



Whither mushroom club fieldtrips?

Denis R. Benjamin

The year is 2035. On the nightly news we hear, for the 65th time this year, that an attempt was made to harvest the last known naturally growing patch of chanterelles in Washington. Fortunately the force field worked splendidly and the thieves were once again thwarted in their attempt.

Apocalyptic? Perhaps. But recent reports have begun to highlight the consequences of the mainstream urban foraging craze (<http://thebeast/1iS4292>, <http://wnpr.org/post/mushroom-foraging-when-fungi-hunt-gets-out-hand>). When I wrote about this a year ago I was pilloried by some, suggesting that it was emblematic of Benjamin histrionics. But I also received considerable support, especially from experienced (aka, older and wiser) mushroom hunters who shared similar sentiments. There are many reasons to be concerned. For those who doubt, I recommend a careful reading of the “Tragedy of the Commons,” the foundational paper used by many in the natural resource community to evaluate and control the use of any natural resource (Hardin, 1968). This important paper dissects the problems that occur when any resource is held in common.

Two arguments are raised by those who believe there is no issue;

1. Wild mushrooms are different from all other natural products.
2. Teaching foraging will make people stewards of the land.

The second argument can be dismissed out of hand. There is not a shred of documented evidence that today’s urban foragers care more about the forests than others. This notion hinges on “romantic primitivism,” and is more hope than reality. In fact the opposite is fact. As

Langdon Cook so clearly documented in the *Mushroom Hunters*, commercial foragers leave behind a nasty scene. Over the years I have never heard a single discussion at any mushroom conference about the ethics of foraging, conservation or sustainability. Merely raising the concern precipitates invective and rhetoric as people protect their desire to continue foraging, based on opinion and personal experience, with little scientific underpinning. I am unaware of any mushroom club, that has established programs that successfully influence policies on forest or resource management (*vide infra*).

In most foraging cultures, the small populations are migratory or actively manage their resources, allowing the land to recover before the next harvest, a far cry from today’s urban centers that repeatedly spill many hundreds back into the identical habitat each season. Such weekend “warriors” have never displayed any concern about the resource. This is compounded by the vast underground of commercial foragers who earn a living by providing a product for the well-heeled gentry. Foraging has become a chic conceit, not a necessity.

The first argument, that wild mushrooms are different from the rest of the natural world is intuitively attractive. It posits the “apple-on-the-tree” hypothesis, i.e. all we are doing is picking the fruit, not harming the tree. Unfortunately there are precious few scientific studies on the effects of harvesting. Oft quoted to support the idea is the Oregon chanterelle study, a relatively short term and limited study on a single species in one habitat (Norvell, 1995). This can be readily countered by the studies from Switzerland showing that trampling of the forests significantly influenced subsequent fruiting (Egli and Ayer, 1997; Egli et al., 2005). It is frankly impossible to base any long term policy

decisions on such limited data. Well-documented is the fact that the harvest of certain highly desirable species such as *Ophiocordyceps sinensis*, matsutake, and certain truffles are in decline. We need dozens of well-designed, long-term studies to address the reasons for these declines. While changing weather patterns are clearly important, they may well not be the sole culprit.

Since we don’t have the science we can resort to first principles. Edible mycorrhizal mushrooms are patchy in distribution, dependent on very complex habitat conditions and host plant arrangements. Each of these is in constant flux and under certain conditions, of which we understand little, the fungi fruit and sporulate to mate and establish new colonies. Removing the fruiting bodies prior to sporulation, as occurs when matsutake shiros are raked to uncover the “Number 1” buttons, or truffle raking, significantly reduces the likelihood of new colonies. Seriously damaging the forest duff and removing most fruiting bodies, will over time also reduce the fecundity of the fungus (Leonard, 1997). It is also true that destruction of habitat, pollution, climate change and other factors play a large role in reducing harvest size, but none of these are mutually exclusive. Indeed they are additive. Simple arithmetic suggests that with more people chasing a diminishing resource, a negative outcome is inevitable. All it requires is time.

The economic theory of the “tragedy of the commons” is simple enough. This exploitation of a presumably shared public resource has been repeatedly played out in our sad history—the Monterey sardines, the passenger pigeon, the cod fish, the salmon, buffalo, tuna, mahogany and ebony trees, American ginseng, etc. Some have incited fatal confrontations.

