



SOMA News

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April 2009

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

2009 SEASON CALENDAR

April

April 16th » Meeting—7pm
Sonoma County Farm Bureau
Speaker: Elio Schaecter

May

May 21st » Meeting—7pm
Sonoma County Farm Bureau
Speaker: Nicole Hynson



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

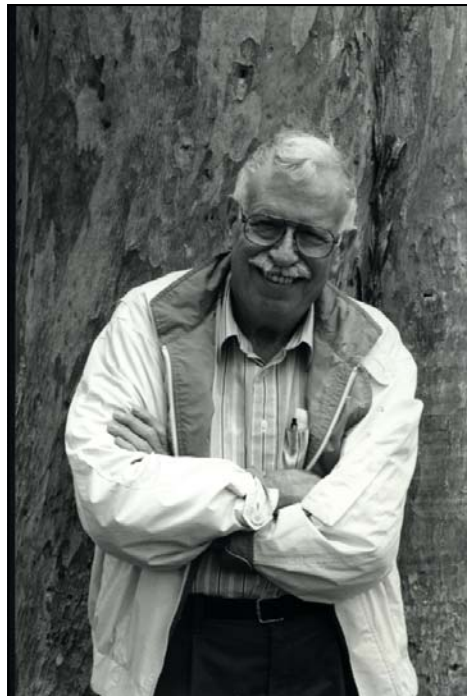
Elio Schaecter

April 16th—7pm—Farm Bureau Mushrooms Through the Ages

Elio is an old mushrooms aficionado. He served for 20 years as the editor of the Bulletin of the Boston Mycological Club and in 1996 helped found the San Diego Mycological Society. In Boston, Over many years, Elio taught courses on mushroom field identification and the use of the microscope. In his other life, he is a microbiologist who spent most of his career at Tufts University Medical School. There, he chaired the department of Molecular Biology and Microbiology for 23 years before retiring to San Diego in 1995. He has authored and edited eight microbiology textbooks and technical books.

Elio Schaecter received the Awards for Contributions to Amateur Mycology from the Northeast Mycological Foray in the 1991 and from the North American Mycological Association in 1993. In 1997, he published "In the Company of Mushrooms" (Harvard University Press), a book on "what are mushrooms and their relationship to people in various cultures and ages."

Elio will discuss how people of various cultures have interacted with mushrooms at different times in history. His talk is based on his attempts and those of his colleagues to find mushrooms, mainly in European paintings. This prolonged foray through museums, books, and the internet has served as the basis for "The Registry of Mushrooms in Works of Art". See <http://www.mykoweb.com/art-registry/index.html>



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SOMA's *Amanita muscaria* logo by Ariel Mahon

PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Dispatch from the duff . . .

Some months ago SOMA added to the multiple number of membership categories offered to interested people. The "Life Time Membership" was added as an option for members or potential members as a method to express support for SOMA. Also, we thought members would like the idea of completing a single membership sign-up or extension, rather than completing the form every year. Please consider this option when you renew.

The current SOMA Board would like to express their appreciation to Judy Angell, LeHui Tsai, Jutta Frankie, Robert Deny and Tina Perricone for their generosity, encouragement and commitment. The Lifetime Membership subscribers will continue to enjoy the company of fellow fungi enthusiasts and the programs or activities that SOMA sponsors for many years to come.

Recently, SOMA received a donation of used books and publications. Some of the titles include:

"Mushrooms Demystified" - Arora; good condition

"Medicinal Mushrooms" - Hobbs; very good condition

"Mycological Guidebook" - MSA, Preliminary copy; cover sheet torn

"Cryptogamic Botany, Vol I and II" - Smith; First Edition, good condition

"Ecology and Management of The Commercially Harvested American Matsutake Mushroom" - Hosford, et al; paperback; very good condition.

The books are for sale . . .selling price can be negotiated. Please email me if you would like a complete list of all the titles. I would like to offer the materials to the membership before posting the list on the website.

Saturday's foray drew 30-35 folks and an excellent selection at the pot-luck lunch. At least 10-12 first time attendees enjoyed their first fungi adventure into Salt Point State Park. Enough edibles and identifiabes were collected to keep everyone interested in the day's activities. Special thanks to Mark, "The Cheese Dude", Todd for the very, very tasty selection of cheeses he sent. Everyone enjoyed sampling the flavorful collection. The folks that sampled Tim Horvath's wine, "Derriere Volant", are still pondering which adjectives to use to describe it.

