



Brewhaha #9: The Great Lost Bear, Portland ME

This touring thing was hard work, so I put extra effort into sleeping well. It was probably only about midnight when I sacked in at the Tourist Trap Hotel, so rising and shining at about 9:30 seemed just fine to me. Needed the shower and such – and the very end of the complimentary breakfast (waffles, yummm) -- before my 11:00 checkout.

That's definitely one good aspect of touring brew pubs: those places just don't open up early. For example, this first stop for Day 3 – Sunday, August 30th, if you're scoring at home (and even if you're not) -- opened for bizniz at the crack o' noon, and I planned on being there when the latch clicked. If the first item on your To Do list is not till "p.m.", you really don't have any good excuses for tardiness.

I did hit up a Best Buy at some mall on the way, though, and scored a nifty three-way AC-DC inverter that would fit C-Note's socket. Charging the phone while driving was of paramount importance, not so much for phone calls or camera or Facebooking, but for two major things: tunes (C-Note has a *cassette* player with AM/FM radio), and the map app with the GPS *oh-there-I-am* function. I simply clipped the iPhone to the bottom of my shorts, and had an easy, accessible, hands-free view of the screen.

Before resuming the Tour, though, I took a moment to make a phone call or two. Yesterday's misses miffed me. Even though Sebago did turn up later, more than an hour of search time had been lost in sniffing out those two not-here's. My list for today was topped by a place in Belfast (no, Maine), and I didn't want to take those slow winding roads through those coastal towns – nice though they surely would be – if there was no brewhaha at the end of that rainbow.

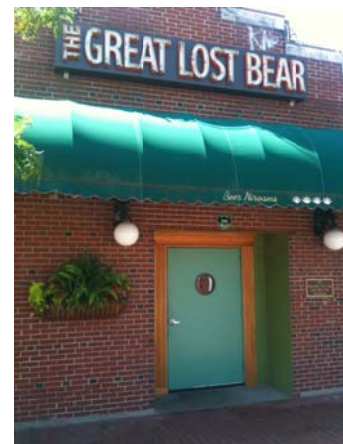
So, I called the Belfast Bay Brewing Company, just to make sure they were there and open (it was Sunday, after all), and I was surprised when a human answered. He informed me that, no, they no longer did the brewhaha thing; they still brewed, but didn't haha on site. I was going to do an "OK, thanks, bye," but he seemed like a good keg to tap for info, so I told him of NEPBT and asked for ideas.

Well, he was indeed a font of knowledge. Pat Mullen was his name and he started giving me info about every place on my list, and, even better, some that weren't. I jotted notes eagerly. Finally, I asked him about his own beers, and he told me that they could be purchased numerous places around coastal Maine, but that their former pub is now an ice cream store, and if I do pass through Belfast, come on in for some good homemade scream.

Pat's strongest suggestion, since I had not left Portland yet, was to find The Great Lost Bear. I had never heard of this one; it wasn't on my scout list.

So, I googled TGLB, found its web page (and address), plinked in my current location, and the map app purple-lined my route from hither to thither. I've long been a huge fan of my Rand McNally Road Atlas, and have relished shaping expeditious routes around the USA and Canada, but I gotta admit that having my phone do all that for me was pretty cool.

It took a little longer than expected to find The Great Lost Bear, which I guess makes some sense, but as I pulled



into the lot right at opening time, four other people were already walking to the door, and two reasonably respectable bikers had just pulled in before me. I could only see that as a good sign. Pubbers flocking to the opening bell. Nice.

TGLB is an assuming place: brick front, green awning, 1950's style neon sign, and a porthole in the otherwise blank door. Even in bright sunlight, it looked like a dive. I liked it right away.

In small letters on the front flap of the awning, with four paw prints as punctuation, it read "Beer Nirvana."



The windows were big rectangles boasting pretty cool hand painted letters and such, with curtains and a dark room behind. It should have occurred to me as I was standing right in front of them, that I had no reflection. I was a better paint job than I thought. There was no glass, just painted bricks!

The really sad part is that I didn't notice that until I was editing the pix when I got home. Dang observant there, Hops. Too focused on the brew within, I reckon.

So, here it was, halfway down page 2, and I'm finally getting inside a bar. It was comfortably dark and woody in there. Ceilings were low, lighting had an orange tint, nothing looked new. 60+ beer taps stood ready in several banks around the long, J-shaped, plain wood bar. An impressive collection of beer cans filled a floor-to-ceiling, plexi-glass-protected wall beside the bar. Etchings decorated the glass dividers between the bar and various dining areas. They had the classic neon clock, the occasional witty sign, and a very cool hand-drawn menu with a happy bear on the front.



The barkeep was not unfriendly, but he had not really warmed to his workday yet. There was still some set-up to do, fruit to cut, juices to arrange, servers crap to attend to, hangover to shake off, the usual day shift shit. I knew it well. I was sometimes slow to offer mirth with the menu too.

I selected the Dogfish Head 60-Minute IPA (7% alcohol), prudently eschewing the more potent 90-Minute version (10%). If this had been the final instead of first stop, things woulda been different. TGLB had dozens of draughts, but didn't brew any of their own, so I just picked a good sounding IPA to get the day rolling.

For food, I chose some open-faced turkey sandwich thing. Sounded good. Wasn't. Shoulda had one of the burgers that they were semi-famous for. So much for "eating right."

Despite the culinary letdown, I easily could've hunkered down in here for a long tap-touring session. But, it was time to head onwards. The goal was Acadia National Park by sunset. Now, you're thinking, it's only Maine, it's like ten miles wide, right? Well, the line looked small on the map, but the Pine Tree State, as it is officially nicknamed, ranks 39th in land area, is larger than South Carolina and New Jersey, and almost as big as Indiana. The State Bird is the chickadee. I don't think I saw any, though.

Anyway, I had about 200 miles to cover. Not all that daunting to a Key Wester, where the nearest shopping mall is 150 miles from home, but those 200 miles also had some very small-town driving involved, and a couple of brewhaha stops.

With a coulda-been-a-contender sigh, I dashed off the last of my Dogfish Head, and bid farewell to The Great Lost Bear. Portland had been a good time indeed.

