



## **History of the Asheville Mushroom Club (1983 until 2008)**

### **Motivation for a Mushroom Club**

Why, on August 25, 1983 did four intrepid souls come together to form the Asheville Mushroom Club (AMC)? The avowed reason was "for the betterment of humanity" with the secondary reason "to have fun walking in the woods". Apparently this was adequate justification for otherwise sane folks to join together and wander through the mountains of Western North Carolina in pursuit of the wily fungi. In any case, the Asheville Mushroom Club has survived and flourished until the present day.

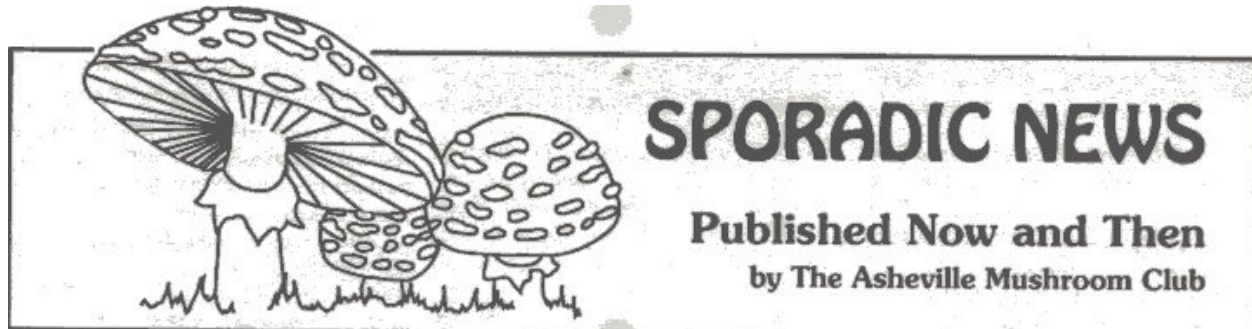
Somehow there was a kindred spirit amongst these folks who banded together under the motto, "fun, fungi, friendship, forays, freedom and spaghetti". They were intrigued by the vagaries of Mother Nature displayed amongst the fungi. Why did she have some fungi possess chemicals deadly to human survival, whereas others possess the ability to enhance health, and still others to entice us with flavor and aroma fit for the gods? These are difficult questions that seem to demand mystical answers. The Asheville Mushroom Club is a place where folks come together to share their experiences and knowledge and to answer these mycological questions. The club often brings in experts to shed additional light on these fascinating creations. After a certain level of mushroom enlightenment is reached, most members are able to identify many mushrooms, select those that are edible, prepare and consume them. Traipsing through the mountains, finding the perfect mushrooms, incorporating them in the perfect meal, and enjoying it with friends is the bond that has kept the Asheville Mushroom club going for all these years.

### **The Beginnings, Organization and the Nature Center**

In the beginning, the club met at the Western North Carolina Nature center in Asheville with monthly meetings eleven months of the year. The Nature Center is really the soul of the club. In 1982, Dan Lazar, a WNCNC employee, taught a course on Mushroom Identification that elicited the interest required to start the club. In 1983, Dan was joined by Roman Stanley, Theresa Rey (now Oursler) and Arnie Cremer to start the club. By the end of 1983 there were eleven members. This number grew over time (albeit with some low points) up to 55 in 1995, and by this writing (2007) there are 170 folks on the AMC mailing list including about 100 dues-paying members. So far in 2007 about 50 persons have attended each meeting. AMC became affiliated with North American Mycological Association ([NAMA](#)) early on. The Nature Center has been good to AMC and is still (2007) the home of AMC monthly meetings. The meetings have been on the second Wednesday of the month since the club's formation in 1983.

AMC has historically been loosely organized, with president and treasurer and a group of generally active folks acting as an executive committee. The first official need for committees became apparent in 1989 when program, foray, welcoming, and fall foray steering committees were created.

In 2006 the first formal documentation of club organization and procedures was approved by the club. The guidelines, so called since the organization was too loose for the more formal title of bylaws, defined responsibilities for committees, officers and an executive committee. The purpose of establishing these guidelines was to ensure that responsibilities in the club rotated among members. The guidelines require that every two years the club elect a new president, thereby building a base of leadership experience in the club. Documentation of meeting minutes is also published on the website.



