

SPORE PRINTS

BULLETIN OF THE PUGET SOUND MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY
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Spore Prints

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PUGET SOUND MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Tuesday, December 11, at 7:30 pm at the Center for Urban Horticulture, 3501 NE 41st Street, Seattle



December is once again time for our famous holiday party and “cookie bash,” hosted annually by your Board of Trustees. It is a time to socialize and showcase the culinary and creative talents of our club members. **Please bring a dish of hors d’oeuvres, other treats, baked goods, or desserts to share.** Wear your best fungal-themed jewelry, clothing, and/or hats and be prepared for a jolly good time. This is a family event, so children are especially welcome.



Art Contest. Enter the art contest and release your inner Myco-angelo! Members of all ages are encouraged to create some form of original art on a fungal theme. Edible entries are encouraged but are not required. We will select the winners by a popular vote and prizes will be awarded for the best entries.

Tonight’s program will feature YOU! As with previous years, we’d love for you to share your stories and adventures from this season’s mushroom hunts, vacations, and other activities. The projector and microphone will be turned on and will be waiting for you, so bring your best digital photos (10-12 per person) to share. Load your photos onto a CD or a USB flash drive and give them to Marian Maxwell or the person running the laptop and projector before the meeting. *Short* video presentations on a DVD format are also welcome.



CALENDAR

- Dec. 11 Membership Meeting & Holiday “Cookie Bash,” 7:30 pm, CUH
- Dec. 17 Board Meeting, 7:30 pm, CUH Board Room
- Dec. 18 *Spore Prints* deadline

YOUR DUES ARE DUE!

Ann Polin

It’s that time of year again! The Puget Sound Mycological Society appreciates all of its members and hopes that you will renew at this time. If renewal is not received by December 31, current members will no longer receive a copy of *Spore Prints* and will no longer have access to the “Member’s Only” portion of the website, including field trip information and class registration. (Members joining at or after the October show are good through 2013.)

You may renew by clicking on the link in the e-mail that was sent in September to all members up for renewal (check your junk mail folder if you can’t find it in your inbox), OR you may renew online at www.psms.org. Either (1) click on “Renew Online,” log in using your user name and password, and then click on “Pay Membership Dues/Fees” under the heading “Membership Information” and follow the prompts, or (2) click on “Join/Renew by Mail,” print the renewal form, and after completing it send it along with a check (payable to PSMS) to Ann Polin, PSMS Membership Chair, 22265 34th Pl. W, Brier, WA 98036. Dues are \$30 for an individual or family membership and \$20 for a full-time student membership. Thanks in advance for your continued support of mushrooming activities in the Pacific Northwest!

PATRICE BENSON GOLDEN MUSHROOM AWARD

Marian Maxwell

At our November general meeting we announced that the board had voted to change the name of our Golden Mushroom Award to the Patrice Benson Golden Mushroom Award. Patrice was a model member for our organization, and provided a lifetime of service to PSMS.

She spent 17 years on the PSMS Board of Trustees in the 33+ years she was a member. Six of these were as President, four were as Immediate Past President, and three were as Vice-President. She brought cooking demonstrations to the show and garnered the interest of many people in the many years that she was the Mycophagy chair. She inspired the newer members as she taught mushroom identification classes. In these last few years she was Education Chair and the NW representative for the North American Mycological Association. In 2013 Patrice will be our recipient of the award that will now bear her name.

We chose to announce this early since we were having the tribute to her service at the November meeting. We are very thankful for the many years that she inspired us, taught us, mentored us, helped us, advised us, worked along side of us, hunted with us, and was a friend to us. We will always miss her and will think of her each and every season when we head out to our favorite spots. She will always be in our hearts.



THE SANTA/SHAMAN MYTH

Nick Iadanza

MushRumors, Ore. Myco. Soc., Nov.-Dec. 2012

A popular belief is that Santa Claus is a folk memory of Siberian shamanism related to *Amanita muscaria*. Santa's red and white costume represents the Fly Agaric's color; flying on a reindeer-driven sleigh relates to mushroom-induced intoxication. Santa's entry via the chimney is thought to stem from the idea that shamans entered yurts through the smoke hole, wearing red and white fur trimmed coats and long black boots. His appearance, clothing, and companions suggest a connection to ancient mushroom-gathering shamans.