Not all professional mycologists share

this concern, but some like Nicholas Money (Money, 2011; Money, 2005) have similar viewpoints and raise troubling questions about our behavior.

As urban foragers we are purely takers. We play no active role in the production or the protection of the product. We receive, but do not give. This is not just a moral and ethical issue, but it is contrary to the behavior of traditional foraging societies. As we are not dependent on the resource for our long term survival, as ancient foraging cultures were for millennia, we care naught about next year. Foraging works when a clan is small and migratory and/or when it actively manages resources as many do. It has been pointed out that there is broad overlap between some agriculture and foraging in many cultures. Not all are migratory, but most manage their resources very carefully (Bharucha et al., 2010). This allows the resource to recuperate or even thrive. It is based on thousands of years of careful empirical observation as conditions change, with oral traditions being passed from one generation to the next and the institution of acceptable cultural norms. But once we settle down and no longer have the intimate ecological knowledge and connection to the land, the only sane alternative is farming and/or reducing the size of the population. It is not in our capitalist ethic to create sustainable foraging systems. We pretend that Mother Nature will do it for us, a myth if ever there was one.

Some mushroom clubs are approaching a crossroads. The larger ones have grown substantially in recent years. New members join and about 90% drop out in a year. And they don't really drop out. They "used" the society to find where to hunt mushrooms. Each spring and fall some clubs host up to a dozen field trips within two hours of an urban center. The new members swarm into the woods, and with nary a polite "thank-you-very-much," proceed to pillage—the appropriate definition of a foray. Not all of course, but many do. They expect a bountiful harvest and are unabashed to express their disappointment if a fieldtrip fails to deliver. Over the past decade such clubs have "trained" many hundreds of new foragers. If each drags a couple of friends along, this becomes a sizable number. With the new forms of communicating the location of the latest

fruiting, the outcome is predictable. Local newspapers even sport foraging blogs. At the same time the habitat is shrinking: development, spreading ex-urbia, the sale of forest lands to private interests resulting in gates, fences and more NO TRESPASSING signs. Wild mushrooms are following a simple supply and demand model. More people chasing a diminishing resource. The demand is high and rising, but the supply is valuable, limited and decreasing, much due to the loss of habitat.

I recently read a diatribe penned by a commercial truffle hunter in Oregon, outraged that he now has to abide by the new Oregon harvesting law, requiring him to get signed permission to hunt truffles on private property. Imagine that. He somehow believed that he had natural right to go where he pleased and to take what he wanted.

The majority of people who join mushroom societies are pot-hunters. They do so to learn how and where to forage. They have not become stewards of the land. The past generosity of leading them by the hand to prime habitat is counterproductive. Field trips should be abolished. Teach basic classes, have identification sessions, go on local urban walks, stress ecology and conservation, highlight taxonomy and evolution. The annual influx of new members has not produced the requisite number of new taxonomists, conservationists, toxicology experts, or volunteers for the annual show.

The dilemma is that we wish to share our passion with the next generation; make them value mushrooms as much as we do and protect the habitat. We don't want the resource to be destroyed. It is the same dilemma faced by the tourism industry: we love places to death. Everyone loses but the travel agent. With field trips the only winner is the mushroom club, attracting new members for a small annual contribution for a season or two.

Some societies have addressed the

growing problem by not publishing the location of the fieldtrip until the final moment. This avoids the inevitable pre-picking by the few that sneak off mid-week to lay waste to the countryside. There are ways out of this conundrum of sharing and selfishness. Eliminate day fieldtrips within a six hour drive, or whatever distance seems appropriate to discourage easy access. Replace these with one or two annual forays in remote locations, even a neighboring state. Some clubs have adopted this approach and it works. It takes members to new habitats; it meets the goals of education, camaraderie and fellowship. It focuses the mind and it is more fun. Let those who wish to freelance find their own places in the same way we all did in the past: hours of driving, hiking, climbing, searching and hunting. Or as the ad used to claim, "We do it the old fashioned way. We earn it." At least this way one gains some ecological appreciation.

Managing field trips is only one of many other possibilities that might address this issue and permit us to have many more years to enjoy the forests, fields and mushrooms. Clubs might consider requiring payment for the harvest of edible mushrooms, with the funds supporting conservation efforts. Perhaps it is time to license mushroom guides and have them charge for edible foraging outings, similar to the professionalism of good fishing and hunting guides. A few entrepreneurial souls have already embarked on this enterprise and I applaud them. Part of the preparatory ritual for the hunt must be the removal of all cameras, phones or other GPS-enabled technology.

