

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

Bar #173:

Cheeseburger Key West
211 Duval Street
Friday, 9 August, 7:30 PM

Dos Equis Amber Ale (bottle) \$4.50

Considering my lifelong love of all things cheeseburg, you might think that I was a regular here. I did eat here, in fact, but only once. Just once.

GB and I came here one summer evening shortly after they first opened in 2004 or so. I was surprised when he suggested this as our dinner venue; GB was a healthy-diet kind of guy, and the hedonism of a fat, juicy, cholesterol-infused c-burg didn't seem to be his style. He spoke with enthusiasm about it, though, so I readily agreed. Such hedonism was my style, and I still suspect that GB was simply deferring to that.

We took turns picking the place for our monthly-or-so dinner nights, and I really expected that he was going to use his turn to bring me to some veggie-oriented place like The Cafe (#21) on Southard, or Thai Cuisine on Greene. I would have gone and tried to find something I could choke down, but I would have been miserable. GB knew me well enough to avoid that, so it was to Cheeseburger Key West that we came.

Trouble was, it was not a very good cheeseburger. Not at all. I mean, when you have the freaking word in your name, you need to kick some big bad ass with your burger. It was smaller than it should have been, it was drier than it should have been, and it cost more than it should have cost. Bah, bah, bah (he said, sheepishly).

So I never went back. It's not like there were no other options around town. If you're the only eatery around, people will put up with your lame-ass vittles, but if you suck -- or even seem to borderline suck -- word gets around.



This place had had plenty of dead nights. I've often noted how just a party or two would be there on a weekend night. It even got to the point where I'd show up at the Gecko (#2) and comment to my cronies, "You know this town is full if even *Cheeseburger* is busy!"

But, on this fine summer evening, as we neared the three-quarter pole of this most noble Second Century Tour, food was not our target. In fact, this *venue* was not our target. We were on our way to another place (see next chapter to find out which, if you can handle the suspense), and as we walked by CKW, I slowed to check something out.

Cheeseburger Key West had to have some kind of a bar. People aren't going to eat on Duval Street without having at least the option of a cocktail. GB and I had eaten at a table on the front patio where we could watch the world pass by, so we never did explore the place. A server had brought us our drinks, so we never had any contact with a bar.



On my frequent walk-by's, I could see a small room behind glass doors at the end of the building. There was clearly a bar within, but it never seemed to be open. Guesswork told me that there was a service bar somewhere and this little room only opened on certain occasions. Every time I walked by, I looked for my chance to be in on one such occasion.

There was a degree of importance to this. Two hundred frikkin' bars is a *lot* of frikkin' bars, and we expected to be scrounging pretty soon. If there was a bar to be had, we wanted to have it.

Today, the door was open! A beer cooler sat atop the bar with a stack o' cups beside it. We had to give it a shot.

With B&J a little mystified but in tow, I backtracked to the hostess stand and asked if we could get a beer in that room. I don't recall how she worded the first half of her reply because the second half of her sentence just washed the first half away: "...but there's a full bar, around the back, right in there."

She may have kept talking after that, but I was gone. Before the last syllable slipped from her soft sweet lips, the switch in the Bar Hop lobe of my brain triggered and I was in mid-stride heading for "around the back, right in there." B&J followed, offering the hostess some form of apology.

Sure enough, we passed under a roofed breezeway, emerged into the backyard patio and -- blammo, jammo -- there on the left, tucked in a



corner, was a scruffy little five-shoulda-been-four-or-even-three-seat bar. There was nothing fancy about it, but it was dressed up with some unilluminated icicle-type Christmas lights hanging from above, and kinda Polynesian carved posts on each end, making it all look a bit -- are you ready? -- cheesy (nyuk nyuk nyuk).

Three stools were occupied. We never

really considered taking either of the end ones. Often we will scrounge up a chair for Jan, just because we are The Quintessential Chivalrous Bastids, but, in this case, she would have been staring into some South Pacific gargoyle's ugly puss, so we did the standee thing.

Standee is a dumbass word. You're a stander. The floor is the standee. Duh.

The bar patrons and the 46-year-old female barkeep got a boot out of how thrilled we were to have found this bar. I happily outlined our quest as I ordered our beers. The bar customer on the end had to be the Stupid Shit, though, asking, "In one day???" You'd be amazed how many people actually ask that question. Really makes you lose faith in the American gene pool.

Dos Equis was once again the beer I preferred. Interesting, yes? It was 34 cents less here. A little more sensible, but the barkeep runs the risk of a 50-cent tip with each and every bottle. I should have asked if the price included automatic gratuity, just to see the barkeep snarl.



Maybe that's why beers cost so much now; we've been double-tipping! OK, not falling for that any more. That should make me really popular. Or at least well-known.

We were about halfway done with our beers when Brian declared, "I've been here before!" To my querulous look, he explained, "Yeah, I knew there was a bar here, but I forgot it until now. Scott and I came in here one night and looked all around. I knew this was here."

I had to laugh. All my vigilance for nothing. It might have been nice if you had remembered that, big guy.

But, anyway, we finally hopped the CBurg and got the bonus point for the night. Proud of ourselves -- though mostly me proud of me -- we moseyed off down (up?) Duval to our next Hop.

ADDENDUM: December 2013

Don't bother checking it out for yourself. This place is CLOSED. Shuttered up, shut down and outa town, clown. CKW lasted about ten years, which doesn't suck, but they finally had enough of not having enough (business). Can't say I miss 'em.