

Blackfin Pub, Comox, BC:

You can tell straight away when the owners know how to run a good pub. They must be doing something right if it's full of locals in the off season. This was the case when we walked into the **Blackfin Pub** in Comox. The friendly staff of this fine upscale pub immediately made us feel welcome, particularly on a cold blustery day at the end of November. We'd been out checking out the town and the museum with its collection of local dinosaur bones, and needed a beer. We had not visited the pub since it changed hands, and were impressed. In 1991 a fire destroyed the original building, only a couple of years after it had opened. The current building was finished in finely crafted cherry wood and Honduras mahogany by local craftsman Ernie Winstanley. Present owners Edd and Lisa Moyes purchased the pub in 2005, and refurbished it with cosy booths and original art work by local artists.

Since Comox is halfway up Vancouver Island we did not have high hopes for the beer list. Indeed the scotch and wine selections are far more impressive than the beer. But of the ten taps, four were craft beers. We were impressed that the glasses were 20 ounce pints, and that the beers came at the right temperature. While the menu is mostly pub food, it does include many seafood dishes. The food is great here and they make a lovely rich fish chowder with local snapper, clams, shrimps and scallops.

Even though it is on the east coast of Vancouver Island, the pub overlooks Comox Harbour and Marina, and it faces south west. This means that on a clear day you can see the Beaufort Mountain Range and the Comox Glacier. There's a deck on the oceanfront which is one of the best spots on the Island on a summer evening. Come and try it when you are touring Vancouver Island next summer!

*Located at 132 Port Augusta Street, Comox, BC. Contact 250-339-5030.
www.blackfinpub.com*

News from Here and There

The B.C. Liquor Distribution Branch released sales figures for the year ending March 2006. B.C.'s craft breweries are expanding sales at a great rate with Russell Brewing leading the pack with 137 percent growth over the previous year. Phillips Brewing is close behind at 134 percent increase, and Mark James Group's Avalon Brewing is up 117 percent. Tin Whistle Brewing (up 82%), Fat Cat Brewery (up 66%), Lighthouse Brewing (up 60%), Mt. Begbie Brewing (up 56%), Tree Brewing (up 42%), and Crannog Ales (up 21%) all experienced double digit sales growth.

Russell Brewing in Surrey, up to now a draught-only brewery, recently doubled its size from 12,000 sq. ft. to make room for a bottling line. Russell is now owned by the Harris family: Andrew, Peter, Angie, and Paul, together with their father, Paul.

Eleven years after moving from Keating Industrial Park to their Bay Street location, **Vancouver Island Brewing** maxed out its tank capacity this summer. Three more conditioning tanks are being installed to keep up with demand. To improve the quality of their packaged beers, the brewery has recently put in new canning and kegging lines.

The 4th annual **Canadian Brewing Awards** competition received over 225 entries in 21 classes from 48 breweries from coast to coast. British Columbia brewers came away with a respectable 19 medals (brewers from the competition's home province, Ontario, took 26 medals). Andrew Tessier, brewer at Buckerfield's Brewery (Swans Hotel) was awarded an outstanding seven medals out of 11 beers entered. Buckerfield's was declared 2006 National Brewpub of the Year. Buckerfield's took home four Gold, two Silver and one bronze medal. Tessier's Extra IPA won best Best of Category (India Pale Ale) and his Smooth Sailing Honey Ale won Best of Category (Special Honey Lager or Ale). Other British Columbia category winners were Vancouver Island Brewery's Hermann's Dark Lager, Old Yale's Pale Ale (Bitter), Mt. Begbie Brewing's High Country Kolsch (Wheat Beer) and Tall Timber Ale (Brown Ale). Other breweries winning medals were Canoe Brewpub, Granville Island, Lighthouse, Phillips, and Whistler.

After 11 years at Spinnakers, **Lon Ladell** is hanging up his brewer's paddle and is now the owner of Fuse Waterfront Grill in Sooke. Taking over at Spinnakers as head brewer is Rob Monk who has been there for three years. Prior to that Rob was brewing with Yukon Brewing Company in his hometown of Whitehorse, Yukon.

CAMRA members picked an old favourite in their annual ballot for CAMRA Victoria Pub of the Year 2006 award: **Spinnakers Gastro Brewpub** on Catherine Street in Victoria West. Runners up in order are Swans Brewpub, Canoe Brewpub, and Christies Carriage House Pub. The award is chosen based on the quality and choice of beer served, and the ambience of the pub and it's staff. CAMRA is the acronym for the **Campaign for Real Ale** society, a group dedicated to the promotion and responsible consumption of naturally-crafted beers. The Victoria branch has close to 200 members.

Benjamin Schottle, of Hugo's Brewpub, has decided to brew another batch of Fireweed Honey Ale. "It's a favourite with some of the regulars and it's been a while

since I've made it", says Schottle. "The honey I use comes from Stan the Honey Man - and it's just beautiful. After dumping a large bucket of honey into a batch, I can't help but clean out the last remaining sticky goodness with my fingers. I find that by being gentle with the honey and careful with the fermentation, a distinctive honey flavour shines through in the finish of this beer." It will likely be on tap mid March, once the Chocolate Nut Brown ale is finished.

