Those of you who were at the November meeting and heard my talk about the New York Botanical Garden and Herbarium might remember me briefly showing this photo of some “locals” Chris and I met during our trip to the United States in August-September of this year.

I said that I'd talk about them in the December meeting and, well, here I am.

So who are these people and how did we come to meet them?

New York Botanical Garden

The long story short is that while I was organising our day at the New York Herbarium with Roy Halling, I asked him if he knew of any mycology groups in his area that might be having a meeting or a foray that I could possibly attend.

I thought it might be interesting – not only from a fungus point of view - but also to see how clubs do things over there and to possibly share some ideas.

He mentioned that the Connecticut-Westchester Mycological Association would be having their annual Clark Rogerson foray.

It is a four day residential foray held over a long weekend.

Unfortunately, because of our travel schedule we could only make it for just one day – the Saturday – but what a wonderful day it was.

The Connecticut-Westchester Mycological Association is an American group of amateur and professional mycologists - a lot like the QMS.

The Association is called COMA for short.

COMA

Connecticut - Westchester Mycological Association

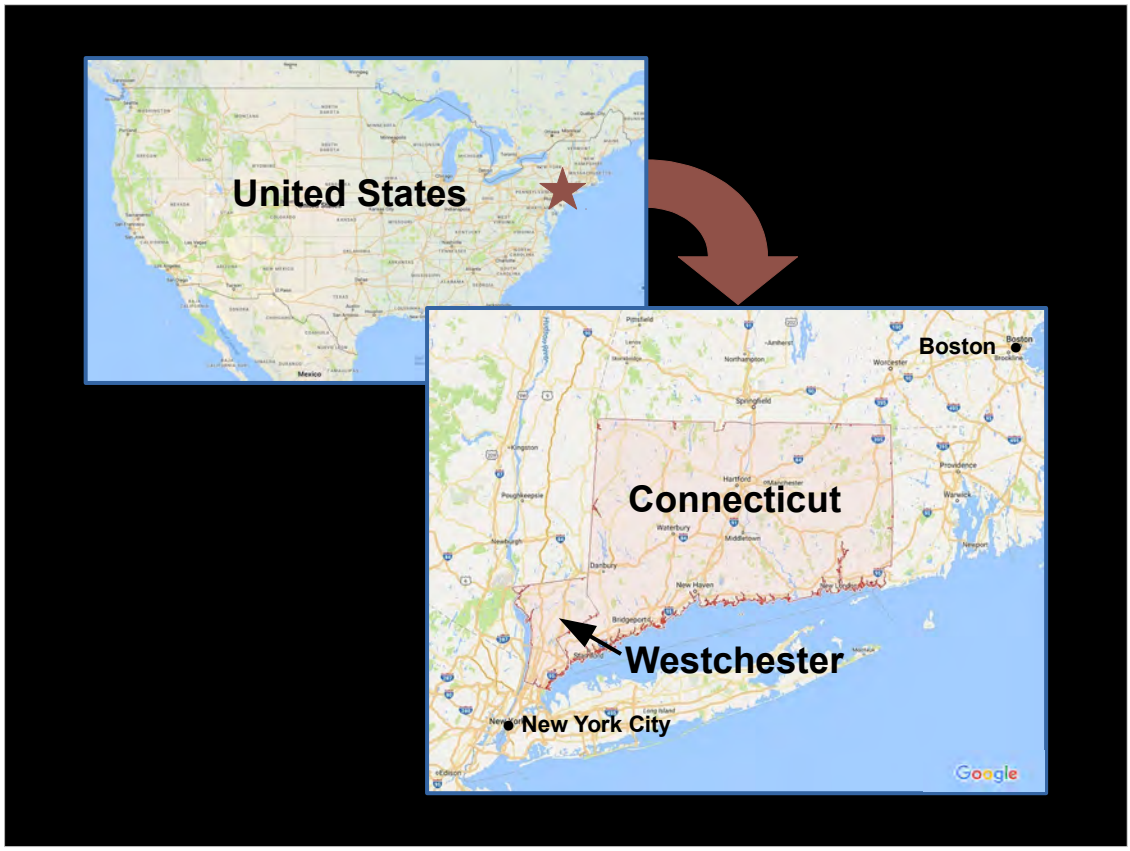
- public education
- organized forays
- publications
- lectures
- nature study
- natural history
- botany
- taxonomy
- culinary arts
- photography
- toxicology
- microscopy

To quote from their website:

“COMA is an educational and recreational group devoted to advancement of the science of mycology through public education, organized forays and field trips, publication, lectures, and nature study.

Our activities encompass the fields of natural history, botany, taxonomy, culinary arts, photography, toxicology, microscopy, and more.

The club actively promotes public education about mushrooms to prevent poisoning by toxic species.”



They are located – as their name suggests – in the state of Connecticut and the adjoining Westchester County in New York State.

COMA was founded in 1975 by a group of people who wanted to learn and share knowledge about the science of mycology.

It currently has about 280 members.

The association holds 6-8 informational evening programs each year. The general public is welcome to come to these and admission is free.

COMA hold walks every weekend from early April to early November. The general public is again welcome and again they are free of charge. COMA does have some walks that the public aren't allowed to attend – these are the special morel hunting forays they hold each Spring.

COMA's scientific activities includes recording comprehensive lists of the fungi collected on their walks and forays and conducting an annual survey of fungi at a reservation in Pound Ridge, New York, for the Westchester County Department of Parks.

Mushroom University

Each year in late winter, the association holds something they call “Mushroom University”.

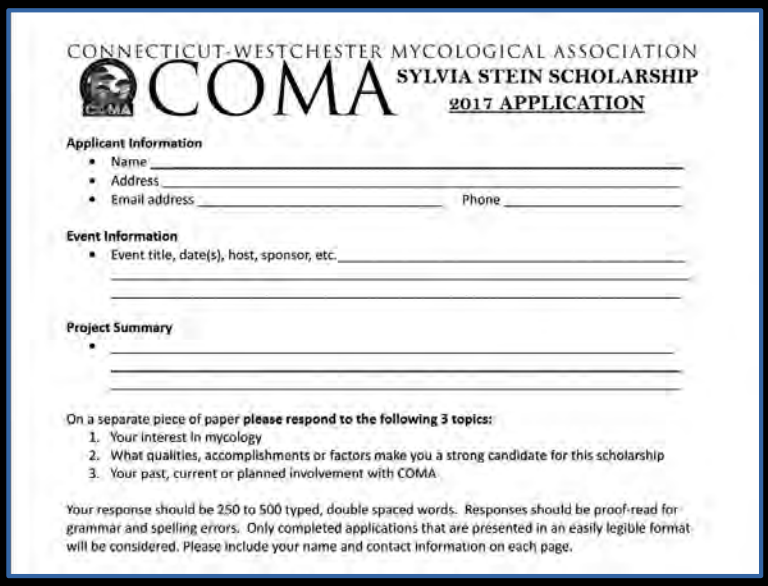
This is an advanced mycology course for non-professionals. It's held over a period of six to eight weekends.

Gary Lincoff, the author of a number of books and papers about fungi, leads the classes.

