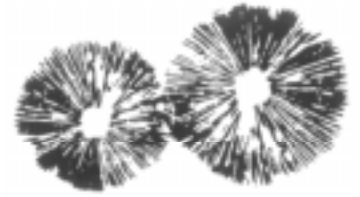


# SPORE PRINTS

BULLETIN OF THE PUGET SOUND MYCOLOGICAL SOCIETY  
Number 407

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# Spore Prints

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## CALENDAR

- Dec. 14 Membership Meeting (Cookie Bash), 7:30 PM, CUH  
*Spore Prints* deadline (**early**)
- Dec. 20 Board Meeting, 7:30 PM, CUH
- Jan. 11 Membership Meeting, 7:30 PM, CUH
- Jan. 17 Board Meeting, 7:30 PM, CUH

## BOARD NEWS

Dennis Oliver

With all the bravos and hurrahs for a wonderful and successful mushroom show fading into the distance of fond memory, the board turned its attention to upcoming events, possible projects for the spring, and even next year's show. Planning for the annual Christmas party is taking shape, with Ron Post as head organizer and Daniel Winkler and Alissa Allen as art contest coordinators. After Christmas, naturally, comes the annual survivor's banquet, and a plan and a possible chair(s) are being formulated by the board; more of these details will be decided at the December meeting.

Other projects discussed at the meeting were a possible spring foray, finally opening up the library for use of the members, repairing the club's microscopes, and the spring mushroom classes. At Mick Mueller's suggestion the club will seek a special use permit from the Portland office of the Forest Service to cover our field trips. The board passed a motion to fund airfare, meals, and lodging for the president of PSMS to attend the annual NAMA foray as a way for the club to demonstrate its presence and to stay informed on national concerns. Steve Bigelow has accepted the position of Web editor, responsible for developing content for our Website. Marilyn Droege has accepted promotion from alternate to full board status, replacing your humble scribe who left his cozy board position for more literary pursuits as secretary.

## MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Tuesday, December 14, 2004, at 7:30 PM at the Center for Urban Horticulture, 3501 NE 41st Street, Seattle



Once again it's time for our annual **holiday gathering and "cookie bash."** There's no program this month, just eating, socializing, sharing slides, and viewing members' artwork. Bring your favorite holiday treat to share—a plate of cookies, appetizers, fruit and cheese, etc. (Please use a disposable plate or mark the utensil clearly with your name.)

If you would like to share some of your favorite pictures from the past year at the December meeting, please get them to us before the show. (Please limit them to about five.) You can e-mail .jpg pictures to [psmsp@lat.mailshell.com](mailto:psmsp@lat.mailshell.com) or bring them ½ hour before the meeting on a CD or a USB Flash drive. We will also set up an "old-fashioned" 35-mm slide projector.

For information and details on exhibiting artwork, contact Daniel Winkler at (425) 822-5080 or [danwink@cs.com](mailto:danwink@cs.com).



## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Ron Post



At the November board meeting Treasurer John Goldman reported that the club's income from the exhibit increased about 40 percent over last year's. The sales from books, clothing, and posters even outstripped the "gate," or ticket sales. My thanks to Trina Litchendorf for her expertise, hard work, and dedication handling book sales for the past four-plus years and organizing the exhibit displays and sales force.

Trina, who is a full-time graduate student at the UW, could use an apprentice willing to help monthly on book sales (though she is not giving it up yet). This is one way I learned about the field of mycology and got some business experience in the process. Call me (206-527-2996) or e-mail me ([ronp46@hotmail.com](mailto:ronp46@hotmail.com)) to volunteer some time in this important monthly duty. (Trina is studying for finals—good luck!)

I hope you all bring some goodies to the meeting/holiday party this month, for there will be little business and much socializing. Also, bring slides to share. (If they are digital, the Web address to send them to is listed elsewhere in this newsletter. Or just bring a photo CD. We'll also have a 35-mm projector available.) My thanks to board member *extraordinaire* Tony Tschanz for his technical know-how and willingness to share his time and expertise.

