



SOMA News

VOLUME 20 ISSUE 9

MAY 2008

SOMA IS AN EDUCATIONAL ORGANIZATION DEDICATED TO MYCOLOGY.
WE ENCOURAGE ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS BY SHARING OUR ENTHUSIASM
THROUGH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND GUIDED FORAYS.

2008 SEASON CALENDAR

May

May 15th » Meeting—7pm
Sonoma County Farm Bureau
Speaker: Dr. Chris Kjeldsen

Important Membership Meeting!!



Painting by Beatrix Potter;
See Page 8 for more.



EMERGENCY MUSHROOM POISONING IDENTIFICATION

After seeking medical attention, contact **Darvin DeShazer** for identification at (707) 829-0596. Email your photos to muscaria@pacbell.net. Photos should show all sides of the mushroom. Please **do not** send photos taken with cell phones—the resolution is simply too poor to allow accurate identification.

NOTE: Always be 100% certain of the identification of any and all mushrooms before you eat them!

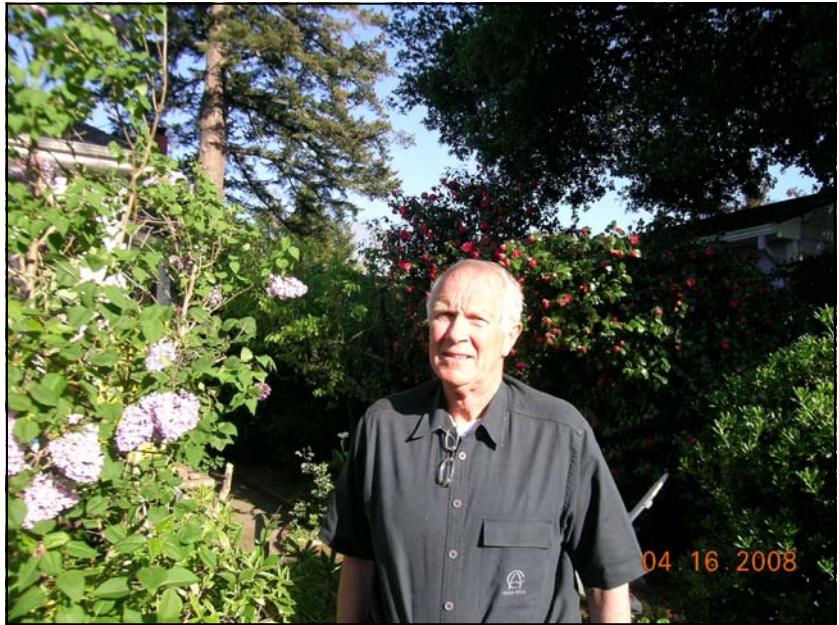
A free service for hospitals, veterinarians and concerned citizens of Sonoma County.

SPEAKER OF THE MONTH

Chris Kjeldsen

Thursday—5/15—7PM—Farm Bureau

Why Fungi: From Elvis the King to Environmental Engineers



This month we are blessed to hear one of the founders of SOMA speak about why he loves fungi in all their glory.

It was during lunch on the back deck of the Bodega Marine Laboratory when Dr. Chris Kjeldsen responded to a minor complaint about the MSSF being too far away to regularly attend the meetings and enjoy the company of other mycophiles. His response was to start another club. That was twenty years ago this June and the first meeting of SOMA was held in his lab at Sonoma State University in December, 1988. Kelly, as he is known to his friends, went on to coin the name for the local club as the Sonoma County Mycological Association and SOMA was born!

Dr. Kjeldsen is a cryptogrammic botanist with a specialty in the algae. Over the course of his teaching career he taught Mycology and peaked the biological interest of many students including several who went into Mycology. Dr. Allison Brown, Dr. Robin Fautley and Dr. Wes Colgan III are three who earned a Master's degree at SSU and went on to get a PhD in mycology. Dr. Kjeldsen was honored into myco-immortality when a new genus of truffles was named with the description of *Kjeldsenia aureispora*. (See the SOMA web site for photos and more info on this truffle):