St. Nicholas of Myra

The history of a Christmas gift giver is a bit obscure but thought to have origins with the medieval St. Nicholas. Various St.-Nicholas-inspired characters were popular throughout the world. In North America, the name Santa Claus evolved in the 18th century from the Dutch Sinter Klass, a man with a blue, three-cornered hat, red waistcoat, and yellow stockings.

Santa's description as a portly, jolly old elf who traveled by reindeer-led sleigh originated in the poem "A Visit from St. Nicholas," written in 1822 by Clement Moore. The poem created a popular icon and in 1881, Thomas Nast, a political cartoonist, drew on Moore's poem to create the first likeness that matches our modern image of Santa as a rotund, cheerful man with a full white beard and bright red suit trimmed with white fur.



St. Nicholas by Thomas Nast, 1881

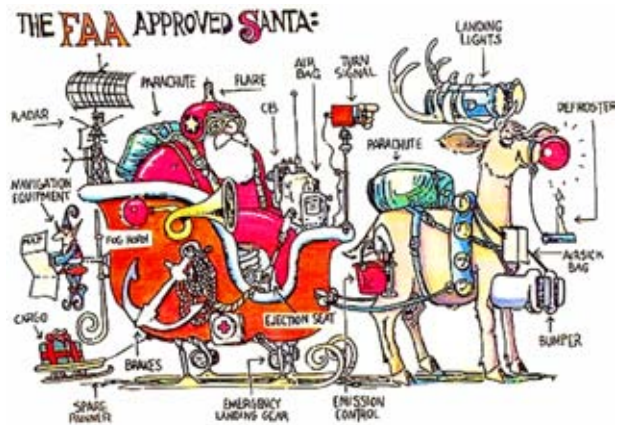
The relationship between Santa, shamans, and *Amanita muscaria* has a recent origin. The ethnobotanist Jonathan Ott suggested the Santa/Fly Agaric relationship in a 1976 book about the narcotic plants of North America. It was brought to a wider audience with an article in *The Sunday Times* in 1980, and reported as fact in the weekly *New Scientist* in 1986. Historian Ronald Hutton has since disputed the connection; he noted reindeer spirits did not appear in Siberian mythology, shamans did not travel by sleigh, nor did they wear red and white or climb out of smoke holes. "The Santa Claus we know was invented by Clement Clarke Moore, who suddenly turned a medieval saint into a flying, reindeer-driving spirit."

Santa's red and white suit became the accepted norm only a century ago after an ad campaign by Coca-Cola featuring Santa drinking a Coke. Coca-Cola ran an ad with Santa wearing their colors in 1931. Red was a popular Santa color in the early 20th century, but red and white together was due to Coke's advertisements.



Coca-Cola ad, 1931

So, unless someone comes up with evidence that the Reverend Moore happened to be tripping on Fly Agaric when he wrote the poem, I'd conclude that the Santa-Amanita connection is a fable.



EDIBLE-MUSHROOM HUNTERS BENEFIT FROM CANINE NOSEWORK

Elisabeth Murray

South Whidbey Record, Nov. 9, 2012

Soon foragers could be entering Whidbey Island's woods in a search for a pungent fungus, one that is available all year round—the truffle.

But the hunt for this one requires a trained snout to sniff it out. A trained dog can smell the distinctive odor and alert its handler to the presence of these culinary treasures even though they are covered by soil and debris.

"We don't know where they are," said Dr. Georgia Edwards, one of the instructors with the K9 nosework class sponsored by the South Whidbey Parks & Recreation District.

"But the dogs do. It is amazing what dogs can really do," Edwards continued.

An introductory class sponsored by the parks district Saturday, Nov. 10, will expose people to this hobby. It will be taught by Elizabeth Kalik and Kelly Slocum of Northwest Truffledogs. A more in-depth, 12-week course will begin in January.

People and their four-legged pals have been receptive to the ongoing K9 nosework classes that have taught doggy nostrils how to scent clove and birch, said Carrie Monforte, program coordinator for the parks district, about the popular program. The truffle program is a natural extension to expand the pup's scent palette, she said.

These truffles grow from British Columbia south to Napa in California and the fungi grow around 10- to 20-year-old Douglas fir.