PS: One forayer, or perhaps, a "fourrageur" (someone who sampled Tim's creation) left a copy of, "All That The Rain Promises and More". I have it and would like to return it to the owner.

Best regards,

Jim Wheeler



FORAY OF THE MONTH

Saturday, April 18th

Meet at **Woodside Campground** in **Salt Point State Park** at 10 AM.
\$6 daily parking fee per car now at SPSP!

Bring a potluck dish to share; vegetarian dishes are always welcome! Please bring your own glasses, plates and eating utensils. Besides the positive environmental reasons and benefit to the gastronomic experience, it will help minimize the amount of trash to be hauled out. Contact foray leader Ben Schmid at (707) 575-4778 for more information.

Members are asked to avoid hunting the club site for at least two weeks prior to a SOMA event. It's only through your cooperation that all members can enjoy a successful foray and experience the thrill of the hunt.

End of another Mushroom Dye Season? Not yet...

Reprinted from April 2005

I finally realized that once again, the Sonoma County fresh mushroom-dye season is subsiding. Of course there are always the morels and black chanterelles for a "last resort" dye... :-> (April fool!) This year I'm not saving any of the leftover dyes, because I've noticed that many lose their color and rapidly deteriorate after a few months in solution. – of course I haven't tried freezing the dye baths because there just isn't the room in my fridge.....The only one I'm holding onto is a large glass jar of *Pisolithus tinctorius*, but the *Phaeolus schweinitzii* is so common around here, there's no point in saving the leftover dye. Better to dry the mushrooms or freeze them while fresh and make new dye liquors as needed. Thanks to my fervent SOMA foray collectors, I've had a nice choice of dried fungi to take to demonstrations and classes this year, and they travel well – (in the cargo hold)... *Dermocybes* spp, *Omphalotus olivescens*, *Pholiota spectabilis*, *Sarcodon fusco-indicus* and many of the *Hydnaceae* have produced tried and true (and in some cases even more intense color) in dye pots out of state when nothing fresh is available for a demonstration...Thank you again, friends!

I think that the *Dermocybes* still emit the most vivid hues when used fresh, but this year, for the first time at SOMA Camp, we tried dyeing with dried *Omphalotus olivescens* (thanks again Tim

Horvath!), and we were amazed at the intense purples (w. alum mordant) and deep forest greens (w. iron) the dried fungi produced with just a gentle simmer for about 15 minutes.

Another discovery: I've applied and extended Miriam Rice's technique of pouring boiling water over the *Dermocybes* to check the color, to actually letting the fibers (wool, silk, and mohair) steep in the dye for 24 - 48 hours on the back of the wood stove – no cooking, to produce some truly amazing color. I'm now doing this with all of my dyes, and the resulting color has a clarity and brilliance not matched by the cooking method! Patience is the lesson, and it is richly rewarded!!! (Bye, bye PG&E...) And this works with the dried mushrooms as well as the fresh. I tried this many years ago with natural dyes from plants – making a "sun-tea" with the dyes for wonderfully clear colors. It would be an interesting experiment to do some tests for comparative light fastness using the 2 methods.... How important is the element of heat for light and color-fastness of mushroom dyes? This summer I'll again try the principle with some of my dried fungi as "sun teas" and run some comparative light-fastness tests.

And yet another – the addition of white vinegar to the dyebath of some *Dermocybe* sp. results in some truly vivid unexpected color – like changing a quiet apricot colored dye on wool to a brilliant orange hue! Definitely another avenue to explore at next year's SOMA camp!



Double-dealing Devilstool
Sarcodon dialbolicus caudatus

Mean and mischievous, this fungus has a devil-may-care attitude and horns in everywhere. Rare, but aptly named. One should always judge this fungus by its cover: the horns say it all. Skillfully concealed at the foot of a tree the Devilstool reaches out and trips up the unsuspecting victim with its hellishly long appendage. Absolutely apolitical, it reacts to right- and left-wing radicals in the same diabolical manner and inspires the fear of hell in a majority of theologians.



