

# MUSHROOM NEWSLETTER

**10 May 2010**

After the spectacularly long and cold winter, you might expect mushrooms to be running late and, sure enough, this is what's happened. I found my first St George on Saturday – a fortnight later than their name implies. Now it's true that most years they don't actually emerge on 23 April, but I reckon May Day is normally about right.



*St George's mushrooms are a delicious and often over-looked spring mushroom*

Despite checking daily for the past week, there was nothing out there, but then I got an e-mail from John Gent which tipped me off that they were up in force on his Berkshire farm. I rushed up my hill and, sure enough, found my first St George of the year . . . always a source of profound celebration for me because they are the first mushrooms of the season in these acid uplands.



*John Gent with his perfect 1kg porcino in 2005*

Just before I go on to mention some other finds from readers, I would like to thank him for the tip (I really do appreciate feedback on what's going on elsewhere in the country).

John is one of my star former guests. My recollection was that he was dragged somewhat reluctantly onto my two day break by his wife Anna. Until he came to Wales he had little interest in mushrooms and was really just there to keep her company. He caught the fungal bug, however, and if he had any doubts at the end of the weekend, these were completely quashed by his discovery of an absolutely perfect cepe during the very last minutes of the break. I weighed it when we got back to the Hotel and it came in at 996g if I recollect correctly.

But back to this season . . . a couple of other readers have since reported St George's. David Cowcill found some near Peterborough and Richard Pitts says they are present in Gloucestershire. Perhaps more excitingly Peter Vepers and Richard Pitts have noted good finds of morels in Gloucestershire. Obviously no one was rash enough to give me geographical co-ordinates of the precise location, but I note from their addresses these seem to cluster around the Cotswold escarpment. I don't know the area well, but certainly on paper the well-drained limestone soil and mature woodland here should produce the perfect conditions for these delicious spring fungi. Certainly one reader, reported finding six specimens which between them weighed in at almost exactly 500g. Another phoned to ask advice on selling his finds to a local restaurant – how much should he charge?



*Morels are coming up in Gloucestershire (some people say these point towards their neighbours)*

Now my advice would be not to sell, but instead to feast on this fantastic mushroom – it's far too precious to give to others at any price, I feel. Now St George's are a different matter. Although delicious, they grow in such quantities that it is easy to sate oneself quickly, so here there is no harm in sharing the joy. When it comes to fixing the price, however, it is more difficult. My general advice for anyone would be to phone Booths in London's Borough Market. This is probably Britain's most important wild mushroom wholesaler and – provided you buy in reasonable quantities – they will also sell to the public. For obvious reasons prices vary wildly from species to species and season to season, but the going rate tends to be £15 - £30 per kilo (morels would usually be even more, by the way). At first glance this seems astronomical, particularly when my neighbours are selling their lambs at about £1.50 per kilo (that's liveweight), but actually they're not as much of a luxury as the price might suggest. Wild mushrooms pack a powerful flavour punch and with most species 50g per portion is about right which works out at about £1.

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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.