According to Edwards, truffles have already been found on the northern end of Whidbey, and she believes that more locations are waiting to be discovered.

In addition to teaching about the truffle's habitat and how to find these treats, the course will also teach how to do it sustainably and minimize the ecological impact. A trained dog, once it picks up the scent, will lightly tap its paw on the ground to alert its handler, she said, rather than digging a big hole.

"There are ethics to doing this," Edwards said.

Today's class is limited to 15 canine/handler teams and an additional 20 two-legged auditors. Deadline was Friday, Nov. 9, unless slots remained open.

"This is a fun way to get outside into the woods with your dog," said Edwards.

GUIDELINES TO REDUCE ERRORS IN DNA SEQUENCES <http://www.laboratorytalk.com/>, Nov. 9, 2012

DNA sequence data are an indispensable source of research information in biology. But not all data are reliable. Almost 10% of all fungal DNA sequences are, for example, incorrectly identified to species level.

To combat this, a team of researchers at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden, has prepared a guide to assist the scientific community in the quality control process.

“Many researchers perceive quality control as difficult,” says Henrik Nilsson at the University of Gothenburg, the lead author of a new scientific article on DNA sequence quality which has been published in the open-access journal *MycoKeys*.

“There are, quite simply, no guidelines that you can hand out to new or established researchers so that everyone is using the same approach. Which is why there are major differences in how, and to what extent, quality control is carried out in the research community.”

One complication is that the software that is available to carry out parts of the quality control is cumbersome and often requires considerable computer capacity.

The research group feels that it is not appropriate to require all biologists to have access to and be able to use such complex computer systems. This is why they have written an article describing how quality control can be carried out manually without any tools beyond an Internet browser.

The article features a number of principles and observations on DNA sequences at different quality stages. Although the guidelines focus on fungi, where DNA sequences have had a particularly significant impact as a research instrument, they are general and can be used for most genes and groups of organisms.

The guidelines relate to traditional DNA sequencing as it is used in systematics, taxonomy, and ecology.

The researchers hope that it will help readers to improve their DNA sequences and so halt the trend of increasing noise in the public DNA sequence databases.

MUSHROOMS KILL TWO CALIFORNIA SENIORS

Peter Hecht

The Sacramento Bee, Nov. 11, 2012

Two residents of a Loomis senior care facility died and four other people were hospitalized after consuming soup with wild mushrooms harvested by a caregiver, the Placer County Sheriff's Department reported.

Sheriff's Lt. Mark Reed said Saturday that deputies were called at 10 am Friday to the Gold Age Villa, a care home for the elderly on a rustic, tree-shaded property, tucked amid a community of equestrian estates along Horseshoe Bar Road.

“We got a report that some people had consumed some poisonous mushrooms,” Reed said. “We responded out to the facility and interviewed people to make sure there was no foul play. There wasn't any ... It was an accident.”

Reed said a caregiver who prepared the meal with the mushrooms was among the six people sickened. The two residents who died

were identified as Barbara Lopes, 86, and Teresa Olesniewicz, 73, he said. The caregiver and three residents were hospitalized.

Reed called the event a tragedy, in which the caregiver “just didn't know” the mushrooms were poisonous.

According to state data, more than 1,700 cases of mushroom ingestion were reported in California in 2009 and 2010. They included 10 cases of serious poisoning and two deaths, including an 82-year-old Santa Barbara man who gathered wild mushrooms to sauté with his steak.

While the type of mushrooms consumed in the Loomis tragedy was unknown, two varieties commonly found in California—the *Amanita ocreata* and *Amanita phalloides*, dubbed the “Destroying Angel” and “Death Cap,” respectively—are considered particularly dangerous.

Public health officials say people who gather mushrooms shouldn't eat them unless they have been examined by an expert for safety. People who develop symptoms after eating wild mushrooms should seek immediate medical attention and contact the California Poison Control System at (800) 222-1222.

The incident at Gold Age Villa is being investigated by the California Department of Social Services, which licenses senior care facilities.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Marian Maxwell

It's year end and the mushroom season that started late is winding down.

So many people have helped to make this year possible. We thank them for their service to our organization!