Sometimes they also have guest lecturers on specialized subjects.

Each year the course focuses on a different genus, but this year it covered a number of different topics such as Agarics, Boletes, Ascomycetes and Lichens.

Sylvia Stein Scholarship



CONNECTICUT-WESTCHESTER MYCOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

COMA

SYLVIA STEIN SCHOLARSHIP
2017 APPLICATION

Applicant Information

- Name _____
- Address _____
- Email address _____ Phone _____

Event Information

- Event title, date(s), host, sponsor, etc. _____

Project Summary

-

On a separate piece of paper **please respond to the following 3 topics:**

1. Your interest in mycology
2. What qualities, accomplishments or factors make you a strong candidate for this scholarship
3. Your past, current or planned involvement with COMA

Your response should be 250 to 500 typed, double spaced words. Responses should be proof-read for grammar and spelling errors. Only completed applications that are presented in an easily legible format will be considered. Please include your name and contact information on each page.

© http://www.comafungi.org/

COMA has a scholarship program named in honour of Sylvia Stein, one of their founding members and an eminent amateur mycologist.

The total scholarship funding per year is $1,500 and each recipient receives up to $300.

Only mycology related events or projects are eligible for consideration.

That includes projects involving cultivation, photography, microscopy, crafts and the culinary arts.

Recipients are expected to lead a minimum of three COMA walks and to submit an article to COMA's quarterly newsletter ...

COMA Newsletter

Spores Illustrated

Winter 2017

Spores Illustrated is the newsletter of COMA, the Connecticut-Westchester Mycological Association.

Dear Friends:

I don't think that any of us would be here in the Northeast if we didn't enjoy the dramatic change of seasons, but it still feels rather sad to see our weekly walk season come to an end until next year. Although many of you have stocked your pantries and freezers with goodies to share with friends and family, the camaraderie and the "thrill of the hunt" are largely over for now— but fear not! In the months to come, the Programs Committee (under the careful direction of our own David Rose) will be lining up special evening events for your pre-season enjoyment and edification, and with any luck, yet another semester of "Mushroom University" will be available for those of you seeking a "higher education" in the ever-evolving realm of mycology.

And— there are less than five months remaining until our walk season begins anew, with endless possibilities and adventures in store! While keeping up with your reading (so many new mycology books, so little time!), you should know that Tom Cascione (our intrepid Walks Coordinator) will be hard at

Peniophora albobadia *by Joshua Hutchins*

© http://www.comafungi.org/

… which is called “Spores Illustrated”.

The newsletter is issued several times a year.

By the way, the name is a pun on the popular American sports magazine, Sports Illustrated.

During the mushrooming season, weekly updates are also sent out – the COMA Weekly News - and event reminders are emailed to all of their members.

Each November, COMA holds a banquet where members are asked to bring dishes that are mushroom based.

This is a photo of this year's banquet, which was held just a couple of weeks ago. As you can see, there was quite a spread.

A lot of the mushrooms used in the dishes were foraged from the local forests.

The association is very much orientated towards identifying edible wild fungi and eating them. However, to quote Joe Brandt, the Association's President:

“I know that there are some who join COMA just for the mushrooms, but for the rest of us, it's the great people who really make the club so special - and when we get together (like we did on Thursday evening), it's nothing short of magical.”

Annual Foray

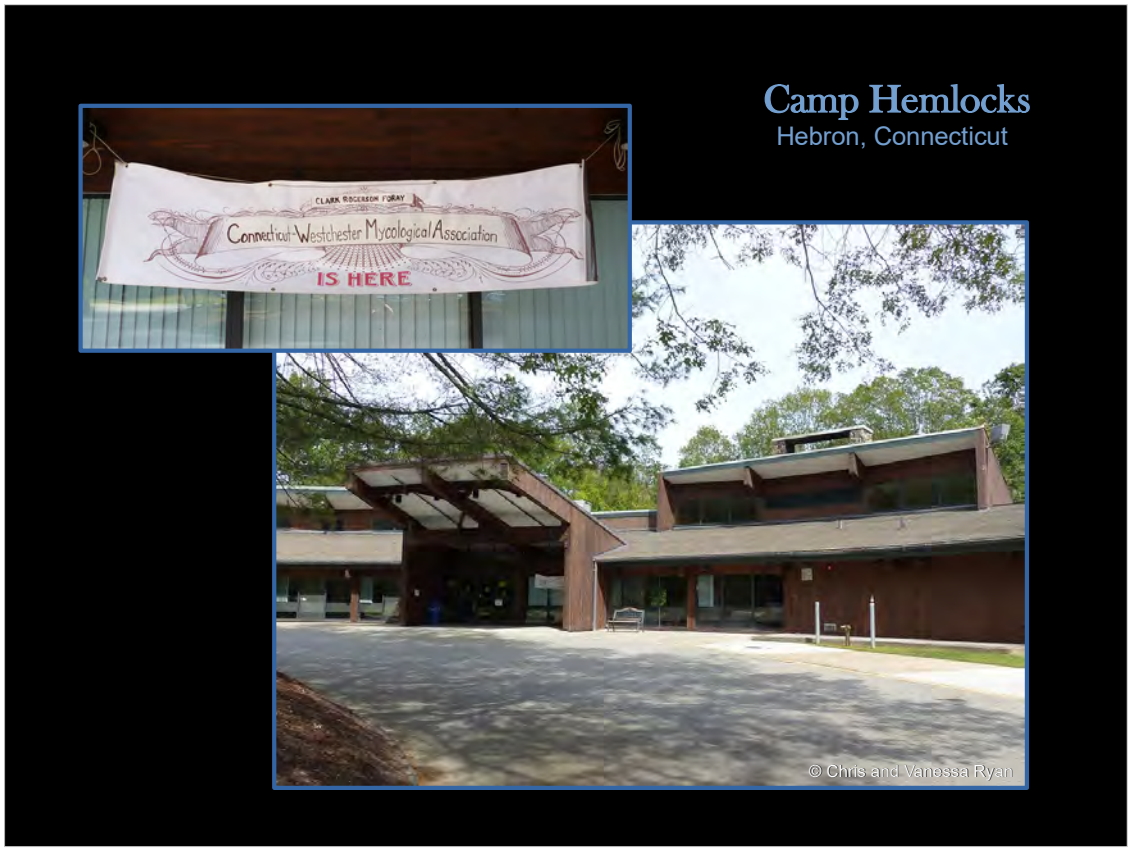
© http://www.comafungi.org/

And so now I come to the Clark Rogerson Foray.

Dr. Clark Rogerson was mycologist and former curator of the mycological herbarium of the New York Botanical Garden. He and Roy Halling were colleagues for several years at the herbarium before he retired.

Dr. Rogerson served as advisor to COMA from its inception to his retirement in 1996.

In 1981, COMA named its annual foray after him in honour and appreciation of his tireless commitment to education and the development of amateur mycology.



The foray this year was held at Camp Hemlocks in central Connecticut. This is, I believe, its usual location, but last year it was held somewhere else because the place was being renovated.

