

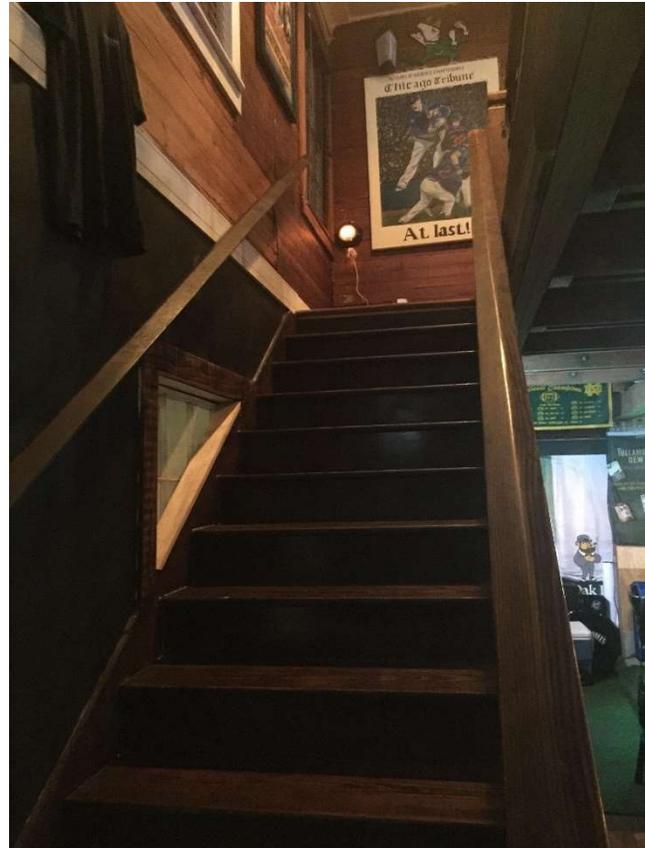
**Bar Hoppin' With Hops**  
The Keep On Hoppin' Tour  
Hops MacBarley's Ongoing  
Key West Bar Boondoggle

Bar #301:

**Irish Oak Barrel Irish Pub**  
506 Southard Street  
Friday, 10/19/18, 9:15 PM

*Bass Ale (bottle)*

'Twas the Friday night of Goombay weekend. Goombay is always good for a casual walkthrough. You see a lot of people you know, just milling about. The mood is mellow, and the vibe is generally happy. There is more food than you can shake a stick at, though I'm not sure why you'd want to do that.



I mean, if you saw somebody shaking a stick at a food booth, you might kinda back away and move on. It might depend on the stick, yeah, and the person too, and the vehemence with which said stick was being shaken. A sweet little 10-year-old girl gently shaking a popsicle stick at the ice cream man and saying, "That popsicle was fucking awesome, dude!" (or some variation thereof) is going to have less impact on you than a scruffy, scarred, bug-eyed man with a pentangle tattoo on his forehead, wildly,



threateningly, and silently shaking a crooked tree branch at a cowering grill tender.

I'll bet if I tried to walk the length of Goombay, shaking a stick at all the food I saw, I wouldn't be able to do it. I suspect

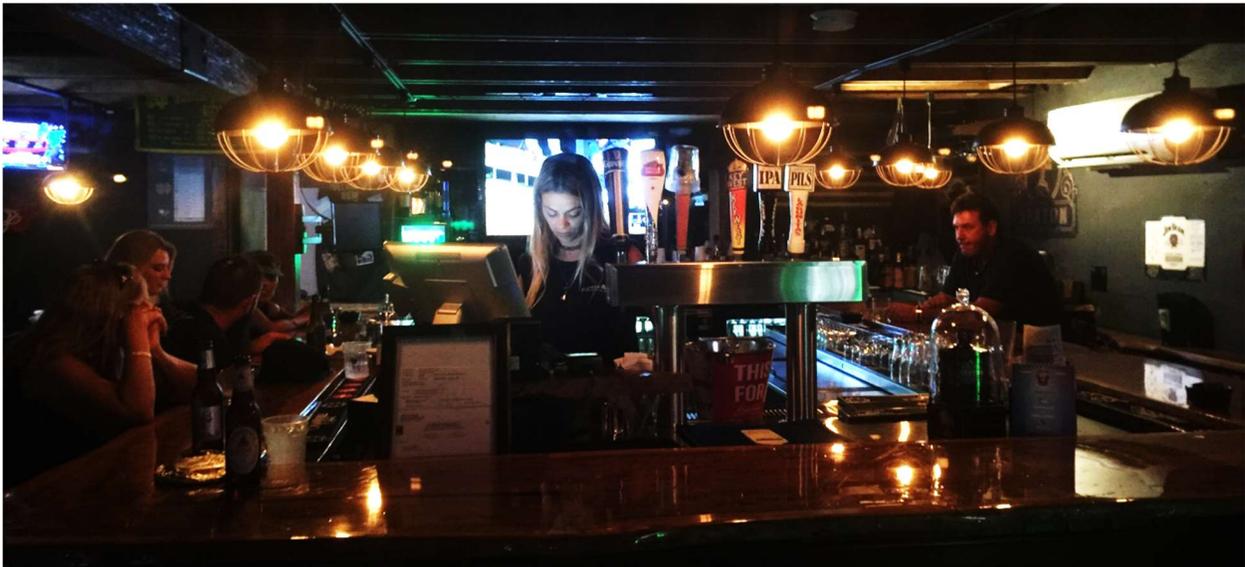
someone would alert KWPD to the weird wizard putting a spell on all the victuals and I would be apprehended and admonished. Hence, it would be true that there *indeed* was more food than I could shake a stick at.