Granville Island Brewing currently has the Scottish Ale back as the Winter Limited release. This beer is made with four different malts, roasted barley and Northdown hops, a variety that is rarely used outside the UK.

From **Phillips Brewing** comes the return of the full bodied Espresso Stout, a good session beer at 5 percent. This will be followed by the Surley Blonde. English malts and an ale yeast together with lots of hops make this a very dry strong (10%) winter ale. In April look for a Belgian ale. Matt Phillips says he is still working on the recipe for that one.

All beers brewed by the **Nelson Brewing Company** have been Certified Organic since November of 2006. Al Mcleod, Marketing Manager, says, "We are currently repackaging and look forward to a great year in new markets".

Destination Pub: Name

Logo or picture

Intro & Description

The beer selection

Delicious food

Snappy ending

Located at

Phone number

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Brewers Choices

I was curious as to which beers craft brewers drink when their own beers are not available. I asked for a draught choice, and favourite bottled beers, both Canadian and imported. This was a tough call for some. Matt Phillips, as president of the Craft Brewers Association of B.C., diplomatically stepped aside from naming names, but did offer these general suggestions:

Matt Phillips – PHILLIPS BREWING, Victoria

Draught beer: Fresh, and poured through clean lines. There are lots of great beers, but beer is fragile, and if it is not cared for properly, the best beer can be a disappointment.

Bottled Canadian beer: Again, there are lots of great beers. Sometimes I am looking for a hop bomb, other days a hefe or a sulphur laden lager. The diversity of beer makes it impossible to choose a favourite, but it helps if it is in a dark bottle and the date code indicates that it is fresh!

Imported beer: Some of the most interesting imported beers that I have had in bottles don't seem to make the crossing very well. The ones that seem to deal best with the crossing are usually a bit bigger in alcohol, and to my taste, brewed with a quirky Belgian abbey yeast.

Chris Gress, CRAIG ST. BREWPUB, Duncan

Draught beer: I love bocks, so I'd pick Sean Hoyne's Copper Bock at Canoe Brewpub.

Bottled Canadian beer: Big Rock Traditional, especially if in Alberta. It appears to have a rounder, more robust flavour there.

Imported beer: a tie between the very complex Wychwood Hobgoblin, and Innes and Gunn (Edinburgh) , an oak aged beer that I've got something different out of each time I've tried it.

Murray Hunter – GULF ISLANDS BREWING, Salt Spring Island

Draught beer: whatever's local. Freshness is the key. Vancouver Island Brewery's Hermanns Dark Lager, if it's fresh.

Bottled Canadian beer: Alley Kat Full Moon Pale Ale – fantastic.

Imported beer: usually Pilsner Urquell or something along that line.

Gary Lohin – CENTRAL CITY BREWING, Surrey

Draught beer: I can't really pick one because I'll drink locally wherever I am. My favourite style though is IPA. When I'm at a local watering hole, I'll always check to see what micro-brewed beers are on tap and if it's available, go with an IPA. The hoppier the better. One of my favourites in this style is made by Boundary Bay Brewing in Bellingham, Washington.

Bottled Canadian beer: I've always admired the beers from Unibroue, and consider them world class. If I'm out camping and selection is an issue I'll try to find Tree Brewing's Hophead, beers from Phillips Brewing, or cans from Fernie Brewing.

Imported beer: My choice would be some of the Micro's from the States, but if we're talking what's available in B.C. stores, I enjoy the tall cans from Warsteiner, Pilsner Urquell, and some of the bottle-conditioned Belgian products.

R&B BREWING, Vancouver, decided to split the questions between their three brewers:
Rick Dellows - *Draught beer*: Steamworks NNW Pale Ale – it's the perfect balance of malt, hops aroma, and reminds me of the best British beers.

Allyson Tomlin – *Bottled Canadian beer*: – Phillips Oatmeal Stout, because she's a huge fan of Matt Phillips' beers.

Ben Van Hee - *Imported beer*: Fullers London Porter – a real quality beer, a fine example of the style.

Andrew Harris – RUSSELL BREWING, Surrey

Draught beer: I recently visited Montreal and discovered an affinity for the St-Amboise Pale Ale. This is a super amber pale ale, hoppy and full flavoured with a very clean mouth feel.

Bottled Canadian beer: Amsterdam Brewery's Blonde Lager (Toronto) – an un-pasteurized, lightly hopped, easy drinking lager without a bitter finish.

Imported beer: Pilsner Urquell – I enjoy the crisp clean finish, in my opinion this pilsner has the perfect ratio of bitterness and hop. Delicious.

Bart Larsen – MT. BEGBIE BREWING, Revelstoke

Draught beer: Guinness because it is dark, smooth, and is nicely hopped.

Bottled Canadian beer: I only drink ours!

Imported beer: Pilsner Urquell as it is a flavourful lager with good bittering hops.

