

## *Malt Maniacs E-pistle #2010-02* *By Lawrence Graham, Canada*

This article is brought to you by 'Malt Maniacs'; an international collective of more than two dozen fiercely independent malt whisky aficionados. Since 1997 we have been enjoying and discussing the pleasures of single malt whisky with like-minded whisky lovers from all over the world. In 2010 our community had members from 15 countries; The United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France, Switzerland, Italy, Greece, The U.S.A., Canada, India, Taiwan, Australia and South Africa. You can find more details on: [www.maltmaniacs.org](http://www.maltmaniacs.org).



# Laphroaig Quest A Malt Obsessive on Maui

Ah **Maui**. What can be said to describe this idyllic **Hawaiian island** to those who have not yet visited this wonderfully warm & beautiful corner of our planet? The weather is warm, it's spectacularly beautiful and the amenities are first rate. The **whisky selection** however, leaves a lot to be desired and the single malt selection is even more wanting.

As with any decent malt obsessive when I travel I spend some time **searching through various liquor retail outlets, corner stores and grocery stores** looking for 'opportunity' malts that aren't available at home. The exception to this practice is in the Canadian province of Ontario; truly a single malt desert and what weak selection they do have is punitively expensive.



Laphroaig 10 and Tiki Totem



Long's Drugs Store

The other Hawaiian islands are not much better; **many years ago on Kauai** I found a **Laphroaig 15 year old** in a ....drug store... called **Long's** (pharmacy to you non North Americans and not a crack house).

Last year on Maui after a heart breaking & seemingly fruitless search I was left with one option; **The Singleton of Glendullan**. We NEVER see this in Canada (nor any of the other Singleton's for that matter) and while this may not seem like a find, it actually was so due to the fact that I'd not yet had the opportunity to sample it; another notch in my malt mileage.

**The Glendullan 'find'** was also purchased from a **Long's Drugs**...things had to improve in 2010 ..... a year of Hope & Change after all.

The Scotch whisky situation on Maui is irritating due to the fact that there didn't seem to be a retail outlet dedicated to ALCOHOL or if there was it was a wine store such as the '**Wine Corner**' in Lahaina which had lots of, you guessed it, **wine and 2 bottles of single malt; a Balvenie Single Cask 15 and a Glenfiddich 12**. Now that's a good start but not what I was looking for.

Just down the road '**Food Land**' had a good, if not odd, selection of whiskies; the usual **Johnnie Walkers** (and the **Blue** carefully locked behind glass), a myriad of Canadians including **Pendleton Blended Canadian Whisky** (which is bottled in Oregon in the USA), a good selection of other **Scottish Blends (J&B, Cutty Sark, Chivas, Dewar's** etcetera) plus some really **low end \$11.99 blends** (\*more on those below) plus an assortment of **American whiskies**.



Foodland

**Also a Clynelish 14**. What? What about the other Classic Malts? Nope. Just the Clynelish. Or the reverse, the entire **Classic Malts** but no Clynelish. The whole island seemed to follow this rather erratic pattern; either a smattering of this and that and maybe one exotic bottling like **Pebble Beach Speyside Single Malt Scotch Whisky** carefully locked up behind glass.



Selection inside Food Land

However be that as it may, I still make an effort to search obsessively for something that's **not available at home**. Unusual for me, this year I set myself a goal of trying to **track down** a few bottles of **Laphroaig 10** (any more and Customs start to give you the fuzzy eye ball). Why would I look for Laphroaig 10? Because a few years ago we **lucky Canadians** were informed, somewhat brightly, that we were the extremely lucky **test market** where the **10 year old was withdrawn** and the **Quarter Cask was dropped into place**. Just to see how we would fare. Which was very frustrating.

After having only the **10 year old** available in most of Canada for DECADES we were suddenly overjoyed to have **TWO Laphroaigs** to choose from. And **then poof! One was gone**. And to add insult to injury, it seemed **most places** (with the exception of Kazakhstan (known as Казакстан in some parts) had a **myriad of choices; 10, 10 Cask Strength, 15, (18 not yet introduced), 25, 30 and even a 1989** or other such exotics.

Nope, not us.

As the 10 year old quickly started to vanish from store shelves, I hastily stocked up for the lean times ahead. However, the **Canadian bottling** was the **40% version** (like they have in the UK and some parts of Europe). The **Americans** however, have the **43% version**, which, **In My Humble Opinion**, is just that **wee bit better** than the **40% bottling**. Slightly richer and sweeter. In any case, that was my decision.

