

Ben Nevis

REGION

There are five Scottish whisky distilling regions; Highlands (including Islands), Speyside, Islay, Campbeltown and Lowlands, each with their own distinctive characteristics. Key to understanding the flavour distinctions between various Single Malts is knowing these regions and the kind of whiskies that they produce.



Region

Highlands

Production Type

Single Malt

Single Grain

Blended Scotch

Distillery Status

Active

Brands

Ben Nevis

HISTORY OF BEN NEVIS

Bootleggers, smugglers and Japanese owners - the curious tale of Ben Nevis

Ben Nevis distillery sits in the town of Fort William in the Scottish Highlands, in the shadow of its namesake, Ben Nevis Mountain. Often referenced as being founded by Long John MacDonald, it was Angus McDonnell who first built the distillery in 1825. Long John took control shortly after, licensing the distillery with production beginning in 1826. Reported figures stating that some 900 litres of spirit were being distilled weekly. Long John, aptly named due to his staggering height clocking in 6ft 4 inches, along with various family members would go on to take the McDonnell built distillery to great heights. Rumours are rife of Long John being a bootlegger, with details on how he ended up working at the distillery to this day still a little sketchy. He became a partner of the distillery in 1830, shortly before purchasing Angus' remaining stake in 1831 for £1,200, the equivalent of £125,000 today.

Ben Nevis Single Malt gained huge popularity, named Long John's Ben Nevis, it was even consumed by the Royal Family with McDonald himself sending a cask direct to Buckingham Palace to mark the 21st birthday of the Prince of Wales, gaining huge popularity in the process. In 1850 the highly esteemed and luxury Ben Nevis Malt sold for 42 shillings per dozen bottles, with a guarantee that the spirit was pure and unblended. MacDonald however had borrowed heavily to fund the purchase and running costs of the distillery. Sadly he failed to make the business financially successful, being declared bankrupt with his estate sequestered in 1856, passing away shortly after.

The reigns of the distillery found their way to his son, Donald Peter MacDonald, acquiring the distillery and transforming Ben Nevis into a thriving business. He rebranded as Long John's Dew of Ben Nevis and sold various bottlings ranging between 5 and 11 years old, building on the popularity that his father had created. He constructed a pier at the distillery, using a fleet of his own cargo ships to ensure delivery to across the West Coast of Scotland, particularly in Glasgow and major ports in the South. By the end of the 19th century, Long John's Dew of Ben Nevis was regarded as arguably the world's best known Single Malt. This led Donald to open a second distillery named Nevis, as well as building a village nearby to house his 230 employees and their families. So popular was their whisky that the sites produced a mammoth 400,000 Gallons each year, exporting to Australia, the USA and Europe.

Donald passed away in 1891, leaving his vast fortune and the distilleries to his sons. This unfortunately came around time of the rise in popularity of Lowland blended and grain whiskies, with the industry dominated by "The Big Three". This was followed soon after by the Pattison Crash of 1898. With the difficulties facing the industry in the early 1900's, Nevis ceased operations in 1908, while Ben Nevis ran intermittently until 1948 when the distillery was sold to Canadian, Joseph Hobbs. Prior to purchasing Ben Nevis and other distilleries in Scotland, akin to the late Long John, Hobbs also had a reputation for smuggling, notably into America during the prohibition era. The drink of choice was none other than Teachers' Highland Cream and it's reported he smuggled a staggering 137,927 cases.

It wasn't until 1955 that Ben Nevis' operations resumed, with Hobbs introducing a Coffey still and an unusual concrete washback. He also began experimenting with blending new grain and malt spirits together, a lot less common in Highland distilleries when compared to the Lowland grain distillers. 1964 saw the passing of Hobbs which led to production stopping again in 1978, before his son Joseph Jr. sold the distillery back to Whitbread & Long John Distillers in 1981. The distillery reopened in 1986 before becoming one of the first Scotch distilleries under Japanese ownership, being sold to Nikka in 1989.

To this day the distillery is going strong and produces a staggering 2 million litres annually. Examples of their quality are the highly collectable "Forgotten Bottlings" and their 40-year-old "Blended at Birth" single blend, both of whose creation is attributed to those early experiments by Hobbs decades previously. A final point to note about Ben Nevis which baffles collectors, consumers, and connoisseurs alike, is despite the large output of the distillery each year, a very small quantity of whisky is released each year, leaving many asking where does it go?



BEN NEVIS FACTS

Everything you ever wanted to know about the inner workings of Ben Nevis Distillery

CAPACITY (MLPA) 1.5	HEAT SOURCE Steam	MALT SUPPLIER Various	YEAST TYPE Brewer's/pressed	GRIST WEIGHT (T) 8.5
WASHBACK TYPE 6 Steel, 2 Pine	FERMENTATION TIME: 48hrs, longer at weekends	WORT CLARITY Clear	WATER SOURCE Allt a Mhullin burn	
NEW-MAKE STRENGTH 70%	CONDENSER TYPE Shell and tube	Malt Supplier Various, usually all major U.K. malt supplier companies		
MALT SPECIFICATION Normally Speyside Type, low/occasionally 30-35ppm	MASH TUN MATERIAL Stainless Steel		WASH STILL SHAPE Plain, with a large, deep, straight sided bottom	
FILLING STRENGTH 63.4% ABV				



STILLS
4 (2 Wash, 2 Spirit)
SPIRIT STILL SIZE
(L) 22,730
SPIRIT STILL SHAPE
Plain, deep base



MASH TUN TYPE
Lauter (Newmill)
WASHBACK SIZE
(L) 50,000
WASHBACK CHARGE
(L) 22,000



WASH STILL SIZE
(L) 36,368
WASH STILL CHARGE
(L) 25,000
WASHBACKS
8

ACCOLADES AND RANGE OF WHISKY

With its colourful history and questionable owners, there is one thing which Ben Nevis do well, and that's create great whisky. The distillery splits its supply between bulk orders from Japan, blends such as MacDonald's of Glencoe and Dew of Ben Nevis and their own Single Malt bottlings. These Single Malt bottlings typically start at 10 years old and in recent years have been developed to include a smokier variant in MacDonald's of Ben Nevis..

- Ben Nevis 10 Year Old Batch No.1 Limited Edition, Master Award 2019 Scotch Whisky Masters
- Distillery of the Year 2017 Scottish Highlands Wine and Spirit Awards
- MacDonald's Celebrated Traditional Ben Nevis, *Highlands & Islands NAS - 2018 The Scotch Whisky Masters Gold*
- Ben Nevis 45 Year Old Scottish Folklore Series, IWSC Awards 2018 Gold

Although the majority of Ben Nevis's whisky is aged in ex-sherry casks, some ex-bourbon cask bottlings have recently appeared on the independent market. The Ben Nevis collection is a vast one with special fillings, collaborations, different cask finishings and spirit of varying ages from 7 years up to 40+. It's safe to say that Ben Nevis have a taste to suit all discerning palates.



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