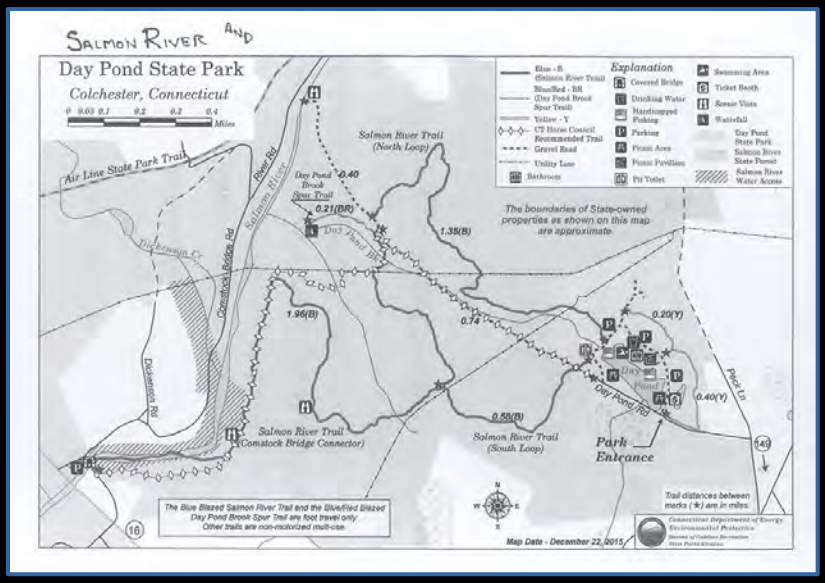
The Camp is run by Oak Hill, one of the Connecticut's largest providers of services for children and adults with developmental disabilities. It also caters for a broad variety of conferences and events – such as weddings, parties, mycological forays, anything.

It is located in 160 acres of unspoiled woodland with a 22 acre lake, and includes three lodges with overnight accommodations for 100 campers, a cafeteria that seats 150, spacious meeting rooms, a hall with a stage, and an indoor heated swimming pool.

There are a number of State Parks and Forests close by.

It really is, in my view, the perfect place to hold a residential foray.

Things to do: Foraging Walks



© http://www.comafungi.org/

As I mentioned earlier, the foray is a four day event – what we'd call a residential foray – and it's held over their Labour Day long weekend.

Each day is packed full of activities, starting with a fungi foraging walk in the morning. The walk goes for two to three hours – that's up to lunch time.

The walk participants are organised into small groups and each group heads off to one of the local Parks or Forests that have been designated a site number. There are a total of eight foraging sites for the weekend.

The site I went to was the Salmon River and Day Pond State Park.

I'll say now that my husband, Chris, didn't come on the walk with me. He went off and did his own thing for most of the day, but came back to the camp in time for dinner and the evening events.

Fungi Foragers

Left to right: Peter, Don, Leon and Irina.

And so we get back to this photo ...

If you've guessed that these are the people I foraged with, you'd be right.

They are, from left to right:

- Peter Knowles, this was his first ever foray;
- Don Shernoff, Treasurer of COMA and owner of a hiking pole with a morel hand-carved on its top;
- Leon Shernoff, Don's son and editor of “Mushroom, the Journal of Wild Mushrooming” a quarterly magazine; and
- Irina Belova, a keen member of COMA and Peter's girlfriend.

So now you know who these “locals” are and how I came to meet them.

This is where we foraged.

As you can see, the Salmon River and Day Pond State Park has a varied landscape. We first searched along the steep river bank and finished up in a flat, almost swampy area.

While we were out there, Peter wandered away from the group.

We were going to continue down the trail, so Don asked Irina to call Peter to come back to us. We all thought that she'd just yell out to him, but she replied that she couldn't call him because she didn't have her phone with her.

So Don simply shouted "PETER" at the top of his lungs and Peter popped up out of some nearby bushes. We all laughed.

I guess it really was a comment on the times.

But I'm getting a bit ahead of things here.

Before we set off into the forest, I had asked about any dangers we might encounter.

I'd already been warned to use a good quality insect repellant.

Deer ticks carry Lyme Disease and, as you can see on the Deep Woods spray can label, mosquitoes can also carry a range of nasty diseases too – like Zika Virus and Dengue Fever.

I had no idea what chiggers are. It turns out they are a kind of mite that is related to our Scrub Itch mite.

Toxicodendron radicans
Poison Ivy

The one thing the guys warned me most about was Poison Ivy. This plant is quite variable in habit and in Connecticut it grows as a low vine on the ground, right at the level you get down to to look for fungi.

They have some sayings in the U.S. to help people avoid Poison Ivy and another similar-looking dangerous plant, Poison Oak.

> “Leaves of three, let it be”,
> “Berries white, run in fright”,
> “Hairy vine, no friend of mine”.

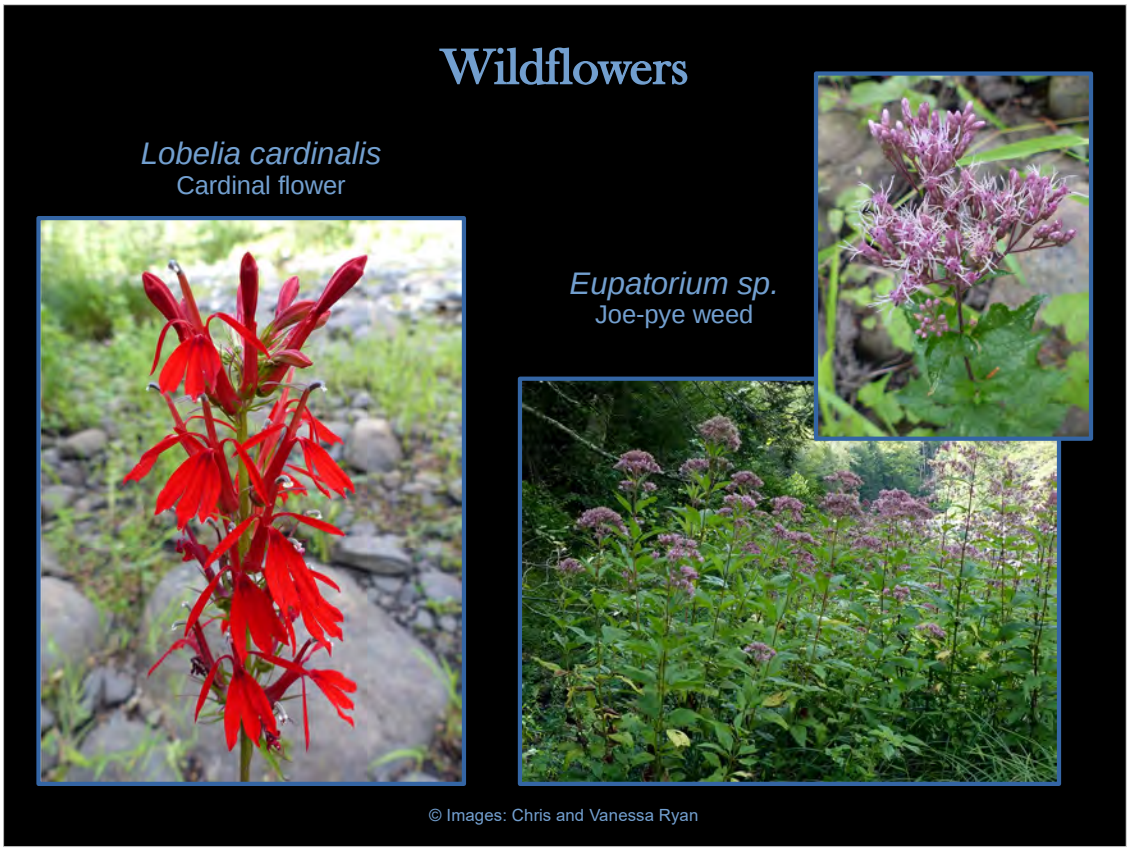
Just a light touch is enough to transfer the oil from these plants onto your skin. The oil causes an allergic reaction which can be quite severe in some people.

