Morel Madness - April 24th at Meramec State Park

Last chance to find morels in the 20th Century! And with the Y2K problem, who knows, they may never reappear. These and other Madness topics will be argued and digested at The 8th Annual Morel Madness, cosponsored by Meramec State Park in Sullivan, MO.

Special Guest Speaker

We are excited to announce that University of Western Illinois Professor Robert V. Gessner will be our guest speaker. His areas of expertise include ecology, physiology and morphology of fungi and fungal-plant interactions. He will present a slide show and talk on morels, which will include the different species of Morchella, so how they differ from false morels, information on their ecology and biology, the festivals he has attended, the morel buying business in southern Wisconsin, the commercial growing of morels (patents and companies) and other personal experiences. Keeping with the Morel Madness tradition, we have enticed his lecture, “Morchella and Y2K: Is this the end of Madness?”

Schedule of Events

Friday, April 23

Campers must arrive before 10:00 p.m. to ”group campground C” or look confused and the park employees will direct you to our group. Pick your campsite and join us around the campfire where we will be huddled together, staying warm and telling lies about past morel finds. This is a non-electrified area, so bring your lanterns, flashlights and candles. If you must have electricity, you will have to camp in a regular campsite and pay for it. Prices remain $12 per electrified site. Pets are allowed on leash.

Saturday, April 24

9:00 A.M. - Meet at Shelter #1 marked with MoMS sign for registration. We will discuss morel hunting, the status of current crop, distribute maps and read the official 1999 Morel Madness Rules.

9:40 A.M. - Morel Madness officially begins. Go find ’em, or beginners can stay around for:

9:40 - 10:00 A.M. - A short talk “How to Find Morels” will be led by Jim Winn and other Morel Madness veterans. This session is designed for beginners, and a question and answer session will follow until everyone feels confident enough to hit the trail.

12:00 A.M. - 1:30 P.M. - Identification of mushroom rooms led by nationally renowned mycologist, Jay Justice, as we will gather for lunch at Shelter #1. Be sure to bring your own picnic lunch, and assuming we find some, you might get to taste morels cooked up by Julie Ridlon, our St. Louis Culinary Society Morel Cuisine Expert.

1:30 - 4:00 P.M. - The Great Morel Hunt continues, on your own or in small groups.

1:30 P.M. and at 4:00 P.M. - A variety of mushroom films will be shown in the theater at the visitor’s center for those who have filled their baskets to the brim.

4:30 P.M. (precisely) - All candidates wishing to enter their finds in the Morel Madness contest must present their entries at Shelter #1 for weigh in. “Most Morels” (by quantity), “Largest Morel” (by height and weight), “Prettiest Morel” (most aesthetically pleasing, not the prettiest morel hunter), and “Smallest Morel” (anybody can find the big ones!) will be determined by a panel of judges and prizes will be awarded. “Largest False Morel” (Gyromitra species) will also be awarded. The ’97 Morel Madness King and Queen will be crowned based upon these results and by applying a complicated, Y2K-impaired computer formula. “Most Ticks” will not be awarded this year due to the fact that certain participants are known to deliberately not wear repellent trying desperately to win this prize. However, the tick that bites the largest person will win the “Tick Biting the Largest Human” prize.

5:30 - 6:45 P.M. - The Madness Dinner at Meramec Park Lodge will be buffet style (approx. $8.00 + beverage) or from the menu. First to arrive will be seated at tables in a somewhat private area. Seating will be your choice by arrival.

7:00 - 9:00 P.M. - We will gather at the amphitheater at Fisher Cave (near the entrance of the campground) for our evening program. In case of foul weather, this will be held at the visitor’s center. Morel Madness King and Queen will be honored by all. At approximately 7:30, Professor Robert V. Gessner will present a slide show and speak on “Morchella and Y2K: Is This the End of Madness?” Dr. Gessner will answer your questions, and we will end the program before 9:00 allowing everyone time to get home or to the camp ground before too late. Warm clothing or a blanket is recommended at the evening program.

Sunday, April 26

9:00 A.M. - Noon - A nature walk will be led by a Meramec Park naturalist, Brian Wilcox. Wild flower spotting and identification, observing wildlife, learning the history of the park, etc. is always fun with Brian. And he also knows where to find the largest morels, but only shares this information with those who attend this walk.

