



# Symbiosis<sup>©</sup>

The newsletter of the Prairie States Mushroom Club

Volume 25:3

August/September 2008

<http://www.geocities.com/iowamushroom>

## Houby Hunting California vs. Iowa

by Lisa Bacon, PSMC California Correspondence



Lisa with  
*Morchella elata*

As a young girl growing up in Toledo Iowa, I really wasn't that interested in mushrooms. They were slightly obscure objects that my dad would bring back when he was out hunting for rabbits

or pheasants. Frankly, I was more intrigued by the macabre process of skinning the rabbits or cleaning the pheasants.

We especially liked those funny wrinkly mushrooms fried (now, we sauté them) in butter. I vaguely remember big white ones that I now realize were oysters. However, my first memory of actually finding mushrooms is magical. I remember waking up one sunny spring morning to find our front yard carpeted with what seemed like several hundred black or grey morels (we had cut down a massive diseased elm the previous year). Five siblings poured out onto the lawn, each chortling that they could pick more than the others, but all conspiring to pick quickly so none of the neighbors could share in our fortune. As I got older, I pretty much forgot about mushrooms except

for several gratuitous experiments with psilocybin in college and those delicious and cheap Italian slices, smothered in fungi (pronounced fhoonghee), we lived on during my junior year abroad in Italy.

I was reintroduced to mushrooms several years ago. After living in California for nearly 30 years, I was invited to a dinner party in San Francisco. Everyone else was a member of the Mycological Society of San Francisco (MSSF). The group has over 750 members. After a magnificent repast topped off by heavenly chocolate Port, I was drafted to become the Treasurer. As I became more active in MSSF, I was delighted to learn that fungi were more than food (although we have a 60+ person strong culinary group that meets once a month for incredible feasts). I am a fiber artist and am exploring mushrooms for coloring natural fibers. We meet monthly having lectures on various aspects of and uses for fungi from all over the world. I have been on a number of forays in the Bay Area and in the Sierras north of Lake Tahoe. I have also joined SOMA (Sonoma County group – Dorothy Beebee is a member and my mentor).

I went on my first Iowa foray since childhood late last summer and early fall when I was back in Iowa helping care for my seriously ill father. I tried to hook up with PSMC folks then (thank you Roger H.), but family obligations kept me busy. On a trip to Cedar Rapids, I stopped by the “Czech Museum” to explore my heritage and learned of the Houby (Mushroom) Festival. Finally, on the day before I left, I managed to go on a foray with a local Bohemie farmer near Tama. We found quite a few specimens of edibles and non-edibles and was quite pleased to be able to cook some for my father (who has since made an amazing recovery).

When I returned to California, I wrote an article on mushroom hunting in Iowa, for MSSF's newsletter, *Mycena News*. When

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# Houby Hunting

(cont. from cover)

they heard I was going back in May to hunt for morels and explore the Houby Festival, several people expressed interest. Ian (my 20 year old son who transforms into a southern, not Iowan, redneck when he puts on a Cabela's cap) and I came out first. We had several delightful romps on the farm near Tama which yielded nearly a bushel of *Morchella esculenta* which we shared with family and friends. I had been in touch with Roger and Glenn S. who arranged a foray on Bill and Marlys Brown's beautiful property near Canton (thank you Bill and Marlys for your outstanding hospitality). The California contingent (Kip, Eva and Dulcie) arrived a little late for the full bloom, but enjoyed themselves all the same. We went on the Pinnicon Ridge Foray where we met up with Dean, Glen, Roger, Rosanne, Marty, Tom and several other PSMC members. We all appreciated your warmth and generosity during our visit. I very much enjoyed the time I got to spend with you. I am most happy to reciprocate if you are ever out in the Bay Area!

While the fungi are fundamentally the same, the basic process is vastly different between morel hunting in California and Iowa. Each has their pros and cons. First, is the distance one must travel to find morels. I live in Petaluma (Sonoma County) 40 miles north of San Francisco. Petaluma is smack in the middle of wine and dairy country (makes a small town Iowa girl feel right at home). While infamous for both the Polly Klaas kidnapping and the World's Ugliest Dog Contest, Petaluma's earliest claim to fame is

being the egg capital of the world - the egg incubator was invented here. We are 25 miles inland from Bodega Bay (remember the movie *The Birds?*). It is rumored that morels can be found in the old apple orchards in nearby Sebastopol. For substantial amounts, we must drive at least 3 hours up into the Sierra Mountains to the Tahoe National Forest near Downeyville and enjoy rustic camping. Last year some friends drove 8 hours to the Oregon border and came back with over a hundred pounds of HUGE specimens of *Morchella esculenta*. Each year MSSF also hosts a large group foray at San Jose Family Camp near Yosemite, also over 3 hours away. In Iowa, as mentioned earlier, if you are lucky they pop in your own yard; but I believe you can usually find them within an hour's drive.

