

THURSDAY, JULY 21, 2011

# The Seattle Times

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## HOPPY TRAILS TO YOU

On the ale trail in the Yakima Valley

NW WEEKEND > D3



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SECTION D

The Seattle Times



Old-fashioned summer festival has sky diving,  
pie-eating, bed races and more. / Page 4



# NW WEEKEND



**BEER ON THE VINE**

**FOLLOW THE HOP TRAIL IN THE YAKIMA VALLEY**

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At the American Hop Museum in Toppenish, visitors can see a selection of hops from last season's harvest plus old hop-harvesting equipment.

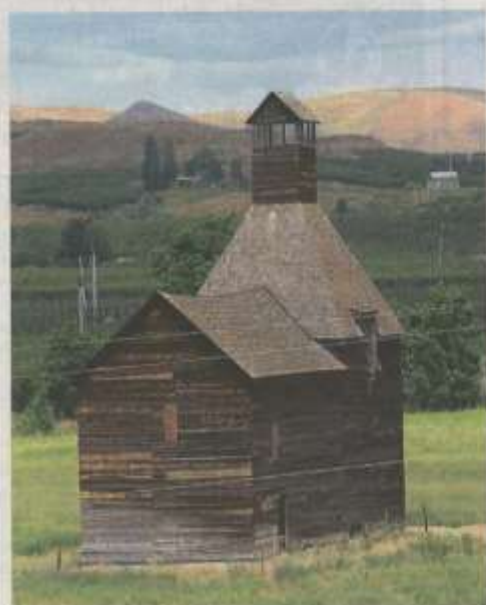
## On the hop trail

**SNIFFING OUT HOPS IN THE YAKIMA VALLEY, BEER LOVERS CAN HAIL THE PLANT THAT FLAVORS ALE**

STORY BY JACKIE SMITH / *Special to The Seattle Times*  
PHOTOS BY MARK HARRISON / *Seattle Times* photographer

PROSSER, Benton County — Sniff. Swirl. Sip. A hint of apricot in the blond liquid. The next sample: coriander prickling the tongue. Finale: in the darkest, a kiss of cherry.

All three: that unmistakable bitter taste that comes from hops.



Just off I-82, at the Donald-Wapato Road exit, sits one of the few remaining wood-frame hop-drying kilns. It was built by the Herke family in 1926.



A fifth-generation hop grower works the land at Puterbaugh Farm in Mabton.

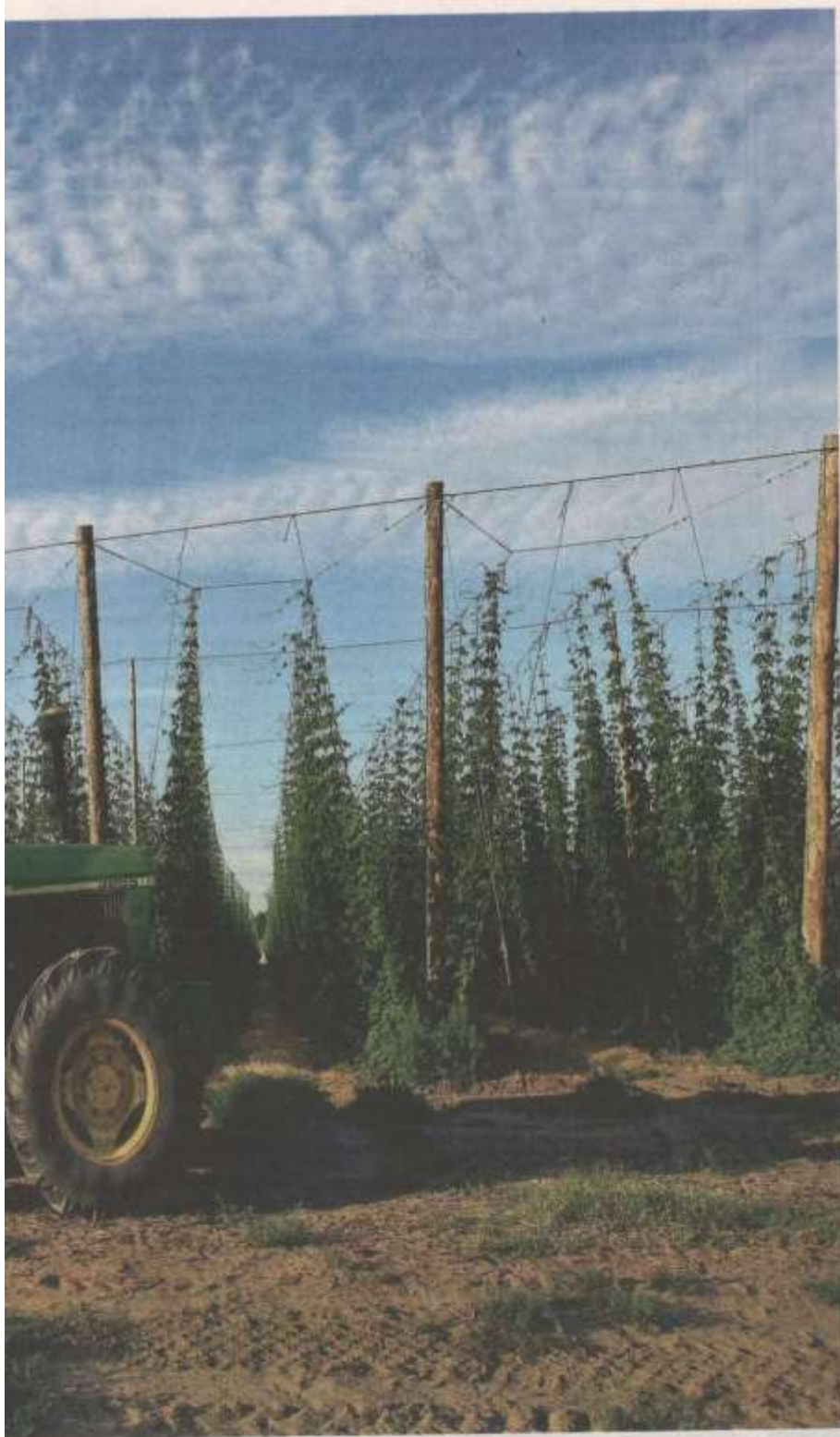
Sniffing, swirling and sipping are part of the whole tasting ritual for visitors to Central Washington's wine country, particularly in this small town, its epicenter. However, I'd detoured from the wine road and was on the ale trail in search of what was brewing in the Land of the Hop.