Halbritter's Plant-and-Animal World



Mycochef's Column on Stuff
April 2009

Rumblings of morel season happening all around the USA and I thought it might be fun for some of you who have not read my stuff much to (maybe) enjoy the first column I wrote for "Mushroom the Journal" back when I was a younger man. Here it is:

Thoughts and Recipes from MycoChef's World

Thin coffee, thin beer and thinly disguised prejudices are what's served up regularly around the rough Formica tables of the only two cafes in Ukiah, Oregon. We'd come high and far away into the beautiful Blue Mountains seeking some prized morels but we got lucky and found much more.

This is God's country--I know that because cathedrals-full of soul pleasing morels religiously take root hereabouts. Many interpretations on things cultural also germinate here, equally capriciously. But heck, you can find stuff like that other places.

What's truly unique about this little town, aside from being virtually dependent for revenues on mushroom pickers, elk hunters and a very few tourists, is that almost no commerce comes rolling down Main street. I mean well-nigh none. No beer, bread, nor lumber trucks, no French spring well water deliveries, no market wholesale distributors of fine under arm deodorants, no nothing, really, except the occasional gas truck going to Dan's service station. He provides fuel for the task force of "Road Warrior chic" vehicles held together with curious cables and duct tape driven mostly by the multitudes of Caucasian (and a few of the Latino) pickers.

It's a pretty wild sight at the end of the day as they come spinning into Ukiah from their secret patches stuffed with morels, spitting dust and mud, their trucks all banged up and rattling from years of working and living on sharp gravel bad mountain roads. I'm talking here about the legendary mushroomers like "Nancy," "Coke Bottle Danny," "Yankee Jim" (of the "Ft. Bragg Boys"), "Canadian Mike," et al. For many people these are nearly mythical folk who have been able to go their own disparate directions through life, fairly anachronistically continuing the traditions of our hunting and gathering pasts.

The immigrant pickers are mostly **L a o t i a n s**, Cambodians, some Vietnamese, and many are recently from tribes in the mountains of South East Asia. They camp off by themselves, sometimes 20 miles from town, but they join the others in coming to Dan's for gasoline. Usually they have much nicer trucks and herein lays a source of some of the irritation that exists between the cultures. Seems that more than just a



Friend of Mycochef, Larry Stickney... on his 10th?

few of the Whites (a lot of them locals) think that all the Asians have gotten ridiculously low government loans to afford the much better transportation. Who knows? I do know "Sam," a Lao, paid \$38,000 (Canadian) for his new truck through revenues earned from Matsutake picking. This is not my area of proficiency.

But what is brings me here--writing this new column at the request of Don Coombs. I have been the foray chef for David Arora's oftentimes zany expeditions into the world of wild mushrooms. Other things that I do and have done led me to being the guest mushroom chef at Breitenbush '95 and I was invited back by Jim Trappe for this year. By the way, on the back of the new printing of All That the Rain Promises and More is a guy wearing coveralls holding two very large Boletes--that's me a few years ago near my home in Inverness, Ca., at the Pt. Reyes National Seashore. I am a trained, professional chef and my food tastes good. I've cooked mushrooms for many people so you'll be joining a large group of appreciators' if you take note. Thanks.

We did a morel tasting over a campstove in Ukiah that year and it proved, once and for all (yeah, right), that "burns" are better than "naturals." (At least that *those* were better). Ever try a cooking experiment with morels, some from a burn area and others from a nearby "natural" environment? These burns are thin-walled and the naturals double-walled.

Here's what was done for David Arora and the others brought together there: In different pans, in hot olive oil and butter, the chopped mushrooms were sautéed until almost done. We then added a bit of chopped garlic (no shallots available in Ukiah, duh), white wine, salt and pepper. After reducing the wine "au sec" (til just about dry) they were served up to the crowd.

First thing we discovered was not what we were looking for. After watching the racially mixed group for reactions we saw some doing this clumsy covert thing--sort of childlike--pushing the morels around their plates. We found out that over a fourth of the pickers, Caucasian and Asian, had never eaten them before! I guess it's kinda like eatin' your own money. . . .

. . . . From your wallet, take bills of any denomination, marinate them in slightly curried citrus juices, then dip in tempura batter, deep fry in peanut oil, serve in a dipping sauce of soy, mirin, sesame oil, scallions, ginger and garlic. . . .

