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KITCHEN TABLE TASTINGS

Hops Hit British Columbia!

February 10, 2005 -- Okay, so maybe I'm being a bit sarcastic. But the truth is that hoppy ales (and I won't even mention pilsners) haven't exactly proliferated in Canada's western-most province over the past half-decade or so, even less so if you go back further. Still, on the basis of a holiday tasting, I'm very pleased to report that this trend is showing signs of reversal. And it's about time!

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My first dose of BC-style hops came from Old Yale Brewing's Sergeant's IPA, which unfortunately was marred by a heavy dose of diacetyl in the aroma. (Diacetyl, for those who may be new to the concept, is a naturally-occurring compound that makes a beer smell and taste like butter or butterscotch. It's acceptable and even welcome in some styles, but can overpower if it gets too strong.) Hazy copper in colour, my bottle had a big butterscotchy aroma that was faintly backed by some nutty notes and a lightly sweet and caramelly start. The body was heavily laced with diacetyl over some rooty bitterness and nuttiness, ending with some significant rooty and grassy bitterness. Understandably, I'd like to try this again in better shape.

More refreshing was the Cannery Brewing Company's Indian Rock IPA, a bright copper ale with a subdued apricot-ish nose. The start is perfumey and gently fruity, leading into a balanced fruity-bitter body with good malt presence supporting a growing hop character. This ale's excellent balance is marred only by a slight thinness in the body, although the dry, appetizingly bitter finish does redeem it somewhat.

R&B Brewing's Hop Goblin' IPA was my fave of the trio, with a hazy, light copper colour and nutty aroma backed by notes of dried fruit and dried leaf. The start gets straight to the hop, as an IPA should, with soft sweetness and some light fruitiness supporting a mildly tannic hop presence. The body reveals a balance of dried fruit (apricot, pear) and spicy hop character, along with a hint of brandy-like alcohol. Like the best of Canada's IPAs, this neatly straddles the line between quenching and satisfying, and does so most deliciously.

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