Now I wasn't looking for Laphroaig just on the off chance. While it wasn't visible in any stores (wine or other wise), I had a significant clue in that the restaurant where we having lunch, **the Pacific O**, proudly displayed a bottle of **Laphroaig 10** on their bar, along with **Macallan 12 & 18**, **Glenlivet 12**, and **Glenfiddich**. The better the restaurant, the better the selection malts it seemed, and if these malts were in a restaurant there **MUST** be a retail store some where that supplied them. While I was waiting for our lunch to arrive, I'd order a **Laphroaig 10** and **watch the Humpback whales breach** just off shore, a magical scene that I never grow tired of.



A Humpback whale seen during our trip on Maui



Pacific O Restaurant on Maui

So after a week or so of poking around most of the food stores, wine stores, 'liquor stores' (yeah right!) etcetera on the south shore, I finally struck upon the bright idea of simply **asking the bartender** at the **Pacific O** if there was a store **dedicated to selling just liquor and whisky**, and specifically **Laphroaig**? "Oh sure," he said, "**try Hawaii Liquor Superstore in Kahului**, they have **Laphroaig 10**, it's next door to the Borders on the way to the airport". Hmmmm, maybe I'd thought of asking him a week ago.....there's an HSBC 'local knowledge' commercial in there somewhere.

The following day we decided to make a day of the **Laphroaig quest** and seek out Hawaii Liquor and on the way to visit the aquarium (well worth the visit) and to go to lunch just past Kahului at a restaurant part way up the volcano.

Thus the plan unfolded as anticipated and low and behold, tucked into the back of a shopping plaza and just around the corner from Borders there it was; **Hawaii Liquor Superstore**.

**Could this be the moment?**



Hawaii Liquor Store Superstore in Kahului

As I parked, I asked Carollyne if she wanted to go inside for this potentially victorious and delicious moment. "No," she said. There was a puddle of water evaporating in front of the car, and she wanted to see what was going to happen. "C'mon," I said, "it'll be fun, it's a liquor store; how can you possibly sit out here at such a time?"

So in we tramped and shortly thereafter I found myself in front of a veritable (for Maui) wall of Scottish single malts including **TWO bottles of Laphroaig 10 year old 43%**. I stood gazing at the all the selection and after a moment or two Carollyne asked, "Are you going to buy the Laphroaigs?" "Yes," I said, "just a moment."

Then she said, "Well, I'm going to buy one," and snatched it off the shelf and as she headed towards the till she tossed back over her shoulder at me: "In two years you'll be begging me for this bottle." (You can see a picture of her at the top of the **page flanked by the 2 bottles of Laphroaig 10**).

It's more than likely that at some future date that I'll try and return the bottle to the rightful owner (me) but I know where she keeps this bottle at home; I can always switch out the 43% bottle for a 40% bottle, time is on my side.....and will she ever notice?

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## \* 11.99 Scotch Whisky Tasting Notes

\*While I was on my obsessive 'Laphroaig Quest' I frequently **came across** various blended Scotch whiskies priced at **US\$11.99 per bottle** which very the very bottom of the price spectrum. As malt maniacs we're always looking **for quality products** with a '**quality price**' (as we all know the two don't always go hand in hand) and I thought it would be fun to take a some time out and see what the bottom of the price spectrum had to offer; the results were somewhat of a surprise (certainly so in one case)....

### **Scoresby 36 Months (40%, Very Rare, Blended Scotch Whisky, +/- 2009)**

"The Connoisseur's Scotch Whisky" so says the label.....

An internet search revealed very little about Scoresby; it seems Diageo wants to keep details a secret?? Come on Diageo, you can do better than that.....

The **nose** is very much of grain whisky with very little evidence of any malt whisky however while it is quite one sided towards grain there are no evil notes like gasoline or strong solvents but there simply isn't much here.

The **taste** is middle of the road in flavour profile and tastes like whisky with some nice sweetness which is pleasant surprise. It's also quite vibrant but there is still little evidence of any malt. Once again there is nothing alarming in the taste. The finish has some fruit and ..... some grain (think of corn or chewing on wheat grains straight from the field). Some chewy moments towards the end and once again nothing to set off the alarm bells, actually quite a vibrant finish, not dull. Some very light green notes towards the end of the finish that is surprisingly long. There some grain in there however not a hint of the malt that must be in there somewhere. After a few minutes there are some slight hints of NutraSweet at the very tail end of the **finish**.

Just for fun, since a large majority of **blended whisky consumed** in the **USA is poured over ice** this was done, merely in the **interests of science**.



