

MUSHROOM NEWSLETTER

September 28 2009

It's still early days, but things are looking good. This morning I went on a scouting expedition with Justin Baird-Murray. Although an excellent restaurateur – do try a drink/meal/night in the Metropole, undoubtedly the greatest hotel in the riskier areas of downtown Llandrindod – he also seems to have an instinctive 'nose' for mushrooms. I thought we were going to pay a quick visit to a favourite wood, but he insisted on going to a completely new patch because he had 'a hunch it would be good – it just looks like it might'.



Justin - was this man born to mushroom?

Fortune favours the brave and we hit the big time very, very, quickly. Looking back, however, I think actually our chat was probably every bit as valuable as the finds. As we strolled we quickly hit patches of fly agaric. It was no surprise to find cepes/porcini close at hand – but we also noticed that as usual the mushrooms all seemed to be growing along the edge of the wood – and the lower, south-facing, edge at that.



Plentiful fly agaric usually means cepes are present . . . but why in sunnier spots?

Now at first glance there is no rhyme or reason to this. Mushrooms can't photosynthesise, so light ought not to be remotely important. Yet it is – both Justin and I agree we rarely find good mushrooms in the woody depths: instead they always seem to be in lighter, airier spots. Similarly, why should a sunny summer matter to them (as it seems to)?

I might have stumbled across the answer, however. When talking to Plantlife's Ray Woods the other day, he observed woodland species such as porcini are actually extracting nutrients from the nearby trees. The better the arboreal growing season: the more the mushrooms benefit. Pines growing along rides and on the woodland edge get far more light than their neighbours. This could mean that the mycelia beneath benefit in parallel. Certainly both Justin and I agreed the theory seemed to be making sense – and within an hour or two we'd picked a good 5 – 7 kgs of lovely mushrooms, half of which are now drying above my woodburner (Justin prefers to 'pot' his in butter – like shrimps).



Five kilos of cepes from a total 'punt' on a new wood – get out there!

The other bit of news I have relates to a cauliflower fungus I have been tracking for the past few weeks. People constantly ask me about the speed of a mushroom's growth. Obviously it varies between species, but here it is visually (unfortunately I wasn't so scientific as to use a uniform focal length and position, but use the tree as a rough scale):



A cauliflower fungus photographed on 4, 8, 14 and 27 September respectively

I am now trying to work out when to harvest the thing – the same tree/mycelium yielded my biggest ever single mushroom four years ago . . . but dare I risk the ravages of insects, squirrels and sheep?



A 2kg cauliflower being harvested from the same tree by a nine year-old Molly in 2006

But I gather we are not alone. Several readers have written in with stories and pictures of their own finds:



Readers Rick Graham, Martin O'Connell and David Mowthorpe have also been hitting gold recently

"I recalled you telling us just a year ago that the downhill mossy edge of a wood was a very likely place to find cepes. I noticed such a place, stopped and found these two yards away! This is my first solo find ever, so I'm naturally thrilled. Three cepes, and a couple of brown birch bolete if I am not mistaken."

Martin O'Connell (Settle, North Yorks)

Finally, if anyone wants to hear my dulcet tones spouting on about mushrooms, until 1 October you can listen to my interview with Radio Wales last Thursday (24th, 10 – 10.30

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/wales/radiowales/sites/jamieandlouise/>)

Do keep the gems rolling in – as I sit here in a house steeped in the rich scent of drying porcini, I've got a feeling this year could leave a lot of mushroom fanatics with smiles on their faces.

Daniel Butler

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P.S. I loathe junk e-mails and would be horrified to think I might be clogging up your systems unnecessarily, so if at any time you want your name taken off, just let me know with a brief - preferably polite - indication that you want to be removed.