Our spring foray and identification classes at the beginning of this year were organized by Patrice Benson. This fall, Danny Miller stepped in to take Patrice's place as Education chair. Instructors who donated time to help teach the ID classes were Hildegard Hendrickson, Danny Miller, Patrice Benson, Daniel Winkler, and Denis Benjamin. Mushroom Maynia! was organized by Pacita Roberts, Joanne Young, and Patrice Benson.

Our field trip selections and reservations were done with careful thought by Brian Luther, who also donated his time at the field trips as our ID chair. Many weekends and hours of planning go into this key part of PSMS. Debra Lehrberger worked tirelessly to organize hosts and co-ordinate drop-off of supplies for hosting for all of our field trips. At times she had to work out last-minute changes. Hildegard Hendrickson organized the ID clinic on Monday nights during the mushroom season and was often accompanied by Danny Miller, Wren Hudgins, Marilyn Droege, Tim Sage, Rory Pease, and others who dropped in from time to time.

Ann Polin made sure that our membership process was working well and answered many membership questions.

Kim Traverse organized his 5th and final annual mushroom show. The people who all donated their time to ensuring that the show was a success should be applauded!

Milton Tam selected and worked on great programs this year for our general meetings. Luise Asif organized and set out refreshments for us at every single meeting again this year! Evelyn Tay and Teddy Basladynski kept our webpage running smoothly. John

Goldman kept us sound financially, and he, Cathy Lennebacker, and Andrea Rose sold books at each meeting. Denise Banazewski served as Secretary and reviewed our bylaws.

Agnes Sieger served as editor for our newsletter, *Spore Prints*. Thank you to the hosts and guides at the field trips. Thank you John, Lynn, Milt, for sharing your homes for some of the smaller committee meetings so that we don't have to rent a room! A thank you, too, to **everyone** who volunteered to make this year happen!

ITALIAN VILLAGE TO GIVE OBAMA RARE MUSHROOM

Aamer Madhani

USA Today, Nov. 13, 2012

Hopefully, President Obama is a fan of rare, pricey mushrooms.

President Obama, who is known to appreciate a fine meal and good drink, will soon be receiving a 2.23 pound white ruffle from the people of Acqualagna, Italy. The small village, which is known for its truffles, announced on Saturday that it would be sending Obama the truffle—valued at about \$3,800—as a gift to mark his re-election.

“The first American president to receive an Acqualagna truffle was Harry Truman in 1956. The latest dignitary to have received it was Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh,” said the town’s mayor, Andréa Pyrite, according to Agene France Presser.

SEARCH & RESCUE TEAMS LOCATE MISSING MUSHROOM PICKER NEAR RANDLE

The Chronicle, Nov. 9

Search and rescue teams located a 50-year-old mushroom picker at about 9:30 am Thursday morning after he was reported missing Wednesday night.

The Packwood man was cold and wet but did not need medical treatment, according to a press release from the Lewis County Sheriff’s Office. The man told searchers that he started a small fire to stay warm overnight.

The man was picking mushrooms with a friend on Lone Tree Mountain off Forest Service Road 55 in Randle in the early afternoon Wednesday, according to the release. When the friend returned to the vehicle a few hours later, he honked the horn and shouted for his friend. The sheriff’s office was called at about 7:45 pm Wednesday to assist in finding the man.

He was located about five miles northwest of where he was last seen Wednesday, according to the release.



“MAGIC” MUSHROOMS MEAN PRISON FOR HOQUIAM GROWER

Levi Pulkkinen

Seattle Post-Intelligencer, Nov. 9, 2012



A “magic” mushroom grower at the center of a federal investigation learned Friday that he faces four years in a federal prison.

A would-be agricultural innovator, Hoquiam resident Michael Maki sold 160 pounds of hallucinogenic mushrooms to a federal informant during an investigation that saw at least six Washington residents charged with growing or dealing the illicit fungi. All the other defendants were sentenced to probation.

Federal prosecutors contend the group was a significant supplier of psilocybin mushrooms to customers across the western United States. They described Maki as a “long-time organizer and leader” of a loose network of hallucinogenic-mushroom growers and dealers.

For his part, Maki readily admits he was growing the mushrooms, which he asserts have spiritual and medicinal uses. Pleading guilty to drug charges, though, Maki swore off the mushroom growing.