Clubs should teach and model ethical harvesting and all should establish conservation groups to create more awareness of the issue. They should partner with state and national agencies like the DNR, BLM, and Forest Service etc. and with the help of professional mycologists craft reasonable harvest limits and regulations. Success and failures should be shared across regions so that best practices can be developed over time. Every region faces different pressures and there will never be a single solution. Enforcement of the regulations remains a major issue, but adequate fines might discourage the majority of transgressors. Losing

one's vehicle and weapon for a hunting violation or a federal indictment is often incentive enough. Such events should be widely publicized and celebrated by amateur societies. Any member who posts photographs of obscene mountains of harvested wild mushrooms (as I once did) should be shunned and lose their club privileges. Today most are celebrated as stellar foragers. Consider having a club adopt a forest and get involved in its management, similar to dirt bike users. This would create a vested interest in the resource and members might learn some ecology and principles of conservation.

At some point the volatile issue of commercial harvesting will have to be addressed. The simplest and most logical solution is to ban it entirely. This would impact a number of people who rely it for a livelihood, but this is no different from that which occurred in the timber and fishing industries. I am not insensitive to the needs of the frontline foragers who work extremely hard for a pittance and even today barely eke out a living. It is a hardscrabble lifestyle and the people

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who profit are the middlemen/buyers and a few restaurants.

I have had a complete change of heart, not in the literal sense like one expert mycologist, but metaphorically. I believe that mushrooms are a threatened resource. They face the same odds as other “wild” products, which were almost eliminated by uncontrolled market hunting. Our record is abysmal and there is no reason to think that mushrooms are somehow immune from our predation

and greed. I know this personally. I have done it and I feel ashamed; not for being human, but because I, too, plundered. True there were fewer of us then, but I should have known better. Hindsight is a sober teacher.

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What do YOU think? Are we loving our wild areas—and in particular wild mushrooms—to death? Notable members of the mycological community (an academic mycologist, a naturalist, and a commercial forager/guide) were invited to comment on “Whither mushroom club fieldtrips?”



Benjamin has a point.

I read the Curmudgeon’s rant quickly, but enough to form an opinion.

I pretty much agree with his general position. Given enough people and enough time, fungus populations will be impacted by collecting (though probably not in a uniform way), no question about it. The existence of supposed evidence to the contrary (the chanterelle study and some work in Switzerland) is way overstated by the freedom-to-pick lobby.

I think he overstates the rape and

pillage aspect of most collecting and his view of mushroom clubs is probably influenced heavily by the fact that PSMS [Puget Sound Mycological Society—this year’s host of the annual NAMA foray] is the club he is most familiar with. I would tone it down a bit if I were writing it, but then perhaps you lose a lot of the “promote debate” factor.

What I would like to see in a piece like this is a critical evaluation of the studies that folks use as evidence for “it’s OK to pick without limitation.” And a discussion of just how hard it is to provide “proof” one way or the other—field ecological experiments with organisms that mostly live beyond your reach is damned tough to do.

—Steve Trudell (author of *Mushrooms of the Pacific Northwest* and *Tricholomas of North America*)



Mushroom foragers do need to be reined in, but...

I’ll say this now, for the moment: I generally agree with many of Denis’s main points, in spirit, particularly his call for a responsible stewardship of our shared natural resources. Yes, we’ve all heard similar conservation messages before. Each generation requires that Aldo Leopold sermon to warn against our sinful potential for self-destruction. So I’m glad to see Denis carrying on that helpful tradition of environmental conscience. His is a virtue I respect.

Yet here’s where I slip away from the sermon: I am absolutely terrified of any proposal by anyone to exclude anyone else from participating in nature. Cracking down on everyone in America to snare and prohibit those rapacious knuckleheads who are picking MY mushrooms on MY public lands is, well, the same mistake that dumps babies in backyards with the bath water.

I see a deeper problem Denis really didn’t target. Far too many people today simply have no idea why conservation of

our natural resources matters.

It’s a modern environmental crisis of common ignorance. And while strangers invading MY morel patch is a terrible, terrible crisis in its own right, I am even more troubled by the general lack of environmental understanding today.

