sure we went there to support them. In the end it was a very worthwhile stop.

We ordered a sampler rack of everything they had on tap, and some rich and savory asagio cheese dip with a delicious dense beer bread for snacking. The beers in the rack were:

- Lumpy Dog. An American Light Lager, 4.2% ABV. Clean, slightly sweet, boring as expected
- Munich Gold. German export lager, 4.4%. Saaz hops evident in the aroma. Color and flavor rather light. Sort of between a Munich Helles and a Vienna.
- North Star Amber. 4.7%. Low bitterness, good Pacific Northwest hop flavor and light aroma. Light caramel in the flavor too.
- Wit, 4.2% He might call it a wit, but it smells like a hefe. More lemon than orange, but nice.
- Select Dry Stout 4.2%, Big chocolate, light roast. Light body. Great session beer.
- Improper Hopper IPA, 5.9%. Mixed C-hops. Aroma is lots of tangerine and grapefruit. My estimation is only about 40 IBU, a little light for an American IPA.

Kathy tasted the whole rack and surprised me by liking the Dry Stout and the IPA much more than anything else in the rack! I fully expected a beer neophyte to go for the light lager or maybe the wit, but

our intrepid traveler preferred the chocolate/coffee of the stout and the citrus of the IPA.

Our waitress, Jean, hails from Spring Hill, and knows her beer. When she saw me taking notes she asked if I'd like to speak with the brewer when he was done shoveling out the tun. Well, sure!

A few minutes later brewmaster Gerry O'Connell came out to our table and spent about 20 minutes visiting and patiently answering my questions. Turns out I had guessed right on the Wit – it was malted wheat rather than unmalted, and used a hefe yeast left over from a previous batch of hefewizen they had made. He simply added coriander and orange peel and called it a wit.

For yeast, he buys the same White Labs or Wyeast strains that we do, but buys a liter of yeast at a time (compared to the 30ml we get in a tube), and pitches half into a 7bbl (217 gallons) batch. He repitches 12-14 times for lagers, and 20 times for ales with no washing in between – just put the new wort on the yeast cake from the previous batch over and over again.

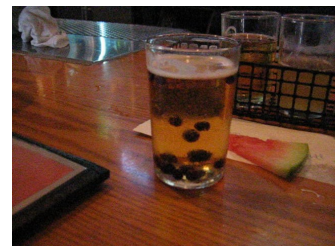
For water, he just uses the straight Boston city water with no additional treatments. If the chlorine is noticeable he heats the water to 200F before using and that seems to drive it off.

After Jean brought us a large slab of Triple Chocolate Stout Cheesecake and gave us locals directions to the next pub, we were on our way.

Back on the Green line and further west we went to the Yawkey station and Fenway Park. Should be easy to find, since the gigantic Citgo sign you see over left field should be right near the subway station. Well, we came out from underground and didn't see the sign, so took our best guess and walked. Just like the last stop, a friendly stranger pointed us in the right direction – right back from where we came! The sign was on the building directly over the subway entrance. Aaarrghh!

Eventually we found ourselves across the street on the 3<sup>rd</sup> base side of Fenway Park in **Boston Beer Works**. They had more choices than we could get in one 4 place sampler rack, so we got two!

- Blueberry. Signature beer of this place, it seems like more of a gimmick than much of a beer. Into a light lager they spoon a tablespoon of blueberries and a little syrup. The blueberries dance up and down with the carbonation and are amusing to watch, but the beer is nothing special. I didn't try the beer without the berries, so I don't know if it is flavored before it comes out of the tap.
- Watermelon. A little bitter bite, but doesn't seem like hop bitterness. My guess is watermelon extract because the watermelon is a bit up front and synthetic tasting compared to the subtle hints from real watermelon juice.
- Hefeweizen. Crisp, a little tart, head dropped quickly.
- Yawkee Wheat. A Berliner Weisse. Very clean, tart enough. No brett character noted, light carbonation.



In the second rack,

- Buckeye Oat Stout. 20% oats! How they sparged that, I'll never know. Pretty roasty, like french roast coffee. Not oily like you might expect from all those oats, but the taste lingers and clings.
- Beantown Nut Brown. Definitely nutty, coffee flavor. Perhaps a bit astringent. Similar to the dry stout we had at Rock Bottom, but with more hops. A little too roasty for a brown ale, in my

- opinion, but drinks well.
- Fenway APA. Firm bitterness, C-hops flavor. Medium body, a little sweet on the finish.
  - Backbay IPA. Brilliantly clear, assertively bitter. Sweetish caramel lingers but bitterness lingers longer.

Food was quite expensive here - \$10 for a burger and \$4 for chips and salsa. I guess that's to be expected being right across from the stadium. Overall the place was OK, and I'm sure it is great fun after a Red Sox game, but we didn't like it as well as Rock Bottom, so we headed on to our next stop pretty quickly.



Back on to the Green Line and out to the Harvard Avenue stop. This goes right through Boston College, so there are stops every few feet to pick up and drop off students. Still better than walking on a roasting hot summer day!

Our final stop was at the **Sunset Grill**, a highly recommended beer bar and restaurant. I'd heard this was an excellent beer oriented restaurant and that they had a great beer selection. The beer menu was a small book, and listed 300 bottled beers and 112 taps, all thoughtfully arranged by beer style.

Unfortunately, the place was very loud and the atmosphere was more that of a college bar than of the nice restaurant we were expecting to end our day. Perhaps the time of day had something to do with it, since we were there in early evening and probably at prime time for BC students getting out of class.

I selected an 8% ABV New York brewed Middle Ages Wailing Wench that was listed as being served on cask. Our server regretfully told us it was not cask, but keg and we went for it anyway. It was a dark strong ale, served in a footed chalice. The aroma was very complex, with different nuances showing up in every whiff. The flavor had a nutty character and reminded me of Burgundy wine, but without any tannic astringency. Indeed, I found it so tasty even after a day full of beer, that I bought a bottle at the gigantic well stocked liquor store across the street to bring home in my carry-on bag.

The fries we had were rather pedestrian, but the portobello burger and tiramisu were both outstanding.

By this time we'd both had enough adventuring and were ready to let the fine Boston transit system trundle us back to the Inn at Scituate Harbor via the boat ride to Logan, then past the fort, then across the bay.

This was a month or so before the recent restrictions on liquids in carry on luggage, so I was able to get home with the aforementioned bottle of Wailing Wench; a Cisco Brewing Captain Swain's Extra Stout from Nantucket; a Thomas Hardy's Ale; a J.W. Lees Harvest Ale that has been aged in a Calvados cask, and a Smuttynose Imperial Stout.

Obviously I only scratched the surface of the Boston beer scene, but was pretty happy with the places we went in the short time available. I'll be sure to try the places I had to skip on the next trip!