We call our December meeting the "cookie bash," but for the past several years a number of healthy dishes also have appeared courtesy of all our winter potluckers. Historically, members went all out to prepare sweets with mushrooms themes, often disguising the goodies so that they resembled real fungi. Do what feels right, but please bring a bit of something to share. There are usually upwards of 100 people there, but it isn't necessary to bring plates and plates and plates! Rumor is, we may have homemade eggnog!

Speaking of socializing, we like to run articles by members that let us know of important events, such as births, weddings, graduations and travels. Feel free to add these to our newsletter over the life of your membership. The newsletter editor can be reached at [sieger@att.net](mailto:sieger@att.net).

As long as we're talking about traveling, I'll put in another plug for the North American Mycological Association foray in La Crosse, Wisconsin, next July. The inimitable Dr. Tom Volk, who was our speaker at the October exhibit, will be hosting the foray. When the exact date and cost become available, we'll let you know. I'm expecting to go, and I hope some of you will, too.

I'm excited at the prospect of three things on the horizon for early in 2005: elections are coming up soon; the annual Flower and Garden show goes up in February; and the Survivor's Banquet comes up in March. You'll hear more about our booth at the Flower and Garden Show and our banquet plans next month.

Annual elections are how we give our club new life. If I had my druthers, we'd keep this excellent board of trustees intact, but a nominating committee will soon begin canvassing the membership for prospective new board members and officers; we elect half of the board every year in March. A report on this process and which positions are open will be forthcoming in the January newsletter. If you are thinking of running for a position and want to discuss it, please call me or one of the other board members or officers. Or talk it over with your mushrooming friends.

By the way, the board appointed Alternate Trustee (and fine botanical illustrator) Marilyn Droege to the position vacated by Dennis Oliver when he became Secretary. A hearty welcome to another term, Marilyn. And my grateful thanks, Dennis, for your calm efficiency and Zen-like good humor. The board also appointed Steve Bigelow our Web content editor. Thanks a bunch for your expertise and time, Steve.



## NEW MEMBER ORIENTATIONS

New-member orientations, in two categories, will be held during the hour preceding the membership meetings in January and February. We'll begin with cyber-mushrooming in January and get to the inner workings of the club in February.

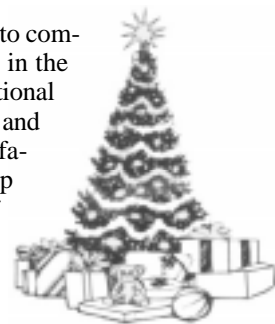
In January, from 6:30 PM until 7:15 PM, new members (and any other members) are welcome to view and use the Matchmaker CD to help them learn to identify mushrooms. We'll have it up on the projection screen, via our digital projector. We'll do the basics, finding our way around the mushroom descriptions and using the Match (I.D.) function, comparing the results to texts, any fresh specimens on hand, etc. We'll be glad to hear from any members who are proficient in its use. Ron Post, who uses the program as a supplement rather than a primary identification tool, will lead this session.

In the same hour before the February meeting, we intend to have an orientation to the society, including some colorful history. Many of our committee chairs will be present, and will talk about how things work in the various committees and how many committee members are needed to make things run efficiently. These sessions were once a regular monthly "pre-meeting" during the winters when we had 700 members (we're now between 500 and 600) and the large committees were run out of our members' homes. Things have changed, but we will schedule these sessions as needed once again.



## FOREST SERVICE WANTS COMMENTS

The USDA Forest Service invites you to comment on your preference for activities in the Colville, Okonogan, and Wenatchee national forests. Go to [www.fs.fed.us/r6/colville](http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/colville) and click on the item asking about your favorite activities. Two maps will pop up and you can write in the coordinates of your recreational activity plus any details and comments you want. Go, mushroomers!



