

**Bar Hoppin' With Hops**  
The Second Century Tour  
Hops MacBarley's June 2013  
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar #104:

**90 Mile Lounge**

300 Front Street

Wednesday, 5 June 2013, 7 pm

*Oberon Ale (bottle) \$5*

*Sierra Nevada Pale Ale (bottle) \$5*

This was a serendipitous find. I had parked on Whitehead with the intention of making the Rooftop Cafe my next stop. I toyed with the idea of doing a quick pop-in at Coasters and get it out of the way, but it looked so empty, and the Miami-style music was so loud, that I walked right on by. Some other night. Maybe.



I was just about to the Rooftop when my attention was seized by a simple sign, hand-written in bold black Sharpie on pale yellow, letter-sized card stock, and stapled to the wooden post at the bottom of a flight of stairs. It flatly informed me that the \$2 beer special was not valid upstairs.

Questions exploded across my mind. Upstairs? What's upstairs? There's a cigar store in the ground floor. \$2 beer special? In a cigar store? Annnnd, just what *is* valid upstairs, hmmm?

I looked around and saw the overhead sign for the 90 Mile Lounge. Nice sign. I'd seen it somewhere before. (Oh yeah, Cat-5 made it. I remember that ass caught my eye on the workshop table.) New bar for the taking, so up the stairs I went. When I reached to top step, an identical cheapo sign reiterated the no-two-buck-beer-here decree. They might as well have added, *so get lost, you cheap fuck*.

The sign did not deter me, though; for one thing, I was on Tour money, and for another, I'd bet that the two-buck beer was not a nice flavorful IPA anyway. And that's what I craved (crove?).

Right away, I liked the room. The first things I saw were the big couches that filled up the middle of the room, and the band setting up their equipment for tonight's blues show. Mmmmm, liiiiive bluuuues. Couuuches.



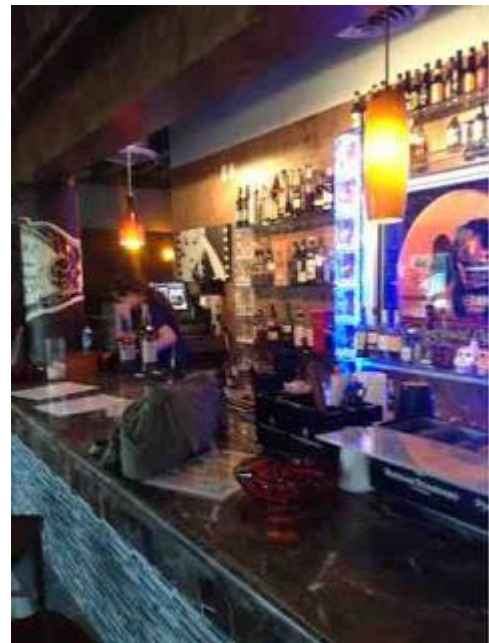
There was some cool art on the walls, and a kind of fence made of four-foot-high cigars. There were big glass doors behind the band, and further along the wall, opened wide onto a balcony overlooking Front Street. The Aquarium could be seen straight ahead across the cobblestones, and the Customs House was in view up to the left. There were a half-dozen or so tables out there, some with umbrellas.

But this is not a balcony tour, nor a couch tour, nor a blues music tour. It is a BAR tour, and, yes, 90 Mile Lounge has a bar, and such a bar it is. It's been open since January, but this was the first I've ever heard or seen of it. There is nothing stuffy about this place; I just felt casually in my element as soon as I bellied up.

Lisa was the barkeep, a Scottish woman of Indian descent, who once had a bar in Hawaii. She was a gas. Sincere passion for her work just exuded from her, made all the more exotic by her brogue.

Her "work" extends far beyond the mere tending of a bar. Her real passion is whisky. Having worked in Glasgow's distilleries since her youth ("my first job was turning sod at age 13, and I was hooked"), she has an esoteric understanding of the spirit like none I've met before. I've known beer brewers who knew their ingredients and processes well, but Lisa was in it from the sod up. 'Tis in her veins. She said she aspires to open her own distillery some day.

Our conversation about booze, travels, marketing, and the travails of the F&B world was lively, so I followed up my Oberon with a Sierra. When Lisa was off attending to other customers, I busied myself taking photos and perusing the artsy menu.



Our conversation about booze, travels, marketing, and the travails of the F&B world was lively, so I followed up my Oberon with a Sierra. When Lisa was off attending to other customers, I busied myself taking photos and perusing the artsy menu. It's not \$ but not \$\$\$ either. Black Angus Beef Sliders on golden pretzel rolls, with chips or po-sal or pa-sal -- all for the low, low, everyday price of \$14 -- sounded like a future dinner for the Hopster. (Not quite as good a deal as Flats, but Flats gives you nothing but pickles with your sliders -- like 30 of them, it's ridiculous.)

Lisa loved to talk about whisky and was happy to find an audience. Her brogue was like music to me, so I listened half because I was interested in what she was saying, and half because it sounded so good.

Then, she brought out the bottle that stopped me cold: Dalmore 12-year-old Scotch. It had the stag from my family's crest on it, and not just printed on, it was in gold plastic, glued on, with the gold antlers wrapping around the sides of the bottle. It was all a marketing gimmick, just something to make the bottle look classy so Americans will buy the mediocre booze within. Still, I thought was dang cool.



90 Mile is, above all else, a cigar bar. That is definitely something to consider. There were few patrons on this visit, and almost none were smoking, so it was easy to forget that the bar is the upstairs extension of the Southernmost Cigar Club & Smoke Shop (who apparently have a \$2 beer special).

I assume that a night of blues tunes will be accompanied by an atmosphere of fine tobacco burning. Cheap stogies can clear a room, but good cigars can be aromatic and pleasant. With such large open doors, it could never get overpowering anyway. I'm betting that the smoke would be a pretty cool element of the room's blues vibe. I might even puff on a long one myself, just to feel like a fat cat.

This struck me as funny. A guy came up to the bar and asked Lisa if it was OK to smoke in here. Cigar bar, duh. Lisa replied, "Ya can smooke cigars anywhar, but cigarettes haf ta be smooked ootside." I loved it.

The best thing about this Tour stuff -- brutally exhausting though it is -- is finding the cool spots that I had been clueless about. Point 5, Santiago's Bodega, and Cork & Stogie were good examples from the *Peace, Love & IPA Tour*. 90 Mile was a good find; the *Second Century Tour* is already a success.

I'm sure their large, colorful, overhead hanging sign cost them big bucks, but it was that shitty little *get your cheap ass outa here* sign that worked on me. Ha. One of life's ironies.