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BEERS AND BRAINFREEZE

A scientific search for Eugene's coldest brew BY RICK LEVIN

Cut to commercial: The day is hot, sultry, almost airless. A man stands before a push mower, surveying a patch of freshly trimmed suburban lawn. He sighs, snakes out of his sweaty T-shirt and, looking into the sky, wipes his brow with a sinewy forearm. Walking to his porch, he reaches into a cooler filled to overflowing with crushed ice and pulls out a single bottle by its frosty neck. He looks at it for just a moment, lovingly, before he twists off the cap with a pneumatic hiss. A steamy cloud of coldness erupts from the opened bottle like a pillow of winter sky, and in erotic slow-mo, the man finally brings the thing to his lips and gulps deeply, greedily.

The transformation is instantaneous and transcendent. Like Dorothy stepping into Oz, that first swig of ice-cold beer brings a Technicolor sheen to the parched world, and the man's face now gleams with religious fervor. Deliverance. Godhead.

Substitute lawnmower man with a clutch of steelworkers gathering after shift or a bloodied bunch of smiling rugby players or the post-coital glow of a dude ignoring his girlfriend because his heady stein has arrived. It's all the same. In one form or another, the commercial image of male happiness by way of icy cold beer has entered our culture like some divine culinary commandment. And, inversely, warm beer has become a venal party foul, a taboo; just the thought of drinking such tepid swill makes us shudder with revulsion. Even Homer Simpson keeps his Duff in the fridge. A chilly beer isn't simply refreshing — it's invigorating, bracing, life affirming.

The idea that beer, like revenge, is a dish best served cold is relatively new. Prior to the modern advent of reliable systems of refrigeration, folks who craved a frosty cold one had to keep their kegs in the cellar

or chip chunks of ice from a frozen lake and haul them home for cold storage. But even in many if not most post-industrial societies, beer continues to be a beverage served by choice at room temperature, as tradition dictates.

In Ireland, for instance, the idea of pouring a cold pint of Guinness is heresy. And until fairly recently, Mexican cantinas served their beer at just around the temperature of pig's blood, even though you could walk into the restroom and piss into a urinal chock full of crushed ice. Realbeer.com notes that the more a beer is chilled, the more it loses its particular flavors and aromas, and that during competitions, beer is judged at room temperature to best bring out the fermentation's full sophistication and complexity. In an online article titled "The Big Chill," the author describes the trend of serving beer at colder and colder temperatures as "irritating and disturbing." And the famous beer connoisseur Michael Jackson's graduated scale of ideal

beer temperatures runs from well-chilled to a roomish warmth, depending on the type of beer (lagers, ales, stouts, etc.), but the coldest temperature he proposes for any beer is 45 degrees Fahrenheit.

Like the metric system or parliamentary politics, however, beer drinkers in the U.S. by and large have ignored or outright rejected the idea of warm beer as some sort of sniffy European snobbery. Would you drink a can of warm Coke? Shit, no! All the less reason, then, why anyone in his right mind would want to imbibe a tasty adult beverage served at the approximate temperature of bathwater. If we are agreed on this, then the question becomes: Which establishment in the vicinity of downtown Eugene pours the frostiest pint of draught beer?

As should be obvious to even the most infrequent reader of this publication, we value the truth at a premium, so it only follows that the scientific method — with its tried-and-true standards of gathering evidence according to set principles, or something like that — is very near and dear to our hearts. We were hardly going to leave something as crucial as discovering the city's coldest tap beer to the unreliable subjectivity of our all-too-human judgment. To ensure the highest level of precision (or is it accuracy?), we therefore acquired a ThermoWorks I.R. Gun., which in layman's terms is an infrared thermometer that uses a pointy laser to measure surface temperatures to within the tenth of a degree. Take it on faith that, along with being really badass looking and super fun to play with, this cutting-edge piece of machinery is accurate as hell.

After months of back and forth, our team of experts — which included a photographer and yours truly — arrived at a surefire means of temperature-testing that we consider fair and accurate. First, we decided to sample the same brand and make of beer at every bar we frequented. Our reasoning for this had to do with a highly scientific thingamajig called "freezing point depression," which is a fancy way of saying that certain solvents, such as alcohol, lower the temperature



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