

The “Bread and Butter” of Winter Fungi by Lisa Mediano

When Susan’s email regarding a walk in the woods with Larry Millman and Zaac Chavez hit my inbox, I immediately thought “who would miss an opportunity to spend a few hours with the Great One in the woods?? The answer was “no one who loves the pursuit of mushroom knowledge”. Little did I know that many other people were thinking the same thing as me (which is unusual in Massachusetts – but I digress). So there I was on Sunday, February 26th, at 1 PM, in the parking lot with a HUGE crowd of Larry groupies, waiting for him in anticipation like we were at a rock concert. There was about 40-50 people there, and Larry told us it was probably the largest crowd he had seen for this type of event.



We broke up into 2 groups, and the Larry group followed him to look for hidden fungi in plain sight. Winter fungi is a lot different from your run of the mill chanterelles and morels; they are sort of weird and remind me of a B horror flick with talk of Witches Butter with Orange tooth, tree brain, bioluminescent bug catchers, and soft rotters. Every log had a story to tell, and Larry was just the storyteller to do it. He explained about the various crust fungi which are found flat against the surface on the logs, how the fungi break down the lignin in the dead logs to become part of the soil again and continue the ecological circle of life. We saw orange and brown Witches’ Butter samples, which are jelly fungus. We learned about turkey tails and false turkey tails and that one grows out and the other grows up. One of the participants found a large fresh Artist’s conk polypore and we discussed how to tell its

age by breaking it and looking for the layers inside. We also found a black footed polypore which is unusual due to it having a stipe.

Larry informed us that each dead log could have dozens of various fungi on it in the form of various crust molds and jelly fungi, etc. We learned about pyrenomycetes, fungi that can reproduce spores asexually, mold that can grow on dead leaves and is important to the decaying process.

Prior to the walk, I was talking with John Avault about mushrooms, and he mentioned that he had found some brick top/cap mushrooms during this past season, a/k/a *Hypholoma sublateritium*. Well lo and behold, I managed to find a sample, which I brought to Larry who had a good laugh. Look for my important sample in the pictures (hopefully it brings a smile to your face).



What I found the most encouraging is the burgeoning interest in fungi in young people. There were a large contingent of millennials in the group, and it seems that mushrooms are becoming cool. That's a good thing as Martha Steward would say.

Finally, as the title of this essay states, between the crust fungi and the witches butter, even strange fungi can sound appetizing with the right imagination!!