## Newsletter and Communications

In January 1985, the club started publishing results of their exploits (and planned exploits) in a newsletter entitled the Sporadic News with the first issue hitting the press in January 1985. At that time, club membership was 15 persons and growing. Theresa Rey was the first newsletter editor. Soon she was assisted by co-editor Susan Mitchell (until 1999). Carol Dreiling picked up the role of co-editor when Susan moved away and eventually became editor, publishing the final (to date) copy of the Sporadic News in 2003. Publication of the newsletter was augmented by a phone chain to inform folks of impromptu forays.

The Sporadic News soon became an integral part of the club, containing articles of interest as well as club news. Many of the recipes collected in the AMC cookbook were originally published in the Sporadic News. Meeting notices, foray results (including species lists), even book reviews, poems and cartoons were included. Of course the mainstay of the newsletter was the posting of information about local and non-local forays and educational events. After the initial issue, the Sporadic News was published "Now and Then" until 2003. A total of 72 issues were published before the electronic world of the internet, forums, and email became the method of communication used by the club.

In 2004, the AMC website began to contain information previously available only in the Sporadic News. News about upcoming events (meetings and forays), listings of species identified on forays, some WNC specific keys (courtesy of Dennis Drehmel) and archives of minutes of business meetings were all available online. To replace the phone chain originally used to initiate impromptu forays, an Asheville Mushroom Club Yahoo group was established. Both members and non-members could post and read mushroom related information in the group forum. Emails are still sent to members announcing forays and meetings. Snail mail is sent to about a dozen folks who do not use email. Although electronic media have provided an alternative to the functional side of the newsletter, the folksy nature of the Sporadic News that captured the essence of

the club is missing. The club is still waiting for someone to volunteer to revive the Sporadic News.

## **Education and Programs**

An important function of the club has been educating club members and the local community about fungi. educational programs are offered throughout the mushroom season at the monthly meetings. Usually, the July and August meetings (peak time for mushroom collecting in WNC) focus on identifying recently collected mushrooms. During other months the club has offered informative programs ranging from cooking with mushrooms, to fungal identification, Ethnomycology (cultural uses of mushrooms), and scientific insights into the ecology and evolution of fungi. Regular programs about mushroom cultivation are offered for the benefit of our many members who grow Shiitakes and other mushrooms.

In the early years much emphasis was put on reaching outside of the club to educate the community and youth about mushrooms. The Sporadic News of April 1989 listed eight educational lectures offered to groups not related to AMC. In addition, forays were offered to UNCA, the Sierra Club, and to the Estes Elementary School students. Outreach to the community has included mushroom fairs offered in 2000-2003 and 2006. Currently the club has three PowerPoint presentations on fungi available for presentation by members to outside groups.

Local colleges have provided a source of expertise as well as an opportunity for collaborative learning. Joint college/AMC efforts included an Appalachian State University (ASU) foray (weekend camping), 1998. For many years the club maintained a close relationship with ASU which was the only semi-local college actually offering a mycology course. Dr. Coleman McClenaghan (at ASU until 2005) became a science advisor to the club. Brevard College offered a fungi course in 2005 and invited AMC (Sheila Dunn in this case) to present an Intro to WNC mushrooms".

At the first AMC mushroom fair, held Labor Day, 2000 at the Nature Center, Coleman brought fifteen of her students to add expertise and energy to the event. Three hundred and eighty people attended the fair. Coleman and ASU students were again a big part of the mushroom fair of 2003 held at the WNC Arboretum. Both Warren Wilson College (Dr. Mark Brenner) and UNC Asheville (Dr. Jonathan Horton) offered mycology courses in 2006. Efforts from the faculty and students at both colleges were instrumental in the success of the FungiFest that AMC held at Warren Wilson College in 2006. Thirty five new members joined the club at Fungifest 2006. The Asheville Mushroom Fair of 2007 was again held at WNC Arboretum. A variety of early morning forays were held, with the discoveries brought back to the Arboretum for identifying by Coleman. She also did her famous "walk around the tables" where she pointed out to all the fair's participants the varieties that were found and what to look for while identifying them. Mushroom fairs have proven to be a good way to introduce many folks to fungi in an all day event while providing outstanding speakers to the whole community.