In Iowa, you "don't need no stinkin' license" to hunt for morels. Private property or parks seem readily accessible. Many people in California constantly grumble that you must go to a seemingly sporadically open ranger's station and waste precious daylight obtaining a piece of paper. In areas where it is legal to pick, there are often limits in the number of pounds you can pick. Maybe it's because I'm an Iowa girl, but I'm pretty easy going about the whole process.

The environment and ambiance are significantly different, but one must still use a keen eye and vigilance. In Iowa, after admiring miles of the rich black dirt of newly planted fields and dense woodlands, you get to hike through

lush green timber situated on rolling hills. The Browns' property, in particular, boasts beautiful rock formations. The sun twinkles through the green canopy and there are an amazing amount of birds chorusing around you (even better when your learned companions know which songbird it is!). Morels are usually mycorrhizal to newly deceased elms trees. Look up and then look down is the prevailing philosophy. Mushrooms peek at you from under broad leafed May apple plants and amid verdant grasses in ditches. You may have to negotiate the untamed multiflora roses from the "Living Fence" Project (whose idea was that any way!). Fence lines can be followed if you lose your sense of direction and walkie talkies work well. For me, hiking through the woods in Iowa is idyllic, except for the ticks. ARGH...they love me and I loathe them!

In California, once we get off the clogged freeways, we do get to drive through some spectacular alpine scenery and along cascading mountain streams. A few morels can be found in live forests with grassy floors; but generally we search for "burn" morels. The best spots are in conifer or hardwood forests that burned a year or two ago. Altitude and moisture are obsessed over. Damp areas in the 5,000-7,000 foot elevations seem to be the best. Slopes where the snow is recently melted, with a warm ground temperature seem to inspire the most prolific fruiting. Unfortunately, the "best" spots may have a nearly non-negotiable slope of 45 degrees or less. There is little if any grass and the

(cont. on pg. 7)

## Lepiota Mysteries

*Leucoagaricus americanus* or “American Lepiota” mushroom is one of my favorite mushrooms. It has a fine flavor and in Iowa it can be found in abundance when other mushrooms are scarce. Some people are turned off by the deep red brown color it turns when cooked, but I find that it makes meals more interesting looking as well as tasting. At least that’s what I find most years. This year, all I’ve found of *americanus* has been mysteries.

I knew for a fact that *americanus* was fruiting this year when PSMC held the foray at Wild Cat Den. One day earlier a dead jellyfish floating by my canoe in the Mississippi turned out to be one. That was my first mystery. Why would a mushroom go swimming? The second mystery came from the foray itself when foray leader, Jim Frink, led us to some “strange” Lepiotas growing on a mulch-pile. I thought *americanus* before I even saw them just because I knew they were out and I’ve seen them looking quite strange before.

I was fairly certain that the clumps of numerous small mushrooms growing on a pile of wood mulch were a small variety of *Leucoagaricus americanus*. The season was right. The habitat was right. The distinctive immediate reddish brown staining reaction was right. Still “fairly certain” is just a degree of uncertain, and Jim Frink was definitely uncertain. “There are over 200 species of Lepiota,” he reminded me, “I’ve seen a lot of

*americanus* and all the other ones I’ve seen were swollen at the base of the stem. I think it’s a different species.” He had a point. These stems had straight slim stems and they were too small. Plus I never saw the yellow phase of the staining reaction though sometimes you don’t with *americanus*. Still, they were a mystery that I thought I could solve, and prove edible so I collected enough for the pot.

The first thing I learned when attempting identification was that there are indeed hundreds of species of Lepiota, and some of those species are deadly. I also learned that they look a lot alike and they looked a lot like the small “*americanus*” on that wood pile. At least one of the deadly (containing Amanita toxins) species, *Lepiota castanea*, also stained brown, but not quickly or dramatically like these mushrooms. The habitats and growth patterns of the deadly species I found were different also. For days I looked up dozens of images and descriptions of Lepiota species and related genera by googling species names from lists I found. The more I learned about this vast genus the more I realized I didn’t know. The similarity and danger was enough to move me from fairly certain to just plain uncertain.

