

Brewtrips

Forget wineries; tour beers

BY ANDREW HITZ



Beer touring Eugene is a worthwhile venture. Even the most snobbish of beer drinkers in this town of fewer than 160,000 find it difficult to be dismayed by choices like Oakshire, Hop Valley, Rogue, McMenamins and — yes, the venerable beer goddesses themselves, Ninkasi. But every now and then, during the depths of rain-soaked winter, the tap lists get stodgy, the bartenders run out of conversation, and our good beer quaffer must take leave of his familiar drinking trough to forage new territory. Here's a survey, by no means complete, of what you might encounter along I-5 or thereabouts.

To get to **Flat Tail Brewing** (flattailcorvallis.com) head north out of the Eug and stop in enemy territory. Flat Tail Brewing is the nascent Corvallis brewing venture of Mark Martin and Laura Bryngelson, owners of Calapooia Brewing in Albany. Aside from a go-to line of inventive "standards," they offer limited batches of brews like Pineapple IPA, an IPA brewed with 100 pounds of fresh pineapple, and another named "El Guapo," which is a light summery beer fermented with 35 pounds of fresh cucumbers, as well as limes and habaneros. They also have four guest taps in their decked out Beaver pad — how humbly badass.

Gilgamesh Brewing (gilgameshbrewing.com) is farther on up the ol' thoroughfare and just before the Salem exit in the town of Turner and perhaps the authority on low to completely unhopped beers. This traditional style, known in the beer world as a Gruit, might seem scary for

some Eugene hopheads (admittedly, my zealotry for the marijuana relative had me emitting a scoff or two), but try thinking outside a hopped state of mind and you might actually come to like these "0 IBU" brews. The Gilgamesh staple is the "Mamba," which it describes as "a very complex hopless brew, with a light yet slightly sweet and spicy body." It is brewed with black tea, tangerine zest and rye, giving it an earthy kick in lieu of the hops. Gilgamesh does also make hopped beers for more pigheaded hopheads.

In the brewing world it's often acknowledged that lagers are the most difficult style to tackle. As one homebrewer and Rogue collaborator put it, "There's nothing to hide behind in a lager." No bold hop flavor to mask off flavors, no weird-ass pseudo-European yeast flavor you can write off as "funk" — nothing but the purity (or lack thereof) of the ingredients shines through. But **Heater Allen Brewing** (heaterallen.com) does it well — so well in fact that right now two of their flagship lagers (Pils and Coastal) are ranked third and fourth out of all the world's lagers in their respective subcategories. Stop in McMinnville and check out the town's sole redemptive quality.

The brewers at Portland's **Upright Brewing** (uprightbrewing.com) are total geeks. They listen to Ween, named their brewery after Charles Mingus's instrument and brew perhaps the most formidable line of farmhouse-style ales in the country. A very seasonally influenced brewery, right now drinkers of Upright will be catching the tail end of their bottled fall sour rye called the "Late Harvest." None

of their flagships are pigeonholed into a style category, but instead are given numerical names (4, 5, 6 and 7), which correlate to increasing levels of body, aroma, ABV and bitterness. With something new and improved or aged and weird always on tap, Upright is a must for those looking for the pinnacle in local, artisan beer.

If you're tired of the rain, and of I-5, head on over to the east side where you will encounter dryer weather and still more beer. In keeping with the slightly less hipster, slightly more redneck nature of the east side, eastern Oregon's beers are being promoted with a "controlled hunt beer tag." You can get your tag at the breweries below, or go to www.visiteasternoregon.com/beertag and if you fill your tag by tasting a pint at four breweries, you get a free camo beer koozie to document your achievement.

Head east along I-84 to Pendleton, where you'll find the **Prodigal Son Brewery and Pub** (prodigalsonbrewery.com) in a reused auto dealership. Prodigal Son gets praise for its IPAs, and its beers range from the locally sourced (Mt. Hood hops) to overseas (Maris Otter barley from the U.K.). Then continue down the road for English-style ales and pizza to La Grande's **Mt. Emily Ale House** (mtemilyalehouse.com), which also utilizes old buildings in its digs at a former U.S. National Bank.

Barley Brown's Brew Pub (barleybrowns.com) in Baker City is next with American-style beers and is currently offering a chocolate stout called Ooga Nooga that the brew pub calls "silky smooth and slightly sweet."

As you draw near to Idaho, you'll hit **Beer Valley Brewing Co.** in Ontario (beervalleybrewing.com) known for everything from its Black Flag imperial stout to Leafer Madness imperial pale ale.

If, instead of heading down I-84 towards Boise, you go east from La Grande, you will find yourself not only heading for the Wallowa National Forest, but also heading for two more excellent Oregon breweries. **Terminal Gravity Brewing** (terminalgravitybrewing.com) was one of the first Eastern Oregon breweries to get under way and sells Northwest-influenced British-style ales. **Mutiny Brewing Co.** (mutinybrewing.com) in Joseph offers a variety of brews from pale ale to porter.

And while you are collecting your beer tags, or just your beer tastings, remember to bring a designated driver. If everybody you know wants to drink, not drive, look into some of the brew bus tours offered by companies like Wanderlust Tours (www.wanderlusttours.com), which offers a beer tour of Bend and a chance to follow the "Ale Trail" and collect stamps. Portland, not to be outdone, offers the Portland Brew Bus (www.brewbus.com). Send us a picture of your koozie when you're done. **EW**

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