Directions, Madness and Accommodations

Meramec State Park is three miles south of Sullivan, Mo. on Hwy 185, approximately one hour west of St. Louis following I-44. Cabins are available in the park for groups of 2 to 8 people. Early reservations are required by calling (573) 468-6519. Also, Sullivan has several clean, inexpensive motels. The Super 8 motel at 601 N. Service Road, Sullivan is $44.00 if you call (573)468-8076 saying that you are participating in Morel Madness.

For meals other than Saturday night, there is an all-you-can-eat buffet at the Flying J, a truck stop at Hwy 185 south and I-44. Country meals served in the old-style, try a local favorite The Du Kum Inn on the north outer road. For white table cloth dining at reasonable prices, try the White House Grill (573) 468-8565 (a remodeled farm house) one block east of 185 South at Springfield Rd. (near the VFW lodge). Shoney’s on the south outer road, west of Walmart, is famous for its breakfast-buffet. Twenty-five minutes away in Bourbon, MO., you will find an interesting bed and breakfast called Greer Hollow Farm, (573) 732-4979.

Proper Morel Madness attitude should be observed at all times during this weekend (mushroomy apparel and hats, anything weird is appropriate) especially during the buffet dinner on Saturday night.

This weekend is open for everyone, members and nonmembers alike, and is free (no meals are included). We thank Meramec State Park for generously cosponsoring this event and providing the camping area, speaker, prizes, shelter, park services and wildlife expertise. All questions should be directed to Jim Winn (314) 532-8030 or the Mera State Park (573) 468-6072. See you there!
STATE OF ILLINOIS
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

RESIDENT
MUSHROOM
HUNTING LICENSE
NO. 003792134 CM

NAME

ADDRESS

DATE OF BIRTH

HEIGHT

WEIGHT

HAIR

EYES

Issued at:

Month

Day

Year

Issuing Officer

is authorized to hunt, pick, pluck, snatch, grab, shuck, thresh, combine, string, gather, hunt, hoist, harvest, shop, grub, pic, shoot, spear, lance, stab or otherwise latch onto mushroom fungi of any edible species. The use of trolleys, tramnet nets, buillets, chainsaws and dynamite is strictly forbidden. Each mushroom hunter shall be limited to not more than three sacks, bags, pokes, buckets or backpocks in possession at any given time loaded or unloaded. Daily limits shall be not more than 10 pounds in the aggregate of all species except that on the second Tuesday of each week, a daily limit of 100 pounds in the aggregate of all species shall apply.

This license has been prepared as a satire and tribute to one of the few areas of unregulated, non-regulated fun left (at least as of the date this license is compliments of:

The Conservation Police Lodge
P.O. Box 906
Jacksonville, Illinois 62651-0906
e-mail: WARN@RNET.COM

PLACE YELLOW MUSHROOM STAMP HERE

PLACE GREY MUSHROOM STAMP HERE

License Fee $10.00

Issuing Fee $10.00

Total $10.00

CAUTION

Mushrooms taken illegally in any manner not listed on the reverse side of this license are subject to confiscation by the issuing Officer. The holder of this license is required to reveal to the issuing Officer the exact locations of all good, fair and excellent mushroom patches located by the holder.

This license does not authorize trespass for purposes of harvesting mushrooms, and the State of Illinois does not recognize trespass for purposes of tracking wounded mushrooms onto private property without the expressed written permission of the landowner.

Attend this Important Meeting
March 23

There will be an important meeting March 23 at 7:00 at the Headquarters of the St. Louis County Library, 1640 S. Lindbergh, across from Plaza Frontenac. We will take care of club business and plan further for the upcoming NAMA foray.

Firstly, this will be our official annual meeting and election of officers. Three board positions are up for reelection, those of Barb O'Brien and Brad Bomanz and Deb Schroeder.

NAMA is fast approaching. The last couple meetings have been quite productive and enjoyable. Find out what you can do to help.

Dr. Harry Theirs Library?

Dr. Harry Theirs phoned at the end of February to let the club know that he wished to donate about 40-50 mushroom books to be part of the club's library. The society already has several videos, copies of other club newsletters and a large collection of NAMA publications, Melinnea and Mycophile.

These items that comprise our library really need a home and a librarian. Any ideas?

Calhoun County Foray
Sunday, May 8

It should still be morel season and member Robert Beckwith has graciously invited us to his farm in Calhoun County. Bring lunch and drinks. If you plan to attend, please give Robert a call at work, 314-343-6463.

