



VANCOUVER
ISLAND'S

ALE TRAIL

Brewing history on Vancouver Island dates back to 1858, the same year British Columbia became a province. William Steinberger opened Victoria Brewing on the shores of Swan Lake just north of Victoria. Originally, the German immigrant had come to North America in search of gold but he saw a business opportunity when he realized the burgeoning new capital of BC had no breweries of its own.

Steinberger soon moved the business into downtown Victoria, to make use of the excellent mineral waters of Spring Ridge in present-day Fernwood. Within a few years several more breweries followed his lead so the prospector-turned-brewer obviously had the right idea.

To support the city's brewers, farmers on the Saanich peninsula began to grow hops and the success of this crop in coastal BC's temperate climate led to hops becoming one of the province's most significant agricultural products by the early 20th century. Due to falling prices worldwide, however, hop growing died out in BC by the 1990s. Lately, it is seeing a renaissance with a new focus on organic hop production driven by craft brewers who want to buy the product locally.

Victoria has hosted some milestone events in the recent craft brewing resurgence. In 1984, Canada's first modern-day brewpub Spinnakers opened and later that same year Vancouver Island Brewing, one of the country's first modern craft breweries, was also founded.

Along with these and other breweries that have since set up shop in Victoria there are several highlights on Vancouver Island's Ale Trail including Duncan, Nanaimo and Comox.

VICTORIA

Victoria actually boasts more craft breweries than Vancouver. The oldest and largest, Vancouver Island Brewing, turned 25 last year and this year the brewery is celebrating the 100th

anniversary of Canada's Navy with a special brew called Sea Dog Amber Ale. The Navy will observe its centennial this summer with an International Fleet Review featuring naval vessels from more than 20 different nations. With more than 10,000 foreign sailors visiting Victoria during the week of June 9-14, VIB had better have a lot of Sea Dog brewed by then!

This year also marks the 150th birthday of the Fisgard Lighthouse which guards the entrance to Esquimalt Harbour. The beacon, which has been in continuous operation since 1860, was automated in 1929 and is now a National Historic Site. The anniversary will be celebrated on June 11-12 with

fireworks and a flyover by the Snowbirds and is also being commemorated with a new brew from Lighthouse Brewing called Fisgard 150 Bavarian lager

While Phillips Brewing won't be celebrating 10 years in business until 2011 it has already established itself as Victoria's most challenging and innovative craft brewery. This summer, in addition to its standard line-up, Phillips' sampler 12-packs will include either a Big Time Kölsch or Rifflandabrau pilsner. The brewery will also be offering its excellent Wheatking Hefeweizen in six-packs and several specialty brews in single 650 ml bottles, including a sarsaparilla, based on the original "root beer" that was popular in the Wild West.

Over at Driftwood Brewing, Victoria's newest craft brewer, founded in 2008, the specialty is Belgian-style brews including a peppery "saison" called Farmhand Ale and a "wit" called White Bark Ale. Along with these, Driftwood also produces Driftwood Ale, Crooked Coast Amber Ale and specialty brews such as Belle Royale, a Belgian-style strong ale fermented with Morello cherries.

No beer tour of Victoria is complete without a visit to the city's trio of excellent brewpubs. Spinnakers, Swans and the Canoe Pub are all situated next to the picturesque Inner Harbour within easy walking distance of each other – a perfect evening's stroll.

WHETHER YOU GO IN PERSON OR JUST BROWSE THE SHELVES AT YOUR LOCAL BC LIQUOR STORE, YOU'RE BOUND TO MAKE SOME INTERESTING DISCOVERIES ON VANCOUVER ISLAND'S ALE TRAIL.

Vancouver Island's Ale Trail

UP ISLAND

Leaving the beer aficionado's paradise of Victoria behind the next stop is Duncan, halfway to Nanaimo, which makes it the perfect pit stop as you head up island. Craig Street Brewing, the Cowichan Valley's first and only brewpub (founded in 2006), offers a regular set of pale ale, lager, porter and Irish ale on tap along with diverse specialty brews such as *marzen*, bock, hibiscus ale, extra special bitter and rye ale.

Nanaimo is home to the Longwood Brewpub and the Fat Cat Brewery. Longwood's rotating list of brews includes several unfiltered ales served in the traditional manner, hand-drawn through original English beer engines. Fat Cat's beers are made from scratch and all possess unusual names, such as Fat Head IPA, Pompous Pompadour porter and Bunny's Black & Tan.

After the hub city, continue north to Comox, the last-but-not-least stop on Vancouver Island's Ale Trail, to check out BC's newest craft brewery, Surgenor Brewing. Founded in 2009, Surgenor sells two beers, Red House Ale and Steam Donkey Lager in unique aluminum bottles. The brewery plans to add some specialty brews this year, including In Seine Pale Ale, which should be out this summer and #8 Shaft Black Lager, due out in the fall.

Whether you go in person or just browse the shelves of your local BC Liquor Store you're bound to make some interesting discoveries on Vancouver Island's Ale Trail.



DRIFTWOOD FARMHAND ALE

\$4.75 650 ml 528141

The saison style was traditionally brewed by Belgian farmers for their farmhands during harvest time. Driftwood's version employs 10 percent sour mash along with cracked black pepper, which gives the beer a nice zing behind a rich, semi-sweet flavour.



VANCOUVER ISLAND BREWING SEA DOG AMBER ALE

\$11.55 6 x 341 ml 124362

Sea Dog is a great beer from start to finish – it pours rusty orange in colour with a creamy head and boasts a malty body that lives up to its appearance without being too heavy.



PHILLIPS BLUE BUCK

\$11.65 6 x 341 ml 751081

Blue Buck is Phillips' "session ale," a beer that won't knock you off your feet. But that doesn't mean it isn't packed with flavour and character. Quite the opposite – this bronze-coloured ale is lightly hopped with a medium-bodied malty sweetness.



LIGHTHOUSE BREWING FIGARD 150

\$11.95 6 x 355 ml 396184

This new addition to Lighthouse's lineup is a golden lager with a crisp bite, medium body and a dry finish – very typical of a Bavarian lager. An easy-drinking, satisfying beer, Figard 150 is perfect for a warm, sunny afternoon gazing out over the waves.



SURGENOR RED HOUSE ALE

\$10.95 6 x 355 ml 659698

Surgenor's unusual aluminum bottles hold a rusty, red Irish ale. It's a rich and satisfying brew with a robust maltiness and velvety head that sticks around until the last dregs are drained.



DRIFTWOOD CROOKED COAST

\$4.75 650 ml 811976

This alt-styled amber ale has a creamy body, thanks to the inclusion of wheat in the malt, but this is no light-bodied weissbier. Crooked Coast balances a hoppy bitterness with sweet caramel, roasted grain and nut flavours – delicious!