## TRIBUTE TO DR. ALEXANDER SMITH Ron Post

This month marks the centenary of the birth of Dr. Alexander Smith, December 13, 1904, in Crandon, Wisconsin. Dr. Smith died in 1986 at his home in Ann Arbor, Michigan, after a half-century of publishing monographs and scientific papers and writing popular field guides.

During his lifetime, Dr. Smith made more than 100,000 fungal collections and donated many of them to the University of Michigan herbarium, which he also directed for many years. He was an expert on the genus *Mycena* from the time of his doctoral work in the 1930s.

His work not only influenced many of North America's finest taxonomists but inspired the formation of many amateur mushroom clubs. People from all over the continent sent him specimens, and he in turn gave the collectors' names to many species. One of his own favorite collecting grounds was around Priest Lake, Idaho.

After his death a memorial scholarship to promote the study of the taxonomy of the higher fungi was set up at the University of Michigan and administered by the Mycological Society of America.



## NEW CASTLE FIELD TRIP REPORT Lynne Elwell

The predicted rain held off, but a stiff wind blowing over Lake Washington greeted the 25 or so enthusiastic members, guests, and kids who gathered on October 30, many hoping for chanterelles. (They proved to be nonexistent.) The major challenge of the day was keeping maps, paper products, and other lightweight items from blowing off the table. Duct tape and rocks to the rescue.

Alissa Allen led a walk at Coal Creek Park. The group, including lots of kids, had fun and found a lot of interesting mushrooms, but not an abundance of edibles. Some members went home with *Lepiota rachodes*, Blewits, and oyster mushrooms.

Marion Maxwell stayed at the park to ID at the windblown and rather chilly table. We were at a picnic shelter that would have protected us from rain, but did nothing to slow the wind. While



she explained, educated, and entertained (skills at which she and Alissa excel), her son, Brandon, hunted in the park and came back with a nice quantity of *Agaricus augustus* and *Leccinum scabrum* which he generously gave to newcomers.

Since no potluck was planned, a large pot of chili and pasta was brought and heated to warm the chilled 'shroomers at lunch. It must have been good, 'cause it sure went fast. A good time was had by all.



## TWANOH FIELD TRIP REPORT

Brian Luther

The weather prediction for November 6 was for rain, but we lucked out, having only an overcast but dry day at this beautiful park on the shallow water part, or Great Bend, of Hood Canal. Larry Baxter and I got down to the shelter while it was still dark, swept the inside and out, arranged the tables with my displays, and got a fire going before our hosts, Marianne and Ben Sakamoto, arrived. At about 8:30 AM we took a break to get some coffee and breakfast at our place nearby, and when we returned within the hour, the Sakamotos had everything all set up with a great spread of muffins and cookies and hot coffee just waiting for members to be tempted inside the shelter. Thanks, Marianne and Ben. The day wouldn't have been the same without you! We never did see the park ranger to ask him to turn the power on for us, so it was a little dark in the shelter, but we managed OK.

When we first got there in the early morning, we noticed an RV strategically located in the parking lot just about as close as you could get to the shelter. It was members Ross and Val Othus with their granddaughter. It was also nice to see long-time members Ted and Gwen Heib come for the day. Forty-eight members signed in and then headed for the woods in search of something to fill their baskets with. Indeed, most returned with overflowing baskets, buckets, and sacks of mushrooms.

One-hundred and seventeen different species came in, and lots of white and yellow chanterelles and several Matsutake were found right within the park, although many were somewhat past their prime. Rare or interesting finds included a collection of what's either *Tricholoma atroviolaceum* or *T. atosquamosum*, a specimen very close to *Tricholoma intermedium*, a species of *Alboleptonia*, and a *Hygrophorus pusillus*. However, the grand prize of the day was an absolutely spectacular and gorgeous collection of *Hygrophorus (Hygrocybe) puniceus*. The member who found it, took Larry to the site nearby and later I also visited the spot. While at this location with Larry he also found the unusual *Hygrophorus (Hygrocybe) psittacinus*. It was a peculiar tree association of older Western Red Cedar and several mature Lombardy Poplars that had been planted perhaps 60 or 70 years ago, at an old building site near a creek. That's only the second location that I've personally seen this species found in the Puget Sound area. The other was at a special place in Seward Park in South Seattle. If you've never seen *Hygrophorus puniceus* before, please look for color pictures of this beautiful fungus either in books or on the Web. Special thanks to Larry for helping set up and helping with ID all day long.