But, anyway, I don't eat at Goombay, with two exceptions: one arepa, and my annual funnel cake. Once, years ago, I gave into a why-not mood and bought one of those enormous turkey legs. Once. Never again. Yeah, it was huge and hot, and it was early enough in the day that it had not been sitting in the open air for nine hours. But it had no flavor. None. It was just meaty texture with the faintest hint of what have once been a broth poured over it. And it had a lot of those thin white mostly solid strands poking through on almost every bite. Ugh.

So, yeah, I bought an arepa this time and brought it, wrapped up all tidy and warm in aluminum foil, to Irish Oak Barrel, two blocks away on Southard.

IOB is the most recent tenant of the two-story building that used to house Krawl Off Duval (#3) and Crafty Kraken (#271). They opened up a week ago while I was outa town. I hear it was quite a display. A bagpipe band paraded up Duval and led people Pied Piper style to the 500 block of Southard, which was closed off for a block party. Somebody spent some bucks on this shindig. I guess when there are more than 220 bars operating within four square miles of you, you need to make a splash to catch the attention of the drinking public.

I climbed the three stairs, stepped across the gray-painted wooden porch and into the main barroom. The first thing I noted was that the bar itself totally dominates the room now. Whereas it had been across the back wall



and a few tables stood here and there in the room, the bar is now It. It is tall, u-shaped, looks really heavy and solid, has five or so high stools on each side, and has not a lot of space for standees.

My stalwart co-hoppers, B&J, were already there. They had acquired a glass of water to save a seat for me. It was just a prop, though; I didn't come here for no H<sub>2</sub>O.

The barkeep had to look over the register to serve me. She was a cute young woman named Natalie. She looked like a six-footer, looming up there like that, but she wasn't. I was needing some adjustment to the new arrangement and scale, I guess.

And she needed some adjustment to me, too, apparently, because she saw my water glass, assumed I was all set, and went away.

Luckily, the other barkeep, whom B&J remembered from his days at WOB (#101) and who goes by the nickname Cuzzy, came by very shortly thereafter and I was able to flag him down for a beer. I perused the taps, which seemed to show a good variety, and peered back to the glass-doored chillers along the rear wall. One label stood out from the others: Bass Ale. True, Bass is an English brew and this is an Irish bar, but, I figured, close enough.

Besides, to me, Bass Ale will always have a connection to the Irish pub concept. As a collegiate Hops, several lives ago, I toiled as a barback at a Boston-area Irish bar and restaurant called the Harp & Bard. Is that the quintessential Boston-accent name, or what? Haahhp n Baahhd. Classic.

Anyway, the H&B served Guinness (of course), Falstaff (who??) and Bass Ale on tap. The waitresses — yeah, they were called that back then — believed in taking care of the people who took care of of them, so along with the end-of-shift tip-outs, they routinely provided during-shift freebie draughts, surreptitiously poured and cleverly stashed behind the curtain in the service station. Over those four years of employment there, I got very good at chugging Bass and Falstaff, and enjoyed the former considerably more than the latter.

So, when I saw Bass behind the glass, I thought, "that kicks ass," and, with a touch of class, ordered one from the lad, not the lass. It was cold and good so we were cookin' with gas.

I unwrapped my arepa. It was still warm; the foil had done its job. An arepa, if you don't know (and even if you do), is like a grilled cheese sandwich, but the bread is cornbread, and the cheese is mozzarella. Heated and fresh, it's a yum combo.

Buttttt, when it's been on the grill since way back when, it's not. Cornbread goes stale really fast in the open air, and the cheese just gets rubbery. I had asked the Cuban woman who served it to me to choose the freshest one, and she claimed that she did. Maybe she was being truthful. Maybe they hadn't added any to the grill in four hours since nobody was buying any. At any rate, it was awful. I suffered through two unpleasant mouthfuls, then placed it back in the crumpled foil and pushed it away. Goombay was a failure. I would not bother funnel caking now; my



Goombay spirit had been laid low.

I consoled myself with the Bass, the bar atmosphere, and my companions, though, and was happy. Screw the damn arepa.

After a bit, I got up to take the

obligatory photos. I climbed the interior flight of stairs — which used to lead to a pretty shaky and technically off-limits bathroom — and discovered a good-sized, finished room with a pool table, bar, and sturdy porch. Nice addition!

By the time I went back downstairs, it had been deemed Time To Mosey ... so mosey we did.