Impatiens capensis
Jewel Weed

Don showed me another plant, Jewel Weed – a kind of *Impatiens* species. Even though its name has "weed" in it, it's actually a native plant that is extremely common right across the USA. It often grows in the same places as Poison Ivy, which is good, because the juice of the crushed stem and leaves is a natural preventative and treatment for Poison Ivy.

Jewel Weed seeds are also edible and Native Americans used to grind them up to make a flour. As an experiment, Don once tried collecting enough to make some flour. It took him about an hour to just get a tiny handful of seeds and so he gave up on the idea.

On his suggestion, I tried tasting some raw seeds – they have a nutty taste, a bit like walnut.



As it was only just early Autumn, there were still a few other wildflowers also in bloom.

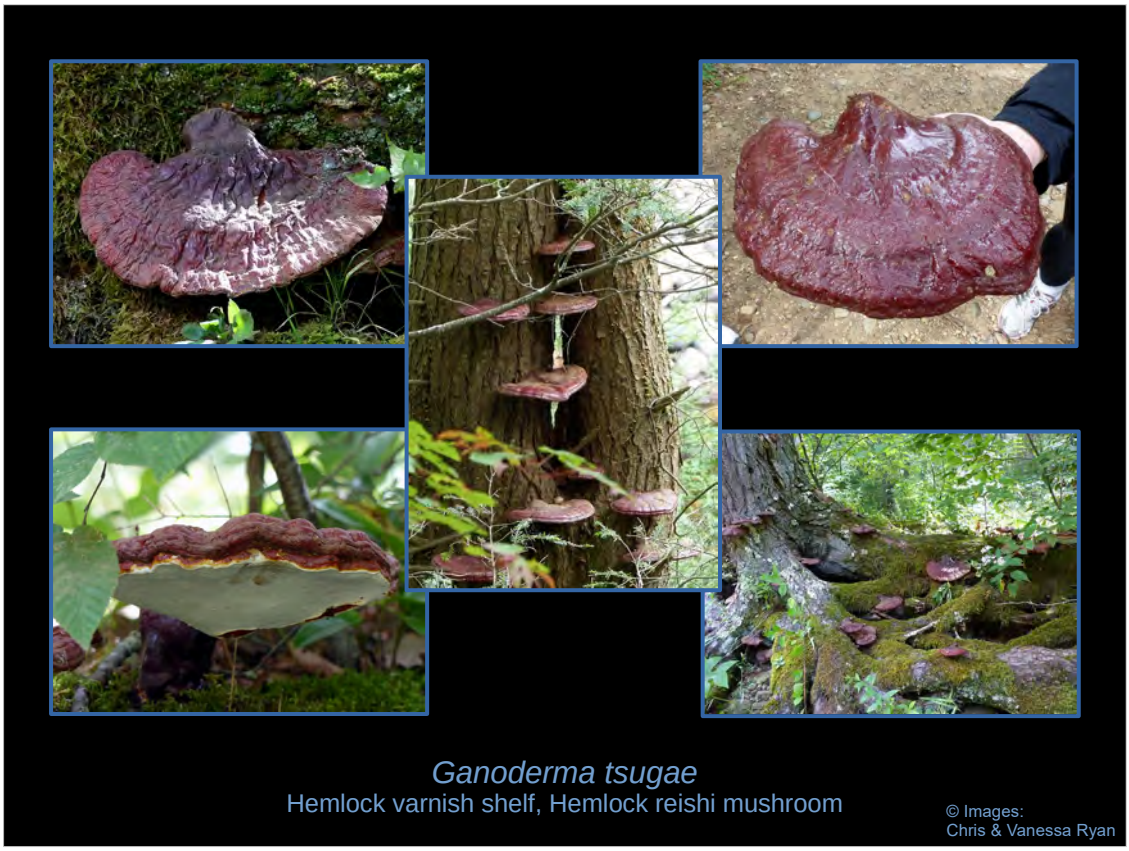
The Cardinal flower is native to both North and South America. Some of you might recognise it as it has been cultivated and is available as a garden flower in many different countries, including Australia.

Joe-pye Weed, also known as “Gravel Root”, is native to North America. We can also buy here from garden nurseries. It's known for being drought tolerant.

The Fungi we Found

Ok, so the flowers were pretty, but we were there for the fungi!

We found a few that were worth collecting.