“Life is too short, especially at age 62, to make further serious errors in judgment as I have,” Maki said in a letter to the U.S. District Court, pledging to remain on the right side of the law following his release from federal custody.

IOWA CRAFTER TURNS CHRISTMAS TREES INTO MUSHROOMS

Kirby Kaufman

<http://www.southwestiowanews.com/>, Nov. 4, 2012

Bobby Milligan can turn a Christmas tree into a mushroom. “I hate the idea of growing a tree for five years and throwing it away after two weeks,” he said.

After the 60-year-old Council Bluffs man collects the trees after the holidays, he strips their bark and lets them dry for two months. Milligan then fashions the wood into morel mushrooms, fish, or signs.

“It gives the tree another life,” he said. “It did its part, and now we have to do our part.”

The ornamental mushrooms reminded Norma Scislowicz, 76, of her childhood. She hunted the coveted fungi with her parents. The tradition eventually spread to her four sons. The realism of Milligan’s creations warmed Scislowicz’s appetite.

“They looked so real,” the Council Bluffs woman said.

Milligan was among 108 vendors Saturday during the 2012 Lewis Central Craft Fair. An estimated 1,000 people attended the event, said craft fair co-chair Debbie Piercy.

All proceeds from the event were donated to the Lewis Central band program, which will help purchase instruments, pay for transportation, and offset instrument repair costs.



WOULD YOU EAT A MUSHROOM NAMED STINKHORN?

Danny Henley

Hannibal Courier-Post, Nov. 9, 2012

HANNIBAL - Offices of the Missouri Department of Conservation have been receiving this fall phone calls from residents who are convinced they have found morel mushrooms, which appear each spring across the state. What many have found, according to Becky Matney of the MDC, are stinkhorn mushrooms, which she stresses are deserving of their name.



“Stinkhorns stink to high heaven. You can actually smell them from several feet away if you’re walking a trail or hiking,” she said.

Earlier this week an estimated 50 to 60 of the fungi were discovered in a yard on Broadway in Hannibal. “My wife spotted them in our daughter’s yard. She was claiming they were morels and they actually look like one,” said Bob Burditt.

As for the smell, Burditt likened it to a morel, only a “little stronger.”

Burditt took the mushroom his wife found to the local MDC office because “I’m curious about things like this.”

“I’m a farm boy and I’d never seen anything like this before,” he said. “I was a surveyor and I never saw them, although I saw everything else. This just must be an unusual year with the amount of moisture we’ve gotten. The conditions must be right for them to pop.”

The stinkhorns first appear as “little pink eggs.” A day later they are slimy and sticky.

“Flies will land on the top of it where it’s real sticky. That’s how they (mushrooms) spread their spores,” said Matney.

After the sticky stage the mushroom’s head and stem begin to stiffen.

“Then you pluck it like you would a morel mushroom,” said Burditt.

During his visit to the local MDC office Burditt learned that stinkhorns are edible. Will he try one?

“I’ll try anything once,” he said. “I’m a poor man. I’ll eat what I can find. Besides, it’s cheaper than going to the grocery store.”

Burditt plans to prepare them like he would morels, by washing them and soaking them in salt water. After that he’ll fry them up.

CULTIVATING “THE PRINCE”

Bruce Waugh

MushRumors, Ore. Myco. Soc., Nov.–Dec. 2012

Just a quick FYI regarding your Prince article. I have tried growing a number of species in my garden and the Prince was one of my successes. I stem butted a couple of individuals, digging them out with the lower portion and some mycelium and substrate attached and “planted” them in my blueberries. I added fresh mulch over the “plantings” and watered them. I usually mulch my blueberries, which are backed by arborvitae, *Thuja occidentalis*, every few years and irrigate them in the summer with drip irrigation.



After a few years I was getting Princes fruiting from May into late September. This lasted a number of years until the last two years when, due to travel and problems with my water line, I failed to mulch and summer irrigate and no longer had any coming up. I plan to mulch again this fall and irrigate next summer to see what happens.

There were eventually nineteen all together, with mature caps ten to twelve inches across on the larger individuals.

ASH DIEBACK: “DISEASE WILL BE “IMPOSSIBLE TO ERADICATE”

guardian.co.uk, Nov. 9, 2012

It will be impossible to eradicate the fungus threatening to destroy Britain’s ash trees, the environment secretary, Owen Paterson, acknowledged on Friday.