We evaluated the merits of both morel dishes and the burns clearly did exhibit more pleasing flavor notes. "Magnified morel flavor" is an easy description. This finding was also confirmed later for me by a friend, Connie Green. She was there with us but her primary vocation is a distributor of top quality wild mushrooms to the finest restaurants in San Francisco. She told me that most chefs will always pay more for the burns, period. Looking at this economically, the burns are lighter and therefore chefs get more mushrooms per pound and more morels mean more profits because they are rarely sold by the pound in restaurants. . . .

Enough of these pontifications, I believe that it is time for recipes. The evolution of recipes from classic haute cuisine to today's more eclectic fusion style has not always been linear. Nor are we to presume that what is fashionable for us now will evolve in a straight line towards tomorrow's fare. (Not everybody is going to turn vegetarian and/or fat free this year. . .). Kind of like the way mankind started in Africa then moved north, then east, then maybe back towards Africa, maybe not, maybe elsewhere. That's the type of journey our tastes have been led on. I present here a couple of methods of preparing morels, one classic French, another perhaps a bit more primitive, and then a more modern one that I have fashioned (read, "stolen") from contemporary choices.

(Continued on page 5)

(Continued from page 4)

Escoffier's Creamed Morels

"If they be small (*I'm quoting Escoffier*), leave them whole; if large, halve or quarter them. After having properly drained them, put them in a saucepan with two oz. of butter, the juice of a lemon, and a pinch of salt and another of pepper per lb. of morels. Boil, and then stew for ten or twelve minutes. Never forget that the vegetable juices produced by the morels should be reduced and added to their accompanying sauce. . . ." Remove the morels from the pan, reserve, and then reduce the juices to 1/4 their volume. Add the morels back to the pan, ". . . Cover them with boiling cream, and boil gently until the latter is completely reduced. At the last moment finish with a little thin cream." (This is not diet food. . .)

-the following recipe was offered, in slightly different form, by Larry Stickney in "Mushroom the Journal" last year but is so good and simple that we thought this version is also worth printing-

Open Fire Esculents

For this method one must have a campfire or other similar wood flame, morels, melted butter, kosher salt, fresh ground pepper, and, most importantly, a long handled metal gizmo made probably for popping corn over fire. This item is about 30" long with a medium sized grated metal basket that clamps together to hold stuff. Know what I mean? They can be had at the hearth and BBQ departments of major variety stores, especially in the spring and early summer. Take some bite sized morels and toss them in the melted butter with a little salt. Place them in the basket and cook over, and in, the flames until done. This will take about 10-12 minutes, depending upon how many mushrooms in the basket, how hot the flame, etc. Be careful not to undercook them because we don't want to eat raw morels. Serve them with some fresh ground pepper and more salt if desired. These are really, really good. . . .

Morel Salsa

servings: 6-8

- 1/3 cup sun-dried tomatoes, not oil packed
- 8 ozs. morels
- olive oil for sautéing
- 1/4 tsp. kosher salt
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 4 ea. shallots, finely chopped
- 2 tbsls balsamic vinegar
- 1/4 tsps brown sugar
- 2 tbsls basil, fresh, minced
- 3 tbsls pine nuts, toasted and chopped coarsely

1. Rehydrate the tomatoes in warm water until softened. (if you must use tomatoes packed in oil then squeeze out much of it and reserve the oil for other use). drain and chop them coarsely.
2. Prepare the morels by sautéing in olive oil until done. chop them into 3/8" dice and put into a mixing bowl.
3. Combine with the sun-dried tomatoes, shallots, vinegar, and sugar. let sit for an hour or so. add the basil and toasted pine nuts just before serving.

-This outstanding salsa will keep for a few days covered in the refrigerator-
-Try it on grilled fish and meats, with chips or with goat cheese on crackers-

Introduction to Home Cultivation

April 25th—1990 Coffee Lane in Sebastopol—9am to 5 pm

This class will be taught by SOMA Cultivation Club guru Benjamin Schmid.

In this class you will learn how to do basic hands on work in front of a laminar flow hood, prepare and pour agar agar, transfer cultures, produce grain and plug spawn, and sterilize substrate and spawn media.

Highly recommended preparatory reading:

Growing Gourmet and Medicinal Mushrooms by Paul Stamets—chapters 9 through 17. Please bring the book to the class. This book is available through the club bookstore.

Bring lunch including your own table ware. Also bring your own folding chair if possible. **CARPOOL if you can arrange it!**

Please note that this class is limited to 20 participants and requires prior registration.