Ganoderma tsugae
Hemlock varnish shelf, Hemlock reishi mushroom

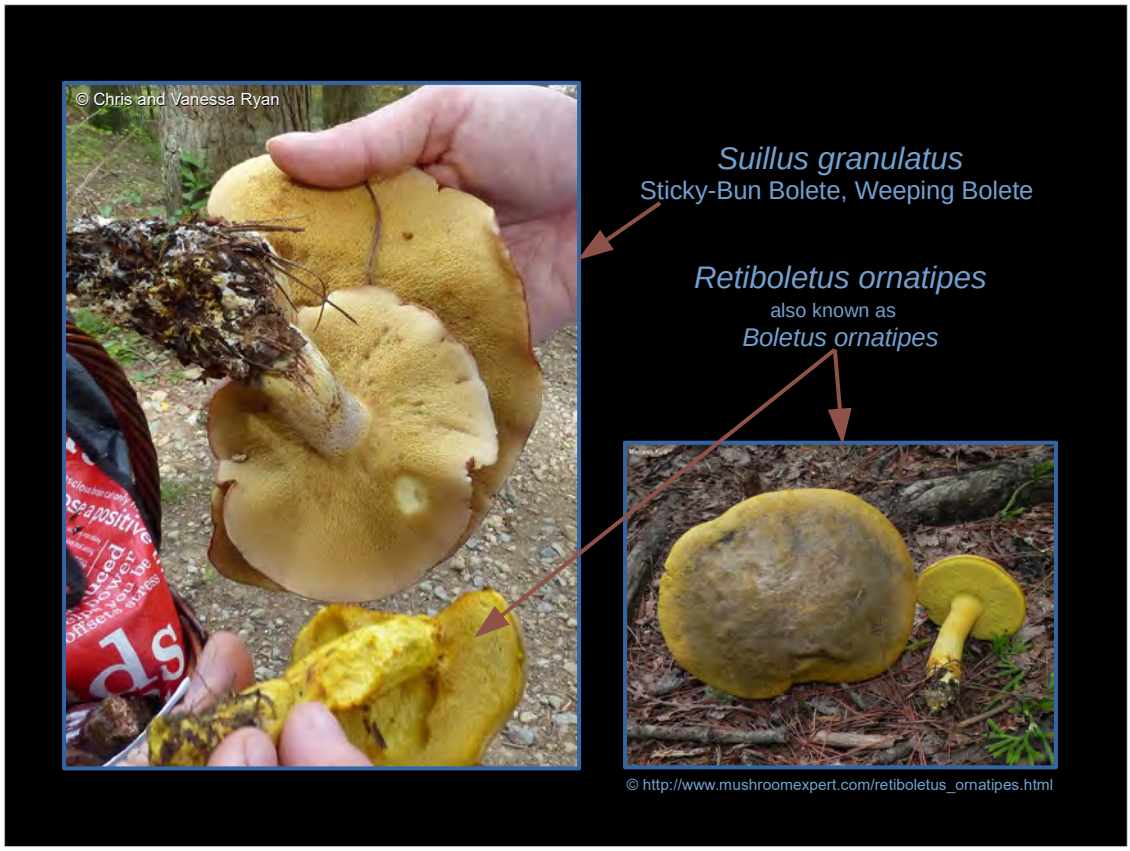
© Images:
Chris & Vanessa Ryan

We first caught tantalising glimpses of this *Ganoderma* through the leafy undergrowth. It was on the trunks of a couple of trees that were growing on a steep bank above the river.

Peter risked life and limb to climb down the slippery bank and then up the tree to get one.

We later found some more easily accessible specimens on some other trees, including one massive old trunk that even had the huge fruiting bodies growing on its exposed roots.

To my knowledge, this species of *Ganoderma* has not been found in Australia.



Irina found these boletes and Leon identified them for her.

Suillus granulatus is an edible species and these were very large specimens in pretty good condition. They quickly went into our collecting basket.

Some of you might recognise the *Suillus* as it was introduced here with our *Pinus radiata* forestry. The species is native to the northern hemisphere.

The other more bright yellow bolete at the bottom of the photo has been undergoing some name changes. *Retiboletus* was one of the first boletes to be recognized as a separate genera via DNA sequencing.

I don't think it's been found in Australia and according to Roy - and I quote him here: it has a “bitter, bitter, bitter taste”, so I guess it's not edible either.

Gymnopilus sp.

These two mature mushrooms were growing on an old log.

Leon and I think that it is a member of the *Gymnopilus junonius* group, which we also have here in Australia.

This group is in a state of flux at the moment, so “species” is about the best I can give you for a name.

The same log had a couple of other fungi growing on it.

One was a polypore of some sort that was too manky to collect.

The other was this lovely birch mazegill, which *was* collected.

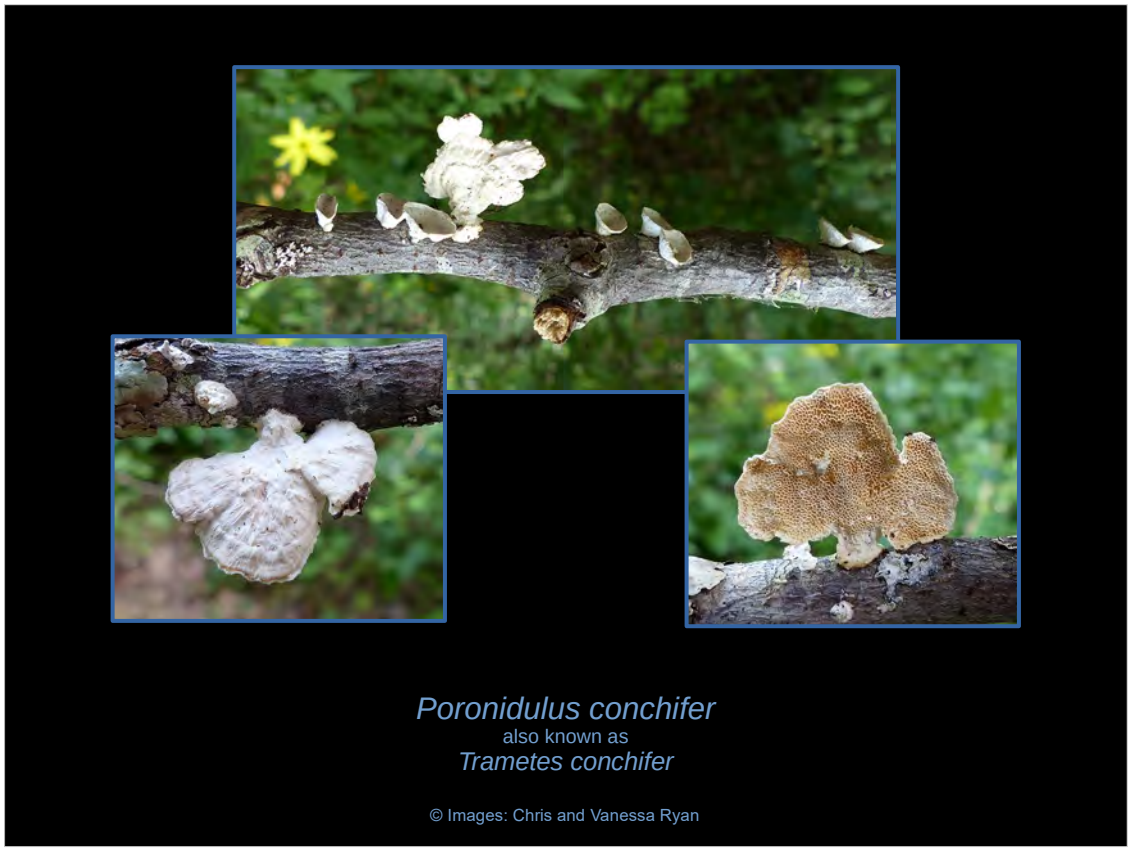
This species of *Lenzites* has been found in Queensland.

Amanita atkinsoniana
(Immature)

This *Amanita* was only a baby and half eaten, but Leon could still identify it.

He told me that the diagnostic feature for *Amanita atkinsoniana* is that the brown velar material on the cap and bulb is quite flat. In most *Lepidellas* – which is a subgenus of *Amanita* - the material on the bulb is quite spiky, or at least chunky.

This species is found across eastern North America and down into Mexico.



The last fungus we found was an interesting little white polypore. It's a North American species.

Leon told me that it was originally classed as a *Trametes*, but it was moved into its own genus about a 100 years ago. The more recent trend is to call it a *Trametes* again.

When it's young, it forms these little cup or bell-shaped fruiting bodies. As they mature, they grow from the edge of the cup into a typical-looking polypore, often engulfing the cup base with pores.