Directions: From Alton, take the Great River Road north to Route 16, left and west to Harden, (right at the end of the bridge and then north) to Kampsville Route 96, (left and west) to Mozier, (right at stop and north) just past Rip-Rap Landing to west Panther Creek Road, (right). It's 9/10 mile to a yellow gate on the right and MoMS markers to follow.

Winter Luncheon Big Success

Over a hundred folks got to sample elk, fresh crappie, smoked wild duck, 15 different kinds of mushrooms, great wines and fabulous desserts.

Don and Maxine Huffman were received warmly by our group. Everyone enjoyed the presentation on mushrooms of China.

Thanks to Linda Dollard and her fine crew for putting on such a class luncheon!
I read in NAMA’s *Mycophile* about some poor soul who went searching around his house in the middle of January for mushrooms and called it a winter foray. He shook jars of pickled hen of the woods, sniffed bags of dried tree ears and even went to his wood pile to hunt out spent carbon balls. He gave his address as Boardman, OH. I guess! Go figure.

I sympathize with his plight. Wouldn’t it be wonderful to find something more than last year’s unharvested mushrooms, unidentifiable on the forest floor. Well, I have an idea to brighten your winter ‘shroom blahs, something to take the affect right out of “seasonal affect disorder.” It’s a smile. It’s not the camera-ready, posed “Say Cheese” kind. It’s the remembering one. It’s the smile that starts inside the purest part of your heart and brings with it the essence of “mushroom and memory.”

Let me help you get started with some of my M&Ms (read: mushroom and memory). The first time I really found morels, I had searched forever, without success. Tired, I sat on a log to discover several beauties at the toe of my boot. Think about the first time you found a morel. See how the ends of your lips begin to curl.

There was a time when I thought I found morels, I struttad, photographed, fired up and fed my family the mysterious and perhaps poisonous *Gyromitra caroliniana*. This memory is accompanied with a smile of embarrassed regret and a promise to identify better.

Ah, that first chicken of the woods. I had to scramble up a river bank hike with one hand, hold on to a rootball with the other. When I got it down, it was too heavy to carry. I think Don (smile here for the kindness of friends) carried it to camp for me. You clapped for us when we came in. I got a pride grin—ear to ear.

Once I was on the hunt for bearded tooth and boy did I find a honey. It was huge! Gloriously white, a perfect specimen. It was also six feet over my head perched safely in the arms of a oak. A smile for Mother Nature and survival of the species.

Remember the year the meadow mushrooms erupted like violets in a Webster Groves front yard? Remember how you thought you processed all of them. Remember when you found you didn’t. Remember the puddles of aromatic black goo it took way too long to clean out of the back of the ‘fridge. This smile comes with a head shake and mild profanity.

Then, there was the time when I swore the people I was foraging with hadn’t bathed or at least were having a mean bout with flatulence. I kept sliding further away from them and into a pile of stinkhorns. This smile still has me wrinkling my nose.

So, by now you have the idea for your own M&M winter foray. You’ve probably started dreaming about your own personal mushroom history. I hope you find a basketful of smiles. Me? I think I’ll send a copy of this article to the guy in Boardman, OH, with a list of the fungus I’ve noticed on my wood pile.

With all the winter rain, I can’t help but think the spring season will be popping with the elusive morel. This creation comes from Patrick Hamilton’s fertile culinary imagination. Unfortunately, I haven’t tried this recipe as I can never find enough morels to do more than saute them.

---

**A Mushroom Poem**

Holly Bertold sent this and says it’s fun to read aloud.

The Mushroom is the Elf of Plants—
At Evening, it is not—
At Morning, in a Truffled Hut
It stops upon a Spot
As if it tarried always
And yet its whole Career
Is shorter than a Snake’s Delay
And fleeting than a Tare—
’Tis Vegetation’s Juggler—
The Germ of Alibi—
Doth like a Bubble antedate
And like a Bubble, hei—
I feel as if the Grass was pleased
To have it intermit—
This surreptitious scion
Of Summer’s circumspect.
Had Nature any supple Face
Or could she one content—
Had Nature an Apostate—
That Mushroom—it is Him!

