



Brewhaha #8: Sea Dog Brewing Company, South Portland ME

Rules are made to be broken, I hear. I had to drive to SoPo (South Portland) to get to Sea Dog. It wasn't any big deal to me. My friend Cathy used to praise me as "the best drunk driver she had ever seen," mainly because I actually get less competitive than I am when I am stone cold sober. I tend to laugh things off, don't try to mad-dash through yellow lights, and get more in vibrate with the tunes. I also recognize my plight and respect it, becoming less reckless and more reckless.

And, of course, with Moby my trusty van as my usual steed, if I gave the beer gods too much rope, I just curl up in the belly o' th' whale and snooze it off for a couple hours before they hanged me with it.

But that would not be an option here. C-Note, though a good set o' wheels so far, just was not camper material.

It wasn't a long ride from Po to SoPo, and Sea Dog, being a big stand-alone building on a major intersection, was an easy find.

Like Shipyard, the Dog was a familiar brew. It had been around since the early 90's or so, and had made the jump from local to regional. Can't say I've seen it in Florida anywhere, though.

And that's part of the reason I came on this ride. Key West was only recently breaking out of a Bud-induced malaise where Sam Adams, or Heinken, or – dare I say it – Rolling Rock was about the most exotic thing you were going to find. But, of late,

craft beers had been sneaking through holes in the Anheuser-Busch wall. When Harpoon IPA showed up on the taps of Lazy Gecko and Jack Flats, it was game on. Ilona's came out of nowhere with 60+ rare and potent brews, like Monk In A Trunk, and Midas Touch (9% alcohol, with just a touch of saffron). The Porch burst on the scene shortly after with a tantalizing array of drafts and bottles, and even cans.

Even the Green Parrot added Dogfish Head 60-Minute IPA to their taps! (The Porch has the 90-Minute variety – 10% -- in draft pints now. Oh lordy.)

So, the seed of the NEBPT may have been sown in a time of draught drought, but the fresh burst of hoppy tastes in the Southernmost City gave this trip a Purpose. Not just a purpose: a Purpose. Gimme gimme gimme more goooood beeeeeer! More more MORRRE!

Hence, this ill-advised drive to SoPo.

No, really, officer, ya gotta understand. It's one of those on-a-mission-from-God things. Really!

Yah, OK, you lush.

But, hey, I was diggin' this tour bigtime, and this was only the first full day.

So, I walk on into Sea Dog and like it right away. There was a hippie-ish dude pluckin' away on his gee-tah and crooning some mellow Counting Crows tune. The Crows *always* work for me. One look at the taps told me that, in other circumstances, I



could be here often, long, and late. I love that cute doggy, and look at all those flavors. Ahhhhh.



Of course, I had me the IPA. My name *is* Hops, after all; what would you expect?

This ended up being an odd stop, though. I took the only empty bar stool, the second from the far end. A group of four or so to my left was practically huddling, so I saw nothing but the backs of shirts, and the dude on my right didn't seem to speak any English.

Normally, I'd be happy as a clam about this, misanthrope that I am, but I was

in a talkative mood, and it was too dark down here to do any legible jotting in the Notbook. Even the barkeep was engaged in convo well down the bar.

So, I drank my beer and recalled the day's highlights. Portsmouth seemed like about a week ago. Suds swilled, I detoured for a pit stop on my way out, and was stopped dead in my tracks by the mural.

Taking up a real good chunk of the far wall, and spotlit for extra impressiveness, was a four-foot-by-six-foot mural of the Sea Dog! He looked awesome. As I walked closer, the texture really caught my eye. It looked like the skin of a football or a basketball. Then, as I got a few feet away, I realized that this mural was made out of bottle caps, all colored and layered in one damn fine decoration.



"Cap Dog" is his name, and he was pieced together by one Robert Cochran, back in '09. In all, 5,220 caps comprise the piece. That's a LOT of caps. I doubt Robert drank 'em all, but I'm betting that he got a few cold Sea Doggies on the house for this work of art. Very cool.



I still had no home for the night, though. I had all my bars planned out, but neglected to line up a room for sleepy-time-time.

No worries, though; the barkeep would surely know of a nearby hotel. I caught his attention and asked him. Instead of just blurting something out, he turned and consulted the huddled guys, and suddenly it became a common quest to find this travelling boozehound the cheapest and bestest room in SoPo.

It was almost comical. They were tossing

out hotel names and gesturing towards all points of the compass with a mishmash of directions, even arguing with one another, like “nooo, this one’s closer than that” or “no way, that place is closed now!” One guy, who seemed like the ringleader, decided to outdo them all. He made a big production of taking out his cell phone and making a call to some guy who was a friend of his ex-wife, who ran or owned – well, he used to own it, now I think he just runs it – a rooming house a couple miles down the road, easy to find just follow such-and-such a road for only like five or six miles, till it looks like it’s gonna just *end*, and there it is. He’ll have rooms for less than these tourist rip-off places. (Like a Key West dude was going to think an \$89 night was a rip-off.)

I wanted to tell him that a tourist rip-off place was gonna be just fine, but he was so intent on providing The Best Answer, and being borderline belligerent about it with his cronies, that I didn’t have the nads to interrupt him. I just stood there, politely waiting, and waiting, as he ... got no answer to his call.

He was about to try some other number, when I stayed him with a “No, Hampton Inn sounds great, actually -- just up the road that way about a mile?” I said, turning to the guy who I thought mentioned something like that. The dude looked at me like I had three heads. “*Holiday Inn*, and no, *that way*, about *four* miles.”

“Got it. Thanks, guys!” And I was outa there. I’m sure they had nothing but wonderful things to say about me as I departed.

I got into C-Note and steered down a road that nobody had seemed to point to. In less than a minute, I came to a large, locally-owned hotel. In another ten minutes, I was lying on my bed for the night.

Perfect.

Thanks again, guys.