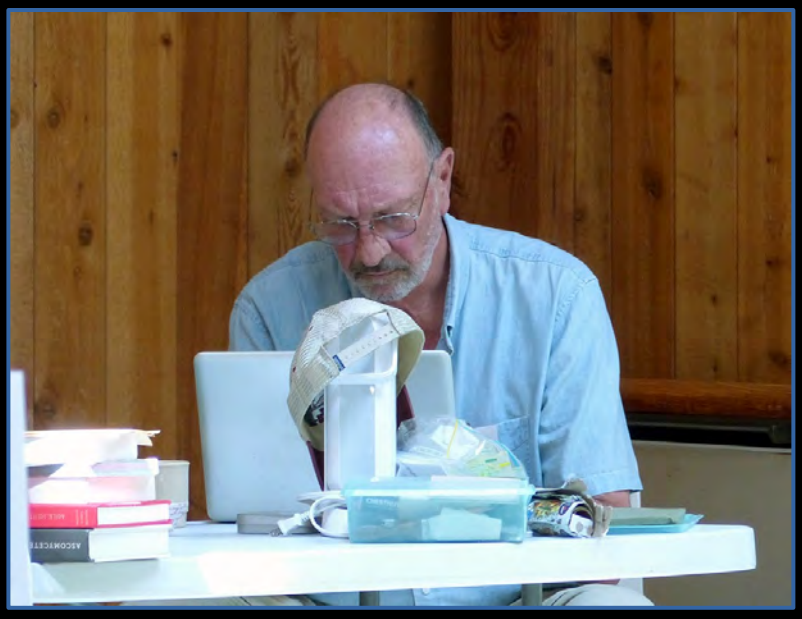
Michael Kuo of MushroomExpert.Com says:

“Bird's nest fungus expert H. J. Brodie was not really a "polypore man," but he obviously couldn't let it go when a polypore looked like a bird's nest fungus; publishing in Science (1951) he determined that the cup-like stage of *Poronidulus conchifer* served as a splash-cup apparatus for the distribution of asexual spores. Thus the mushroom extended its reproductive period, and hedged its bets by cloning itself before engaging in sexual reproduction and producing sexual spores like a "normal" polypore.”

When we got back to the camp, we found that the other foragers had also been very busy.

The collected fungi had tags written for them, put together with their tag into a cardboard takeaway container and then laid out on a table to be identified.

As you can see, there was more than ample space to work in.



Roy Halling
Curator of Mycology
Institute of Systematic Botany, The New York Botanical Garden

Roy was there, quietly working away in an unofficial capacity.

He was looking at the boletes that had been found.

Boletinellus merulioides
Ash-tree Bolete

He showed me this very interesting little specimen. At the base of the stipe, just under the ground surface, are some little black nodules called sclerotia.

Wikipedia nicely sums up what Roy told me about the bolete:

“The sclerotia allow the fungus to survive harsh conditions such as low temperatures, and will rapidly colonize nearby soil when conditions are favorable. The fungus's preference for growing near ash is not due to a mycorrhizal association between them, but rather because the fungus has a relationship with a parasitic aphid that occurs only on these trees. The aphid feeds on the tree roots, and shelters inside hollow sclerotia formed by the fungus in the soil, or attached to the root system. The aphid secretes carbohydrates and other nutrients that benefit the fungus.”

It was thought to grow only in North America and Asia, but Roy told me that he and Nigel have found one in Queensland.

After the fungi were identified, they were laid out on on tables in the middle of the room for display.

They were organised by group - so all the agarics were put together, the polypores were together and so forth.

I thought that the number of finds was impressive, but apparently it was nowhere near as many as usual.

In total, over the weekend, they collected about 200 different species.

Usually this number is well over 300.

One of the reasons is possibly this, the Gypsy Moth. While we were out on our foraging walk, we'd seen a lot of their empty pupal casings on some tree trunks.

The moth was introduced into eastern North America from Europe in 1869. Since then it has been gradually spreading south and west across the country.

I was told that the eastern states had a mild winter this year and that this meant that as many moth eggs hadn't been killed off by the cold.

The resulting plague of caterpillars in the spring and summer had stripped the trees of their leaves.

The thought was that this meant that many of the trees were stressed, which in turn meant that their fungal mycorrhizal partners were also stressed.

As a result, less fungi were fruiting that Autumn.

So that's enough about the foraging walks.

In the afternoons and evenings there were talks.

This is a list of the presentations given at this year's foray.

I was lucky in that three of the talks were held on the day I was there, so I got to hear Roz, Bill and Karen all speak.

Their three topics were all very different.

Roz spoke about the trials and tribulations of hunting on a protected mountaintop for a rare fungus - which is actually the fruiting body of a basidio-lichen,

Bill spoke about various creatures which eat fungi,

and Karen spoke about identifying which fungi are safe for us to eat and showed us some of her recipes.

Karen, her husband and daughter call themselves the “Three foragers”. They have a blog and a Facebook page with heaps of information about edible native North American fungi and plants and lots of yummy-looking recipes. If you are interested, just Google “3 Foragers” and you will find them.

There were some other, less formal talks held as well.

Each afternoon, there was a table tour of the day's finds.

On the Saturday, it was Leon's turn to be the guide.

When we had been out on our walk, Leon had impressed me with his huge knowledge of fungi and how he patiently answered each of my questions. He continued to do this as he led the group along the tables.

Most of the questions were about edibility and how to recognise species in the field.

By the way, Leon is actually a professional composer and singer, but he is yet to write a song about a fungus.

Things to do: Mycophagy

COMA chefs, COMA Foray – September 4-7, 2015.

And now we get to the mycophagy part of the foray.

Hunting for wild mushrooms, cooking and eating them is a very popular pass-time in North America. I already touched on this when I talked about COMA's annual banquet.

Having seen for myself just how easy it is to find enough edible wild fungi for a meal over there, it's no wonder this is so.

Mycophagy with an International Theme

I have to admit that one of the things I'd been really looking forward to at the foray was tasting some of the local fungi.

I've never eaten wild fungi before and this was a fabulous opportunity to do so.

On Saturday afternoon is a Pot Luck, where people bring in their dishes from home to share.

On Sunday afternoon is a Mycophagy event, where a team of chefs cook up from scratch the edible fungi that had been found on the weekend's foraging walks.

For that event, the vast majority of dishes are planned out well in advance and so it can be set to a theme, though provisions are made for the unpredictable nature of the finds that come in.

This is a photo of a previous year's Mycophagy event when they had an international theme.

Pot Luck

I guess I wasn't the only one who'd been looking forward to Saturday's Pot Luck.

By the end of the event, the platters were mostly empty with very few leftovers.

Fortunately dinner, which was held about two hours later, was only a very light meal as we were all still too stuffed from the Pot Luck to eat!

As expected, a great many of the dishes were fungi based but some were also made from other foraged foods such as nuts and berries.

