

Bar Hoppin' With Hops
The Second Century Tour
Hops MacBarley's 2013
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar #146:

Pincher's Crab Shack

712 Duval Street

www.pincherscrabshack.com

Sunday, 14 July, 3:00 PM

Bud Light (draft) \$0.00!!!

Yes, you read that right: Bud Light draft. I know. Ugh. BUT you also read this right: **\$0.00!** FFB, my friends: *free farkin' beer!* Such a wonderful thing.

What happened to bestow such beneficence upon Hops and his Hoperatives? Pincher's soft opening. Yeahhhhh, one of those in-the-know events that B&J are so adept at finding.



One of the barkeeps -- someone that they knew from the Big Coppitt Era of



their lives, I think -- had sent Jan a text about it, and they immediately called Hop On. We had already known that this place would be opening soon, but a Sunday mid-afternoon was primo. It set us up for a day of koo-all-it-eee hoppin'. The perfect way to celebrate Bastille Day!

We met at a few minutes to three and waited with about a dozen other people for the chain to be set aside before we could ascend the grand stairway into the upper level restaurant and bar. There is a ground floor bar as well, but it was gated and was not to be part of today's plan. Some day...

For several years, 712 Duval was the home of Crabby Dick's. I never ate

there. I walked up once, just to look around and check the view from the balcony, thought, "heyyy, not bad," and never went back. It would be a dandy vantage point for the Fantasy Fest parade up there. Or the Bed Races. Or Drag Races. Or Christmas Parade. Or Pride Parade. Or New Year's Eve. Dammit, there's never anything to do in this town.

Crabby Dick's always had a barker at the base of their stairs. For a long time, it was the same bland, middle-aged guy. He'd rattle out the restaurant's name and try to hand out flyers or menus or whatever; I never took one.

A couple of times, though, I think the guy was messing with the passers-by.

The place is right across from Aqua, and amongst a number of gay-owned or gay-oriented businesses, so I'm sure he assumed a high percentage of the people strolling by were

gay. I swear I heard him change his usual "Crrrrrabby Dick's" to "Grrrrrab ya dick." He said it so fast, though, and with no telltale smirk, so nobody could really be sure.

C-Dix eventually went out of business, though, and this locale sat vacant for a good while. The next tenant, another seafood place called Overboard, opened to mediocre fanfare and closed to even less, just 54 days later. That, I believe, was an even shorter life than Maddy's Hot Dogs (Hop #61), just up the block.

Pincher, whoever he is, was pretty true to his word, and let us in at just a few ticks past three. It's a tall climb up those 22 steps, and I've often wondered how many would-be customers had declined the incline and just moseyed on by.

Once we got to the top, we were immediately impressed with the interior. Brand new wood and bright colored decorations abounded. There was a really high ceiling and wide open doors to the balcony. It looked like a fine place to drink. Yeah, yeahhh, eat too, whatever.



The bar dominates the middle part of the room: hooded above with a cool-looking raw wood framework, and varnished at drinkin' level. With tall, padded, curved-slat-back stools, it just plain beckoned us to sit down and do some quenching.



Stephanie, the cheery blonde that B&J knew, greeted us and let us know the scoop. Draft Bud Light was free, wings were fifty cents, and select appetizers were half price. There was something amiss with the alcohol aspect, though. Sounded to me like the license had gotten delayed at the last minute, so they could not sell any booze -- but they could *give it away!* No problem there, eh?

What was also odd was that the brand new set of taps that stand behind the bar was not being used. Three kegs of beer

sat on the floor with a portable tap and several bags of ice. It looked like a backyard kegger.

So, with a clink of raised glasses to toast #146, we commenced imbibing. It wasn't long, though, before the managers starting getting a little edgy about how much beer was crossing that bar, so they told to the barkeeps to inform us all that everyone would get two freebies, and then after that, it would be two-for-one.