<http://www.somamushrooms.org/about/Kjeldsenia.html>

SOMA OFFICERS

PRESIDENT

Bill Hanson
(707) 837-8028

VICE PRESIDENT

Jim Wheeler

SECRETARY

Bill Wolpert

TREASURER

Julie Schreiber
SOMAtreasurer@SOMAmushrooms.org

COMMITTEES AND BOARD MEMBERS

BOOK SALES

Bill Hanson
(707) 837-8028

CULINARY QUESTIONS

Caitlin Marigold
SOMAculinary@SOMAmushrooms.org

CULTIVATION CLUB CHAIR

Position Vacant

FORAYS

Bill Wolpert
SOMAwalk@SOMAmushrooms.org

MEMBERSHIP

Jim Wheeler
wheeler.j.d@att.net

MUSHROOM DYE COORDINATOR

Dorothy Beebee
SOMAmushroomdyes@SOMAmushrooms.org

MUSHROOM PAPER COORDINATOR

Catherine Wesley
(707) 887-0842

SCIENTIFIC ADVISORS

Darvin DeShazer
(707) 829-0596
muscaria@pacbell.net

Chris Kjeldsen, Ph.D.
(707) 544-3091

Chris.Kjeldsen@sonoma.edu

SOMA CAMP DIRECTOR

Chris Murray
SOMAcampinfo@SOMAmushrooms.org

SOMA CAMP REGISTRAR

Linda Morris
SOMAreqistrar@SOMAmushrooms.org

SOMA NEWS EDITOR

Tom Cruckshank
SOMAnewseditor@SOMAmushrooms.org

SOMA WEBMASTERS

Dorothy Beebee and Martin Beebee
SOMAinfo@SOMAmushrooms.org

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR

Julie Schreiber
julieschreiber@hotmail.com

BOARD MEMBER

Eric Marigold

SOMA's *Amanita muscaria* logo by Ariel Mahon

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

May brings to close the official mushroom year for SOMA. Last fall brought one of the finest bolete seasons in recent memory. More rain ushered in the early winter varieties including *A. calyptroderma*, matsutake and great yields of candy cap. January brought one of the most fun and well liked Winter Camps ever. We made new friends and visited with old friends for three days. The Sunday night feast was one that will last in our minds for many years. The midwinter mushroom season started with vast quantities of blacks and hedgehogs. Yellowfoot were shy this year, they came in February in somewhat fewer numbers than in the past.

This year also brought the more ominous possibility of Salt Point Park being closed to mushroom hunting. This is not yet out of the woods, so to speak, the issue is still being debated. In response, the members of our clubs joined with park management to sponsor a clean-up day. It was as much fun as it was work. The event also brought a closer relationship to the clubs and the volunteer organization that assists park staff. We expect to hear more on future events and work parties that will support Salt Point Park and that great resource.

The year also brought out some of the finest volunteers I have seen in my ten years with SOMA. Folks pitched in to help with all our events and supported Winter Camp with a light hearted spirit that makes me proud to be a member.

Jim Wheeler will be taking over as club president for next year; he is a man you will come to know as a strong, intelligent leader with a lifetime of experience in management.

Our Volunteer Appreciation Day picnic will be another great event with fine food and great camaraderie among our members.

-Bill Hanson

FORAY OF THE MONTH

NAMA Annual Foray in McCall Idaho

Get a jump on next fall's mushroom season by attending the North American Mycological Association's annual foray, September 4-7, 2008, in McCall, Idaho — a mushroom paradise of conifer forests, meadows and sagebrush prairie. Participants will foray in the Payette National Forest and surrounding area. Foray headquarters is Camp Pinewood, on the Payette River.

McCall has a rich mycological history and is the home of several type species, including *Hygorphorus caeruleus*, which is incorporated into this year's foray logo. McCall is also where Orson and Hope Miller spent their summers while Dr. Miller taught at Virginia Tech and where they eventually retired.

Foray chief mycologist will be Dr. Cathy Cripps, Assistant Professor in the Department of Plant Science and Plant Pathology at Montana State University. Dr. Cripps studies alpine fungi and ectomycorrhizal fungi in aspen forests. She wrote *Fungi in Forest Ecosystems*, a compilation of research from around the globe that documents a diversity of fungi and the roles they play in forest health and function.

If you've never been to a NAMA foray, this would be a good one to attend, since it's on this side of the country. In addition to mushrooms, the McCall area has access to hot springs, river rafting, golf, fishing, and horseback riding. This event is a great way to meet mycophiles from around the country and to learn from a wide array of professional mycologists. And there's even a photography contest!

For more information and to register, check the NAMA website, www.namyc.org, or look for details on the website of the host club, the Southern Idaho Mycological Association, <http://www.simykos.org/>.

-David Rust

Looking for Relevance in the Dyepot...
From a mushroom dyer's journal,
by Dorothy Beebee, April 2003

I sit here, now, struggling to find some relevance in my daily dyeing activity, besides being thankful that I have my own roof over my head and Swiss Chard growing in the garden....But what is the point of doing mushroom dyes in times like these?

This letter to me (and the International Mushroom Dye Institute) came from a teacher in India and gives me comfort and hope:

"Colourful mushrooms have always fascinated me...

We would be grateful to receive your literature on chemical aspects of the mushroom dyes. I have worked on the mushrooms of Goa, for my doctorate in Microbiology, in this beautiful tourist state on India's west coast and we maintain a fungus culture collection at Goa university despite funding and space constraints. **Dyeing with mushroom pigments could be one promising area to provide jobs. For the poor people without employment opportunities in rural parts of my state this knowledge of the use of dyes would come handy.** We have several colourful basidiomycetes here springing with rains. But there are not enough mushroom crops to sustain a mushroom dye business. So, it would be valuable to receive information from IMDI, about the extraction and application of the mushroom dyes, their chemical nature etc. and whether we could get dyes from pure cultures. We have abundant crops of Pisolithus tinctorius here during monsoon and I found that it gives a bright golden yellow pigment."

