

IPA Lost and Found

The story of India Pale Ale, begins in the 1700s, when British soldiers began going to India. Traditional legend states that ordinary British beer could not withstand the three or four month journey to India, going from cold to tropics and back to the cold again, leaving many a thirsty soldier, and brew master George Hodgson “invented” IPA by making a massively hopped beer with a higher alcohol content that would withstand the journey.

However, there has been considerable debunking of that legend. First, strong, relatively hoppy British beers were around already, including barley wines, porter and a beer called October ale. Porter, in particular, had been known to survive for up to a year at sea in tropical climates. Second, while George Hodgson may have been the first brewer to capitalize on the style, other brewers were making strong, hoppy beer and shipping it. Hodgson’s brewery happened to be in close proximity to the shipyards where the soldiers and supplies went out to India, and he developed a bit of a monopoly. Particularly in the 1800s, brewers from Burton-on-Trent, such as Bass, were in the market with their own versions of strong, hoppy pale ales. Some authorities consider Bass Ale brewed in the 1800s to have been an IPA.

In England, classic IPA appears to have waned in popularity beginning in the early 1900s. It has not been as popular domestically as bitter or “regular” pale ale. Over the years, British IPA became less hoppy and lower in alcohol than in its original formulations. The imposition of taxes based on alcohol content is one factor that has led to lower alcohol content. To the extent that the hops were used to preserve the beer, that was not a necessity in the domestic market. Some modern British beers with “IPA,” in their name, such as Flowers, are actually classified as a “bitter.” For many years, Samuel Smith’s India Ale was considered to be the “classic” example of an English IPA. However, the alcohol and hop content in Samuel Smith’s pales in comparison to its early predecessors.

Traditionally, the English IPAs used East Kent Goldings and after their introduction in the later 1800s, Fuggles hops. Typically, brewers would obtain hops through a hop exchange, but there is some evidence that George Hodgson contracted for Goldings hops with specific farmers. (My speculation is that this would have led to a more consistent flavor profile and may be one of the reasons he was credited with “inventing” the style.) Samuel Smiths uses Progress and Phoenix. Although the English hops can have a citrusy, fruity character, particularly when used in large amounts, they usually are not as bold or bitter as the hops typically preferred by American brewers. (See IPA Hop Cheat Sheet). American IPAs tend to be more bitter and have a more pronounced citrus / pine / fruit character than their English counterparts.

In terms of alcohol content and IBUs, American IPAs typically are closer in style to the original English IPA than many modern English counterparts. Several American microbreweries have created “English” IPAs, but even those IPAs typically have non-English hops giving the flavor profile a uniquely American twist.

Enter Meantime Brewery, in Greenwich, England. After extensive research, Meantime began brewing an IPA that it claims is formulated in the manner of the “original” IPAs. Copious

amounts of Fuggles and East Kent Goldings give it a complex, citrus / fruity essence. Meantime compares well with America IPA in bitterness, hop character and alcohol content.

A review of the BJCP Style Guidelines demonstrates the similarities in alcohol content and IBUs between the two styles:

Category	OG	FG	Alcohol	IBU
14A – English IPA	1050-1075	1010-1018	5-7.5	40-60
14B American IPA	1056-1075	1010-1018	5.5-7.5	40-70

In summary, the differences between most English IPA and American IPA centers on the use of English malt, classic English hops and, to some extent, traditional English yeast varieties. Should the trend of reverting to the roots of English IPA continue, those IPAs probably will have more in common with American IPA in their hop assertiveness than with “standards” like Samuel Smiths.