An action plan agreed at a meeting of the government’s emergency response committee, Cobra, will focus on harnessing the help of the public to try to slow the spread of the disease, while searching for trees that have a genetic resistance to the disease that could provide stock for a new breeding program.



More than 100,000 newly planted and nursery trees with the disease have already been destroyed and that will continue, Paterson said. But mature trees will not be burned, because they are important for other wildlife and may help identify resistant strains. Paterson also promised a “very, very radical” overhaul of his priorities at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), with much more spent on tackling the rising number of exotic diseases affecting plants and trees and less spent in other areas.

“It won’t be possible to eradicate this disease now that we have discovered it in mature trees in Great Britain,” said Paterson. “However, that does not necessarily mean the end of the British ash. If we can slow its spread and minimize its impact, we will gain time to find those trees with genetic resistance to the disease. Wildlife and countryside groups will play a major role in minimizing the impact of the disease and so will the general public, especially when it comes to spotting other areas where the disease has taken hold.”

Martin Harper, RSPB conservation director, said: “The plan is a vital part of stopping the spread of this disease. However, it is essential we do not divert resources away from other vital environmental services. Money must be found from central government coffers or we will simply be robbing Peter to pay Paul.”

The number of sites identified with ash infected with the *Chalara fraxinea* fungus has risen from 115 on Wednesday to 129 on Thursday, after what Paterson called an “unprecedented” nationwide survey involving around 500 people. The government has already banned the import of ash trees and movement of trees around the country.

Simon Pryor, natural environment director of the National Trust, said: “We welcome the action plan but we are surprised the

government is saying that it will not be possible to eradicate the disease. Given our limited understanding of this disease in this country, we believe we should keep an open mind as to whether it may be possible to eradicate it, or at least contain it within the core area in the east.”

Prof. Ian Boyd, the Defra’s chief scientific adviser, said: “By next season we could potentially have resistant forms of ash growing, though as very small saplings.” Paterson cautioned against false hope, but said: “The great thing is ash reproduces quite quickly. If we know a small number of trees survived the very intense epidemic in Denmark [where 90% were infected], there must be hope here.” He added: “What is regrettable is that I don’t have a pot of magic potion to go up in a helicopter and spray on infected trees. There is no chemical we know of that kills this fungus.”

Paterson criticized current European Union trade rules: “At the moment forestry and plant products are treated by the European Union as freely tradable products—is that really appropriate? We need to have a radical rethink.” He acknowledged the growing problem of new plant diseases arriving in the UK. “There are a number of very dangerous diseases out there which pose a real threat. I am prepared to consider radical proposals to protect the woodland environment and look forward to seeing Boyd’s interim proposals at the end of November.”

Ash dieback may have arrived in Britain after spores were blown on the wind from continental Europe, or via infected trees imported by the horticultural trade, or both. But Boyd said the “balance of probabilities is swinging towards it being wind-blown,” based on the pattern of known infections in the wild, which are clustered in the southeast of England. “We can do nothing about that,” he said, noting that wind-blown spores may extend the infected area by 20–30 km a year.

Ministers have been criticized for being slow to act after the Horticultural Trade Association asked government to ban ash imports in 2009. However, at that time the fungus causing ash dieback was thought to be already endemic in the UK, meaning no ban was possible. In 2010, scientists realized that the deadly fungus was in fact a similar but distinct species, *Chalara fraxinea*. The first British case of the disease was confirmed in February 2012 in a tree imported from the Netherlands to a nursery in Buckinghamshire. In 2011, trade unions at the Forestry commission warned that its ability to tackle tree diseases would be hit by the 25% cuts to the agency.

Paterson said he had met his predecessors as environment secretary, Caroline Spelman and Hilary Benn, this week. He also appeared to rule out financial aid to affected plant businesses: “It has never been policy to pay compensation on plant losses.”



D. Staples/Reuters

SEARCH FOR WALES LARGEST FAIRY RING

<http://www.thisissouthwales.co.uk/>, Oct. 10, 2012

AS part of the very first Wales Fungus Day—which is being held at the National Botanic Garden on Sunday—there is a nationwide search for Wales’s largest fairy ring.