-with best wishes
Dr. Nandkumar Kamat
Scientist, Goa University—fungus culture collection
and research unit
Department of Botany
Goa University

One of our 2003 SOMA scholarship winners, (and an IMDI member), Megan Romberg, is also interested in the same process of extracting dyes from mycelia, and so I put one in touch with the other, hoping for a meaningful connection...

And indeed a response from Dr. Kamat which was received on March 26th, 2003:

"Yes, I received some information from Dr. Sundstrom and Ms. Megan indeed was like an angel to bless me with reprints of some useful research papers which might have cost her a small fortune in postage. We have successfully applied on small scale dyes extracted with alkali from Pisolithus and Ganoderma. Ganoderma fruitbodies give a beautiful brown shade." We are working on several other basidiomycetes and waiting for the tropical monsoon to get a good crop for further experimentation which may begin in July."

This idea is certainly near and dear to the heart of Miriam Rice, that champion of self-sustainability and the art of recycling, as demonstrated by her wonderful idea of turning left-over mushroom dye materials into mushroom paper! She continually speaks about the possibilities of cottage industries of mushroom dyers and paper-makers evolving world-wide! Maybe this is just a beginning...



Hope springs eternal....In 2008, as well as 2003!



Peeproom (or Shuteye)
morchella oculata

Hollow-legged fungus with a well developed visual sense. Looks around all day, every day, and shuts up shop at night. Very perceptive with a fine sense of humor: always sees the lighter side. Abounds in woods and visual fields, especially those by Seabury Wells. Has a good eye even on a bad day.



Halbritter;'s Plant-and-Animal World



Maybe because this is the last column, I am thinking of writing about much of nothing. As in no reason to read any further. Just to see.

Anybody still here?

Okay. For those remaining I proffer pearls of morel secrets. Some factual and some facetious.

Herein are presented posits of potentially possible productive pickings.

"And what does he know?" They ask having paid good money for the right to this rag. Nothing. Please review the first sentence.

Perhaps years of going morel hunting with gallons of gas gone, hard ground camping, walking at times without aim, rain and snow and sleet and cold to the bones grumpiness, lost in newly fog-bound clear cuts,—ooh, but wait, isn't that a morel over there?

Yes it is. And aren't there some more over there? And there?

My morel skills came by way of Larry Stickney, David Arora, and many trips with David Campbell. Lots of rides to the Sierras, Oregon, Alaska, and the Yukon for years and years.

CLIP & SAVE

No shortcuts here. Nose to the grindstone kind of mushroom dedication.

We are aware of pretenders to this game of knowing where to hunt. Maybe a person who thinks he/she knows much about it. Be wary of self-described "experts."

Heck—from them can you buy a morel map? Well from me you can. Just mail \$25 to SOMA and you will be rewarded mightily. Please review the seventh sentence.

Last fall I drove by and through many logging sites and noted on my calendar when to go check these spots. At the time of this writing—and probably the time of your reading also—I recommend going up to the 5,000' level and walk last year's, and the year before, logged areas.

Morels are not necessarily easy to find in these places. Not with all the detritus from the timber operation, new growths of flora, eyesight getting older and worsen, etc. But persevere and you might get rewarded.

Thinking of awarding things how about this recipe (done many times)?

Morel Cracker Crumb Fry

Amended from one of my favorite mushrooms cooks' (Louise Freedman) recipes

Amount	Ingredient	Preparation Method
30-ea	morels, small to medium	
1-ea	egg	slightly beaten
2-tbl	water (Fiji preferred—just kidding)	
½-cup	crumbs (Panko preferred)	
	sea salt and freshly ground pepper	
5-tbl	unsalted butter, Irish if available (just because)	
2-tbl	pure olive oil (not extra virgin)	

Roll the morels in the egg (mixed with the water). Put the crumbs and salt and pepper in a paper bag. Quickly shake the morels a few at a time in the bag. Melt the butter with the oil in a sauté pan and sauté the morels until brown and crisp.

Serve with this sort of weird appearing, but great tasting, tartar sauce.

Mycochef's Caesar Tartar Sauce

Amount	Ingredient	Preparation Method
2/3-cup	mayonnaise	
2-tbl	sweet pickle relish	
2-tbl	onion	minced
1-tbl	shallots	minced
2-tsp	fennel stalks	finely chopped
2-tbl	Parmigiano	grated
2-drops	Tabasco sauce	
¾-tsp	anchovy paste	

Mix in a bowl and serve. May add more fennel as garnish. Can be thinned with heavy cream.

That's all for now folks! See you next season

ELECTION TIME...NO MUD-SLINGING OR CARPET-BAGGING!

Our May meeting is approaching quickly. With Dr. Chris Kjeldsen as our featured speaker, this should be a well attended and memorable meeting; don't miss it!