At first, everyone reacted with an "oh well" nod and shrug, figuring that it was still a good deal. But then I asked her, "How can it be 2-4-1 if you're not allowed to sell any? Two times free sounds like free to me."



She pointed at me and gave this *hmm, good point, lemme ask* look. She came back a moment later. "Yup. All free. He didn't think of that part." Yay, Hops! Always fighting the good fight for the common boozer.

Big Dog showed up just a few minutes later and happily joined the flow. We all ordered up some wingies just so wouldn't be total freeloaders. If they're going to pour us a couple dozen free brews, the least we could do is drop a finner for some clucker wings. (And I always like to do the least I can do.).



I ordered mine plain, with bleu (no, not *blue* or *blew*, spell check) cheese dressing on the side. Yeah, I know, wimp ass. Bite me. You can have my share of hot sauce, OK?

B&J got "regular" -- or whatever clever term they used for their standard order -- but Big Dog cued up the nastiest, most potent, wing juice that they had. I wasn't even sure I wanted to sit next to that. And it turned out to be as advertised. He was beet red and sweating profusely by the third wing.

I've never grasped the concept of suffering while you eat and enjoying the agony. Richie did that once in Los Angeles on a long-ago roadtrip. I got a roast beast at some sub shop, but

he followed his nose to a Szechuan chicken place next store for the hottest, most ghastly sauce he could get. We weren't far from Mexico – socially or geographically -- so that sauce was dammmmn hot.

I was a couple of bites into my RB sub when I heard slurping and gasping noises from the passenger seat. Honest to God, I thought Richie was choking to death. He had gone all crimson and his throat seemed locked up while he tried to suck a stream of hot LA summer air through his mouth to cool his seared gullet. Sweat was gushing down the sides of his head.

"Holy shit, Richie, are you OK??" I asked, legitimately concerned.

He looked at me, with this wild look, apparently not able to speak, then dove back in for another big bite of his sub. More gasping and slurping and reddening. I thought he was going to explode.

"Richie, if it's that bad, just throw it away!"

He gathered between gasps, gesticulating haphazardly. "No ... it's ... *urrrrrgh* ... too *GOOD!!!*"

I had to do something. He was dying and didn't seem to know it. I started up the van and drove up onto the highway just to get some air moving. Fortunately, traffic was moving well and we were soon zooming along at 65. Between bites, Richie was hanging his head out the window like a freaking dog. It was alarming.



But Big Dog wasn't that bad. Richie was a little guy and that food just bulldozed him. Big Dog, as the name would imply, is the more sturdy type. Same amount of Atomic in the sauce perhaps, but a much bigger vessel in which to contain the flames. He was still feeling a good burn, but nothing he couldn't dance with.

After several ice cold mugs of free beer, I sent Jacko a text. I wasn't sure if he had gotten the word, and he's one of most devoted Bud Light fans that I

know. He was working just a block away and would be out at five, so he'd still get an hour of *biere au gratis*. Pretty damn good follow-up to a full day of work. Happy Hour is nice, but this was Ecstatic Hour. Not to be missed by a devotee of that lameass beer.

The place was quite full by now, and a few familiars were seated here and there. Soft openings are kind of like private parties; they are never advertised except by word of mouth or social media. It doesn't keep *all* the dickheads out (*I* got in), but it gives the staff a pretty friendly and patient group to test everything out on. We didn't care if the beer was from a keg on the floor, as long as it was free. We didn't care whether the crab dip or lobster quiche or whatever was good or not (it was, the seafood lovers said), just keep trotting those samples out! Ha, the good life.

BUT, reality reared its ugly head around 6:00, and we were told that Free Time was over. Awwwwwwwwwwwwwwww. But I was ready to move on anyway. I mean, I had had at least seven, and maybe nine, Bud Lights and I felt sober as a traffic light. (Never heard that simile before, have ya?) I should have had seven Cokes; at least I would have had a caffeine buzz.

So, I was ready to hop onward. We had plenty more Bastille Day reveling to do.