

OREGON TRAIL BREWING COMPANY

Oregon Trail, founded in 1987, is the oldest brewery in the Willamette Valley and the fourth oldest in Oregon. The copper kettle that houses pounds upon pounds of ingredients each year attests to this fact — it used to belong to Pyramid Breweries, which is now a corporately run giant out of Seattle. Beyond being long established, though, Oregon Trail has an antiquity to it that serves more to intrigue than to impress. With a limited number of beers on tap at the brewery itself, the true excitement in a tour here starts with the gravity-based system they use.

Each story has a hole in the floor and a hole in the ceiling (with the exception of the third and highest story) through which the ingredients for every beer must pass before reaching their final destination in the miniscule, packed-like-sardines fermentation room.

“Brewing is, not even on purpose, a very green industry,” says Sean Martin, self-proclaimed “everything man” and brewmaster of Oregon Trail. His explanation of the green gravity system makes it appear exceptionally fertile, and it’s clear that he enjoys it. Martin gets a workout each day from climbing the steps, and for a low-personnel project such as this, the small amount of beer they have ready to go is really quite awesome.

“My favorite beer depends on my mood and the weather,” Martin says, giving a nod to the Oregon heat of late. “I’ve been drinking a ton of Wit, but in the winter nothing beats our Ginseng Porter.” With summer in the air, the temperature has been rising in Oregon, and the Oregon Trail Wit is perfect for shaking off the swelter — light in texture and taste but surprisingly dark in color, it could have you back on your feet (or sitting on your ass) in no time.



Sean Martin
Oregon Trail Brewing Company



Dave Marliave
Flat Tail Brewing

At this point, I feel it’s only right to mention the Bourbon Barrel Porter. When you crack the wax-sealed cap on a bottle of this beer, you better be ready to smell whiskey and taste barbeque — in short, it’s fucking dank. At 10-percent ABV (alcohol by volume) it’ll play with your head pretty hard. I’d recommend eating before trying this.

Speaking of ABV, the Corvallis beer scene must be full of wasted people. Seriously, the beers up there average 8 to 10-percent a lot of the time, and most of them are deceptively light. This is a fact easily discovered at Corvallis’ youngest brewery, Flat Tail.

FLAT TAIL BREWING

The vibe at Flat Tail Brewing is chilled out. With five-year brewer Dave Marliave manning their seven-barrel system at all times, there’s rarely a complaint to be heard — that is, unless you don’t like beer. Marliave got his degree at OSU’s School of Fermentation Sciences — a trend that would appear to grip the entire Corvallis beer scene by the balls — and since graduating at the beginning of last summer, he’s set to work finely tuning his art.

“Brewing is like any art form,” says Marliave. “It has layers.” And sure, most of his beers have a bunch of separate layers — each of them as delicious as the last — but what happens when they’re mixed together? This, it would seem, is a process of trial and error, because it’s all too easy to end up with solid separate layers that don’t mesh well. “It’s like a peanut butter, jelly and bacon smoothie,” Marliave explains. “The ingredients are great on their own, but not always together.”

Overall, the beer at Flat Tail is incredible. Dare I say it? They’ve stumbled upon a double IPA recipe that blows Ninkasi’s “Tricerahops” out of the water — at

10-percent ABV, “Some Like it Hop” is one of the strongest and most enjoyable beers around, and when placed hand-in-hand with the wine-like delicacy of Flat Tail’s English ESB, it creates a beautiful contrast that you can’t help but enjoy.

BLOCK 15 BREW PUB

Unfortunately, Block 15’s owner and founding brewmaster, Nick Arzner, was unavailable for comment due to a case of Widespread Panic, but that meant Matt Williams was given a chance to spit some game. Though still young, Matt has been on the scene for a good six years, and he’s gained barrels of experience along the way.

“Every day I end up learning something new,” says Williams, remarking that Arzner has shown him techniques he never could have learned in school.

The Block 15 Brew Pub is small and lively; they have an insane assortment of beers — including a house brew designed as a stand in for the domestic bullshit they got tired of serving — and the food is awesome. They plan to expand next door with a “European-style beer café,” and that’s probably for the best, considering that they need the space.

Literally every single barrel, bag of grain and piece of equipment in Block 15’s labyrinthine cellar was carried down by hand. This includes, of course, the custom-designed fermentation tanks that weigh in at something to the tune of 800 pounds each.



Matt Williams
Block 15 Brew Pub

“(Some of) our fermenters were designed specially so that they would fit down the stairs,” Williams says. Honestly, it’s miraculous how much *stuff* they’ve got down there — and it’s probably a safe bet that none of it’s ever coming back up.

Of the 14 beers on tap at Block 15, the flight you’re looking at should probably include the following: Aborigine, King Caspian, Wandelpad and Alpha IPA. The rest is up to you, but those four are freakin’ magical. Unfortunately, the “Millennium Falcon” IPA that Williams deems his personal favorite currently is not in production. As he says, though: “The Millennium Falcon will be back, I’m sure.”

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