There is another important reason to attend this meeting and that is to participate in nominating and voting for new officers to lead SOMA. In fact, you may want to throw your hat in the ring. Our Board meetings are enjoyable events held at the beautiful home of gracious hosts, Marianne and Jim Wheeler. Please consider joining the Board and help us to steer the club to even greater accomplishments. We are currently in need of a new Secretary, and Vice President. Additionally, we are looking for folks to step up and perform the very important functions of Camp Registrar and Foray Leader.

Currently, Jim Wheeler is nominated to replace retiring President Bill Hanson (nominated by the process of raising his hand!). Look forward to the benign reign of King James—The Brave as he leads us into the future.

Please consider joining us on the Board and you could find yourself lucky enough to star in Hänsel and Gretel at Camp this winter...

SOMA gives kudos and many thanks to retiring Board members, Bill Hanson and Bill Wolpert.



Morels are my favorite mushroom, for several reasons. Of course, the flavor (when they are well cooked) is superb, some say the best on the planet. More than one person has come up to me after eating an especially good batch of morels that I have prepared, and looked me right in the eye while saying "That was the best thing that I have ever tasted". Morels are excellent, whether used fresh or dried, and can be prepared in many delicious ways. And they are one of the most enjoyable mushrooms to hunt. Coming across a large patch of morels is one of the greatest thrills that can be experienced.

Morels are what first inspired me to learn about wild mushrooms. The morel, I'd read as a teenager, has a rare and marvelous flavor, is very difficult to find, and is highly prized. So highly prized, in fact, that very few people will take you to their morel patches. You might find someone who will show you a chanterelle patch, or take you to their oyster mushroom log, but morels are in another category.

There are several reasons for this. First of all, the fruiting season is usually fleeting. In most morel locales, this means three or four weeks, although with favorable weather conditions, the season can be extended somewhat. Morels are found in various parts of the country from February through August, depending on location and elevation, but May is usually the main month to collect. Besides their brief fruiting period, morels are often very difficult to see, because they can be masters of camouflage, blending in with their surroundings. Sometimes they are out in the open sunlight, easy to see. But more often, they are hidden away, under collections of branches and twigs, under logs, or in darkened areas. The biggest challenge, however, is to locate those 'surroundings' in the first place, as areas where morels can be collected are usually closely guarded secrets.

Morels can look very strange, the first time one is seen. With a generally conical cap that is pitted and ridged all over the surface, they are very distinctive. Their height can range from an inch to a foot or more, although giant morels are not common. The usual size collected is between 2 to 5 inches. There are several major species found in this country, along with a confusing number of subspecies, variants, or hybrids, each distinct in its own way (color tone, cap shape, 'pit pattern', habitat, flavor). The morel most commonly found in the mountains of the western states, the black morel (*Morchella conica*), appear to have several sub-varieties that differ from the classic conic or 'pinecone' shape by being especially round and bulbous, or particularly thin and pointy. And I have collected, here and there over the years, various groups that can be differentiated by color tone, including versions with a distinct pinkish cast, a darker, reddish-burgundy cast (extra-delicious!), and those with a cast of grayish-green (greenish-gray?), each with a distinct flavor. There are also golden morels of various shapes and shades, which, while beautiful to see, and rare to behold, seem to be a bit milder in flavor than the much more populous black morel. And in this case, "black" actually means more of a tan or dark brown, until the mushroom begins to age, at which point the ridge edges start to blacken. There are also white morels found occasionally, as well as the fabled gray morels, and the often huge green morels, which are distinct for having a convoluted webwork of stem material growing up into the typically hollow cap. There's also what we call "naturals" -- a version that are particularly large and robust, with a double-walled stalk, which are usually found growing in undisturbed, natural forests, or areas that were logged a few years past. I have no doubt that other variants, with which I am unfamiliar, exist across the country.

Morels can grow almost anywhere, but yet, they are hardly anywhere. They can come up unexpectedly in your garden. I

have seen them growing from the mortar between bricks in a patio. I've heard a report of them appearing in a pile of wet, decomposing sheet rock. They might appear in the dead, undisturbed ashes of a fire pit, or in wood chips laid down for landscaping. Undoubtedly the strangest place I have ever seen a morel growing was in the basement of a friend's house, where he had lapidary equipment set up for cutting and polishing gemstones. One day, he showed me a morel that was growing on the floor beneath the saws and grinders. It was coming up out of a small, messy pile of accumulated quartz fragments, gemstone grindings, and lubricating oil! It did not go into the frying pan.

Finding where to go to hunt morels is the challenge. In the Midwest, where morels are a big attraction in the spring, they grow with dead or dying elm trees. In the mountains of the western states, morels are often found in areas where there was a forest fire the year before. There's something special about the disturbance caused by fire that the morels really like. The elevation varies with the latitude, but in general, the fires of interest take place in the mid-mountain elevations, in the forests of tall trees. This is the land of loggers and forest service back roads. On the western side of the central Sierra Nevada, we usually hunt between 4000 - 6000 feet, sometimes going as high as eight or nine thousand feet, if environmental conditions are appropriate. Morels can also be found in areas that were logged the year before.