Wales fairy ring.

Fairy rings are a large grouping of fungi, and organizer Bruce Langridge is calling on keen-eyed dog walkers, ramblers, gardeners, and park rangers to let him know about any they come across.

On Fungus Day itself there will be a fungi recording blitz around the garden and its adjoining Waun Las National Nature Reserve.

There will also be a walk to the garden’s fungal hotspots, and family activities linked to the UK’s first major exhibition on fungi, which is on tour from Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh.

Renowned fungi expert Professor Lynne Boddy will give the inaugural Wales Fungus Day Lecture.

MUSHROOMS, A NEW BOOK ABOUT BRITISH FUNGI

Michael McCarthy

The Independent, Nov. 14, 2012

A man may have a relationship with animals, but may a man—or a woman for that matter—have a relationship with mushrooms? That was my thought this week after reading a new book on our native fungi by the naturalist and author Peter Marren.

I have half a shelf of books on mushrooms and toadstools, including a couple of the glossy magazine-style guides that appear in French news agents every September. What these books are unfailingly about, all of them, is information. Theirs is a mission to inform. It is by no means a mission to entertain.

Yet I came away from Peter Marren’s book, which is entitled with blunt simplicity *Mushrooms* (British Wildlife Publishing, £24.95), better informed than ever, but also hugely entertained.

For not only does Marren have knowledge, quite staggering knowledge, of the precise differences between all the British boletes and the brittlegills, all the waxcaps and the blewits, but he also has enormous affection for them—for their beauty, for the odd corners in which they turn up, for their links to the landscape, and most of all for the roles they have played in human lives with their curious names (stinkhorn, candlesnuff, earthstar, dapperling), their intriguing smells (marzipan, aniseed, After Eight mints, rotting crabmeat), and their potential to be culinary delights on the one hand and psychedelic mind-benders and killers on the other.

Mushrooms is profusely and exquisitely illustrated, and a real bonus is its vibrant dust jacket by the artist Carry Ackroyd. But the biggest attraction of all is Marren’s writing: quirky, trenchantly observant, sometimes hilarious, full of engaging anecdotes and as far from the soulless impersonal tone of a fungi field guide as it is possible to get. Implausible as it may seem, here indeed is a man’s relationship with mushrooms, in fact, his extravagant love affair with them. It is the single best book on the natural world I have read this year.

CHRISTMAS EVE CELERIAC SOUP WITH WILD MUSHROOMS <http://junglefrog-cooking.com/>

You can prepare this soup a day ahead and just reheat when you want to eat it. Sauté the mushrooms, add them to the soup, and you're good to go.

The soup is lovely creamy and yet not too heavy to serve in little cups. To achieve the creaminess it does not use cream but milk, so that makes it also lighter than you might think.

(appetizer or small dish for 8-10 people)

Ingredients:

- 1 oz dried porcini
- 5 TBs of olive oil
- 4 shallots, finely chopped
- 1¼ lb celeriac,
peeled and cut into large chunks
- 1 leek, white part only, cut into rings
- 6 cups hot vegetable stock
- 3½ cups 2% milk
- 2 springs of rosemary
- 1 lb mixed mushrooms (porcini, chantharelles, etc.),
cleaned and cut into pieces
- 2 TBs butter
- 2 sprigs of fresh thyme, leaves only



Preparations: (can be done a day ahead, start ½ day before the dinner)

Soak the porcini in ½ cup hot water. Heat 3 TBs of olive oil on medium heat and fry the onions until glazed (about 5 minutes). Add celeriac and leeks and fry for another 5 minutes.

Pour the hot stock and the milk into the pan and bring to a boil. Boil for 10 minutes.

Add the soaked porcini and the rosemary and boil for another 10 minutes. Remove the rosemary and purée the soup in a blender or with a stick blender. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Finish:

Start 10 minutes before serving. Heat the rest of the olive oil with the butter and bake the mushrooms on medium heat for about 8 minutes. Add a little salt, freshly ground pepper, and fresh thyme leaves. In the meantime make sure you heat the soup through and through. Divide over 8 bowls. Put the mushrooms on top and a little bit of garnish.

Preparation 30 minutes; finishing 10 minutes.



See you next year!



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