

# LOST HORIZON IN TELLURIDE

By Mark Carnessale

This August marks the 32nd anniversary of one of the oldest mushroom festivals in North America, the Telluride Mushroom Festival.

Most of us fungophiles know that summers in L.A. can get pretty lonely with nary a mushroom in sight. So last year, for the second year in a row, several of our Los Angeles mushroom club (LAMS) members packed up our cars and headed east through the Four Corners to the majestic Rocky Mountains, arriving in Telluride early the day before the festival opened. Although there are many warm and cozy options for accommodations, we always choose the campground on the edge of town, just a short walk to all the events. The campsite is fun and convenient, not just for meeting other mushroom hunters, but for cooking all our finds from that day's hunt.

The first year was spectacular: white and brown boletes, yellow and blue chanterelles, shingled hawkwings, hedgehogs, and scaly yellow *Armillaria*, now identified as *Floccularia straminea*, just to name a few. It was apparently one of the most prolific years for mushrooms since the event began. This last year, although the mushrooms were out, there were fewer, and you really had to look for them. I suppose that's why they call it "hunting." Funny thing is, even with fewer mushrooms, I ended up having a much better time. I was able to just relax, enjoy the festival's program, and learn something instead of constantly obsessing about filling my basket.

The team that puts this festival together is headed by Telluride's local poet laureate, named- I kid you not- Art Goodtimes. But once you meet



this gentle, funny, bearded sage of a man, you instantly realize he fully lives up to his name. Each day's events are varied and numerous, leaving options open to suit one's desires. The mornings and afternoons offer forays of different lengths and difficulty levels. All of these take place in the breathtaking mountain meadows surrounding Telluride. The afternoon and evenings hold a variety of featured workshops, panels, lectures, slide shows, movies and cooking demonstrations. In the center of town there's a large white tent with free mushroom identification and cook-your-own tables to sample your bounty. There's even a mushroom parade down Main Street where everybody dresses like their favorite mushroom.

Although the festival bills itself as "celebrating everything fungal and entheogenic" (aka magic mushrooms), I even found this portion of the event fascinating with lectures from physicians and psychologists, extolling the spiritual and medicinal benefits of these shamanic mushrooms used in controlled and supportive settings on ailments such as anxiety and depression due to terminal cancer, post traumatic stress and obsessive-compulsive disorders, as well as drug and alcohol disease. And, in

case you don't think this is serious stuff, the research was funded in part by the National Institute on Drug Abuse.

Special guest speakers are featured each evening, most of whom will be back this year, including famed authors and mycologists such as Gary Lincoff, who teaches at the New York Botanical Gardens and has written a number of field guides including, *The Audubon Society*

*Field Guide to Mushrooms*. Michael Beug, renowned mycologist and retired professor at Evergreen State College, and Britt Bunyard, Editor in Chief of FUNGI Magazine, to name a few.

If you think there's something spectacular about seeing Telluride for the first time, it's even better returning, like the character in the James Hilton novel who searches the Himalayas to find the portal that delivers him back to his utopian Shangri La. But, if you don't visit Telluride for one of its famed festivals, I would still highly recommend seeing it and the surrounding countryside. Even though it bills itself as a hip ski town, it's a place that hasn't lost its bohemian charm from the gold rush days.

So if you're like me and suffer mushroom deprivation in the summer and are considering a trip to hunt mushrooms in Telluride, be sure to stop by and see me. I'll be at the campground on the edge of town, where there's always room at my picnic table for a nice plate of mushrooms! For more information visit: [www.shroomfest.com](http://www.shroomfest.com) or the Shroomfest Facebook page.

Photo is of Michael Beug and Larry Evans at the 2011 Telluride Mushroom Festival. ♡