The potluck at 3:00 in the afternoon was good, with quite a few members staying. My wife, Pam, had a large pan of chicken and rice just out of the oven, and there were plenty of other dishes to

satisfy the hungry mushroomers who had trudged through the woods all day. We all worked together to pack up and clean up and we were out of the park just as it was getting dark. This is a great place, and I think everybody who's ever been there agrees.

## BOWMAN BAY FIELD TRIP REPORT Brian Luther

There was already a sizable group of people and the parking lot was almost full when I arrived at Bowman Bay about 9:45 Saturday morning, November 13. This was a joint PSMS and Whatcom Co. Mushroom Club outing, with Larry Baxter hosting for PSMS and Margaret Dilly officiating for the Whatcom Co. Club. Special thanks to Russ Kurtz for bringing the hosting supplies up from Seattle. I did not see the sign-in sheets for the two clubs to know how many folks showed up, but it was very busy all day with lots of people. It was great to see Claude Dilly recovering so well from recent bypass surgery—he looked great and some of us got a chance to buy a quart of yummy honey from his own hives. It was also a pleasant surprise to see long-time PSMS member Margo Harrison stop by briefly.

This picturesque spot in a rocky bay surrounded by beautiful woods is just one mile north of Deception Pass, on Fidalgo Island. Again we got good weather and almost no wind off the water, until later in the day, and it was very pleasant for this time of year. Mushrooms were everywhere. Although edibles were not found in any great quantity, there was a broad diversity of fungi on the display tables and it was a great opportunity for members of both clubs to study some species they didn't previously know. Margaret, Larry, and I were constantly busy all day helping people with their collections and labeling species for the tables. All together we had 140 different species on display, with the usual pile of miscellaneous unidentified *Cortinarius*, *Inocybe* and *Russula* species that we didn't have time to go any further with. A number of rare or interesting species showed up, including *Agaricus haemorrhoidarius*, *A. bitorquis*, *Callistosporium luteo-olivaceum*, *Rhodocollybia oregonensis*, *Cantharellula umbonata*, *Neolentinus adhaerans*, *Hygrophorus (Hygrocybe) cuspidatus*, *Russula queletii*, *Lepiota subincarnata*, *L. castanea*, and the very pretty little *Chromasera cyanophylla* (= *Mycena lilacifolia*).

The Whatcom Club had a potluck around noon in the cozy shelter, and it was a very welcome and big spread of food which included many delicious hot dishes made with freshly collected mushrooms.



Judging from the positive comments I got during the day, I think most everyone had a good time getting out into the woods and searching for treasures and came away having learned a few new mushrooms, which is the whole purpose of our field trips.

## THANKS TO UWAJIMAYA

Amos Prudhon

We would like to thank Jeff of Uwajimaya in Bellevue for donating several pounds of Matsutake to the PSMS exhibit this past October. Uwajimaya sells a wide variety of wild mushrooms (including Matsutake) from its locations in Bellevue, Seattle, and Beaverton, Oregon. Thanks again, Jeff!

## BOG BLOG 3 - *Leptoporus mollis*

Christie Robertson

Last November, in the midst of our many collections of *Cortinarius*, *Hebeloma*, and *Galerina*, I happened to lift my eyes from their standard moss-gazing angle long enough to catch a glimpse of brilliant purple-red on an algae-covered hemlock. The polypore that caught my eye that day had a color somewhat reminiscent of a bright *Ganoderma oregonensis* but looked more like an *Oligoporus* (AKA *Tyromeces*, the squishy white shelf polypore) in stature.