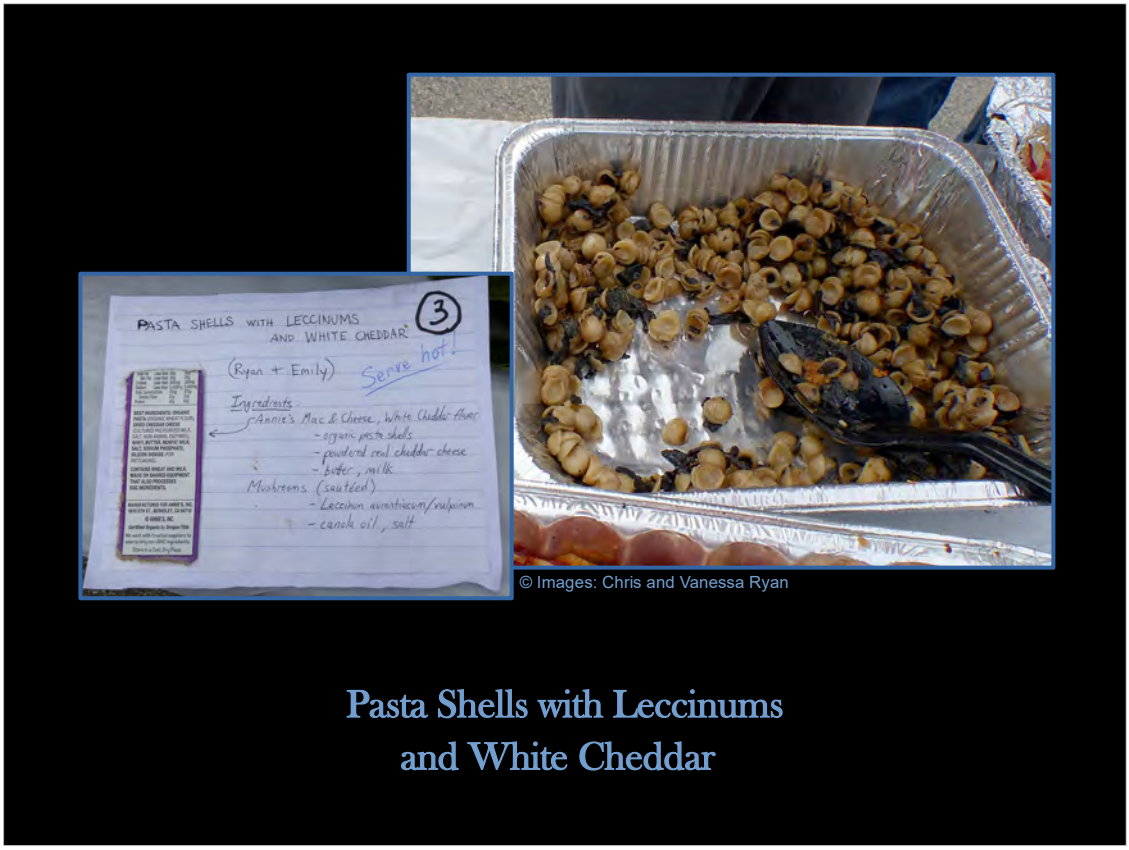
Pasta Salad

Now I'm going to be really mean and show you photos of some of the delicious dishes I tried…

Each plate had a list of the ingredients with it.

Pickled Grifola

-



© Images: Chris and Vanessa Ryan

Pasta Shells with Leccinums and White Cheddar

-

Black Trumpet Pate

-

Puffball Casserole

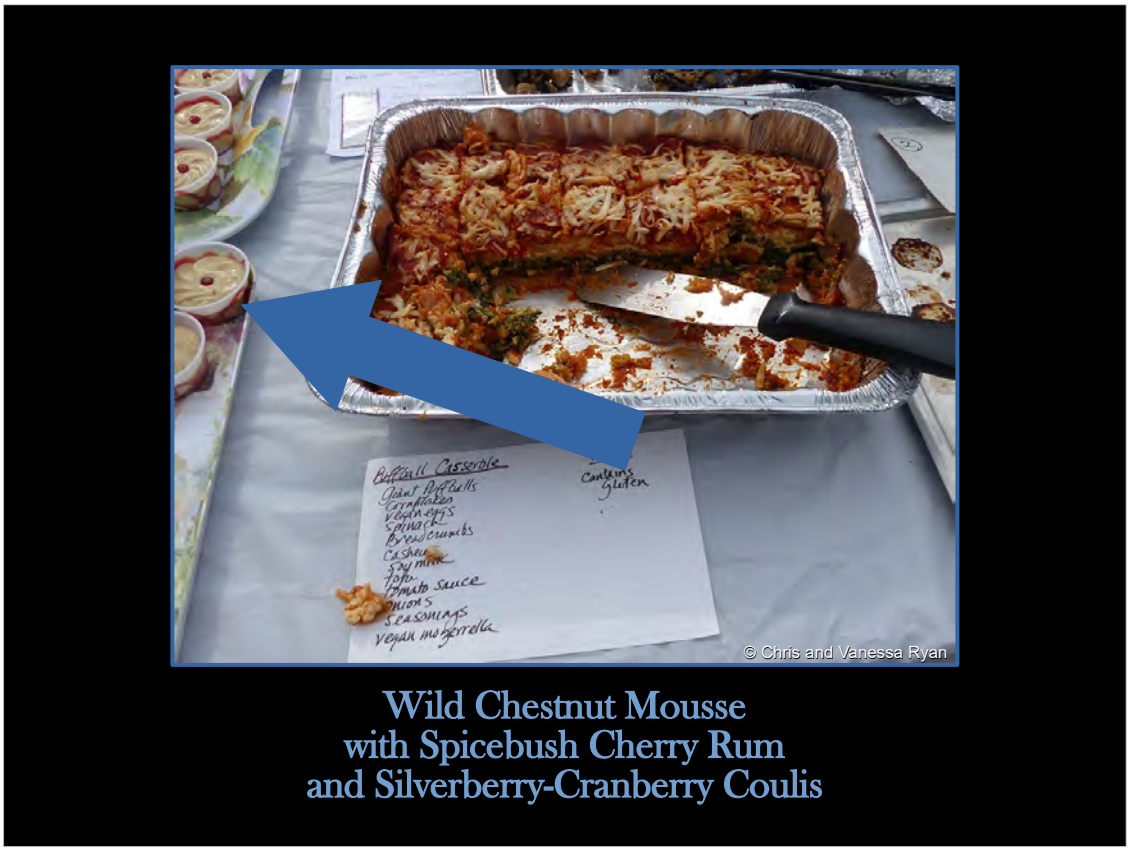
-

Dessert

By the time I got around to taking more photos of the food, the two trays of dessert had been totally emptied.

They didn't have fungi as any ingredients, but they were made from other foraged wild foods.

They were absolutely delicious.



Actually, if we go back to this picture, you can just see them here…

They were made by Karen Raczewski of the 3 Foragers.

Joe Brandt, President of COMA,
and his wife Kathy.

I think I mentioned earlier that Joe Brandt is the president of COMA.

He and his wife Kathy are regular food columnists in the quarterly magazine “Mushroom – the Journal of Wild Mushrooming”.

What they don't know about their local edible mushrooms isn't worth knowing.

Joe and Kathy's Freezer

Chickens = *Laetiporus sulphureus* and *L. cincinnatus*
Hens = *Grifola frondos*

During the Pot Luck, Joe and I got chatting about mycophagy and Joe showed me on his mobile phone some photos of their freezer, packed full of frozen fungal goodies.

The mushrooms will keep for a year or two, depending on what they are.

This photo is from a couple of years ago.

"Today's collection ..."

Since returning home, I've kept in contact with Joe and he sent me this photo back in early November.

Joe and I have worked out a list of species that grow in both Connecticut and Queensland.