With due respect to beer geeks, those aficionados of true craft beer — some traveling from as far as Switzerland and Germany to sip the local brews — this wasn't a sophisticated sampling, but just a taste of the Yakima Valley's hops, from plant to product.

It is the hop vine's flower, whether dried, used in pellet or extract form, or fresh plucked, that gives a brew its degree of bitterness and aroma when added to beer's other key ingredients: malt, water and yeast.

### A long, hoppy history

Hops have been grown here in the Yakima Valley since Charles Carpenter brought roots from his father's New York farm and planted them in 1868 just west of present-day Yakima. By the early 1900s hop crops stretched from Moxee to the Lower Yakima Valley,



where today they continue to grow—in an area more widely known now as wine country.

In 2010, Washington state produced nearly 80 percent of the U.S. hop crop, most of which was grown on some 24,000 acres in the Yakima Valley. The industry—from the cultivated hop yards and processing plants to craft breweries that use them— attracts visitors from as far away as Asia, Europe and South America.

Hop-country tourism, though, remains uncharted territory. You won't find any hop growers making the brew and serving it in a tasting room on the farm like their

winemaking vintner counterparts. With no "Hop Country" maps available, I used the oenophile's guide to the area, to create my two-day tour through miles of hop vines, with stops at four brew pubs.

#### First stop

Hours before the tiny tap room opened for sampling at **Yakima Craft Brewing Company**, I found brewmaster and founder Jeff Winn whirling between tanks, a batch of brew in the making at his 3-year-old company tucked away in an industrial area in northwest Yakima

## WEB EXTRA

More photos online: [Link from this story at seattletimes.com/traveloutdoors](http://Link from this story at seattletimes.com/traveloutdoors)



At 6 a.m., Stacy Puterbaugh, at left, goes over the work plans for the day with sons Drew, 16, and Levi, 17, at Puterbaugh Farms in Mabton.

(2920 River Road; 509-654-7357 or [www.yakimacraftbrewing.com](http://www.yakimacraftbrewing.com)).

"I began as a home brewer and worked for 20 years in technology," he said, "I moved the family up from Portland. The hop is here. The weather is here."

Winn was right about the hops. On my tour, the first trellis-filled fields appeared along Highway 24 between Yakima and Moxee, population 3,308, a town that's called itself the "Hop Capital of the World" for so long that no one is quite sure when the slogan came to be. One story is that it once appeared as that in the Guinness Book of World Records and it's been used ever since. Surrounded by hop yards, Moxee swells in size the first weekend of August when its annual, decades-old Moxee Hop Festival draws thousands to celebrate hop harvest.

Midday Moxee streets were empty when I drove through, but at the 1950s-style **Big Red's Diner** (110 Holly Drive, 509-575-0070) a half-dozen farmers lunched at a large center table—called The Farmers Table—discussing picking equipment, irrigation and processing. None, I noted, had ordered the house specialty, Big Red's Belly Buster, a \$15 two-pound hamburger.

