

Concerning Mushrooms

by Walter Wentz

Now that the mushroom season is here, hordes of eager mycologists and mycophages—mushroom-eaters to you—are storming into the woods in search of their prey, while the long-suffering public will once more be deluged with inane articles—such as this one—trumpeting the virtues of wild mushrooms, their flavor, their nutritive value, and the fact that they are free. Oregon is fortunate in the matter of mushrooms; we have a great many edible and delicious fungi that would cost too much per pound in the supermarket, but may be found, free for the taking, by anyone willing to hunt them in their native lairs, chase them up a tree and club them to death.

We have many safe mushrooms, and our few bad ones are easy to identify or avoid.

Your humble servant has been involved in the local pursuit of edible mushrooms for three seasons now; and a grand and glorious feeling it is, to be in the woods on Opening Day, listening to the clumsy crashing of mushroom-hunters in the underbrush, the yelling and clatter of the beaters, the whimper of fleeing mushrooms, the occasional snarl of a larger specimen turning at bay.

Many a happy mycologist will go home with a basketful of savory fungi for the cooking-pot, or a prize trophy to be sent to the taxidermist for stuffing; while others will have only claw-marks and poison-oak to show for a strenuous day.

Only very occasionally does one hear of somebody who has trustingly eaten one of our more interesting fungi, such as the Satan's Boletus (*Boletus Eastwoodiae*). While most of our Boletes are nutritious and harmless, this particular Boletus, though fleshy and beautifully-marked, is something of a humorist.

The amateur who eats it is afflicted with all sorts of interesting sensations, turns a variety of charming colors, and does a creditable imitation of an old-fashioned whirligig, ending up with the damndest display of plain and fancy gymnastics that anyone ever saw, or even heard of. The victim may afterwards be utilized as a doorstop or fencepost.

I was recently introduced to an obscure individual who had brought a large shipment of dried mushrooms back from Mexico; these Mexican mushrooms were apparently supposed to be an exotic delicacy.

From the importer's disconnected mumblings, I gathered that the mushrooms had been grown, or perhaps harvested, by "silly old Si Bean." Why old Si should have been called "silly" I don't know; certainly his mushrooms commanded a high price, despite their small size.



But no dedicated toadstool-muncher is deterred by minor obstacles, so, after some haggling, I bought enough for a good mess—say half a pound—and used them in the preparation of my justly-famous "Horsemeat Steak with Mushroom Gravy and Dark Beer." The flavor was passable; but the new mushrooms seemed to have the most fantastic effect upon my mushroom-hunting luck!

Taking a walk after the meal, I was amazed to note that strange-looking mushrooms were suddenly springing up everywhere; all of them were completely unfamiliar to me, and did not appear in any of my manuals.

Most of them seemed to be boletes; I gathered and tested them voraciously, which was fortunate, as I was unable to discover any of them the next day.

Since I have been unable to discover any references to these unfamiliar mushrooms, I can only assume that they are local hybrids or mutants. Therefore, for the information of local mycologists, I will append from my field notes the characteristics of some of the more interesting varieties:

Dumbunni's Boletus (*Boletus dumbunni*)

Purple spores, cap yellow, with purple and green spots. Stem fat, with blue and red pinstripes. Found underneath billboards, decaying bridges, and in auto graveyards and old log dumps.



Remarks: A most delicious mushroom, of meaty and robust flavor. Two or three caps will make a full meal. Fine for soup, stew, gravy, souffles, or cooked by itself. It must be remembered, however, that *B. dumbunni* apparently contains an obscure chemical related to the well-known Disulfocincoframmistan compounds, but which, fortunately, is harmless to humans—unless they happen to drink beer, coffee, tea, milk, wine or water while ingesting the mushrooms, in which case splitting headaches, dizziness, violent nausea, diarrhea, and the persistent delusion that one has become a Bluejay will ensue. The strident squawking of afflicted members of the family can be rather trying at times.

Four-Footed Boletus (*Boletus fakeii*)

Colorless spores, cap reddish or brownish, wet and shiny. Stem same color as cap, showing two longitudinal grooves. Found on low, artificial-looking mounds in the woods.

Remarks: Not a mushroom at all, but the nose of an animal, *Omnivorens fangii*, a large mammal related to the aardvark, though differing from it in being entirely carnivorous. The Four-Footed Boletus will bury itself in the ground, leaving only its nose exposed, and at the first tug on the deceptive organ, will open great fang-studded jaws and devour the inquisitive mycologist.

Surprise Boletus (*Boletus hehe*)

Black spores. Cap looks exactly like that of the tender and delicious Suggins' Boletus. Stem looks exactly like that of the toothsome and savory Suggins' Boletus. Found in exactly the same habitat as the flavorful and luscious Suggins' Boletus.

Remarks: When touched, each cap will explode with a force approximately equal to that of three sticks of dynamite. At present a movement is underway to rename this interesting fungus *Boletus sugginsiae*, after the late Merwyn L. Suggins, the prominent Eastern mycologist whose recent unexpected demise was a great loss to mushroom-fans everywhere.