Eventually I figured that it was a *Leucoagaricus* species similar to *americana* but I still had dozens of species in that genus to investigate. I finally found two species besides



Lepiotas on wood mulch  
Photos by Robert and Linda Scarth

*americanus* in that genus *croceovelutinus* and *georginae* that these mushrooms could be. I found no information on either species edibility. I’d finally reached a dead end. I removed the mushrooms from my fridge. They were already too far gone to eat anyway.

I still had the mystery of the swimming mushroom to solve. For that I traveled back in time and envisioned myself as a ten year old on the river bank, sneaking up on an unsuspecting preteen girl, disgusting toadstool grenade in hand. Then, just as I unload she ducks and my hideous projectile lands harmlessly in the water. I run away as fast as I can to escape a certain beating – Mystery solved!

**NOTE:** Microscopic features may have solved the mystery of these Lepiotas, but, for pot hunting purposes I feel mushrooms must be readily recognized in the field -

Dave 

# PSMC Summer Foray Report

by Dave Layton

This summer we had a number of interesting forays. This report will highlight some, but not all of them.



*Pluteus salicinus*

Photo by Bob and Linda Scarth

Unfortunately, the foray at Bill and Marlys Brown's farm had to be canceled due to flooding, but the foray at the Ledges the next week was well attended. Though there wasn't an abundance of fleshyfungi there were many interesting and unusual specimens. They included *Mutinus elegans* which is a county record according to Rosanne Healy. She convinced me to go back and pick a specimen. I confess I don't normally harvest mature stinkhorns. An even more unusual find was *Pluteus salicinus* which stains blue at the base.

One of the biggest treats for everyone was having Dr. Tiffany with us. I know we all had questions for her and she had fascinating answers for all our questions. 



Dr. Lois Tiffany with Mike and Pegi Bevins

Photo by Glenn Schwartz



Left to right standing in parking lot: Bob Scarth, Linda Scarth, Dave Layton, Rosanne Healy, Mike Blevins, Dr. Lois Tiffany, Pegi Blevins, Melinda Witherow, Sally Myers, Jay Bierstedt

Photo by Glen Schwartz

Iowa City Bird Club Foray  
Kent Park, Tiffin  
Submitted by Dean Abel

We had a small turnout at F.W. Kent Park. Brad Freidhof, the Kent Park ranger, Karen Disbrow and I were the only PSMC folk plus three birders. Highlights were the sighting of several Orchard Orioles and a catalpa tree being defoliated by 100's of Catalpa Sphinx Moth caterpillars. Mushroom-wise not much. We did see the Conifer Purple Tooth (*Trichaptum abietinus*) and new-for-me the Yellow Jelly Gumdrops (*Guepiniopsis* sp. - probably *G. alpinus* - I need to take another look at it). Also, some Russulas (I think I can put a name on one of them) and an assortment of *Marasmius* species in the pine needle duff. 

Wickiup Report  
Submitted by Marty Augustine

I thought the class went pretty well. No one got up and left anyway. It was quite a small group and had it not been for four of our group to show up it would have been really small. The foray had a much larger group which was nice to see. A rather meager variety of mushrooms were found and no edibles were taken home. I collected a *meripilus giganteus*, a *Pluteus cervinus*, a few *Russulas* for show and tell in the class. After the foray I made a quick jaunt out and brought home *Lactarius volemus* which I am still snacking on. I also took pictures of jelly babies. This is the first time I've seen these. 



Jelly Babies *Leotia lubrica*

Photo by Marty Augustine

(cont. on pg. 5)

# PSMC Summer Foray Report

(cont. from pg. 4)

Lucas County Foray:  
Submitted by Skylar Hobbs

“The weather could not have been more perfect for a July walk in the woods. Thanks to Dave Layton and his son for making the trek to be our guide. The enthusiasm from the group made the hunting easy. We never seemed to walk far without a fungus to identify. A lone deadly Amanita was an especially neat find as was the variety of delicate pinwheels and bird nest fungi. The hours passed quickly. We then went to Pin Oak Lodge for lunch. Dave presented a great power point on edibles.”