When we got back to the lab, we cut our specimen in half and were surprised to discover pure white flesh inside, although it quickly started bruising a deep vinaceous purple like the outside. After some work with Gilbertson and Ryvardeen's *North American Polypores*, we were able to key our fungus to *Leptoporus mollis* (a fun name to say—try it!), partially on the basis of a characteristic yellow band between the pores and the rest of the cap flesh.



C. Robertson

*Leptoporus mollis* growing on hemlock



C. Robertson

*Leptoporus mollis* showing yellow band between pores and cap flesh

Ten months later, on September 5 of this year, a bright white polypore turned up on what we later realized was the same hemlock. We spent at least as long keying out this mushroom the second time, ending up in several dead ends in our key. It was when we cut the fruiting body open and noticed the ochre-yellow line that something clicked, and we remembered the *Leptoporus mollis* from the year before. It took a while to convince ourselves that we were looking at the same mushroom, but after a day in the drier, the two mushrooms looked almost identical—both a deep wine purple.

You won't find this mushroom in Arora's *Mushrooms Demystified*, so pay attention, because I guarantee that you will see it someday!



C. Robertson

*Leptoporus mollis* a year later

Stature: Wedge-shaped—flattish on top, with the pores angled toward the tree, becoming much wider at the base.

Flesh: White to vinaceous-purple, turning vinaceous-purple on drying. Yellow line between the pores and the cap flesh (sometimes indistinct; cut down the middle for the best view). Texture fleshy to corky.

Sterile surface: Horizontal to slightly angled away from tree. White to light brown to vinaceous purple. Tomentose (fuzzy) to adpressed tomentose. Sometimes forms a fat lip at the edge.

Pores: Single layer (so it's an annual). Long. Small diameter (1–3 pores per millimeter).

Substrate: Wood (I've seen it both on the pictured hemlock and on the edge of a dead log).

Seasonality: I've seen it September–November so far.

## JAPANESE ANGEL WINGS CAUSE DEATH IN KIDNEY PATIENTS

Various sources

As of 4 November the Japanese Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare said that 46 cases of brain illness associated with *Pleurocybella porrigens* (Angel Wings) had been reported in eight Japanese prefectures from Tohoku to Hokuriku, and 14 patients had died.

The problem began in late September, when deadly cases of acute encephalopathy, a brain disorder marked by fever and convulsions, began appearing in Japan. The only things the victims had in common were that they all had serious kidney ailments and they had all eaten sugihiratake (*Pleurocybella porrigens*) 10 to 14 days before they experienced symptoms.

Acute encephalopathy occurs when a person is infected with a virus or bacteria and a toxic substance enters the body. The probability that the victims' symptoms were caused by infections was low, as their families and those around them did not show similar symptoms. Nor did the patients show any signs of food poisoning such as vomiting. A toxic mold or chemical spray on the mushrooms was considered, but no such substance was found.

It was hard to imagine that the mushrooms themselves were the cause of the illness, as sugihiratake is popular in Japan, and many of the victims had been eating them all their lives.

As more cases appeared, however, the possibility could not be ignored, and the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry asked prefectural governments across Japan to issue warnings to people with kidney problems not to eat sugihiratake.

Akira Hishida, a professor at Hamamatsu University School of Medicine speculated that possible toxic elements of the mushrooms had entered the bodies of the victims. Because of their impaired kidneys the victims could not expel them, and the toxic elements seeped into their bloodstream, damaging brain cells.

This year's crop of Angel Wing mushrooms was nearly twice the amount of last year's, with extraordinarily large mushrooms being found across the country, giving rise to speculation that the environment in which such mushrooms grow has drastically changed, apparently causing them to contain toxic components.

*Pleurocybella porrigens* (Angel Wings)



O. Miller, Mushrooms of North America

## MYCENA MADNESS

Ron Post

Dr. Alexander Smith, who during his career authored a monograph that described well over 200 species of *Mycena*, must have had quite an affinity for small, evanescent white-spored fungi. These decomposers may last but a few hours during their lifetimes, and some are smaller than a millimeter in diameter in the stipe.