The strategies and tactics involved in successfully hunting for morels can become very elaborate. It's sometimes said that, if you're driving around looking for a place to find morels, and you run into someone who has some morels, and they tell you to go up to the ridge top, that means you should probably go down into the valley. While outright deceit isn't always the case, morel hunters will often do what they can to confuse others, sometime going to great lengths, such as deliberately leaving a known picker's vehicle at locations where there are no morels (by using two cars), so as to mislead others. On the other hand, close friends will share information amongst themselves, but will expect the information to not travel beyond their private group. For the interested beginner, mushroom clubs are one of the best ways to be initiated into the secrets and etiquette of morel hunting. For novices, of prime importance is learning how to read Forest Service maps (some of the roads can get very gnarly), how to locate desirable habitat by taking into consideration elevation and land orientation, and the basic prerequisites for not getting lost in the woods.

In northern California, in the inland valleys nearby to the coast, morels can sometimes be found in late February throughout March, growing in abandoned or organically managed apple orchards. They like something in apple debris, and are also known to show up in apple processing wastes. At the same general time the year, there's always reports of morels fruiting from wood chips in landscaping. If it's commercial landscaping around businesses, there is the possibility that the area is sprayed with herbicides, so it you take your chances on harvesting at these locations. If possible, it's best to inquire at the business. Home landscaping is less likely to be sprayed, but unless it's your home, asking permission, and checking for spray history, are both prudent suggestions. Growing them yourself at home is a good trick, and apparently, red fir bark (not redwood bark) is what works well for this. Spread it during the summer or fall, and the morels, if they cooperate, will appear the following early spring. There are also several commercial sources that sell morel "kits" with instructions of how to create an outdoor bed for

(Continued on page 6)

(Continued from page 5)

growing your own private patch. While potentially successful, there are no guaranteed methods for the home cultivation of morels.

On the West coast, morels can also be found growing with alder and cottonwood in riparian areas, although they are not commonly hunted there.

Serious morel hunting takes places in the mountains. As mentioned, the best habitats for producing the largest quantities are areas where there was a forest fire or prescribed burn the year before. Morels love burn zones (incorporating burned material or ashes into a home cultivated patch is a recommended technique). All of the mountain ranges of the Western states -- the Rockies, the Sierra, the Cascades, the Sawtooths -- can play host to morels. Alaska is legendary for vast fires and vast numbers of morels. When Mt. St. Helens blew her top, the following spring was a morel bonanza on the mountainside. At least, so it appeared. People were filling pickup trucks full, until they brought them home and discovered that the surface pits were filled with a gritty volcanic ash that was impossible to clean.

In the Sierra Nevada, my home turf, morels usually begin to appear near the end of April, and will fruit until June or July, depending on when the snow melt occurs at any given elevation. They will generally appear at around 3500 feet as the season begins, and then work their way up in elevation, following the snow melt, to about 6000 feet by the beginning of June. The Sierra season usually ends in early June, but if suitable habitat and appropriate weather is available at higher elevations, such as 7000 feet and above, they can fruit through July or August. A legendary burn at a central Sierran lake a few years back, at 7200 - 7500 feet, produced copious amounts of four distinct varieties of morels through late August.

The ground needs to warm up to a certain temperature for the morels to get going. South facing exposures will warm up first, with the north sides taking the longest to start producing. But then, because of the higher amount of conserved moisture that they hold, the north sides will usually fruit for a longer period of time. Fruiting patterns depend on moisture. If it's a dry spring, there will be less morels. If it's a spring that gets some rain every few days, and is cloudy or overcast much of the time, then the season will extend, with several generations of morels appearing in succession. In a good year, one can sometimes observe three generations at once with large, mature morels side-by-side with pickable sized adolescents, and small "raisins", or fingertip-sized babies.

The thrill of discovering at large patch of morels is exceeded only by the thrill of finding an entire forest full of morels. When you get into a serious area, they stretch away as far as the eye can see, in every direction. Squatting down to pick only reveals more. The sense of giddiness is palpable, your heart rate increases, and it's time to calm down and be sure you are not going to lose your sense of direction and become lost. The first time two friends and myself found a lot of morels was an unforgettable experience. We'd been up in the Sierra, not far from Lake Tahoe, camping for the weekend with a group organized by David Arora, the well known mushroom authority and author. Although we'd had several groups hunting in different areas for most of the weekend, we'd not done very well, and found just enough for our camp dinners. After we broke camp, a few of our people went out for one more try. As my friends and I drove about looking for a likely place, two members of our group emerged on the side of the road, baskets full of morels. "Go down there!" they said, pointing down a steep hillside. "We'd still be there picking, but we have to get back home." So down we went, and it was not long before we started to find morels. After a while, they were everywhere. We

picked and picked, and there were still more morels stretching out into the forest in every direction. It began to get dark. Having not had the foresight to bring flashlights, we reluctantly headed back to our car. It was heartbreaking to leave. We had picked about 20 pounds. Ten days later, I returned with one of the friends, and we picked another 35 pounds. By an experienced commercial picker's standards, that may not be a lot, but when you are new at the game, it is an amazing bonanza.