A **prepaid, non-refundable fee** of \$30 per person for club members and \$50 for non-club members is **required**. Please make your check out to **SOMA** with "**Cultivation Workshop**" in the memo line.

Mail check and registration form (or facsimile) to:

Ben Schmid
1008 Link Lane
Santa Rosa, CA 95401
575-4778

Questions? Call Ben or email benjaminschmid@juno.com.

You can learn more about the Cultivation Club at:

<http://www.somamushrooms.org/growing/growing.html>

And join the discussion group at:

<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/SOMA-Cultivation/>

Registration Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Cell: _____

E-mail: _____

Please make your check out to **SOMA** with "**Cultivation Workshop**" in the memo line.

Mail check(s) and registration form to:

Ben Schmid
1008 Link Lane
SR 95401
575-4778

Contact Ben via email benjaminschmid@juno.com.

Amanita again! (See March 2008 SOMA News)

Again, Santa Cruz doctor helps save family who ate poisonous mushrooms

By Jodi Gumz

Santa Cruz Sentinel

Posted: 01/12/2009 07:48:01 AM PST

The call that awakened Dr. Todd Mitchell on the Tuesday after Christmas gave him chills.

A woman and her twin 11-year-old grandsons had eaten soup made from deadly mushrooms they picked in the woods. Dr. Kent Olson of California Poison Control was on the line, asking how to contact the German company that makes a drug used to treat death cap mushroom cases in Europe.

Mitchell knew mortality from death caps is higher for children.

He felt a sense of urgency, and the situation was hauntingly familiar.

Two years ago at Dominican Hospital in Santa Cruz, Mitchell and Dr. Wendy Knapp treated a family of six who had eaten tacos made of death cap mushrooms they picked at Wilder Ranch State Park.

Mitchell searched Google and found a treatment used in Europe, an intravenous milk thistle preparation called Legalon-Sil. He persuaded the Food and Drug Administration to allow its use as an emergency investigational new drug. He arranged for an air courier to deliver the medication to the San Francisco hospital where four of the six patients had been taken after developing liver failure and needed transplants.

None of the patients underwent transplants. All recovered but one, the 83-year-old grandmother. Her liver recovered but she succumbed to kidney failure.

Afterward, Mitchell prepared a report on the treatment for the FDA and made a presentation at a European toxicology conference in Seville, Spain.

Now, he was being asked whether he could retrace his steps, procure the intravenous milk thistle, obtain FDA approval and get it to San Francisco the very next day.

"It was like déjà vu all over," Mitchell said.

This time, the patients included Sarah Elbert, 72, a retired history professor and lifelong mushroom hunter from Ithaca, N.Y. While visiting her grandsons in the Bay Area, she had taken them mushroom picking on Mount Tamalpais in Marin County the Sunday after Christmas, and made soup.

Twelve hours later, all three were vomiting and experiencing diarrhea. Twice they went to the hospital and were discharged.

When the symptoms worsened, the family returned to the hospital, where they were told to drive to University of California-San Francisco Medical Center, which has a pediatric liver transplant unit.

Mitchell called Joe Veilleux of German drugmaker Madaus in Pittsburgh. Veilleux told him Madaus' offices in Germany were closed for the holiday and wouldn't reopen until Jan. 5. The same was true for an Italian company that bought Madaus six months after the Santa Cruz mushroom poison case.

"He told me I don't know what you will do," Mitchell said, so he called the FDA.

There is not a huge market for the drug in the United States because mushroom poisoning is more common in Europe. So the astronomical cost to get FDA approval for milk thistle extract, or silybinin, has so far stalled any effort to stock it in the United States for emergency use.

When Mitchell rang the FDA, he asked whether he could use the identification number granted two years ago for Legalon, which would speed things up. He was told he would have to reapply for permission.

Mitchell called the pharmacy at a hospital in Munich and asked for as much silybinin as it had in stock. Nicola Clausius, clinical pharmacist, said she would try to get the drug onto the next Lufthansa flight to San Francisco, departing Frankfurt the next morning. She arranged for a personal courier. As she packed the drug in a box, she asked whether Mitchell had the investigational new drug number the shipment required.

He didn't — yet.

Within hours of his call, the FDA phoned Mitchell. Staffers had met the Santa Cruz doctor and had seen the report he submitted the year before and decided to issue the requisite number.