Few people have had Dr. Smith's dedication to this genus. Amy Miller authored the Pacific Northwest Key Council key that lists more than 60 Northwest species of *Mycena*, and Ian Gibson's compilation on database, Matchmaker, lists more than 70 species. About 60 species are listed in the *Fungi of Switzerland* series. The actual number of *Mycena* species is said to be in excess of 400.

But *Mycena* provides even those of us with blunt senses some of the most glorious surprises in the large group we know as agarics, the gilled mushrooms. Their colors, as evanescent as the moon, range from deep blue to sunburst orange to every shade of yellow you can see. Odors are another matter—you must be able to handle the specimen in order to smell it, and that handling may either help the wondrous odors in this genus to be released or will begin to destroy them at the first touch of a finger. (Remember, humidity and temperature play a big role in what you see and smell.) Finally, you've probably trampled or sat on more *Mycena* species than you will ever identify.

Yet the genus has given many mycologists some extremely memorable and pleasant moments. David Arora, who lists but 19 species ("which is 19 more species than the average individual cares to know," he adds) introduces these small ubiquitous stars, saying "size alone is not a measure of intrinsic worth."

This month is a good time to feature some of the more interesting tidbits about these "most attractive of the fleshy (fleshless?) fungi." Not only are *Mycenas* still fruiting in some locations, but it is the 100th anniversary of the birth of Dr. Smith.

The names in some species give a clue to the beauty that can be seen in this genus, if one is willing to search for the tiny fruiting bodies:

"Elegantula" is a small reddish-brown species growing on decayed wood or cones. Its gill edges have a wine, or "vinaceous," color.

"Adonis" can be 1–2 centimeters wide on the cap, and its scarlet to salmon pink to orange top may be seen in abundance under conifers, but don't forget to look for this "darling's" yellow high-lights around the thin stalk.

"Strobilinoidea" is indeed a "flame" species when seen in abundance. Its cap color fades from scarlet to orange to yellow and even white. The gill edges may be scarlet, or like the stem also pinkish-orange to yellow. It is widely distributed in needle beds and looks like small embers of fire in the right light.

"Rosella" is the hard-to-find "little rose" with bright pink color overall, often with a pale gray cap center, fading in age to slightly yellowish (see the beautiful photo on the Matchmaker CD).

"Monticola" literally lives "in the mountains" under pine. Its color is described as "coral pink" to "Pompeian red" fading to flesh-toned.

Some *Mycenas* have a viscid coating on the stem (e.g., *M. rorida*, the slippery *Mycena*). But handling them may strip the slimy evidence away, or it may collect lower down or disappear with age. These species may also have tiny hairs on the stem near the base.

And some species are densely hairy, especially on the lower stem (*M. overholtsii*).

On many *Mycenas* the edge of the gills may be tinged a deep purple or a color different from the cap. *M. capillaripes* is a gray-brown species with prominent pink or red tones at the gill edges.

Color in *Mycenas* ranges from "dark Orient blue" on the cap disc of *M. amicta* to the "almost burnt sienna" of *M. galericulata*, to a bright red-brown or orange-brown cap in *M. sanguinolenta*. Many elegant, pure white species inhabit a host of substrates.

The odors to be found in some *Mycenas* are one of the wonders of the genus. They range from chemical and bleach-like (*M. stipitata*) to iodine (variants of *M. epipterygia*) or radish-like (*M. pura*, *M. pelianthina*, and *M. vulgaris*). Others are described as simply "fragrant" and "fruity" or "farinaceous" and "disagreeable."

If you are a "grouper" and like your species in larger and neater bundles, perhaps *Mycena* is not going to be your genus. But these fascinating little species do, indeed, deserve to be better known.