Too many of us simply don’t know anything about nature anymore. We don’t understand the essential roles of life outdoors, the interdependence of complex systems and, worse still, we don’t know why it matters. We can Google instant facts of nature trivia. But we don’t actually pay attention to the natural world in any significant way because, honestly, we have no immediate need to do so. Beyond today’s weather forecast, we have no obligation to understand what to expect from nature. Our food supply which originates in nature is a homogenous constant. We buy fresh grapes in January or perfect watermelons at Christmas, which, until recent decades, was something that had never been possible throughout our long human history. We’ve grown accustomed to year-round availability of what were once seasonal harvests, and, to get to my point, this is where the pursuit of wild mushrooms can give us hope.

Without participation in nature, we have no incentive whatsoever to be responsible toward that resource. And while a lot of us today aren’t doing a great job of protecting specific resources, we are actually doing a pretty decent job on other fronts because people got involved. We now manage our wildlife populations rather well, despite massive habitat losses since America’s pioneer days. I am a hunter and a fisherman, and I do not want for either. We protect our endangered species and now wage aggressive war against the onslaught of invasive plants and animals because we got involved. There is hope, thanks to a strong public-private lobby of conservation interests including millions of people worldwide who actually do something to save the world.

The thing is, we are not the first people to lament the passing of the way things used to be. When I read Denis’s whimsical, futuristic prediction of the last wild chanterelle being protected by a force shield, I was reminded of another tongue-in-cheek scenario offered by local mushroom hunters. In the morel-obsessed Midwest where I live, fanatical

morel hunters have jokingly suggested they might resort to hunting morels with flashlights at night to get advantage over the increasingly intense competition. And while they joke about such openly ridiculous strategy, nobody would really hunt for mushrooms in the dark.

Or so I thought. It turns out, there's actually a precedent of truth in the seemingly absurd scenario of hunting mushrooms at night. In New York, there's been a reported increase in mushroom-harvesting competition among commercial urban foragers. And it's led to that once-unimaginable reality where mushroom hunters browse the city's dimly lit parks in the middle of the night just to beat the commercial competition.

Yes, it has actually come to this. I'm not making this up. Illicit mushroom hunters in New York have actually switched to foraging at night. So it would appear Denis and my morel-hunter buddies are right. It has, in fact, come to this. And, echoing Denis's call to arms, New York park authorities have vowed to arrest the nocturnal fungus poachers—if they can be caught—citing, among other things, the renegade foragers' sloppy disregard for park rules while trampling

vegetation off designated pathways.

One example: Near Madison Square Garden in Central Park, a night patrolman interviewed by the *New York Sun* reported spotting mushroom hunters on almost any given night during the summer mushroom season, the foragers crouched in near-darkness, picking every single mushroom, leaving nothing for daylight, thoroughly ransacking the resource.

Law enforcement acknowledged they originally dismissed the park foragers as minor, isolated violators. But as nightly poaching increased, the once-overlooked offenders provoked open hostility amid an increasingly vitriolic foraging war. Rivaling the angry discourse surrounding commercial foraging battles of the West, the commercial mushroom-pickers of Central Park have been compared to nothing less than corpse robbers. As the *Sun* described their shadowy nocturnal forays, the pickers were like "those despoilers of the dead who are said to haunt battlefields when the day's victims are lying there."

So much for social harmony. And so much for the absurdist joke about hunting morels at night.

It really has come to this. But there is actually more to this story. The mushroom poachers described in the *Sun* article are all long-dead. In fact, everybody involved is dead. That's because the "despoilers of the dead" were first described in a news article that appeared in the *New York Sun* on August 15, 1880.

That's right. Roughly 134 years ago, commercial mushroom pickers supplying New York's city markets went nocturnal and resorted to harvesting mushrooms at night in city parks.

Decades and generations have since passed. The *New York Sun* no longer exists. The pilloined mushrooms described in the article are now digested history. But the same battle for possession of our wild natural resources continues. Has anything really changed? Again, I totally respect Denis Benjamin for voicing his concerns about modern foraging and he is truly correct to argue, essentially, that strangers have absolutely no right to pick MY mushrooms on MY public land because they are, and for the last time, MY mushrooms, not anyone else's mushrooms. They're all mine. Mine. And I hope we are now absolutely



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clear on that point.

Now here's something else. History is constantly reworking the same issues and the same, basic struggles. If we consider our place in history today and find what we really need to understand about the conservation of the natural world and those mushroomy, wild places outdoors we all share, we might come to realize that discovering a stranger's evil footprints in our personal morel patch isn't so bad after all, as long as we are able to participate. There are many people who would gladly collect no mushrooms at all if only they were able to go for a walk in the woods.