Then the Munich pharmacist called with bad news. The first plane departing Frankfurt was sold out. The next flight would depart four hours later and arrive in San Francisco as rush hour traffic began.



Dr. Todd Mitchell with a pair of poisonous death cap... (Bill Lovejoy / Santa Cruz Sentinel)

Mitchell worried the special delivery would arrive too late for the twins, who were sicker than their grandmother. So he went to work explaining to Lufthansa why the stakes were high. After 15 minutes, he got a seat for the courier on the earliest flight. But when the drug arrived

— with expenses paid for by Madaus — there were only 14 vials rather than the 18 Mitchell had expected. Who would get what?

Doctors decided to treat the twins first because of the higher mortality rate in children.

By the next morning, both boys improved, allowing what remained of the drug to be given to their grandmother. She recovered and was discharged three days later. Her grandsons left the hospital eight days after ingesting the poison.

Another transglobal success story — that maybe next time won't be so hectic.

"I'm getting strong signals from the FDA that they may soon grant an open IND (investigational new drug) application for Legalon-Sil," Mitchell said Friday. "This would allow the antidote to be rapidly accessible from a California pharmacy after an amatoxin poisoning."

358 people were treated for mushroom ingestion last year in California.

Seventeen ended up in intensive care.

Five experienced liver failure requiring a transplant or ongoing dialysis.

One died.

Source: California Poison Control

http://www.mercurynews.com/portlet/article/html/render_gallery.jsp?articleId=11434645&siteId=568&startImage=1

SOMA News Editor's Note: Often when composing this letter I have to find ways to fill space with interesting articles. Among those I have archived for consideration, one stands out for its sheer fascination. However, this article is quite long and would never fit in one issue of the News. So after mulling this for years, I have decided to "serialize" this article for your entertainment. The article is a full reprint from the (in)famous Life Magazine article, June 10, 1957, on the remarkable adventures of R. Gordon Wasson involving experiences with curanderas or shamans on a night in 1955. If you cannot stand the suspense you may read the entire article here:

<http://www.imaginarium.org/wasson/life.htm>

Where possible I will retain some of the interesting formatting from the original article as with the boxed introduction below. So, without additional fanfare, find the first installment on the next 2 pages.

SEEKING THE MAGIC MUSHROOM



A New York banker goes to Mexico's mountains to participate in the age-old rituals of Indians who chew strange growths that produce visions

By R. GORDON WASSON

PREPARING FOR CEREMONY at which author chewed hallucinogenic mushrooms and had visions, *Curandera* Eva Mendez ceremonially turns fungus in the smoke of burning aromatic leaves.

The author of this article, a vice president of J.P. Morgan & Co. Incorporated, together with his wife, Valentina P. Wasson, M.D., a New York pediatrician, has spent the last four summers in remote mountains of Mexico. The Wassons have been on the trail of strange and hitherto unstudied mushrooms with vision-giving powers.

They have been pursuing the cultural role of wild mushrooms for 30 years. Their travels and inquiries throughout the world have led them to some surprising discoveries in this field in which they are pioneers. They are now publishing their findings in Mushrooms Russia and History, a large, richly illustrated two-volume book, which is limited to 500 copies and is now on sale at \$125 (Pantheon Books, New York).

AUTHOR WASSON sits in New York home with recorder, mushroom pictures and "mushroom stone." A onetime newspaperman, he took up banking in 1928.



On the night of June 29-30, 1955, in a Mexican Indian village so remote from the world that most of the people still speak no Spanish, my friend Allan Richardson and I shared with a family of Indian friends a celebration of "holy communion" where "divine" mushrooms were first adored and then consumed. The Indians mingled Christian and pre-Christian elements in their religious practices in a way disconcerting for Christians but natural for them. The rite was led by two women, mother and daughter, both of them *curanderas*, or shamans. The proceedings went on in the Mixteco language. The mushrooms were of a species with hallucinogenic powers; that is, they cause the eater to see visions. We chewed and swallowed these acrid mushrooms, saw visions, and emerged from the experience awestruck. We had come far to attend a mushroom rite but had expected nothing so staggering as the virtuosity of the performing *curanderas* and the astonishing effects of the mushrooms. Richardson and I were the first white men in recorded history to eat the divine mushrooms, which for centuries have been a secret of certain Indian peoples living far from the great world in southern Mexico. No anthropologists had ever described the scene that we witnessed.