A few years later, I took a group to the Sierra to hunt morels. My buddy and Wild About Mushrooms foray partner David Campbell was with us, and he had come across a controlled burn that no morel hunters had discovered. We were the first to be there. You could see morels from the road, and the hillsides were full of patches and areas thick with the beautiful forms. We spent two days hunting at this spot, and estimated that our group of about 30 collected between 300 to 400 pounds. Most of the group took home 5 or 10 pounds, except those who took 20 or 30 or 50. Contrary to most burns that produce for only one year, this spot, which we dubbed "Area 51" for the number of the forest service road that went through the locale, did well on the 2nd year. Three years later, I was back again, looking for any 3rd year strays. At one point, as I looked through the burned forest, I saw in the distance what looked like large pine cones standing on end. Now, sometimes a single pinecone will stand on end, looking very much like a morel, but it is usually smaller pinecones, and I have never seen groups of pinecones standing on end. I took a close-up look with the monocular that I carry, and couldn't believe my eyes - it was indeed a colony of huge morels. As I got closer to the area, I began finding other jumbos, and altogether found about 3 dozen that were around 6 - 7 inches tall, and very fat, with thick, stocky stalks. A normal tall morel may not be that big a deal, but the girth of these were about 4 times the size of regular morels. These were the so-called "natural" morels. It was the first time I had ever found them. It was incredible. I wish you could have been there with me (but just to see...).

Into the Kitchen:

To clean, or not to clean...

Often, morels can be picked clean, by cutting the caps off above the dirty portion of the stalk. If the morels are emerging from the ground through a layer of pine or fir needles, they will be clean, and will not need further cleaning back in the kitchen. Sometimes, however, field conditions are such that morels are sandy or dirty when picked. The dirt is lodged in the pits of the cap. This can also be the case with purchased dried morels. To determine if the morels are dirty, submerge a sample amount in a bowl of fresh water, and swirl them about. Remove the morels from the bowl, and allow the water to settle. Then feel the sediment at the bottom of the bowl with your fingertip. If it is gritty, the morels will need to be cleaned. If the sediment is soft, it is not of concern. If you are using dried morels, you can do the same test by feeling the sediment at the bottom of the water in which you have rehydrated the mushrooms. If they are dirty, either fresh or dried, the only thing to do is submerge them repeatedly in basins of cool, clear water, and rinse until there is no gritty or sandy sediment at the bottom of the settled rinse water. Then, after the morels are rinsed clean, put them in a salad spinner, and spin all the excess absorbed water away. If you don't have a spinner, put them in a colander with some kind of cover, such as a dinner plate, and whisk it around rapidly by hand.

Cooking with morels:

I have eaten morels when they were a complete failure, usually in a restaurant, when the chef overwhelmed the taste with some strong ingredient, such as port, sherry, or anise. Avoid using ingredients with extreme dominating flavors, especially when

(Continued on page 7)

(Continued from page 6)

cooking with fresh morels. There are a several tricks one can use to bring out the flavor of the morels. Morels love dairy products, so sautéing in butter, adding cream, sour cream, and/or grated Parmesan cheese, are all good techniques to employ. A judicious amount of tamari (or soy sauce), along with good salt, will also help enhance the flavor of morels. Marsala and Madiera, again in judicious amounts, are also good additives. Additional accent ingredients that go well with morels include garlic, caramelized onions, shallots, leeks, and ramps. Other agreeable accompanying items include asparagus, fresh corn (stripped from the cob), potatoes, and smoked foods, such as salmon or smoked cheeses. Morels with caramelized onions in a cream sauce (see recipe), served over grilled wild salmon, are superb. Large morels, when available fresh, are excellent for stuffing with cheeses or other prepared stuffing ingredients. Grilling fresh morels over good mountain wood or mesquite coals (preferably not just commercial charcoal), is a simple and great way to prepare them. The addition of a good, woody smoke flavor is a wonderful compliment to their flavor. They are also excellent to sauté, broil, or include in soups. Eggs are another great medium that carry the flavor well. Just sauté morels in butter and garlic until tender, add a touch of grated Parmesan cheese, and scramble eggs over them. A breakfast fit for royalty!

One important point to mention is that morels should always be thoroughly cooked. Sometimes this takes longer than one would expect. If the pan starts to dry out, add a splash of water. Cooked morels should be tender, not rubbery or chewy. Undercooked morels are notorious for causing upset stomachs.

If you are cooking morels that are on the small side, such as thumb size, they can be cooked whole. Larger morels should be cut into smaller portions, either by slicing in halves or quarters, or by cutting horizontally, which produces a nice ring shape. The smaller the size of the pieces, the less cooking time will be needed.

Fresh versus dry:

I had heard of people who will dry all the morels they collect, not “bothering” to eat any fresh, because they think that flavor is so superior when they have been dried. I am not a member of this camp. I think they have an excellent flavor when fresh, as well as a certain very enjoyable mouth succulence that is lost when using dried morels. However, the flavor of the fresh is subtler than those that have been dried, and one must take care not to bury the fresh flavor with other ingredients.

