



a  
**bounty** to  
call my own

A journey through Oregon  
bears untold fruit by Mack Cannon

# The traveler of yesteryear was an easily impressed tourist.

Show him a paltry trickle of milk and a spring of honey and he would promptly fill his journal with sweet-tongued endorsements of the paradise he had found.

Today's journeyers are a more demanding breed. I, for one, require a few wild truffles on the menu, orchards of hazelnuts out the window, beer lists 100 labels long, wild Chinook salmon, and vodka infused with herbs. Last autumn, these fancies lured my attention to Portland, Ore. and the surrounding countryside—a region notable for an intriguing balance of rugged frontiersman spirit, environmental awareness, and a culinary sophistication rivaling that of classic Europe.

Beforehand, I contacted Travel Oregon for direction and was answered with a list of destinations pulled from a current program they're calling "Oregon Bounty." From these suggestions I planned a three-day weekend of taste and travel that dripped with all the proverbial milk and honey for which any explorer could hope.

Pulling my luggage into the heart of downtown on a balmy summer afternoon, I walked past trolleys, traffic, and urban cowboys before arriving at the door of Higgins Restaurant and Bar. With a well-regarded menu of Northwest cuisine populated by porcine elements that Chef/Owner Greg Higgins harvests and cures, and fungi he forages, the place drips DIY. I located Chef Higgins while waiting for my meal, and we traded mushroom hunting tales. All I could offer was an account of finding a few white buttons in the local park, but this man was a mushroom marvel. He digs his own native truffles, has filled the trunk of his car with matsutakes, and



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knows where to find dog-sized porcinis. Alas, he would share no secrets, so I dismissed him.

I made my pilgrimage to this fine-dining destination mostly for its beer list—a lengthy document 140 labels long. I got tipsy just reading it before ordering a local imperial stout to sip with my olive oil-poached halibut and whipped potatoes.

Green Dragon, Henry's, and Horse Brass Pub also feature boggling beer lists, reminders that Portland has become the beeriest place on Earth with more breweries per capita than almost any other city—40 in a town of 600,000.

Breweries include notables like BridgePort, Rogue, Golden Valley, and Deschutes (headquartered in Bend), which brews some of its juice just two blocks from the old Governor Hotel. The land around Portland seems made for beer—thousands of hop vines grow on the acres surrounding the city, and the cool climate is conducive to warming the bones with heavy, dark ale.

I also sipped the newest tradition in this land: spirits. In an unpretending, rugged warehouse district in southeast Portland nicknamed "Distillery Row," a half-dozen maverick spirit houses have taken their place this decade, signifying Portland's innovative headway into the arcane realm of vodka, whiskey, and absinthe production. Sub Rosa Spirits, House Spirits, and Artisan Spirits are just three such facilities, the latter being the first in the world to render mead, or honey wine, into vodka. This experimental homebrew attitude speaks even louder at Sub Rosa, where the signature drink is a wonderful saffron-infused vodka, made with herbs Owner Mike Sherwood grows in his garden. Sherwood is forever dabbling in bucket experiments of vodka flavored by various veggies and fruits.

On a drive through the Willamette Valley, I made base camp at Abbey Road Bed and Breakfast, where several retired grain silos have been converted into high-end suites and where breakfast consisted of berries, cheese, milk, and eggs harvested in the pastures out back. Though the Tuscanesque hills of the region support agriculture in many forms, the great fame of the Willamette is the savory, gamey juice of Pinot Noir. Over dinner at the small-town Dundee Bistro, I scanned a Pinot Noir list rivaling the Higgins beer list. Pinot-making in the Willamette dates back only to the 1970s, though the grape's reputation here is on par with some of the most established regions in the Old World. Some of the valley's first vintages have endured the test of time

as nobly as an olive grove and are still available for tasting at Adelsheim Vineyard, one of Willamette's pioneers of grape-growing.

At home now, an experimental quart of vodka stews in my fridge with a pound of mashed dried figs, and I take a moment to glance back through my Oregon journal. I blush to see no mention of milk or honey—of which any explorer worth his pen should make fast note—but I must concede: I recall a few cows and some bee boxes among the orchards, but I was overcome with greater marvels in Oregon. For here I found the craftiest distillers in the nation, woods that crawl with chefs on the forage, and a land that flows with Pinot and beer.