

When West Coast Meets Midwest Meat

For years through hushed whispers and logo-donning T-shirts, In-N-Out burger seemed elusive to Whataburger fans like a secret society of burger-revering Americans praising a thin patty with a side of Animal-Style fries. I barely thought it existed.

Until it came to my state. Thirty minutes away laid the esteemed ground chuck joint, minus the palm trees and beachy climate, awaiting my arrival.

With a bleached exterior and domed architecture, I thought I was walking into the bedroom in *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Driving up to the car line, comparable to McDonald's during a lunch rush, I was greeted by a waiter with a grin taunting me to try their milkshakes, claiming they were world-famous. I secretly doubted this.

No Animal-Style fries at this dive. They weren't on the menu. Suffering this tragic loss, I asked him to give me a combo with the *exceptional* shake he persuaded me to buy, irritation swelling in my throat. I wanted my fries sweating under Thousand Island dressing.

Ripping open the brown paper bags (I hadn't eaten breakfast; I was a pig), halves of burgers glistening with a slight yellow color flashed themselves like pretty blonde girls in movies.

Unsettled by the odd color, I told myself there was a Burger King right down the street in case of an emergency.

American singles wedged between the Double-Doubles melted like my patience at the half-hour wait. You're not you when you're hungry, after all.

Chewing, I realized the color was ballpark mustard. They grill the burgers in America's second ketchup for flavor. To feel quirkier, caramelized onions topped the sponge bun. That's the California equivalent of wearing ripped jeans.

My tongue still felt pallid and dull. Dipping my hand back into the grease-soaked bag, a miniature box of fries no bigger than my child-sized hand emerged, again with the striped logo.

Hungry, I shoveled the thin sticks into my mouth as I was digging for any scarce morsel of Heinz Ketchup. They were saltier than my mood.

Tolerating a bite of the sliced potatoes was like drinking Redondo Beach. It felt despicable, almost un-American to torture something so prized as the hand-dug potato.

I drank the milkshake, wrongly assuming the creaminess would subdue the saliferous fried vegetable. It was thin and watery, with the consistency and appearance of Pepto-Bismol.

Needless to say, Burger King received a hefty order ten minutes later.

The concept of In-N-Out is spectacular. Fresh food, clean buildings, adored workers. But the food didn't live up to the West Coast standard. Dining on one of America's favorite foods did not feel like lounging on a crystal coast with a cocktail in hand.

Did we really expect it to satisfy the Colorado Cowboy?