If you are fortunate enough to have an abundance of morels, the best way to preserve them is to dry them thoroughly. A food dehydrator, set on the lowest temperature, is the best way to go. However, since morels are hollow, they can be dried successfully a couple of other ways. Placing them on cookie sheets in a gas range that uses a pilot light, and leaving the door cracked few inches for circulation, is a workable technique. They can also be strung with a needle and thread, and hung in a warm, dry place until they dry. Once they are thoroughly dried (cracker-crisp), they should be stored in glass jars with a tight lid. They will keep well dried for a couple of years, after which they begin to get a little acid. They can also be sautéed and frozen.

To cook with dry morels, they must first be rehydrated. The quickest method is to pour freshly boiled water over them, and let soak for about 10 minutes. Use just enough water to cover them, since you want to use the soaking water in your dish (as much of the flavor and nutrients has moved into the water), and if you have rehydrated with too much water, you will not be able to use it all. Stir the morels several times while they are soaking. After they have rehydrated, transfer to another bowl, and let the water settle. Then carefully decant the liquid, to separate out the sediment. Morels can also be rehydrated by soaking in water overnight. Some people like to rehydrate in cream or white wine, which is of course then used in the dish being prepared.

Spring is here. So enjoy one of nature's greatest gifts - the incredible morel!

(Continued on page 8)



Photo by
Darvin DeShazer

Recipes:

Note: the quantities in these 2 recipes are approximate. I have not done any measuring in the past, just eyeballed everything...

Simple Grilled Morels

Prepare a fire of good wood coals for grilling.

ingredients:

1/2 lb. fresh morels-- small to medium-size

1/2 stick butter

1 Tbls. minced or crushed garlic

1/4 Tsp. salt

1/4 Tsp. tamari or soy sauce

1/8 cup fine grated Parmesan cheese

Melt the butter with the garlic, salt, and tamari. Using a basting brush, coat the morels with the melted butter mixture, or roll them around in the melting pot until they are well coated.

When that coals are ready, place the morels on the grill. After two or three minutes, rotate them. Continue rotating every couple of minutes until all sides have been cooked. The edges of the morels should start to get crispy. Depending on their size and thickness, they will take between 5 to 10 minutes to cook thoroughly. Remove from grill when done, sprinkle with grated Parmesan, and serve. Option: insert a small portion of Gorgonzola or a blue vein cheese into the morel before grilling.

Morels Stuffed with Crab and Gruyere

ingredients:

10 large fresh morels

1/2 stick butter

1 Tbls. minced or crushed garlic

1/4 cup fine grated Parmesan cheese

1/2 cup picked cooked crab meat (Dungeness preferred)

1/2 cup grated Gruyere cheese

1/4 cup sourdough bread crumbs (fine)

1/2 teaspoon salt

Prepare a fire of good wood coals for grilling.

Mix the last four ingredients in a bowl. Cut the stems off the morels near where they join the cap. Using a small spoon, fill the morels with the stuffing.

Melt the butter with the garlic. Using a basting brush, coat the morels with the garlic butter, or roll them around in the melting pot until they are well coated.

When that coals are ready, place the morels on the grill. After a few minutes, turn them over. After another few minutes, turn them on to a side that has not yet cooked, then turn onto the other uncooked side after a couple more minutes. The edges of the morels should start to get crispy. Depending on their size and thickness, they will take between 8 to 15 minutes to cook thoroughly. Remove from grill when done, sprinkle with grated Parmesan, and serve.

BEATRIX POTTER...THE MUSHROOM ARTIST

Beatrix Potter's first studies of fungi were painted in 1888, whilst on holiday at Lingholm in the Lake District. Over the next ten years she devoted many hours to her work, presenting a scientific paper on the germination of spores to the Linnean Society in April 1897, and although her findings were rejected at the time, experts now consider that her thesis was correct.

Helped by the Perthshire Naturalist, Charles McIntosh, whom she met in 1892, she painted hundreds of water-colours of all varieties of fungi. Indeed McIntosh praised her for the botanical accuracy of her work. Sixty of her paintings were used in 1967 to illustrate Dr W P K Findlay's *Wayside and Woodland Fungi* and collections of her work are cared for by the Armit Library in Ambleside and by Perth Museum.



Yellow Grisette (*Amanita crocea*) and Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*), drawn by Beatrix Potter in September 1897



Fungi sometimes appear in Beatrix Potter's illustrations. In *The Toad's Tea Party*, painted for the unpublished 1905 *Book of Rhymes*, toadstools appear as chairs and table.

http://www.peterrabbit.com/beatrixpotter/beatrixpotter1c_c.cfm

Thanks to Barbara Framm and Keith Oshins.

SOMA Membership Application and Renewal Form

Regardless of what others may think of me, I wish to become a member of the Sonoma County Mycological Association, a Non-Profit, 501 (c)(3), Corporation dedicated to the promotion of the knowledge and appreciation of local fungi.



