

The Day That Feeds a Year: Ethnography of Mushrooming in the Russian Arctic

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Key words: Mushrooms, Ethnomycology, Mycophagy, Chukotka, Russian Federation

Mushrooming in the Far North

In the last week of April 2004 my Yupik friend Dasha and I were hovering over a hole in the ice about 200 meters out of Novoe Chaplino, one of the small settlements on the Chukchi Peninsula, the easternmost end of the Russian Arctic. Pulling on a long line with a small rake tied to its end, Dasha was showing me how to get *upa*—orange-colored ascidians or so-called “sea peaches”—from under the ice. Turning away from the blowing snow, we faced the snow-covered village, rows of red, blue, and green roofs protruding from the sheet of harsh, blinding white. The down coat I had worn over five winters in interior Alaska turned out disappointingly ineffective for the gusting, wet winds of the Bering Strait coast.

All photographs in the article were taken by the author. Dr. Yamin-Pasternak can be reached at rechichanka@gmail.com.

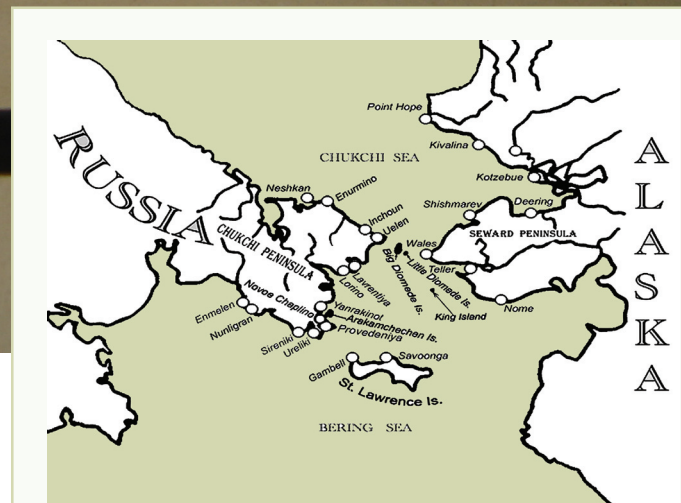


Figure 1. Map of the Bering Strait Area.

Nevertheless, the ice edge was clearly visible to my right, the seagulls had arrived, and the sun stayed high and late into the evenings. More and more dramatically over the next month, the sunlight will eliminate the snow cover, most of which will partly melt, partly evaporate by mid-June. The surrounding slopes will turn their summer colors, acquiring patches of green amidst the rocky surfaces of brown and black. The air will warm up enough to absorb and transport the smell of the surroundings. Between the third and fourth week of July it will bring about *gribnoy zapashok* [“mushroom scent”]—a moist earthy fragrance signifying the beginning of the gathering season. *Gribi poshli* [“the mushrooms have surfaced”] will become the oral headline quickly spreading from