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Fantasy Drafts

The "Beer Geeks" celebrate 400 breweries visited with five wise ideas.

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Life is full of milestones. Growing tall enough to ride the stomach twisting carnival ride. Graduating college and becoming part of the "real world." And my mom's favorite: hitting that magic age in order to get the senior discount at Ross.

In late July, my fellow beer-blogging husband Chris and I hit a milestone during our trip to Oregon, but perhaps it's an achievement that only craft beer devotees could appreciate. We visited our 400th brewery.

We have very specific criteria about how a brewery can be counted on what has become known as "The List." The beer must be brewed on site. You must drink a beer. And you can only count a chain brewery once. We've been to multiple Rock Bottom breweries and they all brew on site. However, Rock Bottom only gets counted once. This last criterion is what sets us apart from other tap-inspired travelers.

Having never reached this malty milestone before, we weren't really sure how to best mark this important occasion. After careful consideration, we decided to assemble a list of the best draught five beers we've found in our travels in Monterey County (see below) so locals could celebrate with us. We also opted for T-shirts, "I have been to 400 breweries. Ask me how." Chris added the last part for comedic effect, but it also necessitated some liter-sized soul searching just in case someone really did ask how.

Friends have tried to be helpful by suggesting responses. One said, "Because I could." Another friend offered, "Because I was thirsty." But those are really answers to why.

The "how" would be most literally by trains, planes, automobiles, ferries, and feet— and by wiping out our bank account and spending our children's inheritance. While I'm not positive, I'm pretty sure that our dachshunds Porter and Stout are OK with their lack of inheritance. But I think a big part of how we did it was by developing a great fondness for beer and travel. Oh, and a deeply embedded obsession with adding to The List probably helped.

It's important to be passionate about the things that make you happiest. To quote comedian Drew Carey, "Things don't make me nearly as happy as talking and having a beer with friends. And that's something everyone can do."

To that end, here are the five best draft beers we discovered in our local travels and where to find them around town (for more on our ongoing adventures, visit www.thebeergeek.com):

Chimay White (O' Factory Café): Chimay is the second largest but best known of the seven Trappist breweries. Chimay White, at 8 percent ABV, is a crisp, dry Belgian Triple and the hoppiest of the Chimay beers. A classic Belgian beer.

Black Prince Porter (Various bars that carry English Ales): Locally brewed by English Ales, BPB is a dark brew with a wonderful roasted malt flavor. If you visit the brewery ask if they have Black Prince available on cask. On cask, this great beer gets bumped up a notch.

Old Rasputin (O' Factory Café): From North Coast Brewing, Old Rasputin is the classic American version of a Russian Imperial Stout. Coming in at 8.9 percent ABV, Old Rasputin is a rich, complex beer. Winter is just around the corner and this beer is the perfect warmer.

Green Flash IPA (Trailside Café, O' Factory Café): This San Diego brewery took the West Coast by storm with their India Pale Ale. Highly hopped, Green Flash will kick you in the pants with its forward, bitter flavor. A must drink for hopheads and aspiring hopheads alike.

Double Barrel Ale (The Running Iron): Firestone Walker's flagship beer, Double Barrel is a British-style Pale Ale with a twist. A portion of the brew is fermented in American oak barrels giving the beer subtle oak flavors. Another rising California brewery, Firestone Walker has several great beers.

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