—Emily Dickinson

**Morel Salsa for 6 -8**
1/3 cup sun-dried tomatoes, not packed in oil
8 ounces morels
olive oil for saute
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
3 Tablespoons olive oil
4 shallots, chopped fine
2 Tablespoons balsamic vinegar
1/4 teaspoon brown sugar
2 Tablespoons fresh basil, minced
3 Tablespoons pine nuts, toasted and coarse chopped


Serving suggestions include grilled fish and chicken, chips or with goat cheese and crackers. Enjoy!

**Morel Pasta for 4**
6 strips bacon, cooked crisp, chopped coarse
1 Tablespoon butter
1 teaspoon bacon grease (saved from crisp-ing)
2 medium shallots
1 Tablespoon dry white wine
12 medium morels, halved
3 ounces heavy cream
1 pound linguini
1/3 cup grated Swiss cheese

Sauté shallots until soft. Add crisped bacon, wine and morels. Cook until morels are done. Add cream and thicken slightly. Cook pasta al dente. Mix with sauce and Swiss cheese. Enjoy!
Southernmost Illinois is ripe for spring mushroom hunting

Just like all fishermen enjoy spinning slightly exaggerated fish stories about their latest “catch,” mushroom hunters have their own tales to tell. Perhaps the best goes something like this: “The biggest mushroom that I ever found had a shadow that weighed three pounds.”

This spring, you can search for such weighty mushrooms—equally sensational stories—during the Morel Heaven Weekends at the Trail of Tears Lodge and Sports Resort in Jonesboro, Ill. Larry “Tree” Lonik, who is considered North America’s No. 1 morel expert, will guide participants through the woods to find the elusive sponge-like mushrooms.

Mushroom hunting has been growing in popularity for several years. Most enthusiasts scour the countrysides and forests for the wild morels, which are the most easily recognized and perhaps the most desirable in flavor and texture of all mushrooms.

Mushroom seekers do not need any prior experience to participate in the weekend events. In addition to the guided hunt, the package includes a seminar, during which Lonik will explain how to find the mushrooms and safety tips.

Guests also will be treated to a cooking demonstration and Mushroom Feast. Lonik will share gourmet morel recipes.

The package, which is $149 per person, includes a Friday night welcoming party, Friday and Saturday lodging, all meals through Sunday breakfast, plus a copy of Lonik’s book, “The Curious Morel.”

The events will be held April 2-4, 9-11, 16-18 and 23-25. During the weekend of April 16-18, the lodge also will host the Mid-America Morel Mushroom Festival, with hunting, crafts, lectures and more.

For details, visit the website www.morelheaven.com. Or call the lodge at (618) 833-8697.

–Mary Brent spotted this in the Midwest Traveler, AAA’s monthly publication.

Virginia Forest Near Cape Girardeau

–by Richard Ziock, reprinted from The Kansas Mycolog, newsletter of The Kaw Valley Mycological Society, February-March 1999. Though it’s not true that Big Oak Tree is the only virgin forest in Missouri, we appreciate the plug for the foray and the sentiments behind the nature of virgin forests and their fungal relationships.

If you love mushrooms, you must at least like trees. For if there weren’t any trees there wouldn’t be very many mushrooms. For that reason we should know a little about trees too.

Although many of the forests we hunt mushrooms in have some big trees, almost none are virgin, i.e. existed when the first white men stepped onto the continent. In fact, there are only 80 acres of virgin hardwood timber in the whole State of Missouri and not far from Cape Girardeau where the 1999 national NAMA meeting will be held August 12-15. The other Midwestern states are similar in their lack of old growth trees.

The 80 acres of virgin timber are in the Big Oak Tree State Park about 60 miles south of Cape Girardeau. It is a swamp forest in the Mississippi river flood plain. It is usually flooded only in the spring. An elevated boardwalk allows you to walk through about a mile of it. The trees are huge, but oaks of 6’ or more in diameter and 350 years old. There are also some huge barked cypress trees with knees and wide buttresses to support them in the wet swamp. There are 12 trees that qualify as state champion trees including: a pumpkin ash of 57” diameter, which is also a national champion, a swamp chestnut oak of 82” diameter, and a persimmon of 28” diameter, also a national champion. There are plenty of mushrooms at the wet times of the year. I saw a nice Laetiporus sulphureus there once. I wonder if there are mushroom species there that can’t be found elsewhere, or if the prevalence is greater because it’s never had any trees cut. According to the park ranger, picking of mushrooms is permitted.

On this question of the bearing of virginity on the prevalence of mushrooms this paragraph from A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold seems relevant.