(Please Print) New Member Renewal
Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____
Phone(s): Home: _____ Cell: _____
E-mail: _____

SOMA will not share your info!

- Date: _____
- \$25 for family membership (mailed SOMA News, plus website download if desired)
 - \$20 for family membership who do not require a mailed newsletter (**website download only**)
 - \$20 for seniors with mailed newsletter (60 years +) (plus website download if desired)
 - \$20 for seniors—**website download only**, (help SOMA and the environment out!)
 - Check here if website download is desired. **Include your email address!**

I am interested in participating in the following activities (Check):

Culinary Group _____ Mushroom Forays _____ Cultivation _____
Mushroom Dyes _____ Mushroom Papermaking _____ Newsletter _____

Other ideas/comments: _____

Checks to: **SOMA**
P.O. Box 7147
Santa Rosa, CA 95407

www.SOMAmushrooms.org

YOU CAN NOW RENEW/JOIN ONLINE AT THE WEBSITE!

ANNOUNCEMENTS

☆☆☆☆☆

15-18 May 2008 Boyne City, Michigan hosts the Boyne City Mushroom Festival <http://www.moreelfest.com/>

☆☆☆☆☆

May 18th Susquehanna Valley Mycological Society. The spring morel foray is on from 10 am to 1 pm in Shindagin State Forest, Candor, New York. <http://svmsonline.org/forays.shtml>

☆☆☆☆☆

May 21 - 24, 2008 The 17th International Congress on the Science and Cultivation of Edible Fungi, Cape Town, South Africa <http://www.isms2008.co.za/>

☆☆☆☆☆

May 24 - 25, 2008 29th Annual Morgan Hill Mushroom Mardi Gras in California <http://www.mhmushroommardigras.com/index.htm>

☆☆☆☆☆

June 21-22, 2008 Glacier Institute in Glacier National Park offers an outdoor summer mushroom course.

☆☆☆☆☆

July 7-13 2008 Pacific Northwest Lichen tour – roadtrip from Seattle WA to Monterey CA <http://home.comcast.net/~nwlichens/montereyfieldtrip.html> \$500 includes room and some food.

☆☆☆☆☆

July 13-19, 2008 International Association for Lichenology and ABLs joint meeting. Early reg Dec 31 2007

http://www.lichenology.org:8080/IAL6_ABLs/index.jsp

☆☆☆☆☆

The 2008 Breitenbush Mushroom Conference will be held at the Breitenbush Hot Springs Resort in the depths of the Oregon Old Growth Forest on Oct 23-26, 2008. Featured Speakers will be Dr. Tom Volk of the University of Wisconsin at LaCrosse and the innovative mycologist Paul Stamets of Fungi Perfecti. We will also feature Chef Michael Blackwell and local mushroom experts Judy Roger, Paul Kroeger, and hopefully Mushroom illustrator and dye expert Dorothy Beebee.

Please reserve the date and spread the word! You can register directly with Breitenbush.

<http://www.breitenbush.com/>

☆☆☆☆☆

Check out the brand new and excellent "Fungi Magazine":

<http://www.fungimag.com/>

Deadline for the September 2008 issue of SOMA News is August 21st. Please send your articles, calendar items, and other information to: SOMAnewseditor@SOMAmushrooms.org

Offering your help at SOMA events ensures that the club will continue to thrive for many years to come. There are many ways to get involved: SOMA Camp, Culinary Group, Cultivation Club, Forays, and more. Contact a SOMA Board member if you would like to offer your services.

May is the month when new Board members are voted in to office. Think about joining the board or nominating someone you think would help SOMA in the future. We are looking for a foray leader, a speaker coordinator, a camp registrar, and more.

Julie Schreiber

Volunteer coordinator

julieschreiber@hotmail.com

H: 707 473-9766



SOMA News

P.O. Box 7147
Santa Rosa, CA 95407

SOMA
DIVINE MUSHROOM
OF IMMORTALITY
& Gracie Wynn



SOMA Members

The May Issue of
SOMA News has arrived!

SOMA usually meets on the third Thursday of the month throughout the year (September through May), at 7 PM, at the Sonoma County Farm Bureau, 970 Piner Road, Santa Rosa, California.

Fungi are displayed at 7 PM, and speakers begin at 7:45 PM. Bring in your baffling fungi to be identified!

Directions to the Sonoma County Farm Bureau

Coming from the south:

- Go north on Highway 101.
- Past Steele Lane, take the Bicentennial Way exit.
- Go over Highway 101.
- Turn right on Range Ave.
- Turn left on Piner Road.
- At about ¼ mile, turn left into parking lot at 970 Piner Road.

Coming from the north:

- Go south on Highway 101.
- Take the first Santa Rosa exit, Hopper Ave/Mendocino Ave.
- Stay left on the frontage road, (it becomes Cleveland Ave after you cross Industrial Drive).
- Turn right on Piner Road.
- At about ¼ mile, turn left into parking lot at 970 Piner Road.

970 Piner Road is marked by a star on the map at right.