He's sent me some of his favourite recipes to share with you. I've passed them on to Dave Holdom, who will be publishing them in the Queensland Mycologist.

Just to tempt you, we have a number of recipes for the following species...

Chicken of the Woods. That's *Laetiporus sulphureus* and *Laetiporus concinnatus*.

Winecaps - *Stropharia rugosoannulata.*

And the giant Puffball, *Calvatia gigantea.*

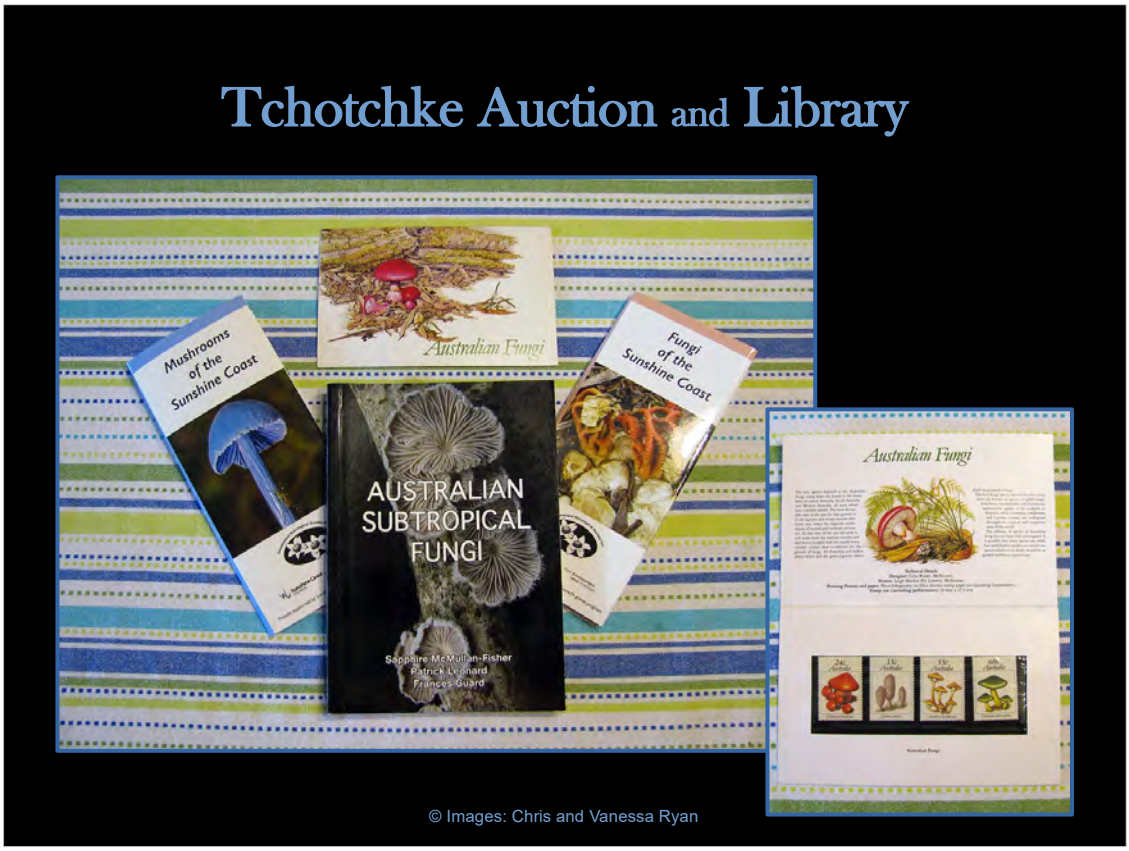
Joe thinks that we could also use these particular recipes for *Calvatia lilacina*.

He and Kathy also have recipes for Oyster mushrooms, Chanterelles, Morels and well, just about every edible mushroon there is.

And, as you can see, Joe also has a “cheeky” sense of humour!

Now, there is one more event at the Clark Rogerson foray that I'd like to talk about. It's the (CHOTCH-ka) tchotchke auction.

The auction is held on Sunday evening and the aim is to raise money for the association. The primary theme of the items for sale is mushroom related, but any outdoor or nature-related items are acceptable.



It's a highlight of the foray and even though I couldn't be there for it, I thought it might be nice if the QMS could contribute something as a gesture of friendship from a fellow mycological organisation.

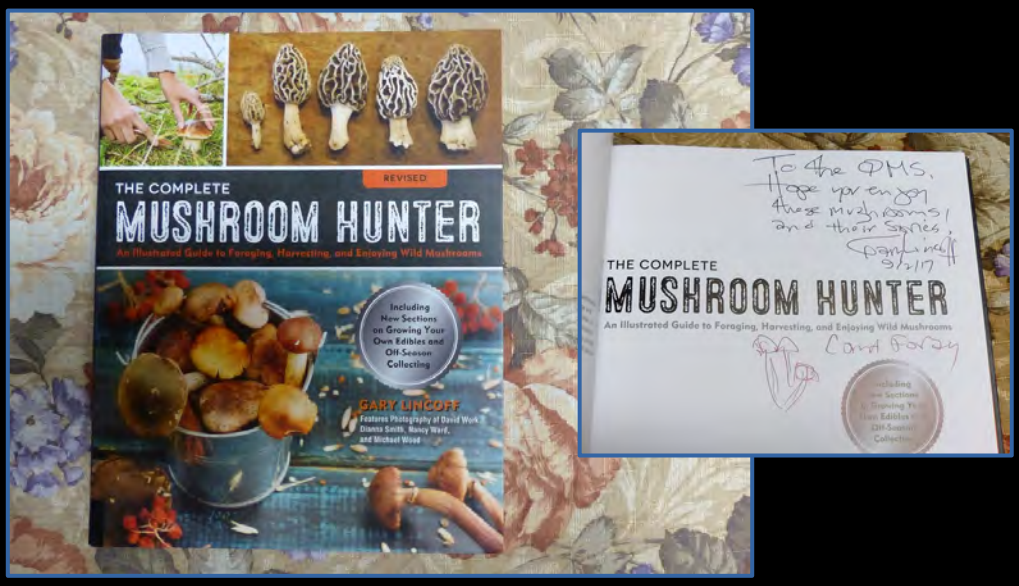
I asked the QMS committee if they could help out and they generously gave me two sets of the Sunshine Coast pocket guides, a copy of Australian Subtropical Fungi and a pack of the 1981 series of stamps on Australian Fungi.

One set of the guides and the stamps were for the auction and the book and other set of guides was a gift to their library.

I presented the gifts to Joe and he said to please say a big “thank you” to the QMS. So “thank you” guys.

I don't know what our items went for at the auction as they didn't keep individual records, but apparently it raised about $400 overall, which is pretty good. It's nice to know that we helped with that.

A Gift in Return



© Images: Chris and Vanessa Ryan

In return, Joe would like me to present to you on behalf of COMA, this book for our library.

The author, Gary Lincoff, was at the foray and he wrote a little message inside it for us.

Well, that's about it.

But there's one last thing.

Joe would also like me to wish the QMS a very Merry Christmas and all the best for the New Year.

So Merry Christmas everyone!