Birdsnest Fungi and Amanita *bisporigera* at Lucas Co. Foray  
Photos by Loren Burkhalter



*Dave's note:* My highlight of the foray was Lucas County itself and the folks I met there. The amount of natural wetlands and well managed conservation areas Lucas county has is outstanding and a great testimony to the conservation minded citizens. I took great pleasure in listening to two of those citizens each pointing out patches of mushroom woods the other one better stay out of. Skylar would laugh and say, “you guys know those are public woods.” The Powerpoint Skylar mentioned was mainly developed by Rosanne Healy with some slides added by me. Anyone interested in using it please contact me. 

The foray at Wild Cat Den State Park was also very interesting. Though we didn't find anything edible in abundance. We were treated to tantalizing isolated specimens of *Lactarius hygrophoroides* and most interesting to me, were the mystery *Lepiotas* that I wrote about in the “Pothunters Corner.” 

Hickory Hill Park  
Iowa City  
Submitted by Glen Schwatz  
(Full text and photos are on the PSMC Website <http://www.geocities.com/iowamushroom/>)

There were just a few of us that forayed at Hickory Hill Park, but we found 50 species including this tiny hard to see *Helvella* and what appears to be an albino red-cup. It was pure white on a tiny stick next to a normal colored red coup. 



Maybe one of the most notable aspects of all the forays was the absence of many species that were in abundance the year before. This was despite what seemed like plenty of rain. We are still a long way from understanding how and why many mushrooms grow in cycles over the years. Amateurs foraying and documenting the information gleaned is one way to gain an understanding of these multi year cycles and the environmental interactions of fungi.

If you haven't been to a foray, I highly recommend that you attend future ones. You're sure to learn something new!

For a list of upcoming foray's see the back page. 

More pictures, species lists and interesting information can be found at the PSMC Website: <http://www.geocities.com/iowamushroom/>

Submissions are requested. If you have a fungi article, picture, recipe or joke to share please submit it to:  
email: [davelayton@q.com](mailto:davelayton@q.com)  
fax: 309-793-6807  
mail: Dave Layton  
542 9th Ave., S  
Clinton, IA 52732

# Recipe Corner

## Grifoa Frondosa With Brown Rice



Photo found at [www.english-country-garden.com](http://www.english-country-garden.com)

Here is a variation on a recipe attributed to Shirley Thenen from *Boston Mycological Club Mushroom Recipes 1982-1983* for **Grifola frondosa** (“Hen of the Woods”) with brown rice. The author notes, “Other fungi can be used, but this one provides the earthy flavor to complement brown rice.” The result can be devoured as is or used for stuffing peppers or other things, too. The recipe makes 8 - 10 servings.

1/8 c. olive oil  
1 large onion, chopped  
1 3/4 cups brown rice  
4 c. *Grifola frondosa*

4 1/3 c. vegetable bouillon or chicken stock  
2 t. salt (only if bouillon or stock is unsalted)  
1 1/2 t. sweet marjoram

Clean the mushroom and prepare 1/4-inch slices. Cover with bouillon (stock) and simmer until tender. (Can be stored frozen with the liquid until needed.) Saute onion in olive oil until transparent. Add rice and stir 2 minutes; set aside. Bring cooked *Grifola frondosa* and liquid to a boil (may add some water as necessary for cooking the rice); add salt (if needed), pepper and marjoram. Mix with onions and rice. Cover and simmer 45 minutes or until rice is tender and liquid is absorbed.

This Recipe was found at <http://www.njcc.com/~ret/Roosevelt/grifola.html>

## Foxfire Funnies

Hi Folks. We have a little foxfire fun quiz in this issue. See how you do on it, and remember the larger message – looks are deceiving.

One mushroom in each of the following pairs is edible. The other is poisonous . Which is edible A. or B.?



(Answers on pg. 7)

# Houby Hunting

(cont. from pg. 2)

black morels are nearly invisible on the ashy ground. When you find a morel, the best thing to do is to drop low and look upslope to see if there are any others in the area.

These areas are very remote and even though we carry whistles, compasses



and some have GPS', it is not unheard of to get totally separated from your group. Walkie talkies often don't work. Adding

insult to injury, you might emerge from the ashen forest looking like a coal miner after a day in the mines. Last spring my companions and I stopped by the local general store after a foray, only to find a friend who had gone out

with another group. She was a little shaken because she had to hike 2 miles down a very steep slope and another mile down the road to the store. There are no song birds to speak of and the wind can whistle eerily through the barren trees. Ticks are minimal, but we must be on the lookout for brown bears and mountain lions. Last year a lady told me of looking upslope at her husband in a fine stand of morels. About 100 feet away was a mountain line creeping towards him. He jumped up, yelled and scared it off, but we do have several attacks each year in the state.