Dust blew from the hop yards framing Faucher ("foe-shay") Road as I followed it south from Moxee to Konnowac Pass Road, a paved two-laner that twists and turns over Rattlesnake Ridge to the Lower Yakima Valley. This less-traveled route provides sweeping views of orchards, vineyards and hop yards.

From Konnowac Pass, I headed to the Donald-Wapato Road (Exit 44 from Interstate 82) to see one of the few remaining early-1900s wood-framed hop-drying kilns. Built by the Herke family in 1926, the hop kiln's image appears on the wine labels of nearby Piety Flats Winery (2560 Donald-Wapato Road; [www.pietyflatswinery.com](http://www.pietyflatswinery.com)).

**HOPS  
TOUR MAP  
of the  
Yakima  
Valley. > 12**

## IF YOU GO

### On the Hop Trail

#### Maps

Pick up wine-country and agriculture maps from Yakima Valley Visitors Center (101 N. Fair Ave., Yakima; take Exit 33A off Interstate 82), or download them from [www.visityakimavalley.org](http://www.visityakimavalley.org). None is specific to hop crops.

#### Visiting craft breweries

You can sip a brew or two in the tap room, or buy some to go, at each of the breweries; hours vary by brewery. If you want to chat with a brewer or watch ale being made, call in advance to schedule a visit. Brewing schedules vary.

#### Popular hop routes

**East of Yakima:** Take Exit 34 from I-82. Hop yards are visible along Highway 24 between Yakima and Moxee and any of the secondary roads that lead off from it in the Moxee area.

**South of Yakima:** Take Highway 97 to Lateral A. Follow it to Fort Road and turn left toward Toppenish. Taking a right on Fort Road will take you to Fort Simcoe State Park (5150 Fort Simcoe Road, White Swan), also worth a visit.

Hop harvest time is approximately Aug. 15 through September.

#### Transportation

**A & A Motorcoach** can offer private tours for 2 to 55 passengers by private auto or bus, 2410 S. 26th Ave., Yakima; 509-575-3676 or [www.aamotorcoach.com](http://www.aamotorcoach.com).

**Aladdin Limousine**, 406 N. 30th Ave., Yakima; 509-969-2877.

#### Museum

**American Hop Museum**, 22 S. B St., Toppenish: Open May 1-Sept. 30, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Wednesday-Saturday, 11 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday, \$3/adult, \$2/student, younger than 5 free; \$7 per family, 509-865-4677 or [www.americanhopmuseum.org](http://www.americanhopmuseum.org).

#### More Information

**Yakima Valley Visitors & Convention Bureau:** [www.visityakimavalley.org](http://www.visityakimavalley.org)

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#### A whole museum for hops

Ten miles south, in Toppenish, a town whose slogan is "Where the West Still Lives," I spent an hour at the **American Hop Museum** (22 S. B St.; 509-865-4677 or [www.americanhopmuseum.com](http://www.americanhopmuseum.com)).

Housed in a building near the old Northern Pacific Railway station (also a museum); the hop museum tells the vine's story from colonists' cultivation in the 1600s to modern-day harvest through an array of photos, equipment, tools, gadgets and curious paraphernalia. Early-day cultivation and

harvesting equipment is displayed outside.

Museum board President Mary Jane Craigen, whose family raised hops for more than a century, recommends visiting at harvest time, roughly Aug. 15 to Sept. 30, when the vines and their flower-laden arms are cut from the 18-foot trellises that support them. "When they are harvesting, the air is just filled with the scent of hops. It's wonderful."

Most hop growers don't offer tours at any time, particularly during harvest, but Diana and Stacy Puterbaugh, fourth-generation Mabton-area hop growers, do host prearranged group tours at their 700-acre **Puterbaugh**

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PHOTOS BY MARK HARRISON / THE SEATTLE TIMES

At Whitstran Brewing Company in Prosser, brewmaster Larry Barbus pours a beer and delivers it with a smile at his pub and restaurant.



Guests at Snipes Mountain Brewery & Restaurant in Sunnyside can sip a beer and watch the brewing process through windows.

**Farms**, which grows 13 varieties of hops for their Hops Direct wholesaling business (686 Green Valley Road, Mabton; 888-972-3616 or [www.hopsdirect.com](http://www.hopsdirect.com)). They also produce pickled hop shoots, hop tea and hop soap, all sold on their website.