In Germany there is a mountain called the Spessart. Its south slope bears the most magnificent oaks in the world. American cabinetmakers, when they want the last word in quality, use Spessart oak. The north slope, which should be the better, bears an indifferent stand of Scotch pine. Why? Both slopes are part of the same state forest; both have been managed with equally scrupulous care for two centuries. Why the difference?

Kick up the litter under the oak and you will see that the leaves rot almost as fast as they fall. Under the pines, though, the needles pile up as a thick duff; decay is much slower. Why? Because in the Middle Ages the south slope was preserved as a deer forest by a hunting bishop; the north slope was pastured, plowed, and cut by settlers, just as we do with our woodlots in Wisconsin and Iowa today. Only after this period of abuse was the north slope replanted to pines. During this period of abuse something happened to the microscopic flora and fauna of the soil. The number of species was greatly reduced, i.e., the digestive apparatus of the soil lost some of its parts. Two centuries of conservation have not sufficed to restore these losses. It required the modern microscope and a century of research in soil science, to discover the existence of these “small cogs and wheels” which determine harmony or disharmony between men and land in the Spessart.

I think that Aldo Leopold would predict more mushrooms in the virgin forest. Also Big Oak has a reputation among bird watchers. It has at least 146 species, several of which are considered to be extremely rare in the state.

It is interesting to see these big trees and to try to imagine what this country must have looked like to the original settlers. For one, you realize what a job it must have been to clear the trees to make farmland. For another you realize how a valuable resource was mined almost to extinction. (I estimate that the lumber value of the 80 acres today is more than $10,000,000.) I’m not making a value judgment here, I know the settlers were not rich people and had to make a go of it. But, our efforts to save the South American rainforest seem a little two-faced.

To get there take Interstate 55 south to Hwy 80, go east to East Prairie, then south 14 miles on Hwy 102 to the park in Mississippi County.
1999 Event and Foray Schedule—So Far!

Forays meet at visitor centers unless otherwise noted. Bring a basket, long pants, wax paper, bug repellent. Foray coordinator: Don Dill

Tuesday, March 23, 7:00 p.m.- Planning meeting for Board elections and planning MONAMA'99, etc. at St. Louis County Library Headquarters. See article this issue.

Sunday, March 28, 10:00 A.M. - Foray at Rockwoods Reservation. Leader: Don Dill.

Saturday, April 24 - 9:00 a.m. - Morel Madness officially starts at Meramec State Park. Coordinator Jim Winn. See article this issue.

Saturday, May 1, 10:00 a.m. - Foray at Pere Marquette. Leader: Leland Von Behren.

Sunday, May 8, 10:00 A.M. - Foray at Robert Beckwith's farm in Calhoun County. See article this issue.

Saturday, Oct. 2 - 10:00 A.M. - 3:00 P.M. - Foray at Hazlet State Park. Bring sack lunch. Leader: Leland Von Behren

The Incurable Epicureans

On January 23, 1999 the Incurable Epicureans met at the home of Barbara and Gary Steps. The theme for this dinner was "A Mouth Watering Vegan Dinner". Vegan means no animal products of any kind. No butter, no honey, no eggs, no cheese. The dinner was pot luck—a style rarely done by the Incurable Epicureans. It was excellent. Everything from soup and salads, to tempeh, tofu and legumes of many kinds, and a couple wonderful desserts.

The next dinner is on March 27, 1999. It will be held at the newly remodeled Freund Center on the grounds of the Arboretum. This is a magical place. Beautiful views can be seen from the terrace. A fine, rustic building inside. Our theme for this dinner is "Splendid Emilia-Romagna". The Emilia-Romagna region of northern Italy sits between Venice and Florence, to the south of Milan. It produces balsamic vinegar, tortellini and Parmigiano-Reggiano among other gastronomic delights. Most of the recipes for this eight course dinner are coming from the single cookbook The Splendid Table by Lynne Rossetto Kasper.

Members of the Incurable Epicureans should look for a mailing soon with more specific information on "Splendid Emilia-Romagna".

World Class Mushroom Hunting

Picked - Plucked - Poached - Pruned - Stalked - Snagged
Sacked - Trimmed - Tromped - Begged - Grabbed - Chased
Hacked - Wacked - Walked - Watched

Robert Beckwith

Have Sack, Will Travel

-More humor from our champion picker/plucker