—Joseph McFarland (author of *Edible Wild Mushrooms of Illinois and Surrounding States*)



Benjamin bemoans growing pains in the Mushroom World.

Stealing from nature seems a contradiction in terms. I am part of nature, a mushroom purist willing to do whatever it takes to be with my beloved fungi; I've been in the game 45 years or so now. I certainly feel more blessing than guilt in the matter. I consider mushroom foraging a birthright rather than a luxury. I am a citizen of this vast and beautiful American landscape, so much of it publicly owned—meaning it is mine—there to use and enjoy within the confines of reasonable civil code. I do not believe in nature as diorama. The “look but don't touch” policy completely fails to satisfy my need to engage in the natural world.

I was fortunate to get involved with mushrooms in San Francisco in the late 1960s, a time of relative fungal virginity in American culture. The rich forests,

more than any other resource, are where I earned my degree in mycology. The pristine fungal resource I enjoyed during those decades is largely unique to the USA. Most cultures of the world are mycophilic; they love wild mushrooms and have collected them since forever. But our culture inherited British fear of mushrooms and for centuries America has been a mycophobic country. But now that we are finally emerging from our London fog, are we to declare frolicking with mushrooms in the wild too much fun, take the Brave New World approach and just say no to the joy? Do we really wish to make vapid deals with soulless bureaucrats and encourage draconian laws of denial?

Two authors of recent articles in which I was quoted (Benjamin mentions one of them, the other is <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/01/31/the-foraging-wars-extreme-eating-hits-california.html>) blithely misconstrued my comments to support their preconceived topic idea that increased mushroom collecting activity has gone too far and is threatening survival of the resource. I don't believe that. If mushrooms relied on humans for their survival, they would have perished long ago. That mushrooms rely on viable habitat is the real fact, leading to the obvious conclusion that it is *habitat* that needs protection, and I do not mean protection from people or other animals walking around, in, or on it.

The act of mushroom collecting is not inherently causative of habitat destruction and degeneration, certainly not as my cohorts and I practice, nor those we tutor. We take care of our precious gardens. Sure, individual humans may at times behave like rapacious pigs, driven by the gold-rush fever a hot flush of morels, matsutake, or king boletes may incite. But mushrooms are markedly resilient. As I understand it, any given sporocarp is capable of repopulating the entire planet. And proper ecological etiquette can be taught and learned even if it takes a while. I feel no onus to prove the ancient practice of mushroom collecting to be harmless. Rather, any such onus rests squarely on those who want to prove it harmful. Their efforts to date have generally failed.

Mushrooms *are* very different from the other threatened life forms

Benjamin mentions as evidence for why we need to leave them alone. Mushroom collecting does not compare to “kill hunting.” Mushroom hunters collect the fruit body of the fungal organism, leaving the parent organism essentially unharmed; a critical distinction compared to actually killing and taking an organism. The taking of a bird, fish, mammal, or tree results in the immediate and absolute death of the organism. “Taking a mushroom is just like cutting down a tree,” rangers warn, oblivious to the conspicuous difference between picking a pear from a pear tree, and chopping the pear tree down. Yet such twisted and unfounded logic is at the root of many land manager decisions controlling or denying our access to mushroom habitats.

Of late, we've suffered a fresh wave of ill-conceived, restrictive land manager policies (burn zone closures are becoming increasingly commonplace in California national forest jurisdictions, for instance), often formulated from a position of supreme hubris and profound mycological ignorance. At the same time, vast clear-cut operations are commonplace, acid rain is a given, climate change vexes us all, and construction projects, farms, and roads are deemed good for the economy. These are the conspicuous enemies of habitat for mushrooms, not the people showing their love and desire for them by picking.

Wild mushrooms are highly esteemed in most cultures, where they have been collected for eons with considerable vigor. Northern Italy is a mushroom crazed culture I have come to know, having led mushroom and truffle tours there for several years running. While I have heard occasional lamentation from locals about prime mushroom habitat destroyed for industry or new vineyards, I've never heard a peep about “over-picking.” There are always plenty of mushrooms for anyone who cares enough to put out the effort, even today, after a millennium of local harvesting. “Nobody gets 'em all” is the simple truth that echoes across continents and time. I collect mushrooms in Italy to my heart's content, each and every visit.