## **Forays**

In addition to meetings, forays have always been a major function of the club. Indeed the search for fungi (forays), was a main motivation for the early members. A foray is essentially a group mushroom hunt. It is something like an Easter egg hunt except that there are more baskets carrying adults than children participating, and we look for

mushrooms rather than Easter eggs. We head out into the woods to collect mushrooms to identify or to eat. When we find mushrooms that are known to be edible, we will collect a lot of that species. If mushroom is inedible and is of only scientific interest, we will collect a smaller number. Folks spread out into small groups once they enter the woods, with beginners finding a more experienced person to walk with. After a couple of hours everyone meets back at the starting point to help each other identify the fungi. Often the foray is followed by a potluck meal that often includes some of the day's find.

In the club's early years, forays were typically weekend camping events. In some years there were as many as four camping forays. Over time, as club members' aged, joints stiffened and muscle aches become more common, the club offered fewer camping events and more single day forays. Today, even the camping events are often softened by the use of RVs or cabins. At the annual morel foray in TN in 2007, most participants stayed in cabins at Big Ridge State Park. The potluck dinner was cooked over stoves rather than open fires.

However, the tradition of the old camping forays is continued at the annual Cataloochee camping foray which is still a "tents only" weekend in one of the best mushrooming spots in the area. The first Cataloochee camping foray was held in 1988. The club skipped an occasional year since then but has held the event every year for the last ten years. Often a professional mycologist attends this event to help with identification and to aid the club as it contributes information to the All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (ATBI) database maintained for the Great Smoky Mountain National Park. Over the years, camping forays have also been held at Lake Powhatan, Curtis Creek, the Julian Price campground, Lake Julian, Norris State Park, Coweeta Experimental Research Station south of Franklin, Standing Indian Campground, North White Pines Group Campground in Pisgah National Forest, and Purchase Knob.

Every spring, AMC has its annual morel foray, usually the first foray of the year. Each year from 1994 until the present, George Lantz has led the club to Tennessee to places where he hunted morels as a child. Because of the distance involved, this is another overnight foray that lends itself very well to a big potluck meal on Saturday night. The first annual morel foray (1984) was held at the farm of Jim and Susan Goldsmith near Old Fort. Jim Goldsmith hosted the annual morel foray for the next five years. These were always fun forays, if for no other reason than that folks were ready to get out in the woods after a winter when few edible mushrooms could be found.

The first Asheville Mushroom Club annual fall foray (later to become the Annual Labor Day Foray) was held on Sept 8, 1984. It was held in conjunction with Triangle Mushroom Club with Dr. Ron Peterson (U of Tennessee, Knoxville) as guest leader. This event continued until at least 1993 with folks from many mushroom clubs converging on Asheville for a mycologist led foray. The foray gave mushroom lovers from other parts of the country a chance to experience the fungi of the WNC mountains. Workshops and classes were held in conjunction with the foray to provide more insights into the ecosystems and occurrences of Southern Appalachian mushrooms. In 2000 the Annual Labor Day Foray was replaced by a fall mushroom festival that catered more to inexperienced mushroomers although workshops and classes were still a part of the fair experience.

The Club has hosted two national forays in Asheville for the North American Mushroom Association. In 1994 a NAMA foray was held at Montreat College in Montreat, and then in 2004, NAMA based its foray at the University of North Carolina in Asheville. In both events a large diversity of mushrooms were collected. A regional, NAMA sponsored foray is held each fall at Wild Acres, NC (Little Switzerland).

## The Future

More and more people are moving into the Asheville area bringing with them an interest in the natural environment of the mountains. Because of that, we can expect growth in the number of folks interested in the mycology of the area. In spite of the loss of natural areas due to new development, WNC is fortunate to have natural areas that are protected because they are included in national and state forests and parks. Because of this, we are guaranteed environments where mushrooms will continue to flourish. If the Asheville Mushroom Club continues to teach new folks about mushrooms, to offer programs for continued learning for our more experienced members, and to provide good fellowship and outdoor experiences for all, the ASHEVILLE Mushroom Club should be around for many more years.

## Appendix

### Presidents

- 1983- 1985 Dan Lazar
- 1986-1992 Roman Stanley
- 1993-99 Theresa Rey
- 2000-04 Pete Whelihan
- 2005-06 Doyle Horne
- 2007 Rich Schumacher
- 2008 Jackie Schieb



**1983-1993  
Sporadic News**



**1993 original color**



October 1993-2005



Fungi Fest 2006



2007 - Present day logo