

13th Annual New England Home Brew Jamboree September 11-13, 2009

On a recommendation from our friends in FOAM, Darja and I attended the 13th Annual New England Home Brewer's Jamboree held at the Branch Brook Campground in Campton, NH this past weekend. It turned out to be an excellent recommendation; we had a great time and are already planning to go back next year.

Without knowing what to expect, we arrived Friday night just as it was getting dark. Two things really surprised me on our arrival. First, the people were all incredibly friendly and welcoming in helping us get in and situated. Cars and trucks were moved out of the way and we had a handful of people all wanting to help us park. The second surprise was the taps. As you walk down the road there is tap or two, plastic cups, maybe a light and nobody around. All in all this repeated itself at least four or five times over the length of the road. It took me a while to figure out it was a help yourself arrangement.



Figure 1 - The Beer Garden – Note the Blueline Dispensing Van which spent the rest of the time parked across the street from us

Friday night we met a bunch of nice people - three of which really stand out. First the organizer Steve came by to personally welcome us. Then under the guise of wanting to check out their fire, we met our neighbors from the Make a Wish Foundation (more on them later). Then it was on to the neighbors across the street that had the dispensing van (you can see it in the picture above). That's when the only rain of the weekend started. Offering to share our awning with whoever was at the van, we met the guys from the Knights of the Mashing



Figure 2 - Looking away from the Beer Garden. The blue tarp is FOAM; we're tucked in between the big camper and the small one.

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Fork from Connecticut who, by the way, never stopped raving about my cream ale all weekend.

Another pair of interesting chaps we met were our neighbors Jeff and Richard. I think they were from Maine? They had a Friday night fire too but didn't seem to spend much time by it preferring instead to hang out with our Make a Wish neighbors. Jeff gave us a most delicious Belgian trippel that ending up wining third place in his competition flight. I couldn't see myself drinking too many in one sitting but I enjoyed the one I had. We didn't see much of Richard. Maybe it was due to the trippel?

Saturday was the big event. The weather was decent – no bright sunshine but no rain either. Two hundred and one paying guests came through the gate and the first thing you'd notice was the beer garden with seven clubs serving about twenty-five different beers. The clubs were the Concord Area Homebrewers (NH), Brew Free or Die (NH), The Knights of the Mashing Fork (CT), South Shore Brew Club (MA), Winnepesaukee Area Brew



Figure 3 - The Crowd at the Beer Garden (and our neighbor Don in the white cap)

Crew (NH), White Mountain Fermenters (NH), and the Southern Maine Homebrewers (ME). Any club who wants can serve in the beer garden. Most of the beers were pretty good but the standout for both of us was the California Common from the Winnepesaukee Area Brew Crew which also won the fan favorite award in voting. The White Mountain Fermenters also had a public judging of their Iron Brewer Contest (http://www.whitemtnfermenters.com/Iron_Brewer.php). There was even cask ale served on a hand-pump! It wasn't foaming like mine does and the guy told me I need a ½ inch check valve from Lowes – whatever that is. But if it works this will be worth the trip alone.

The day was run out of the command center or at least that's what I called it. Steve made announcements all day about the competition, the sponsors, Make a Wish and the raffle. The Wizards got mentioned more than once which was quite a surprise given there were only the two of us. Admission also got you a raffle ticket for the prize drawings. It seemed like everyone there could have won something if they listened for their ticket number. There were certainly enough prizes available and they even had "leftovers" for next year. Darja and I both picked out t-shirts when we won although her choice from the Woodstock Inn might be a little too big for her. What a shame! The entertainment came

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from Jim Tyrell, an act described as “Drinking Songs, Blues, Originals, a band not to miss!”, although we didn't catch much of him with everything else going on.

There was also a home brew competition with 171 entries and it was one of the more interesting ones I've ever seen. The flights were light, dark, amber, specialty, red wine, white wine, cider and mead, all going head to head with each other for best of show. Anyone can judge and no experience is necessary. They say they will teach you. Flights were judged one at a time and 4 or 5 entries went to a table. They used BJCP scoring and I think the highest score won the flight. I'm not sure but I think the BOS went to the highest overall score as I never heard about a BOS round. A mead won BOS followed by a blueberry ale and a black currant cider. No score sheets were returned.

All this makes me think you have to be pretty strategic about what you enter if you want to place. I entered a dark mild which seemed to be a bad choice. All in all it seems to be more about the experience and making money for the charity than a real competition.

The jamboree was surprisingly kid friendly. There were quite a few of them around and they all seemed to be having a good time. Besides the bouncy castle we also heard about a scavenger hunt and ran into a couple kids looking for acorns. Too bad they couldn't come to my backyard. My personal favorite kid moment came on Friday when one of them was playing ring toss with one of those glow in the dark bracelets and the taps on the Blue Line van.



Figure 5 - The Command Center, Stage and Prize Barn



Figure 4 - The Judging Tent

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FOAM showed up Saturday morning. We mostly watched them unpack and setup in the morning then had a few together at the fest. We also spent time with them at their campfire at the end of the night. We thought it would be easier to donate our wood to someone else and let them have the fire. Good idea - not only did it give us reason to hang out by their fire and drink their beer and cider, but it also gave us more of a chance to mingle with the other guests. Thia proposed our clubs should do more together. I agreed. We talked about sharing a booth in the garden next year. We should keep this in mind.

The beneficiary of the jamboree was the Make A Wish Foundation of New Hampshire. I can safely say I've never seen an event like this where the charity is so much a part of the event. Everybody talks about it and how great it is for the kids. The folks in the trailer next to us represented Make A Wish and they appeared to be enjoying the weekend as much as the next guy. There was a 50-50 raffle for \$274 but I didn't win. Oh well. Either way, the number of people who talked about how great it was for the charity and the children it benefits was astounding.



Figure 6 - Inside the Beer Garden

By the time Sunday morning came around people were packing up and leaving in droves. This was kind of surprising given the activities of the day before. As it turned out, we were the last of the guests to leave! Only Steve and a few of his fellow organizers were still there.

We're looking forward to next year. Till then you can check out the jamboree's website at <http://www.homebrewersjamboree.com/index.html>. – Bill.