ATW-35
Mushroom Hunting in Oregon IV: Mushrooms on the March

Tucson, Arizona
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Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

During the spring and summer months, when no Liberty Caps are available, Oregonians can use another variety of psilocybin mushroom in the genus Panaeolus. It is easily collected in quantity on piles of rotting hay in manured cow fields in the Willamette Valley, where most of the population of the state lives. This mushroom, although small, is twice as fleshy as the Liberty Cap, yet the dose is the same: 20 mushrooms. That is to say, the Panaeolus is less potent. Moreover, the quality of its effect is not as good. Particularly when fresh it tends to produce symptoms of toxicity. Some persons experience nausea with it; I get a peculiar and uncomfortable restlessness for an hour after eating it. The toxicity is reduced on drying but not eliminated. And the Panaeolus is less effective at triggering visual spectacles. Nonetheless it is a popular mushroom during the warm months.

As many as five or six other active species might grow in the Pacific Northwest. Some of these are woodland species that are much weaker than the Liberty Cap. Collecting little mushrooms in woods is much riskier than doing the same thing in open pastures. Several species of the genus Galerina, little brown mushrooms that grow on wood or from buried wood, contain the same

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toxins as the deadly Amanitas and can easily kill. No one should look for psilocybin mushrooms under trees who has not learned to recognize Galerinas. Many collectors of Liberty Caps and Panaeolus have little or no knowledge of mushrooms in general. Most of the magic mushroom hunters I know do not know how to collect edibles, for example. Yet I have heard of no cases of poisonings of people looking for psilocybin mushrooms in open cow fields, at least not in the Pacific Northwest. In the Gulf South, where the principal species is Stropharia cubensis, the San Ysidro mushroom, I have met people who made themselves sick to their stomachs by eating the wrong kinds but still have uncovered no cases of anything worse.

One of the more powerful woodland species of Psilocybe is P. baeocystis, which occurs throughout western Oregon and Washington. It is a larger mushroom than the Liberty Cap, and two caps may be sufficient for a strong experience. Last fall P. baeocystis turned up in large numbers on the mulch under rhododendron bushes in a municipal park in the middle of Eugene. It was collected and used by many people. Just before Christmas a bookstore here in Tucson was offering them for sale at $1.50 each ("Limit: 12 to a customer"). They were advertised as "Psilocybin mushrooms from Eugene, Oregon," and sold out in a few days.

Other species have been turning up in unusual places. A species that may be Psilocybe cyanescens, related to the derrumbe ("landslide") mushroom of Oaxaca, began growing heavily on the campus of the University of Washington in Seattle in the fall of 1973. Word of it got out quickly, and students began eating it to the consternation of University officials. The mushroom appeared to be spreading by way of a bark mulch used by the buildings and grounds crew; at least, each time a new area of the campus was mulched, it came up in great numbers.

During a trip to Washington State last October I found

this mushroom growing abundantly on a lawn in front of a commercial nursery just south of the state capital at Olympia. It was first discovered there by an Oregon collector now living near Olympia who was taking his laundry to a laundromat next to the nursery and noticed the mushrooms on the lawn. He tried them and confirmed their activity. They are lovely, chestnut-brown, fleshy mushrooms that readily turn blue (cyanescens means "blue-turning") and have a persistent annulus or veil around the upper stipe, an unusual character in this genus. Some users call them "Washington Blue Veils" and rate them as strong as the Liberty Caps. They grow in clusters, the stipes arising from a common point. When I first met up with them, I recognized them at once as the mushrooms I saw in the visions of my first Liberty Cap experience.

I had a chat with the owner of the nursery about his lawn. He had not failed to notice large numbers of young people, especially students from nearby Evergreen State College, crawling about on his property picking mushrooms. "Sometimes it gets so bad, I have to turn the sprinklers on to get rid of them," he complained. I explained to him what the mushrooms were, assured him that no one could get hurt with them, and got permission to collect specimens for identification. He told me his staff had prepared hundreds of similar lawns all over Olympia using the same mulch and manure. It was Indian Summer in Washington, too, with almost no mushrooms anywhere. Heavy sprinkling had brought them up in front of the nursery. But next fall, when the rains will probably come as usual, Psilocybe cyanescens may well turn up all over the state capital.

I hear of people picking psilocybin mushrooms in New York State, Maine, Indiana, Tennessee, California, Colorado, and many other places where I have not yet had a chance to see the mushrooms myself. It looks as if they are everywhere in the United States and Canada and that people who go out seriously to look for them will find them. I see no way that any government agency

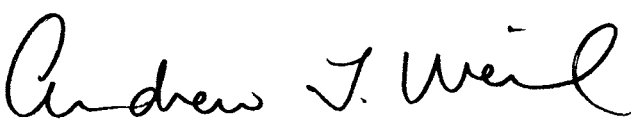
can control the spread of these mushrooms or of the knowledge of their properties. They are with us to stay and doubtless will be more and more in evidence.

Have they always been here and not been noticed until recently? Or are they really appearing in new locations? The story of the University of Washington suggests that psilocybin mushrooms are really on the march.

Meantime, we are told the market for fresh, cultivated mushrooms has been expanding steadily, as the demand for canned mushrooms declines. Mushroom farming is a profitable business in a time of worsening economic conditions. Last September in the produce section of a San Francisco supermarket I witnessed a remarkable scene. A young mother was buying mushrooms while her infant daughter urged her on from the shopping cart. "Mushroom, Mommy! Mushroom!" the little girl shouted. "I'm getting them as fast as I can, dear," her mother said, handing her a large white one. The girl munched it up at once. "Mushroom!" The mother saw me watching and seemed slightly embarrassed. "It's really something," she explained. "Ever since she could sit up, she's loved them."

The essence of the revolution in consciousness occurring all about us is the emergence of unconscious forces long denied by our culture and the beginnings of attempts to integrate them into the fabric of our individual and social lives. Mushrooms are external symbols of those forces and their invasion of our outward lives is a dramatic and encouraging sign of the progress of this great change.

Sincerely yours,



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