



This summer, get to the ...

Telluride Mushroom Festival

Gary Gilbert, Boston Mycological Club

What kind of a weird thing is a mushroom festival one might ask? Well, there are garlic, apple and tulip festivals, so why not mushrooms?

Mind you, the Telluride Mushroom Festival (<https://www.tellurideinstitute.org/telluride-mushroom-festival/>) is not just a gathering of hippies and alternative medicine people. Rather, this event has been going on for 42 years and last year attracted people from all over the world, from Siberia to Florida and Chile to Maine. It brings together serious scientists from Nobel Prize laureates to doctors, chemists, writers, businesspeople, and a myriad of other professionals. Many of the attendees represent decades in the study of mycology and want to try to make the

world a better place through the use and scientific study of fungi.

In 1981 Beth Israel Hospital hosted a conference in Aspen, Colorado focusing on the clinical treatment of mushroom poisonings. Following this, mycologists such as Gary Lincoff, author of the *Audubon Guide to North American Mushrooms*; Paul Stamets, owner of the large Washington-based company Fungi Perfecti; Andrew Weil, world-renowned mushroom guru, and Manny Salzman, a radiologist and expert on mushroom poisonings, decided to host an annual event to continue the study of mushrooms deep in southwestern Colorado. Of course, they also liked to party together, but that was not the main idea behind their efforts. The study of mushrooms does, after all, lend itself to

good food, fermented beverages, and sometimes some psychoactive fungi thrown into the mix, right?

One of the reasons Telluride, Colorado was chosen is because it is a charming historic mining town locked within a panoramic box canyon, surrounded on three sides by towering mountains. Telluride is also very close to lots of high-elevation forests and meadows which are easily (or not-so-easily) accessible by interesting, and often rather challenging, dirt logging roads. They may be rocky, bouncy, and winding, with the occasional sheer cliff thrown in, but they'll get you there.

If you do happen to be there at the right time and with the right conditions, you may find the mountains are covered with many mushrooms. This



range of topics were lectured on, not the least of which was the currently popular topic of psilocybin mushrooms and their increasing use in psychotherapy for people suffering from all sorts of ailments, from PTSD to end of life care, fighting addiction, treatment-resistant depression, and chronic pain. There were also talks on the evolution and diversity of *Psilocybe* species in the USA and Mexico, a history of the psychiatric uses of *Psilocybe*, and the current and future status of *Psilocybe* with regards to the changing laws in our country.

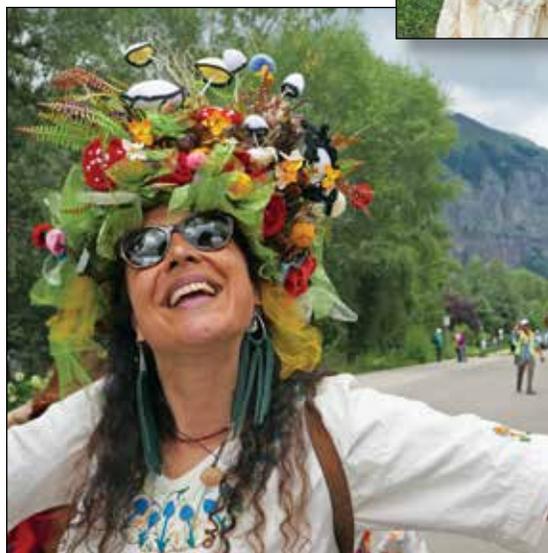
There were lectures on everything else including sequencing DNA, mycoremediation (using fungi to decompose polluted lands), mushroom cultivation, the use of microscopes in taxonomy, identification of mushrooms of the Rocky Mountain region, cultivating medicinal mushrooms, cooking demonstrations, mycotechnologies (such as making

southwestern part of the state was chosen because it receives late summer monsoon rains which activate fungal production, particularly with the prolific red-capped Colorado porcini, known to many as “rubies” (*Boletus rubriceps*). Or possibly just truckloads of Rocky Mountain chanterelles. Either way, be prepared—very well prepared—to dry or cook and preserve them if you want to take them home. Each year I bring a large 18-tray dehydrator with me and it can get filled up, literally in minutes. A couple years ago, two of us picked so many perfect large specimens of king boletes that it took two days to dry them all. In such a state of inundation, you may end up filling your bathtub up with stems just so you can dry the caps as fast as possible! Typically, you will be racing against time trying to stay ahead of that nasty secondary fungus setting in, *Hypomyces*, the “bolete eater.”

The elevations are quite high, from around 9,000 to 11,500 feet and filled with gigantic panoramas of mountain vistas that never seem to end. Those elevations often get one above the aspen zone and into pure spruce and fir forests—trees which have unique relationships with a specific variety of fantastic fungi (if one is still allowed to

use that term casually?).

With phrases like “Mushrooms have the potential to revolutionize our relationship with the world and ourselves” last year’s festival saw an assemblage of therapists, forest pathologists, edible fungi cultivators, polluted habitat restorers, DNA analysts, taxonomists, brewers, journalists, chefs, photographers, artists, vendors, and ardent travelers like myself. A wide



paper, packaging material, and structural building components from mycelium), analysis of the genome of the porcini family, fungal spore release mechanisms, conservation of trees, and fungi in the Amazonian rainforest and hunting fungi in the Himalayan mountains.

From Russia, there was a presentation on a well-researched new book coming out about the medicinal applications of *Amanita muscaria*, the famous red

mushroom with white dots, including microdosing and topical pain relief treatments. This was based on studies done in Siberia with over 3,000 participants conducted by a doctor of pharmacology. This is the first time a serious book from Russia has been written that concerns itself with the medicinal use of very small doses of this powerful hallucinogenic either internally, or as a topical cream for pain. Siberia is the region of the world where this mushroom has been used and experimented with for a variety of medicinal purposes for centuries.

On a lighter note, there were forums on edible mushrooms (“mycophagy”)—a talk of which I was a participant, and on every day of the five day event at

least four different guided walks in the mountains were offered by local experts. There was also the annual poetry slam with highly entertaining theater, very creative stage performances, phenomenal poetry, and song, along with a bar serving myco-beers.

And finally on Saturday afternoon the annual mushroom parade was held. Each year awards are given for the best costumes. Last year a giant porcino, complete with a few fabric worms hanging off of its cap, won the grand prize. There were also entertaining costumes such as the stinkhorn lady with her accompanying black fly circling around her. There were various *Cantharellus* ladies and *Ganoderma* men (mostly just with funny hats). And

the parade ended in a giant drumming circle that went on into the evening with some of the people in various states of altered consciousness.

Telluride, and all of Colorado, is a glorious place to visit with literally endless vistas of new mountain ranges around each corner you go. The state is absolutely vast in size, so rent a good car and, of course, bring a good mushroom hunting knife.

Gary Gilbert lectures on fungi, leads mushroom walks, and serves on the Executive Committee of the Boston Mycological Club. He is the originator of “Mycocards,” flashcards for learning mushrooms as well as having recipes in the recent Fantastic Fungi Community Cookbook. 🍄