Benjamin Schottle – HUGO's BREWPUB, Victoria

Draught beer: Phillips Brewing Co. IPA. The head on this beer is just ferocious - thick and creamy and then some! A very welcome and respectable IPA in a land where hoppy beers are not always easy to find.

Bottled Canadian beer: Unibroue's Trois Pistoles (La Fin Du Monde, eau Benite, and Terrible are all neck and neck for the number one position). I applaud their dedication to producing authentic Belgian beerstyles. Flavours of dark fruit/plum/candy/esters in big bodied, bottle conditioned ales really turn my crank.

Imported beer: Rochefort 8. Trappist ales are the pinnacle of quality in my opinion. If a beer is made by monks, chances are, I'm going to love it. This one reminds me of a very pleasant springtime afternoon spent on a patio in the rustic, cozy town of Rochefort, Belgium.

Neil Herbst - ALLEY KAT BREWING, Edmonton

Draught beer: Hm. tough one. On reflection I would have to say Brewsters' Pilsner. It is a really nice, hoppy, Czech style pilsner. I've even been known to have it on draught at home!

Bottled Canadian beer: I really don't drink a lot of Canadian bottled beer, but when I do it is usually on the coast in your lovely province and I usually try to drink from the local brewery. In the Victoria area I usually drink Lighthouse Amber or pale ale.

Imported beer: recently had a chocolate stout from Brooklyn Brewing that was absolutely delightful. It got its dark chocolate flavours entirely from black malts.

Paul Hoyne - LIGHTHOUSE BREWERY, Victoria

Draught beer: Dix IPA brewed by Tony Dewald. This is a wonderful fresh draught beer...beautiful malt character and balance...grapefruit, mandarin and a hint of pine are the dominate flavours.

Bottled Canadian beer: La Fin du Monde by Unibroue. This is a very good Canadian version of a Belgian Triple...spicy and citrus flavours.

Imported beer: Schneider Aventinus, a great example of how tasty weizenbock beer can be. A warming finish that is creamy and smooth that leaves you wanting more!

Ralf Pittroff – VANCOUVER ISLAND BREWERY, Victoria

Draught beer: Sleemans Honey Brown Lager.

Bottled Canadian beer: Big Rock Pale Ale

Imported beer: Pilsner Urquell.

Vern Lambourne - GRANVILLE ISLAND BREWING, Vancouver

Your questions are probably some of the hardest I've had in a while. I honestly can't say that I have a favourite beer, but if pushed here are three answers for beers that have impressed me lately.

Draught beer: ESB at High Mountain in Whistler. It is a very well balanced bitter, and went well with a rainy afternoon in the pub.

Bottled Canadian beer: Phillips Black Toque India Dark Ale. I had this just before Christmas and was really impressed with the bitterness and the dark malt and hop flavours.

Imported beer: a tie between Fullers London Pride and Coniston's Bluebird Bitter. Why? They're both delicious.

Dave Fenn - HOWE SOUND BREWING, Squamish

Draught beer: Lighthouse IPA. It's refreshing to get some great flavour in a draught product, in a market dominated by mild ales and lagers.

Bottled Canadian beer: Phillips IPA. A great beer that gives people a surprised look that beer can be this flavourful.

Imported beer: Grolsch. Although I prefer not to buy imported products, I like this Dutch beer for its clean finish.

Tim Brown – MISSION SPRINGS BREWING, Mission

Draught beer: Dix BBQ and Brewery IPA.

Bottled Canadian beer: Phillips Longboat Double Chocolate Porter.

Imported beer: Chimay Grande Reserve.

Tony DeWalt – DIX BBQ & BREWERY, Vancouver

Draught beer: Central City's IPA. It has loads of bitterness and the abundant hops are well balanced with malt.

Bottled Canadian beer: Unibroue Noir de Chambly with its unique flavour of roast malt and anise.

Imported beer: I've always been particular to Duvel but now I'm asking friends to bring back Stone Ruination from the US. This is as intense as it gets, especially when fresh.

And the team from CRANNOG ALES, Sorrento, agreed to differ:

Brian MacIssac:

Draught beer: Longwood Brewpub's Imperial Stout. Intense, true to style, lots of great roast character and the alcohol level to match it.

Bottled Canadian beer: Unibroue Raftman: Intense flavour, massive body, bottle-conditioned.

Imported beer: Fraoch, from Scotland. This beer has a unique malt profile, delicate heather notes; it is subtle and very pleasant.

Rebecca Kneen:

Draught beer: Hurricane IPA by Storm Brewing. Very complex, lots of lovely hops and plenty of alcohol to lift them to your palate, plus it's a bit different every time (this is a good thing).

Bottled Canadian beer: Unibroue Maudite - because if you have to have bottled beer, bottle-conditioned is the only way to go. All the Unibroue beers are massive, even the lighter ones, with complexity and balance. Magic.

Imported beer: Stone Brewing's IPA (California), because it's the best IPA I've ever tasted, seconded by Pelican Brewpub's IPA (Oregon). Unbelievably hoppy, but it carries it off well, with enough alcohol to balance the bitterness and a nice malt profile.

And, we'll leave the last words to Rebecca & Brian: "That's a fun little exercise!"