



Brewhaha #19: Sunday River Brewing Company, Bethel ME

It was just about a 90-minute ride due west to reach the 19th hole. Sunday River is one of Maine's largest ski resorts, and the SRBC was situated just down the road from the mountain.

Labor Day weekend is not typically a bango day at ski resorts, though, so I wasn't expecting a crowd. I was right. I pulled into the large parking lot and was immediately impressed with the size and newness of the building.

I was also struck by the *emptiness* of the lot; not a single car graced the wide, lined, asphalt. It made me sad. This place looked good, and it had taken a goodly ride to reach it, but it must have been closed for the off-season. Dayummm.

With a sigh, I continued my slow roll past the front steps towards the exit on the opposite side. I had just about resigned myself to head

for New Hampshire, when I saw a handful of cars parked around the corner on the west side of the building, like where employees would be expected to park. There was also a sign boldly announcing that the place opened at 11:30. Jackpot, after all!



The front doors give a very classy, wintertime-by-the-fire look: etched glass with SRBC logo and frosty effects. Nice. I could do that kinda thing with my laser, but nobody in KW ever seems to request frosty effects. Go figure, right?



Then you get through the doors and right in front of you is the glassed-in brewing room: gleaming stainless steel kettles, tall and wide and noble, proclaiming to all who enter, "YES, we are a brewery, damn it! You can eat here, and you can get a freaking lame-ass Bud Light Lime if you want (you loser), but above all other callings, we BREW!"

To my right was the empty-but-inviting dining room. If I had just skied by ass off all day, this would be a nice place to kick back with a good plate o' vittles.

BUT, to my left was the almost-as-empty bar area, and, above all other callings, I was here for the BREWS.

As usual, I settled onto a stool as close to the taps as I can get. And since there was only one other stool taken, my choice was easy. I always sit close to the taps so (a) I can read them, and (b) the barkeep will have an easier time feeding my cravings, which can be aggressive at time.

The barkeep was an amiable fellow, about my age, with that used-to-be-a-hippie-and-kind-of-still-am look about him. I liked him immediately.

The only other patron (see photo) was another matter: too loquacious, too ready to share a too-long story that neither of us gave a festering turd about. So that's all the words he deserves.



Stu, the keeper of the bar, was also the brewmaster. I ordered up the obvious choice, a 420 IPA. Stu asked what brought me there, so I briefly described my tour and showed him my koozies, coasters, and openers. He was enthusiastic and actually wanted to buy some. I begged off on the sale, though, explaining that these were my calling cards, and that I had but a small amount in hand with many brewhahas yet to go.

I asked what brought him to these parts, and he told a four-sentence life story. You can deal with that kinda tale anytime: drop the concise synopsis (is there another kind?) and if they have any questions, let 'em ask.

I did, so I did. And he happily answered, well, working around Loquacious Man's lengthy interruptions. LM would shift into ramble mode, Stu would excuse himself to "get a little work done," and I'd be left to politely nod and slurp my drink. My empty glass signaled Stu's return, he poured me a Sunday River Alt, and I eagerly shifted my attention back to his tale.

Turns out, Stu and his friend Will did their collegiate years at UCal-Berkeley, back when that was still the height of hippiedom. As soon as he mentioned Berkeley, I gave the knowing nod of someone who knew the vibe. I didn't immerse myself in it for years as he did, but my one late afternoon gave me enough of a sip to know what the vat tasted like.

That was in 1984, and it was only my third roadtrip of any distance. Richie and I were bound from Boston to L.A. to catch the Olympic Track & Trials, and we stopped in San Francisco to tip a few with Bowie and Chico. The coolest thing about that stop was up in Berkeley. Having chanced down a small street to grab a slice of pizza, we sauntered towards a small park where we heard some conga beat. One guy was calmly slapping away at his drums, and another was just setting up to join him on some bongos.

We leaned against something and lingered to listen for a while. Soon, another percussionist arrived and joined in the flow, playing off the conga's lead. Then another.

And in the next quarter-hour, several musicians with a variety of instruments – clarinet, flute, mandolin, and diverse percussion add-ons – had flocked into one mellow but lively jam session. Conga Man set the pace, and occasionally one of the others would kinda take the forefront with his/her own special touch for a cuppla minutes, then blend back into the mood. It went on for well over an hour, and was *excellent*.

Anyway, back to Sunday River. I was being like Loquacious Man there. Sawree.

Stu and Will chose to study Brewing at UCB, a new discipline that had not yet attracted a big crowd. It seems that Stu was a good student, because SRBC's brews were deeeelicious.

Will must have been just as good, as Stu informed me that his one-time college bud was now the brewmaster at Moat Mountain Brewery, just across the border in New Hampshire. He had even been the best man in his wedding three years ago.



Moat Mountain was my next stop, and it occurred to me that I had a few hours to go to reach Burlington, and I wasn't getting any closer by sitting here sampling Stu's homework.

Once again, it was with regret that I hefted my carcass from the stool and bid a good barkeep – and his most excellent brews -- farewell.

I'll bet this place *rocks* in wintertime.

A few miles later, I breached the border of the White Mountain State and left Maine behind. Probably for the last time.

Vacationland (The Way Life Should Be) had been a great take. I entered at about 5:00 PM on Saturday, and was departing at about the same hour on Tuesday. In just 72 hours, I had visited 16 brewhahas, drank 31 different craft brews, trekked down Memory Lane, and sucked the scenic marrow out of America's easternmost National Park.

Thank you, State O' Maine!