



March 2008

### The Big DIPA

**Blue Frog Grog and Grill, Fairfield, California**

**8.3%abv \$9.50/750ml**

When the Blue Frog Grog and Grill brewpub opened its doors in 1999, it instantly became the second largest brewery in the small central California city of Fairfield. Of course, the only other brewery in Fairfield is the one that brews enough Budweiser to supply all of Northern California, Alaska, Hawaii, and the Pacific Northwest, so the folks at Blue Frog have some catching up to do! Last year, their production reached a whopping total of 675 barrels of beer, and they hope to reach their maximum capacity of 1000 barrels this year. Anheuser-Busch's Fairfield plant produced *4.4 million* barrels last year. The pub was founded by local restaurateurs and former hippies (the pub's name comes from the Peter, Paul and Mary song "I'm In Love with a Big Blue Frog") Dennis and Alex Landis, and was their third restaurant, but first brewery. With the talented Nick Campbell in charge of the brewery, and an innovative pub grub menu being offered in the dining room, Blue Frog quickly became a favorite with the Fairfield-Vacaville locals. By 2005, the demand for their beer had reached a level that allowed them to begin bottling their beers for sale out the pub door, and later, enough for local distribution. While they have been available in parts of the Bay Area for a couple of years now, they are new to us in the City, and I'm quite sure that they are unheard of to our more far-flung Beer Club members.

IPA, or India Pale Ale, is a style of beer that originated in England during their colonial period. When the Brits first tried to ship beer to their troops in India, they found that more often than not the beer would spoil due to the rigors of four to six months in the hold of a ship as it sailed through the tropics. Then, in 1790, one George Hodgson found that if the amount of hops – which contain a natural preservative – were doubled from the normal level of pale ales, and the beer was brewed to a higher degree of alcohol, the product had a much better chance of surviving the trip. And thus, the India Pale Ale was born as essentially a double-hopped version of the classic British pale ale. Blue Frog's Big DIPA is a 'Double IPA', a fairly new, West Coast contribution to the world of beer, which basically doubles, once again, the amount of malt and hops used in the brewing. These über-hoppy beers have become quite the rage in the US in recent years, even to the point where some of the older, traditional brewers here – and even in Britain and Belgium – have begun to emulate the style. Unfortunately, there is currently a world-wide hop shortage, so these styles are already becoming more expensive, and they could become true rarities over the next couple of years unless more acreage is planted to hops soon. The Big DIPA is brewed using mostly 2-row pale barley malt, with about 10% Briess Victory Malt for added body. One of the more interesting techniques used in this particular beer is their use of "First wort hopping", where the initial hop charge is made to the brewing kettle before the boil has begun. This method allows the brewer to extract extra flavor and aroma compounds without extracting excessive bitterness, which is released by the hops during the boil itself. Galena, Summit, Liberty and Cascade hops are used for this first charge, and in the boil. After the boil, when the ale is moved to the fermentation vessel, it is then dry-hopped with additional Liberty and Cascade hops for their aromas. After fermentation, the beer is allowed to settle in tank, and is then bottled with an addition of brewers' sugar and yeast for its final fermentation in the bottle. It is then allowed to condition in the bottle for a few weeks before being released to the public. Try your Big DIPA in a traditional pint glass, or for a more aromatic experience, from a large-mouthed red wine glass of Belgian ale chalice. It will show its broadest array of flavors and aromas if you don't serve it too chilled – about 50°F is ideal.

The Big DIPA pours into the glass with a striking deep gold, almost copper color, with just the slightest haze from the conditioning yeast. The head is off-white, and a little rocky, but leaves little lace in the glass. The aromas are bright, and focused on the hops, with notes of citrus, grass, and resin, with hints of toasted malt and spice cake in the background. It is very full-bodied in the mouth, leading with the toasty, earthy, almost woody notes that were only hinted at in the nose. The mid-palate has some smoky and fruity notes, almost like grilled oranges, along with more of that elusive spice note from the nose. The finish is totally dry, and slightly bitter, but echoes on the palate for quite a while after swallowing. This beer would pair nicely with just about any traditional beer food (sausages, BBQ, fish n' chips, etc.), but Brewmaster Nick says it's "outtasightawesome" with a hunk of grilled meat and some herb-roasted potatoes.



