

OF BEER AND BRINE

Scotland's Kelpie Ale

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Scottish Seaweed beer? You're probably thinking what I was when my editor asked if I was interested in writing about such a beverage. However, having tasted Kelpie from one of my favorite Scottish breweries, I can assure you that my doubts were unfounded, and that this unique style is, in fact, historically well-grounded.

Legends, Ltd., a beer importer in Baltimore, MD, added Kelpie to its lineup card in the summer of 2001. Kelpie is the fifth such addition from Heather Ale Ltd., a Strathhaven, Scotland brewer of indigenous, historic ales. "Kelpie" is the Gaelic word for malevolent, mythical creatures that live in bodies of water -- the Loch Ness monster could be considered a modern example -- and the beer's label depicts the Pictish symbol for a kelpie. In addition to the seaweed ale, Legends is also the exclusive U.S. importer of Grozet gooseberry wheat ale, Alba Scots pine and spruce ale, Ebulum elderberry black ale, and the well-known flagship Fraoch Heather Ale (reported to be the only beer Mel Gibson would allow on the set during the filming of the Academy Award-winning epic Braveheart).

Patrick and Sherri Casey founded Legends, Ltd. in 1994. They admittedly were not huge beer fans until a friend brought back some specialty beers from a trip to the UK for them to sample. They reasoned that other Americans might like to have the opportunity to buy such beers, and it turns out they were right. Today, legends imports eleven beers from three breweries, two based in Scotland and one in England. These beers are now sold in retail outlets in 28 states. The Caseys also operate a Maryland beer distributorship that wholesales over 100 specialty beers from around the world.

Most Americans probably believe Scotch is the national drink of Scotland, but the Scots know better. Ale is what the Scots drink and Scotch is largely what they export. The earliest references to Scotch appear in writings around the start of the sixteenth century. By contrast, evidence of fermented beverages made with barley, oats, and heather flowers, dating back to 2000 BC, has been found on the Isle of Rhum, which is off the coast of the Western Highlands. Coincidentally, Kelpie got its beginning on the pristine beaches of Arisaig, near the Isle of Rhum.

Arisaig is a sandy, seaside port south of the fishing village of Mallaig, in a picturesque region of Scotland known as the Argyll Coast. Arisaig has fabulous beaches with a view of the islands of Rhum and Eigg. The original inhabitants of this coastal area used the seaweed beds for crop cultivation. Seaweed is still used in the region as a fertilizer. Today, many of the locally grown vegetables and grains have a unique color and flavor due to the seaweed's contribution.

Brewer Bruce Williams harvests bladderwrack seaweed from the Arisaig shores during the spring tides. Bladderwrack (*fucus vesiculosus*) is a common, North Atlantic seaweed that is olive to brown in color. The plant is covered with bubbles that give it a buoyancy to reach sunlight.

Williams likened the experience of chewing the raw seaweed to tasting hard kale or cabbage in salt, with a full, oily texture lingering in the aftertaste.

Post-harvest, the seaweed is shredded, added to the mash tun, and mashed for two hours along with organic Scottish malts. According to Williams, this mash mixture "smells fantastic," as the seaweed turns bright green with black edges. He believes the color change is in fact a chemical change as the seaweed leaches its iodine into the wort.

Those who know about brewing processes and ingredients will recognize seaweed for its use as a fining or clearing agent when added to beer. Commonly, brewers will add a type called Irish moss (carageenan) to the brew kettle. This kettle fining aids in the precipitation of proteins and helps prevent turbidity in the finished beer. The small amount of seaweed added for this purpose drops out of suspension, to be left behind in the trub pile.

kelpie
4.4% alc

at first whiff, maybe not the perfect mate for a salad, but darker malt lends nuttiness to the greens, gentle hopiness complements the acid and oil.

Rich chocolately ale with the distinctive rich malt (luscious flavors), a crisp wine-like finish, a whiff of seabreeze.

In early-mid 1800s many alehouses along the western coast. natural bladderwrack seaweed used as fertilizer for the barley. All on pristine beaches along the Argyll coast near the island of Rum. (Edward Lear poem).

Act of parliament in early 18th century forbade use of anything BUT hops to flavor beer. Scotland north of hop circle...brewers refused to purchase hops from English hop merchants..used local ingredients, akin to the church's use of gruit for beer bittering. Bog myrtle, wormwood, juniper, etc.

Kelpies are the monsters which are said to inhabit many of the inland lochs, such as the famous Loch Ness.

Session beer
brown ale
mild

brewery near Glasgow.
92 points by Bev Testing institute in October 2001.

organic barley and seaweed.