I am a banker by occupation and Richardson is a New York society photographer and is in charge of visual education at The Brearley School.

It was, however, no accident that we found ourselves in the lower chamber of that thatch roofed, adobe-walled Indian home. For both of us this was simply the latest trip to Mexico in quest of the mushroom rite. For me and my wife, who was to join us with our daughter a day later, it was a climax to nearly 30 years of inquiries and research into the strange role of toadstools in the early cultural history of Europe and Asia.

Thus that June evening found us, Allan Richardson and me, deep in the south of Mexico, bedded down with an Indian family in the heart of the Mixteco mountains at an altitude of 5,500 feet. We could only stay a week or so: we had no time to lose. I went to the *municipio* or town hall, and there I found the official in charge, the *síndico*, seated alone at his great table in an upper room. He was young a Indian, about 35 years old, and he spoke Spanish well. His name was Filemón. He had a friendly manner and I took a chance. Leaning over his table, I asked him earnestly and in a low voice if I could speak to him in confidence. Instantly curious, he encouraged me. "Will you," I went on, "help me learn the secrets of the divine mushroom?" and I used the Mixteco name, '*nti sheeto*, correctly pronouncing it with glottal stop and tonal differentiation of the syllables. When Filemón recovered from his surprise he said warmly that nothing could be easier. He asked me to pass by his house, on the outskirts of town, at siesta time.

Allan and I arrived there about 3 o'clock. Filemón's home is built on a mountainside, with a trail on one side at the level of the upper story and a deep ravine on the other. Filemón at once led us down the ravine to a spot where the divine mushrooms were growing in abundance. After photographing them we gathered them in a cardboard box and then labored back up the ravine in the heavy moist heat of that torrid afternoon. Not letting us rest Filemón sent us high up above his house to meet the *curandera*, the woman who would officiate at the mushroom rite. A connection of his, Eva Mendez by name, she was a *curandera de primera categoría*, of the highest quality, *una Señora sin mancha*, a woman without stain. We found her in the house of her daughter, who pursues the same vocation. Eva was resting on a mat on the floor from her previous night's performance. She was middle-aged, and short like all Mixtecos, with a spirituality in her expression that struck us at once. She had presence. We showed our mushrooms to the woman and her daughter. They cried out in rapture over the firmness, the fresh beauty and abundance of our



HOUSE where mushroom sessions took place is built of adobe, has thatch "dog-ears" over gable ends. Door, lower right, leads into ceremonial room.

young specimens. Through an interpreter we asked if they would serve us that night. They said yes.

ABOUT 20 of us gathered in the lower chamber of Filemón's house after 8 o'clock that evening. Allan and I were the only strangers, the only ones who spoke no Mixteco. Only our hosts, Filemón and his wife, could talk to us in Spanish. The welcome accorded to us was of a kind that we had never experienced before in the Indian country. Everyone observed a friendly decorum. They did not treat us stiffly, as strange white men; we were of their number. The Indians were wearing their best clothes, the women dressed in their *huipiles* or native costumes, the men in clean white trousers tied around the waist with strings and their best serapes over their clean shirts. They gave us chocolate to drink, somewhat ceremonially, and suddenly I recalled the words of the early Spanish writer who had said that before the mushrooms were served, chocolate was drunk. I sensed what we were in for: at long last we were discovering that the ancient communion rite still survived and we were going to witness it. The mushrooms lay there in their box, regarded by everyone respectfully but without solemnity. The mushrooms are sacred and never the butt of the vulgar jocularity that is often the way of white men with alcohol.

At about 10:30 o'clock Eva Mendez cleaned the mushrooms of their grosser dirt and then, with prayers, passed them through the smoke of resin incense burning on the floor. As she did this, she sat on a mat before a simple altar table adorned with Christian images, the Child Jesus and the Baptism in Jordan. Then she apportioned the mushrooms among the adults. She reserved 13 pair for herself and 13 pair for her daughter. (The mushrooms are always counted in pairs.) I was on tiptoe of expectancy: she turned and gave me six pair in a cup. I could not have been happier: this was the culmination of years of pursuit. She gave Allan six pair too. His emotions were mixed. His wife Mary had consented to his coming only after she had drawn from him a promise not to let those nasty toadstools cross his lips. Now he faced a behaviour dilemma. He took the mushrooms, and I heard him mutter in anguish, "My God, what will Mary say!" Then we ate our mushrooms, chewing them slowly, over the course of a half hour. They tasted bad-acrid with a rancid odor that repeated itself. Allan and I were determined to resist any effects they might have, to observe better the events of the night. But our resolve soon melted before the onslaught of the mushrooms.