Their collecting regulations vary from district to region, habitat to quarry, in reasoned attempt to keep things fair for enthusiasts while protecting the resource. In the Ligurian Alps,

the requisite permit stipulates picking allowed only on odd dates of the calendar, with even days reserved for mushroom population recovery. In rural Tuscany, a permit was moot, but I was warned of harsh reprimand if discovered taking baby porcini, before allowing them to mature and sporulate. Woven baskets or other carrying devices that allow free escape of spores from collected mushrooms are generally mandatory. While I find this rule rather quaint, I do greatly appreciate the sense of stewardship and conservation that it denotes.* Mycophilic cultures eventually develop sensibilities about these things. The Italian people are no more inclined to adhere to rigid regulations than we are, yet they are unequivocally dedicated to preserving their precious fungal resource and so abide by the regulations governing collection.

Mushroom hunting is, for the most part, a healthy, wholesome, and harmless activity. Even commercially practiced, it provides employment and food from a renewable resource. While it may not be fair for an individual mushroom hunter to compete directly with organized groups of commercial hunters, and thoughtful oversight may be called for in certain locales, the fact remains that greedy and abusive behavior takes no favorites between professional and amateur collectors. Rascals commit dastardly deeds, regardless of creed.

Nobody likes to lose something dear. Many “old-timers” in the mushroom world, like me, cope with ever increasing competition for a limited resource with ever decreasing access. Truly, it’s enough to render one curmudgeonly. But I do not regret the knowledge I have shared over the years, even though that knowledge has on occasion been used against my druthers, and even though many so-called friends have summarily abused spots I generously revealed. Above all, I ride the metaphysical truth that the more I give, the greater my wealth, tangibly, and metaphorically. I learn by teaching, and suffer no shortage of mushrooms in my larder.

One positive aspect of this new surge of the innocent and not so innocent into woods is their fresh exposure to the forgotten wonders of our precious woods, hills, and dales. When folks come to understand the relationship of the environment to their beloved fungal

quarry, they don’t need to be told to be nice; they are already servants to the cause. Sure, some people are abusive, especially those naïve to the overall realities at play. Human nature can be such a drag, but I do not believe you can legislate against it, aside from just going for the lowest common denominator and banishing all access and activity in response to the bad behavior of a few. That seems rather draconian to me. Better to educate, which is the function of the mycological societies, along with individually organized classes, guided walks and seminars, which many, myself included, teach and lead.

The mycological societies are volunteer organizations that rely on the integrity and worthiness of volunteer leadership. They necessarily take what they get. So what if some new people step away after learning a few shared spots and simple identification skills? In the long run, even the quickly departed walk away with fresh insight about nature and habitat, and are now in a better position to impart that sensibility within their own respective social circles.

More importantly, the societies and their forays are a spawning ground for future champions of mushroom knowledge; the true mycologists, amateur and professional. We are at a pivotal point in history, a time of profound change, as we transform from a people who used to see toadstools to a people who sees mushrooms. We bear a debt to our progeny to get it right, and the mycological societies are clearly the first and best place to do it.

Going into the forest, into prime mushroom habitat, inspires folks to

learn more about fungi. This is where we raise our army of fungi advocates. It’s where we recruit the next generation and endow them with greater understanding, appreciation, and sense of stewardship for the fungal kingdom. Learning the importance of habitat is the necessary first step to relieve this angst about over-picking, and focus on the real task at hand: preserving what’s left of our disappearing “Garden of Eden.”

I think we, the American mushroom community, are on proper course; we just need to keep after this worthy but daunting task of recreating America into a mycophilic culture. Of course this is painful in the short run. And to that end, I agree with Benjamin: these damn growing pains sure hurt, but that’s all they are.

*In fact, as avid mushroom collectors, we cannot help but spread mushroom spores wherever we go; spores on our clothes and hair, in and on our vehicles while parked and traveling, spores flying out of our baskets once home, spores flinging about as we discard trimmings, spores plastered to any friends, family, or strangers that deign come anywhere near. The essence of what mushrooms are all about is quite simple: they are designed to produce and disseminate billions of spores. With that understanding, I feel free of guilt for my decades of alleged fungal plunder. I am not so much a dirty, rotten mushroom fiend, as a hero of fungal spore distribution.

—David Campbell (the author is Past President, Mycological Society of San Francisco, and Proprietor Myco-Ventures, Inc.) †

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