

ROAD-KILL IPA

Giving a purpose to fresh hops left for dead

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In the fall of 2013 I was assigned to oversee construction crews for a local cable provider. My destination: Washington's Yakima Valley. This area is one of the most important hop-growing regions in the world, harvesting 75% of the nation's hops. One of the sites we worked on was the new Bale Breaker taproom, a fresh off-the-farm brewing company that was expanding its operation to showcase their products. Nowadays you may have heard of Top Cutter IPA, their flagship IPA, though at the time they were still relatively unknown outside of those parts.

As a homebrewer, I was stoked to be involved in anything beer-adjacent, but that was just the start! Between the hop industry and the hopping craft brewery culture, Yakima is a true beer lover's destination. Each year, thousands of brewers from around the world visit Yakima during the annual hop harvest from the end of August through the end of September. It is a hub of activity with hop cutters and transport trucks seen everywhere you go.

If you haven't taken a drive through the lavish hop fields during this time of year, do it quick because the ingathering is a hasty, wild process to get the hops out of the fields at the perfect time.

Waking up every morning during this time, the aroma and the sight of the hops is in the air, literally.

While driving out into the valley, checking up on some of my jobs, I noticed a beaucoup amount of fresh hop bines on the side of the road. Who would leave these just sitting there in the sun? Then, watching all the truck traffic, it hit me. It seems that the trucks transporting the fresh hops to the processing centers lose a few, and the amount lost is insignificant compared to the volume of the crop yield. If you had 1,000 pennies, would you miss just one?

I figured I just discovered a lost treasure and went back to the shop to

get some containers. Still wearing my company-issued safety vest, I probably looked like a county worker picking up roadside trash. Initiating my very own "fall harvest" I snagged up all the fresh bines that I could. My real job could wait!

Some of the bines of hops were starting to turn. Sitting in the hot Yakima sun, they were left to wilt. I was up to three totes full of the good ones, the survivors. It was like a battle triage, evaluating the wounded from the ones that were too far gone and weren't going to make it. I was frantic, almost like a traveler crossing paths with an overturned armored car spilling out cash. Logic finally overcame greed and I had to stop. Plus, I was still on the clock.

Heading back home, I was looking forward to putting these puppies to good use. At the time, my church had a men's group called We Brews. Our mission was to share our homebrew portions, along with some good ole fellowship and fun. I pulled out an IPA recipe I had and went to work. Since I prefer double IPAs, this was the eventual goal with my newfound treasure. Not knowing the hop varieties, I rolled the dice and used what I had for the bittering, end-of-boil, and dry hopping charges. A handful here, and a few more there. A mad scientist overjoyed with bins of fresh hops to use.

After the boil and chilling of wort, time to transfer. Peculiar ... the valve was open, but no wort! I hadn't fully thought through my first experience with fresh hop cones. Reaching deep to the bottom of the kettle, I was able to clear the hop jam. Lesson learned.


The result was a pretty decent batch, a limited-edition session brew like no other. When it came time to name it, I thought back to my time spent on the side of the road collecting the hops that were left to die in the sun. The name was too obvious: Road-Kill IPA. 

Photo courtesy of Yakima Valley Hops



During hop harvest truckloads of hop bines fill the roads transporting the fresh cut hops from field to processing plants. Along the way a few may fall to the side of the road, to the excitement of homebrewers.