## SOMEWHERE OUT IN THE FOREST

Juliet Pendray

To the tune of "Somewhere Over The Rainbow" (meant to be sung in an overly dramatic manner, preferably with a lot of hand waving)

*Somewhere under the humus  
Fungus springs  
Out on a foray I find them  
Finds that make my heart sing*

*Someday I'll sit upon a rock  
And notice that the bryophytes  
Surround — me —  
Where liverworts let their spores drop  
From parasols on thallus top  
Mycophilicity confi - i - i - nes me*

*Somewhere out in the forest  
Boletes grow  
Out on a hunt do I find them  
Into the pan they go*

*I scarcely noticed bryophytes  
Their sporophytes so small and dwarfed by  
Fun — gal — carps —  
It seems that there may be some worth  
In learning these 'pon which I'm sure  
The e - co - lo - gist - harps -*

*So... somewhere under my hand lens  
Life forms lurk  
Fungal and bryophytic subjects  
Teased from the forest murk*

*If tenured academics spy —  
Beyond their subjects —  
Why — o — why — can't — I — ?!*

from an e-mail by Andy MacKinnon



# STROPHARIA AMBIGUA: UNQUESTIONABLY ONE OF MY FAVORITE FUNGI FOR THE TABLE storm

(previously published in *Mushroom: The Journal*)

“With regard to tastes, it is always well to remember that they are individual; ‘otherwise moths would not eat cloth.’”<sup>1</sup>

I am a naturalist and stone-age skills practitioner who became an amateur mycologist in 2002 after a friend took me mushroom hunting. We found a curious rainbow of delectable edibles (it took some courage to partake in that first fungal feast that evening). Among them were the Shaggy Mane, Shrimp Russula, *Bovista plumbea*, Candy Cap, Coccora, Amethyst Laccaria, Blewit, Chanterelle, and Horn-of-Plenty. My friend had exuded such enthusiasm over finding all these mushrooms, I would have thought that this moment could not have been surpassed. Then we encountered “one of the most exquisitely beautiful of all mushrooms,”<sup>2</sup> *Stropharia ambigua*.

My nose beat me to it, although I did not know what “it” was...off trail, peeking out ever-so-slightly under a moist layer of California Bay Laurel and Coast Redwood leaves, just behind a small but heavily nut-laden Tan Oak.

I had never smelled a mushroom before—why would you? But this fungus was unquestionably present from a downwind distance of five meters. This incredible explosion of rich, black, vibrant, moldy humus hit my olfactory senses and became one of the first of 275 wild mushroom species I was to eat within the next three years.

The Questionable *Stropharia* has a silky, white stalk approaching 3 cm in thickness and 20 cm in length. The stalk is usually covered in soft white flakes. The broad (up to 19 cm), dull-to-bright yellow, bald-viscous cap sports the tattered cottony remains of its ample white veil along the margin and around the stem. The gills are adnate and the color of early spring slush. The spore print is purplish-black, and without one for reference, the careless hunter might mistake a *Stropharia* for the Death Cap or related Gemmed Amanita. Around here, I find this mushroom in second-growth Douglas Fir-Western Hemlock rainforest, usually on the periphery of human habitation and trails. *S. ambigua* functions as a secondary decomposer—it prefers to grow in mulch, compost, and duff that has been rotted by primary decomposers like the Oyster Mushroom.<sup>3</sup>

To taste this succulent morsel of a mushroom is to experience a rich, thick tang of rainforest duff, slightly salty with a hint of olive oil (that is, after you sprinkle it with salt and fry it in olive oil). This full-flavor fungus rivals in earthy magnificence any species one can haul to the table. But what do others say about the edibility of this species?

Arora offers “?” in his tome,<sup>4</sup> then in a later publication says “not recommended.”<sup>5</sup> Lincoff writes, “of uncertain edibility.”<sup>6</sup> “Generally considered edible, but very mediocre”<sup>7</sup> pens Michael Wood. Matchmaker<sup>8</sup> agrees with Arora’s earlier work. No wonder it’s called “questionable.”