### Quenching a thirst

It was a \$5, four-beer sampler at Prosser's **Horse Heaven Hills Brewery** that provided a real taste of hop country. Its cozy tasting room opens to the brew house for front-row viewing on brewing days. Owners and longtime friends, Gary and Carol Vegar and Dave and Brenda Keller, opened the 2-year-old brewery in what was a 1960s-era Laundromat, off an auto-parts store parking lot (1118 Meade Ave.; 509-781-6400 or [www.horseheavenhillsbrewery.com](http://www.horseheavenhillsbrewery.com)).

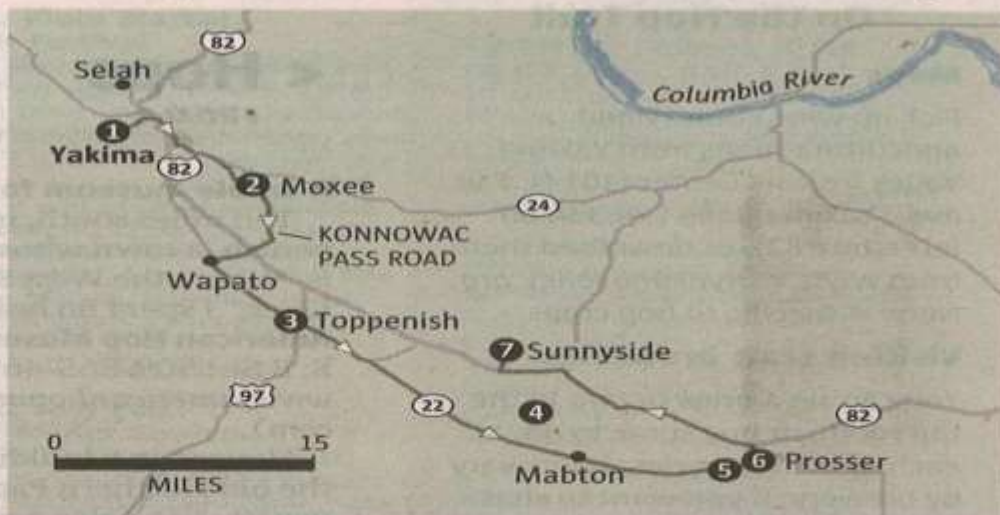
A few blocks away at **Whitstran Brewing Company**, owner/brewer Larry Barbus serves his premium and seasonal ales in a kid-friendly cafe, which he describes as being "patterned after a traditional public ale house." There's a full menu of food and brew, with a special nonalcoholic orange cream soda that tasted like a melted Creamsicle (1427 Wine Country Road; 509-786-4922 or [www.whitstranbrewing.com](http://www.whitstranbrewing.com)).

I finished my tour at Sunnyside's **Snipes Mountain Brewery & Restaurant** (905 Yakima Valley Highway; 509-837-2739 or [www.snipessmountain.com](http://www.snipessmountain.com)), where the glass-enclosed brew house is visible from the kid-friendly restaurant. Daytime diners at this lodgelike place can see brewmaster Chad Roberts creating more than a dozen brews that are served on tap.

I'd come full circle. Their featured brew: Moxee Pale Ale.

*Jackie Smith, a Kirkland-based freelance writer, grew up in Yakima and formerly reported for the Yakima Herald-Republic.*

## A hops tour of the Yakima Valley



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Source: ESRI, TeleAtlas

DAVID SWARTZ / THE SEATTLE TIMES



## Festival sampler

### Hops and ales celebrated here

**Moxee Hop Festival**, Aug. 5-6: Moxee City Park, corner of Rivard and Highway 24. Begins at 5 p.m. Aug. 5, with fireworks at dusk. Aug. 6 events include pancake breakfast, parade, barbecue cook-off, country-music competition, beer garden, crafts and food vendors, pony rides, farm-equipment displays. More info: [moxeehopfestival.org](http://moxeehopfestival.org).

**Fresh Hop Ale Festival**, Yakima, Oct. 1: Millennium Arts Plaza, South Third Street and East Yakima Avenue. Fundraiser for Allied Arts Council. Breweries entering the fresh-hop ale competition must serve a brew created from hops that were picked not longer than 24 hours before brewing. Minimum age: 21. \$30 in advance, or \$35 at gate. Brewer's dinners Thursday and Friday evenings before the festival. See [freshhopalefestival.com](http://freshhopalefestival.com).

**Hoptober Fest**, Yakima: Annual fundraiser for American Hop Museum in Toppenish is held in January. 2012 date not yet set. The event showcases craft brews from Ellensburg to the Tri-Cities. appetizers, silent auction, German dinner, and dancing. Information: 509-453-4749.

**Six craft-brew festivals**, showcasing some 145 craft brewers in the state, are sponsored by the Washington Beer Commission. For dates and locations, see [www.washingtonbeer.com](http://www.washingtonbeer.com).