

A Brewopolis known as Denver

So there we were, dejected because we couldn't find decent airfares to Portland for the Oregon Brewers Fest, wallowing in self pity and wondering where we could go to search out new beers. Ultimately we decided to head to New Mexico, a place we knew well. So we packed up the car and headed down the road. Somewhere around Brady, Texas I asked Sister Hopatha what she thought about going up to Durango. "What the hell, why not just go to Denver", she says. Hmmm...I am lucky to have such an associate as this. I hadn't been to Denver in many years and started to do as much research as possible about beer destinations with the invaluable help of home brewing newsgroup members. On the way North we stopped off in Albuquerque and Santa Fe to see some friends, visiting a number of places I have detailed in the past. Il Vicino's, Chama River, Turtle Mountain in Albuquerque and Santa Fe Brewing as well as Blue Corn in Santa Fe. After a long night drinking Chicken Killer we headed out the next morning towards Denver. We stayed on the outskirts of downtown and drove into the centrally located "beer playground" area around Blake Street at night. Our first stop was Wynkoops, on...Wynkoop Street for a bite to eat. The food was good, the place expansive and the beers a bit hit and miss, although they did have some interesting selections and not your ordinary cookie cutter line up. In addition to fruit beers, they also had a Schwarz and others not normally seen. As most people know Wynkoops is owned by the current Mayor of Denver and is the city's oldest brewpub. Around the corner from Wynkoops is the highly acclaimed Falling Rock tavern owned by ex-Houston Gingerman managing brothers, where I was unfortunately reminded how bad help sometimes detracts from what would otherwise be a good experience. Anyone that has had to put up with surly barkeeps that are annoyed when serving you takes away from their long chats with the pretty girls at the end of the counter know what I am talking about. The beer selection at Falling Rock was great and the location, tucked into a brick lined cubby hole off the main drag was just the right setting for a mellow afternoon. It does get very busy at night and on the weekends, so expect to fight the crowds at those times. Among the bar's offerings were several barleywines originating locally and from parts west as well as regional specialties including La Folie on tap. One of the brothers that own and work at the Falling Rock came in later at night when we returned and restored our faith in good bartenders (I left a tab open since I knew I would be back later). A quick drink at the Rock and we ambled toward Flying Dog where we sampled all of their wares in a pub called the Blake Street Tavern located next door (which seemed to be owned by the same people), none of which seemed very impressive, although appetizers were huge and cheap (we made a note of that). The brewery is open until 5pm and probably well worth a visit given its proximity to everything else in the area. The owner is also now distilling a whiskey next door. We then made our way across the street to the Breckenridge taphouse where several a-typical selections including pilsners and an ESB were available, along with their normal line up. Like Flying Dog Breckenridge also serves food and seems to get a lot of people from the Ballpark. The beers are what you would expect from Breckenridge. At the nearby Ballpark we couldn't make it into the Sandlot, a brewpub owned by Coors as it is closed to the public during games and I am too cheap to buy a baseball ticket just to get a beer. Besides, Falling Rock now carries Sandlot beers on tap (also good to make note of). Another local taphouse within walking distance we didn't

get to was Great Divide's located on nearby Arapahoe St (it closes at 5pm). Further afield you can find Pints, an English style pub with a great setting with diacetyl infused real ales and more importantly for those inclined, one of the largest selections of scotch in the country (or so they claim). There is also the nearby Bull and Bush which we didn't get to, as well as at least one ubiquitous Rock Bottom.

Now Denver was great, and to have so many great places within walking distance trumps the pub crawling experience in almost any metro area I've visited, but a word to the wise if you aren't staying downtown within reach of the light rail system – parking during games and on weekends is a nightmare. The second leg of our journey took us further north still towards Boulder and ultimately Fort Collins near the Wyoming border where we finally found the beer nirvana we were looking for, but an account of those adventures will have to wait until next time.

- Brother Gavin McBeerstalker