Not a huge change from the un-iced sample and perhaps a mild improvement however after a short while in the glass the ice begins to dominate and it changes somewhat to become slightly like a chilled vodka (think of that Polish Vodka with the blade of grass in the bottle).

A nice drink and well done for maintaining balance throughout or perhaps this is merely due to the lack of character? However it should be noted that there are simply no dire notes; perhaps this is the most redeeming character.....

US\$11.99  
Score 69 points

### Lauder's 36 Months (40%, Imported, Blended Scotch Whisky, +/- 2009)

From <http://www.bartonbrands.com/lauders.html> Lauder's Blended Scotch Whisky:

"A smooth, blended Scotch whisky imported from Scotland. Steeped in taste and history, was a Gold Medal Winner at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. One of the finest imported Scotch whiskies-one of the world's affordable luxuries."

On the **nose** there is some strong acetone and industrial notes and not very much that would identify it as a scotch whisky and after some time there are some mild and vague green or vegetal notes. It's a struggle to detect anything else.



Need A First Aid Dram!

The **taste** is surprisingly smokey at first but that soon drops away to reveal some grain (finally) and the industrial notes. Hiding in the back ground is some sweetness.

The **finish** has some light fruit, no appearance of the smoke and some bitterness that is slightly off putting. After several minutes some malt (or some overly active grain) makes an appearance but it's too late to make any difference.

Some mere moments of happiness at the end but some lack of balance...and all the other unhappy characteristics.....one has to conclude that things have gone down hill since the gold medal awarded in Chicago 1893.

\$11.99  
Score 59 points

## Clan MacGregor 36 Months (40%, Imported, Blended Scotch Whisky, +/- 2009)

From <http://www.grantusa.com/>

Clan MacGregor, one of the world's fastest growing major Scotch whisky brands, is enjoyed in over 60 countries around the world, from the USA to Venezuela and the Middle East to Thailand. It is a reassuringly high quality yet affordable Scotch whisky, proudly carrying the Clan MacGregor badge and motto, and with his kind permission, the personal crest of the 24th Clan Chief, Sir Malcolm MacGregor of MacGregor.



The Clan traces its ancestry and takes its name from Gregor, third son of Alpin, King of Scotland in the last part of the eighth century. This royal lineage gives rise to the Clan motto of 'Royal is my Race'. The Clan MacGregor underwent centuries of persecution and turmoil, with their lands being confiscated and the very name MacGregor being outlawed. But they were brave and resilient, and eventually all of their rights and privileges were restored.

The Clan badge, a crowned Lion's head on a wreath, encircled with a belt and buckle, signifies the unity and loyalty of the Clan. By using their badge on both bottle and label, Clan MacGregor Scotch Whisky honours the heritage of this strong ancient Clan.

Clan MacGregor is skillfully blended from a selection of Scotland's finest malt and grain whiskies. It has hints of fruitiness and Speyside malts. It is a high quality, light and fragrant whisky with a well-balanced, smooth, mellow taste that resonates with modern whisky drinkers across the world.

The **nose** sweet and spicy and actually has the familiar aromas one normally associates with Scotch whisky. Naturally it noses as quite young however it is actually pleasant, lively and vibrant (this is a pleasant surprise). There is not however any real hints of malt. The **taste** is smooth, sweet and spicy (just like the aroma) along with some vague hints of tobacco and leather and then some really nice sweetness one often associates with grain (as opposed to malt) whisky. This is actually nice (but not great). The **finish** is sweet, very 'grainy' along with some spice and some mild fruit. The finish is also quite long and reflects the previously commented characteristics. The finish actually improves with time and doesn't degrade over time which is a surprise.....

This is actually a pleasant dram and drinkable and by far the most pleasant of the three whiskies reviewed. Quite a surprise for 36 months...

\$11.99

Score 76 points

Lawrence Graham, Canada



Lawrence Graham joined the Malt Maniacs in 2004 on the invitation of Johannes van den Heuvel (in a moment of extreme distraction it is presumed). His first single malt was, not surprisingly, a Laphroaig 10 year purchased many, many years ago in a large department style store in Glasgow. He is a producer of the Victoria Whisky Festival and the founder & editor of [www.whiskyintelligence.com](http://www.whiskyintelligence.com) a site dedicated to collecting and publishing all types of whisky news and information.

He is captured in a moment of extreme giddiness wearing his most prized bit of clothing; a Magnum P.I. Hawaiian shirt, the only such shirt on permanent display in the Smithsonian Institute in Washington D.C.