



Seattle Day One

November 19, 2014
Barclay Perkins
By: Barclay Perkins

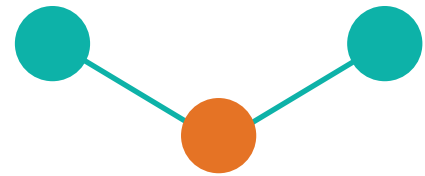
I'm just back from my latest spin around the US. Nine days in the Pacific Northwest and Denver promoting my book. And, of course, meeting people, drinking and generally having the sort of good time only beer can facilitate.

It went pretty well. Like clockwork, really, despite a fairly complicated schedule, including four cities, three internal flights and an international train journey. I may finally be getting the hang of this stuff. I've learned from my previous trips. One thing in particular: don't eat in Golden Corral. Unless you like throwing up all day (I don't).

We'll start at the beginning, with me heading to Schiphol in a taxi.

When you fly to the US, you get an extra security grilling at the gate. I dread it. On my first two trips stateside this year they plucked me out, took me off to a separate room and subjected me to a minute examination of my baggage and a near strip search. They let me keep my trolleys on, but that was it. It's a lovely way to start a long journey.





I've had a couple of calming whiskies at the bar, but I'm still apprehensive as I approach the security check. Try not to sweat, I'm telling myself. If only I really had that much control over my body. At the end of the process they attach a little sticker to the back of your passport. The agent looks at my collection and says with a wry smile:

"I see you've been through here a lot this year. And received special attention."

"Yes, I'm getting used to being strip-searched."

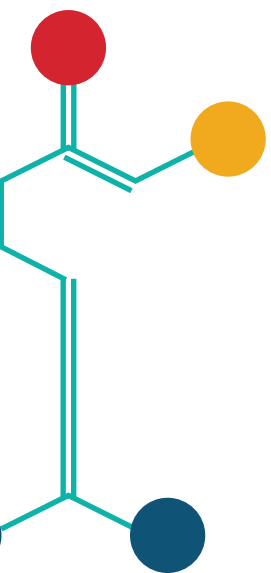
He smiles and waves me through. It's a good start.

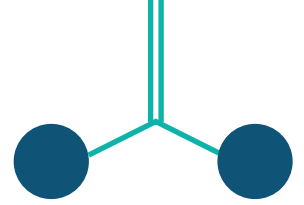
The flight takes a northerly route over Iceland, Greenland and northern Canada. An icy wasteland of bleached beauty. At times it's hard to tell if the white expanse below is cloud or ice, save when a rocky mountain top pierces the white blanket. For once I wish I'd opted for a window seat. The bloke next to my snaps away for much of the journey. I'd have done exactly the same.

We arrive in Seattle at noon, leaving me three hours before my first appointment. Just about enough time to get a taxi to my hotel, orientate myself and get another taxi to the meeting point, Reuben's Brews in Ballard, a suburb to the north of the city centre. I've arranged to meet a few people there before heading off around other nearby breweries.

Reuben's Brews is tiny by any standards. It resembles a small car repair shop. A rollup garage door emphasises this impression. Despite its tiny size, the brewery also houses a tasting room which spills onto the parking spaces in front of it. I'm barely out of the taxi when I'm greeted by Don, who has soon pushed a pint of Alt into my hand. Ah, the first beer of the trip and my first in the Northwest. It slips down a treat.

The other appointees trickle up and soon we've a small crew assembled, sitting between the fermenters and the mash tun. After a while we stroll down the street to Stoup, another slightly larger brewery only a couple of blocks away. It has a similar look, with a roll up door behind which are a few tables and chairs. It's large enough for you not to be sat amongst the fermenters. A mostly young crowd fills it up pretty well. Like most breweries I've visited recently, a row of oak barrels lie sleepily between all the shiny stainless steel. Does everyone barrel age now?





Our next destination, while still in Ballard, is slightly more distant so we drive there. Well, I don't do any actual driving. I sit in the passenger seat while someone else does all the work. This older brewery is different. For a start Maritime Pacific Brewing has a proper pub at its front, with a full kitchen. Though rather than a brewpub, it's a production brewery with an attached restaurant/bar.

It being Friday evening, it's unsurprisingly busy. Though the owner, George Hancock, takes time to show us around his kit, which is completely separated from the pub. It's a pretty decent size, with fermenters reaching up towards the ceiling. Inevitably, leaning against one wall is a rack of oak barrels.

Back in the pub, I drink a cask Double IPA enthusiastically. Rather too enthusiastically, given its strength. Cask is once again displaying its greatest advantage over keg: drinkability. Weird how many people say American-style IPA doesn't work on cask. I hold the opposite view: it really lifts them.

As I haven't eaten in a while, and despite my body thinking it's the middle of the night, I indulge in deep-fried battered bacon strips. I can feel my arteries clogging with every bite.

Maritime isn't quite the end of the night. Don drives me over to the other side of town where a brewery has just started up in part of the former Rainier complex. Rainier having been the local regional brewery, named after the volcano that looms behind the city.

Machine House, run by two British expats, concentrates on cask. Five handpulls stand to attention on the bar and there are no haunched keg fonts to be seen. My choice is easily made - they've got a Dark Mild. No way I'm going to pass that up.

The industrial origins of the building are plain to see. It's stripped down to the point of being Spartan, but that might just be because it isn't quite finished yet. It hasn't been open long. Rough and ready, I'd call it.

And that's it for the evening. I'm amazed I've managed to stay up until 11 pm. And that my body doesn't think it's time to get up rather than go to bed. A nightcap of duty-free Laphroaig puts me in a sleepytime sort of mood and I glide peacefully into the land of nod.

