

THE TELLURIDE MUSHROOM FESTIVAL: HUNTING AND GATHERING WITH THE CLAN

Art Goodtimes, Cloud Acre, Norwood, CO 81423-0160

For information about attending this year's festival, August 26-29, write *Fungophile*, PO Box 480503, Denver, CO 80248. Or call Art Goodtimes at (303) 327-4767. Cost: \$185.

Art Goodtimes in his *Amanita muscaria* truck leading the annual mushroom parade, 1990.



MOVING TO TELLURIDE in the winter of 1980-81, I was extremely pleased to find a community that offered an inordinate amount of cultural activity for its limited size. As a fourth-generation San Franciscan, I'd been accustomed to theater, film, dance, music, lectures, poetry — the full panoply of the arts and humanities. And Telluride, a revitalized mining camp turned ski resort and drop-out mecca, had it all in energetic, if homeopathic, doses.

But I wasn't prepared for Emanuel and Joanne Salzman's *Fungophile, Inc.*

AS A FORMER MEMBER member of the San Francisco Mycological Society, I'd supposed that I'd have to forego the pleasure of groups forays and the delightfully humorous if always instructive lectures of Dr. Harry Thiers, the Bay Area's foremost mycologist.

But lo and behold that summer of '81 a bevy of experts converged on Telluride to foray into the surrounding mountains and lecture on the fascinating world of fungi.

And as the newly-hired executive director of the Telluride Council on the Arts and Humanities, I was dumbfounded when they wrote asking for assistance in organizing the conference in Telluride.

It was too good to be true.

But it was true. And delightfully so. As a neophyte to Rocky Mountain mushrooming, I learned quick. There were forays up

into the rich Lizard Head mushroom fields and workshops with the likes of Dr. Andrew Weil, the Sixties psychedelic guru whose *Natural Mind* was de rigeur in Haight-Ashbury living rooms of my generation, and Gary Lincoff, the New York Botanical Garden mycologist whose wry humor made every slide show session a repaste of bellylaughs and brainfood.

And as the local organizer, securing halls, taking tickets, making sure no one got arrested for flying fungal fights on the Elks Park lawn, I came to find a familial camaraderie with these curious folk who came to town once a year for an intense round of neo-Paleolithic hunting and gathering. Yes, it's a conference, a festival, but it's also a gathering of the wild branch of the mycophilic tribe, and few Telluride events involve such rooted if ephemeral

friendships and rituals — from the rigorous hunts in the woods, to the lively leap of sizzling 'shrooms at the cook and feast party, to the slide shows and wild lectures themselves.

OVER THE YEARS I've come to find my own favorite patches, from the Chanterelle fields a Telluride old-timer first showed me, swearing me to secrecy, to the spectacular meadows I found myself, drenched to the bone, lightning drilling strikes in the spruce-fir nearby, the forest alive with *Hydnums*, *Deliciosas*, and the fabled *Fly Agaric*.

And the fields hunted at the festival are only a fraction of the richness the area holds. I've harvested dozens of *Calvatia booniana* in Slaughterhouse Gulch near Placerville, clumps of morels on Oak Hill near Norwood, and whole fields of 'shrooms on Lone Cone. The legendary Navajo Sam, the backwoods "bandit" who roamed the Woods Lake slopes in the mid-'80s, trading revolutionary yarns for sandwiches while waving pistols and toting gun belts, took me up to vast fields of Chanterelles in the Dolores Peaks region.

But it's more than mushrooms that makes Wild Mushrooms Telluride notable. In the face of illogical drug laws and superstitious taboos, while most professional and political voices have jumped on the scapegoating bandwagon, blaming all manner of social and personal ill on select mind-altering substances, this conference has been a beacon of sanity, insisting on telling the drug czars of the nation they're walking naked in the streets. From the psychological perceptions of Dr. Thomas Szasz to the legalization arguments of Dr. Ethan Nadelmann, from the Haitian voodoo research of Wade Davis to the alchemical wizardry of Dr. Alexander Shulgin, from the ecophilosophy of Dolores LaChapelle to the bear magic of Doug Peacock, from the hallucinogenic mysticism of Terence McKenna to the perennial

straight talk on the full spectrum of drug use in this country (*Chocolate to Morphine*) of Dr. Andrew Weil, the Telluride Mushroom Festival dares to explore the furthest reaches of the social, psychological and spiritual implications of mushrooms.

As the noted American poet Gary Snyder has written: "We set out in the forest To seek the wild mushroom In shapes diverse and colorful Shining through the woodland gloom... Some make you mighty sick they say Or bring you close to God So here's to the mushroom family A far-flung friendly clan For food, for fun, for poison they are a help to man."

In the Telluride Mushroom Festival all aspects of the fungi come under scrutiny — food, fun and poison. It's the most eclectic celebration of science and savagery that I've ever experienced. A cyclic amalgam of baskets, wax paper, merlot, bagpipes, muddy boots, boiled straw and basidia. And as a poet, bioregionalist, and deep ecologist, I can think of no better way to reconnect to this place I call home than once a year to explore the buried native secrets of mycelia with my friends of the mushroom clan.

Long live this celebration of the below ground powers, this festival of search, identification and ingestion that teaches us the value of the natural and the wisdom of the plant kingdom... of which we are all kin.

...THE
TELLURIDE
MUSHROOM
FESTIVAL
DARES TO
EXPLORE THE
FURTHEST
REACHES OF
THE SOCIAL,
PSYCHOLOGI-
CAL AND
SPIRITUAL
IMPLICATIONS
OF
MUSHROOMS.



Visitors admire 'shrooms at Free Fungus Fair in Elk's Park, 1983.

Left: Dr. Andrew Weil examines specimen at 1982 festival.