*Stropharia ambigua*, the Questionable *Stropharia*

This brings me to the issue of eating fungi of uncertain edibility. I feel a certain excitement when, upon looking up the edibility of a freshly keyed-out specimen, I’m offered the succinct disappointment, “Unknown,” which is oft-tempered by that fickle admonition, “Do not experiment.” Hundreds of otherwise edible species are being snubbed by condemnations such as too slimy; rank odor; acrid or bitter taste; not recommended because of its resemblance to species of unknown edibility; too tough or gelatinous in texture; of no consequence because of small size.

There are a few remedies that I employ to overcome hurdles to palatability. One can pound and dice species with tough flesh (*Tyromyces*, *Cryptoporus*, *Ganoderma*, and *Fomitopsis* come to mind) and consume them in the form of a hot tea. Pickling can dispel many acrid or bitter tastes, especially within the genera of *Leucopaxillus*, *Lactarius*, *Agaricus* and *Russula*, though it may not counter low-level toxicity effects in every case.

Some assert that experimenting with mushrooms is unnecessary, for “our ancestors have already provided for us, through trial and error, a comprehensive list”<sup>9</sup> from which we can glean. While I agree that we should take the time to learn about wild organisms before stuffing them into our mouths, the available body of knowledge is far from complete, if not unavailable. For example, I am hard-pressed to find such information on mushrooms eaten by prehistoric First Nations people.

I am not advocating that you go out and eat a Questionable *Stropharia*...unless you are comfortable in doing so. I am merely supplementing the existing literature with my experience: “Each one of us is a trustee of the past; we have the task of living up to our heritage—and adding something to it.”<sup>10</sup>

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## POLENTA PASTICCATA CON SALSA DI FUNGI

(adapted from Paul Zibton's cookbook)

1 oz DRY PORCINI (*Boletus edulis*)  
3/4 cup HOT WATER  
1/2 lb FRESH CULTIVATED MUSHROOMS  
1 TBs OLIVE OIL  
2 TBs UNSALTED BUTTER  
1 small ONION, chopped  
1/2 tsp SALT  
1/4 tsp WHITE PEPPER  
1/2 cup HEAVY CREAM  
24 to 32 oz packaged POLENTA or enough  
to make two 1/2" thick layers in a 7×11" pan  
1/2 lb (2 cups) shredded FONTINA cheese  
1/3 cup grated PARMIGIANO cheese  
1 tsp WHITE TRUFFLE OIL (optional)

Soak the dry porcini in hot water 45–60 minutes. Cut into 3/4" scraps and reserve. Strain the liquid, if necessary, and reserve. Slice the fresh mushrooms thinly. Sauté onion in the butter and olive oil until softened—about 5 minutes. Add the porcini and sauté an additional 5 or 6 minutes to marry the flavors. Add the fresh mushrooms and continue to sauté for about 5 minutes until tender. Add the soaking liquid, salt, and pepper. Simmer, stirring gently, for 5 minutes. Stir in the cream and allow the mixture to barely reach a simmer. Immediately remove from the heat. Line the bottom of a 7×11" pan with 1/2" slices of polenta (spaces are OK).



Spread half of the sauce on the polenta and sprinkle with half the cheeses. Build another layer of polenta, sauce, optional sprinkle of truffle oil, and cheese. Bake at 400° F for 20–30 minutes until cheese is melted, golden, and bubbling. Let stand 10 minutes.

McGee, MS



### THANKS FOR THE ROSTERS

Karin Mendell

A word of gratitude to the Roster Production Team: Bernice Velategui, Pacita Roberts, and Karin & Bob Mendell. Together, they all did a fine job on the new roster!

We would also like to offer our sincere apologies for any typos or edits that were missed, as well as to any folks whose changes did not get to us before we had to go to press. We tried our best for accuracy, but sometimes we miss things! Thanks, everyone!



*Have a Happy Holiday!*

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