

MUSHROOM NEWSLETTER

18 October 2010

Fungal spot-the-ball

Sunday was a red-letter day for me when, after 15 years of searching, I found my first winter chanterelle. OK, if I am completely honest, it wasn't exactly my discovery: as I led a group through the woods, each excitedly asking me to identify a host of 'inedible, yet not poisonous' fungi, Polly Swain, pointed to an almost invisible and apparently innocuous 'small brown job'.

I was starting to dismiss this as yet another gastronomically uninteresting species when I stopped in mid-sentence. I knew I'd seen it before on a French market stall. This was far from boring – it was a winter chanterelle! I looked around wildly – there was another, and another and another! Suddenly I realised we were standing in the mushroom picker's version of a mine field.



Polly holds up a prize find. She has every right to look pleased – this is what it looked like among the leaf mould . . .

Slowly the mushrooms began to come into focus . We were surrounded by scores . . . no hundreds . . . no thousands! of these small yellow and brown mushrooms. Clearly they grow here in prodigious quantities, yet despite scouring the area every autumn for years, this was my first big find (OK, technically it was Polly's, but it felt like mine in just the same way that I regard most local big conifer woods as 'mine' rather than belonging to the Welsh Assembly).

So why had it taken so long? I think the best way to explain is to show you the 'growing-in-habitat' photos that I took for my forthcoming book . . .



Look really closely – there are at least a dozen mushrooms visible in this picture (as Rolf would say, 'Can you see them yet?')



These are marginally easier to spot . . .

The find is particularly exciting because these are absolutely delicious. Indeed, in the days when I used to buy in mushrooms which didn't occur locally, they used to regularly beat their better known yellow cousins in taste tests by the forayers.

There were also decent quantities of hedgehogs growing nearby, which is promising for the last five forays I have organised over the coming fortnight. There are also a fair number of young fly agarics and porcini in evidence, although that said, over the weekend we had the first significant frost of the year, which normally heralds the beginning of the end of the main season. I'm hoping it was just light enough and the woods give just enough shelter to keep things going for another few days. Not that the weather was bad – the views as we drove to the woods were spectacular.



Atmospheric 'inversions' are one of autumn's most spectacular early morning displays in the valleys.

Meanwhile, thanks to everyone who contacted me about Leif's correspondence (see last newsletter). Suffice to say it was supportive to put it mildly.

IF anyone's interested, owing to a couple of cancellations I have a couple more people onto my forthcoming one day break On Sunday 24th October – e-mail for details.

More importantly, however, for those gastronomes who wanted the recipe for the smoked chilli oil I have been dishing out to forayers, the simple recipe (the only equipment you need is a barbeque and food processor) is now on the website.



The haul – and five happy mushroom hunters (plus truffle hound, of course) . . .

Happy foraging!

Daniel Butler

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P.S. As always, let me know if you want to be removed from the list and I will do it forthwith.