Whether in Iowa or California, the end result of a morel foray is still the same. You have spent a day enjoying the camaraderie of some of the best people on the planet; hiked around in

God's country; and may even have something to cook at the end of the day! Whether they are fried or sautéed, there is something so extraordinary and earthy about that wrinkly little fungus!

I was horrified to see all the flooding only two weeks after we left Iowa this spring, but pleased to hear most of you were virtually unaffected.

While each state has its pros and cons, I am still an Iowan and if y'all could get rid of the ticks and humidity, I'd c'mon back home! I hope to have the pleasure of seeing some of you out here. Until my next visit!

Your California correspondent,  
Lisa Bacon  
PSMC, MSSF and SOMA member



## Foxfire Funnies Quiz Results

- A. *Leucoagaricus naucina*  
Edible (Michael W. Beug)

B. *Amanita bisporigera*  
Deadly ([www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com))
- A. *Galerina autumnalis*  
Deadly ([www.mykoweb.com](http://www.mykoweb.com))

B. *Flammulina velutipes*  
Edible ([picasaweb.google.com](http://picasaweb.google.com))
- A. *Chlorophyllum molybdites*  
Poisonous ([www.biology.wustl.edu](http://www.biology.wustl.edu))

B. *Lepiota rachodes*  
Edible ([www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com))
- A. *Agaricus arvensis*  
Edible ([www.english-country-garden.com](http://www.english-country-garden.com))

B. *Agaricus xanthoderma*  
Poisonous ([www.blueswami.com](http://www.blueswami.com))

Results: If you got:

All 4 right - Don't take any risks today. You've used all your good luck on this dumb quiz.

3 right - Go ahead and eat mushrooms that look like the pictures in your mushroom book. You'll only get poisoned 25% of the time.

2 right - You may as well flip a coin to decide if you want to eat some strange looking mushrooms.

1 right - Go back to bed it will get better someday.

None right - You always use a microscope to identify mushrooms don't you?

Dave Layton, President  
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PSMC Web Site:  
[http://www.geocities.com/  
iowamushroom/](http://www.geocities.com/iowamushroom/)



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## Prairie States Mushroom Club Fall Foray Schedule

### **September 21, 10:00 AM**

Wickiup Hill Natural Area  
Linn County  
Park at the end of Wickiup Hill Road  
near the gate.  
For more information contact Roger  
Heidt at 319-393-5712 or  
[psmc@fmtcs.com](mailto:psmc@fmtcs.com)

### **October 4 -5**

2 days of forays at Browns and  
Walnut Woods near DesMoines.

### **October 4, 10:00 AM Browns Woods**

To get to Browns Woods —Go south  
on 63rd Street in West Des Moines  
till you reach Brown’s Woods Drive,  
turn right and go less than a mile, turn  
right at the first entrance where there  
is a parking lot.

### **October 4, 1 PM**

PSMC Annual Membership meeting  
following the Browns woods foray.  
We will be voting on whether or not  
to reduce the dues rate to \$10 for  
members who receive symbiosis  
electronically and we will be accepting  
nominations and voting for At Large  
PSMC Board member. For more  
information on the meeting or to  
submit a nomination in advance  
contact Dave Layton 563-242-0880  
or email [davelayton@q.com](mailto:davelayton@q.com)

### **October 5, 10:00 AM Walnut Woods**

Walnut Woods State park is South of  
Des Moines on Highway 5 next to the  
Raccoon river Walnut has camping  
available as well as fishing.

### Contact Information:

Walnut Woods State Park  
3155 Walnut Woods Dr.  
West Des Moines, IA 50265  
ph. 515/285-4502

E-mail address:

[Walnut\\_Woods@dnr.iowa.gov](mailto:Walnut_Woods@dnr.iowa.gov)

For more information about Prairie  
States Mushroom Club forays, go to  
the PSMC Website [http://  
www.geocities.com/iowamushroom/](http://www.geocities.com/iowamushroom/)  
or contact Dean Abel PSMC  
Secretary, 319-354-3510, email  
[dean-abel@uiowa.edu](mailto:dean-abel@uiowa.edu)