

MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

Coast Weekend's local
restaurant review

New brewery suffers from high prices

Review and photos by
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The march of progress continues in Cannon Beach — in particular, the advent of two new brewpubs. The first, Pelican, opened in early May. Public Coast followed shortly thereafter, cracking the doors as June broke. Besides Oregonians' unquenchable thirst for burgers and microbrews, the blooming of these breweries suggests that it's a whole lot more profitable to make your own beer than sell someone else's.

There are differences, of course. While Pelican is headquartered in Pacific City, Public Coast is born of Cannon Beach, owned by Martin Hospitality, which oversees the Stephanie Inn and Wayfarer Restaurant — two of the town's most upscale properties.

But unlike Pelican, Public Coast was not built from the ground up. It lives in the building that once housed the Lumberyard (which was too owned by Martin Hospitality). The Lumberyard was a cavernous space that has since been reduced considerably — those new stainless steel beer tanks swallow plenty of real estate. What remains is heavy, wooden and highly varnished. But where the Lumberyard hosted events like New Year's parties and its central island bar was well-suited for watching sports with a crowd, Public Coast is more segmented — get your food, your pint and get on with your day. Sure, you could linger on the patio on in the spacious booths, but it's a less communal experience.

There's also a new ordering system. There are no servers at Public Coast — you order and pay at the register, receiving a radio device that lights up and buzzes when it's time to pick up your food. On the busiest days it might be a godsend or at least a streamlining of efficiency. But when you're not sure exactly what you want — as I regularly found myself — you end

up lingering, milling about, and making a decision because, well, it seems like you'd better make one.

While Public Coast's menu shares similarities with the Lumberyard's — like Dirty Fries and 7-ounce hand-pressed burger patties — the new offerings, like the physical space, have been reigned in. Gone are the pizzas, much of the seafood, and outliers like pot pies, prime rib, and mac and cheese. What remains is mostly burgers, with a sprinkling of seafood, salads and so on. Few surprises.

I began with the Forager burger (\$13.95). The counterperson offered cooking options, that Public Coast's burgers will be pink in the middle unless ordered otherwise. I obliged, ordered a beer and retreated to a corner table, waiting for my radio indicator to signal pickup. I looked at it, wondering if the occasional blinks meant it was time. It wasn't. When it was, the thing went berserk.

The Forager, presumably named for its sautéed mushrooms, was a stout stack. With caramelized onions, lettuce, tomatoes and crumbles of the Rouge Creamery's astounding blue cheese, I had to give it a good smush down and still darn-near unhinge my jaw to get my mouth around it. It was as advertised, nicely pink in the middle. The patty was about an inch thick and beyond juicy, almost wet. I went through a stack of napkins, wiping up the drips from my hands. The brioche bun sponged them up too, getting soggy toward the end. Onions offered a tinge of sweetness and the mushrooms a deep, earthy aroma with a mysterious, whispering finish. I enjoyed the Forager



Above: While relatively expensive for the portion of fish, the Fish and Chips were memorable and delicious.

Left: The beer sampler (\$6.50) included six pours of Public Coast's taps; the friendly counterperson added two more, no charge, on this visit.

but wasn't blown away. The meat was under-seasoned, and it didn't quite pop. For \$14, served a la carte (well, OK, with a whole pickle), I covered at the cost.

A similar thing happened when I ordered the Chicken Burger (base price \$10.95). Perusing the build-your-own options I thought bacon sounded nice, but the \$3 up-charge dissuaded me. In the name of health, instead, I added a Side Salad (\$5.95). I thought the addition of the roll was nice, and I enjoyed the freshness of the mixed greens, tomatoes, carrots and cucumbers. The house-made citrus vinaigrette, while sharp, was quite sweet, as was the Public Coast house sauce on the chicken burger. I'd have preferred it without. And that, besides the breast being a bit dry, is all I can say about the chicken burger.

Well, that's not entirely true. I remember the bill. Along with the chicken burger and side salad I had a beer sampler (\$6.50) — six pours of Public Coast's taps to which the friendly counterperson added two more, no charge. I remember double-taking — after tip, the burger, side salad and beer cost over \$27.

At \$22.95, and closer to \$30 after tip, the Fish and Chips turned my eyeballs into dollar signs. But, unlike my previous trips, the dish was both memorable and great. The beer batter was thin and perfectly crisp, the innards blazing hot, and the halibut exquisite, moist and exuberantly clean, with the perfect kiss of sea. Now, there wasn't a lot of fish — four approximately Jo-Jo-sized chunks. But every bite was exhilarating. While certainly far from the best value, Public Coast's is probably the best fried fish I've had on the North Coast.

Where Public Coast delivers a reasonable value is on its beer. From 4 to 6 p.m. every day,

PUBLIC COAST BREWERY

Rating: ★ ★ ★

264 E. Third St., Cannon Beach

503-436-0285

HOURS: Noon to 9 p.m. daily

PRICE: \$\$ – The high end for beers and burgers

SERVICE: Cheery counter service

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN

OPTIONS: A reasonable array of vegetarian and gluten-free options

DRINKS: Beer, soda fountain, ice cream floats

KEY TO STAR RATING SYSTEM

- ★ Poor
- ★★ Below average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Best in region

including weekends, pints are a dollar off from the base price of \$5.50. The brewer, Will Leroux, has apparently just made the shift from home-brewing and, if so, he's off to a fine start. Public Coast's initial offerings run the gamut, from a Heff (banana-y and Belgian-like), to a mild Red, a crisp and easy Lager, a coffee and molasses stout that's not overly heavy, to its entry into the hops arms-race (the 4 Hop). Also, every Friday afternoon Leroux will release a limited edition keg. The iteration I tried was Blood Orange. It earned the name, smacking almost of hard candy.

Besides the beer, though, I can't see much reason to return to Public Coast. I mean, I'd like to have the fish and chips again, but unless I appear in the will of a long-lost, wealthy relative, the financials just don't add up. Which is a bit of a shame. What Cannon Beach gained in a brewery it lost in a local choice. They call it Public Coast, but it seems positioned more toward tourists.