## Malheur 10

**Brewery De Landtsheer, Buggenhout, East Flanders, Belgium**

**10.0%abv \$10.99/750ml**

Emanuel “Manu” De Landtsheer comes from a family with a long history in the brewing trade. Manu’s grandfather had been the fifth generation brewer at the family’s brewery that closed in the days leading up to World War II, but in researching his family’s history, he found that they had been involved in brewing beer locally since at least the late 1600’s. Even after WWII caused the closure of their brewery, the family remained in the hop farming business until the early 1970’s. The family home and brewery are in the small town of Buggenhout, right in the middle of one of Belgium’s two most important hop growing regions, and Manu fondly remembers riding his bike home from school as a teen, and helping the family with the harvesting of their hop crop. When Manu’s father passed away in 1991, he swore that he would return the family to its brewing roots, and set himself on the course that would lead to the founding of De Landtsheer Brewery and the Malheur ales in 1997. Initially, Manu made just one beer, a light (by Belgian standards, anyway) golden ale called Malheur 4. Over the ensuing decade, he has added new ales at a rate of about one per year, culminating in his recent “Champagne-style” ales, the Malheur Brut and Dark Brut, which are among the worlds most sought after – and expensive. He first brewed the Malheur 10 around 2003, but he has not had West Coast distribution since that time, so this is its first time we have seen this beer. The word ‘malheur’ translates as ‘misfortune’, but I think that once you have tasted it, you will recognize this as a typical Belgian tongue-in-cheek beer name, as we are most fortunate to have a brewer of Manu’s lofty skills.

The Malheur 10 is a Belgian Strong Blonde style ale, but could easily be compared to the better Abbey Tripels, stylistically speaking. It is brewed using four different Pilsner malts grown in France, and one Belgian specialty malt from a nearby farm. These malts are boiled for an extended period of time, to extract as much fermentable sugars as possible, allowing for a beer of this strength. Saaz hops from the Czech Republic and Styrian Goldings from Slovenia are added during the boil, and a small amount of the Styrians is added to the fermenter for dry-hopping. This results in a slightly hoppier flavor and aroma profile than is evident in most Belgian Abbey-style ales. Manu uses a yeast strain that he originally got from the nearby Abbey brewery of Affligem, but after self-propagating the strain many times over, it is essentially unique to his brewery at this time, and it lends the ale a distinctive spicy note on the palate. After fermentation, the ale is allowed to settle in tank for natural clarification before being bottled with additional yeast and candy sugar. After corking, the beer is allowed to ferment and condition in bottle for two months before shipping. The finished ale has substantial sediment from this spent yeast, and you will want to handle the bottle gently before serving, and pour slowly, to allow as much of that sediment remain in the bottle. But don’t be afraid of a little haziness – that translates to flavor. I like opening the Malheur 10 at about 45°F, and enjoying it right away, but don’t put it back in the cooler after you pour the first glass. It goes through an amazing evolution in the glass as it slowly comes to room temperature. A nice, big-bowled red wine glass or Belgian ale chalice works best.

You may want to open this one over the kitchen sink – when I opened my sample bottle to prepare my tasting notes, it immediately began violently foaming over, even though it was cold and otherwise undisturbed. This sometimes happens with ‘live’ ales due to the yeast that is still fermenting the beer in the bottle. The Malheur 10 pours into the glass with a hazy, lemon-yellow color with just hints of orange at the core. The head is very active, and just off-white. When the beer settles after pouring, the head subsides nicely, leaving a very faint lace in the glass. The aroma is much hoppier than one would normally expect of a Belgian Tripel, but the classic fruity notes are there, peeking out from behind the hops. It has a very creamy texture in the mouth – perhaps because of the loss of gas upon opening. Notes of stone fruits and citrus predominate on the palate, along with a hint of clove and anise that are a bi-product of the yeast strain used in fermentation. On the palate, the sweeter fruity notes come first, followed by hints of spice, maybe a touch of licorice, and a rock candy or lemon drop-like note in the finish. Try this exceptional strong ale with sharp cheeses or rich seafoods prepared with fresh herbs and/or citrus.