Continued Next Issue...

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!)
 - \$250 for **Lifetime Membership** with website download!

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

Dr. Matteo Garbelotto is going to try another round of SOD blitzes this spring. Join one near you. Get trained on how to recognize symptomatic trees. Collect Bay Laurel leaves in the field, and contribute to science!

<http://www.cnr.berkeley.edu/garbelotto/english/sodblitz.php>

Spring 2009 SOD Blitzes
Scheduled from mid April to mid May 2009

April 18 & 19 - Woodside - Portola Valley:

Contact Debbie Muller-Mendelson

[<dmendelson@fermacorp.com?subject=SOD-Blitz 2009>](mailto:dmendelson@fermacorp.com?subject=SOD-Blitz 2009)

April 25 & 26 - Sonoma Valley:

Contact JamesMarzo

[<j.marzo@jamesmarzo.com?subject=SOD-Blitz 2009>](mailto:j.marzo@jamesmarzo.com?subject=SOD-Blitz 2009)

May 2 & 3 - Santa Lucia Preserve:

Contact Cheryl McCormick

[<cmccormick@slconservancy.org?subject=SOD-Blitz 2009>](mailto:cmccormick@slconservancy.org?subject=SOD-Blitz 2009)

May 9 & 10 - Los Altos Area:

Contact Sue Welch

[<swelch@plan-a.com?subject=SOD-Blitz 2009>](mailto:swelch@plan-a.com?subject=SOD-Blitz 2009)

May 16 & 17 - East Bay:

Contact Ellen Crocker

[<ellen.v.crocker@gmail.com?subject=SOD-Blitz 2009>](mailto:ellen.v.crocker@gmail.com?subject=SOD-Blitz 2009)

Cal Hiking and Outdoor Society presents the 4th sort-of-annual slideshow and hike (or foray, as we foragers call it)

8pm Wed. April 8th, 101 Wheeler Hall, UC Berkeley Campus

Hunting the Wild Mushroom (tips for beginners on how to get started and not get poisoned)

Beginner Mushroom Hike

If you are an experienced mushrooer willing to lead a small group on the foray please contact me. Hope to see y'all - Dave David Lubertozzi—dluber1@berkeley.edu

+++2010+++

9th International Mycological Congress - Edinburgh, 2010

The British Mycological Society (BMS) will host the 9th International Mycological Congress (IMC9) in Edinburgh, Scotland during the period 1-6 August 2010. www.imc9.info/

Deadline for the May 2009 issue of SOMA News is April 25th.

Please send your articles, calendar items, and other information to:

SOMAnewseditor@SOMAmushrooms.org

Frequent SOMA Camp entertainer, Gary Lincoff has a new book going to press: Mushroom Magick: A Visionary Field Guide

For centuries hallucinogenic mushrooms have participated in a sublime relationship with humankind, thanks to their psychoactive chemicals that shift and modify the human mind. Arik Roper's exquisite painted portraits of magic mushrooms illustrate more than 90 of the known hallucinogenic species from around the world. He captures their powerful auras, adding to a tradition of Mushroom art that stretches back more than 400 years.

Popular culture critics Erik Davis and Daniel Pinchbeck provide background and testimony in elegant essays, and mushroom expert Gary Lincoff contributes notes. This beautifully designed and profusely illustrated mushroom bible will appeal to nature lovers, mushroom hunters, and enthusiasts of all things psychedelic.

<http://snipurl.com/esp16>

VOLUNTEER

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.

We are currently looking for new members for the Board. Think about joining or nominating someone you know.

Julie Schreiber

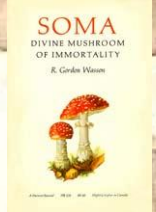
SOMA Camp Volunteer Coordinator

julieschreiber@hotmail.com

H: 707 473-9766

SOMA News

P.O. Box 7147
Santa Rosa, CA 95407



SOMA Members

The April 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.

