

Santa Cruz Sentinel

SATURDAY
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DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Luca Lorenzini and Dario Margheriti show off their basket full of bolete mushrooms they foraged off Empire Grade Road on Wednesday.

Mushroom hunters find tasty treats in the forests

By JANE PALMER

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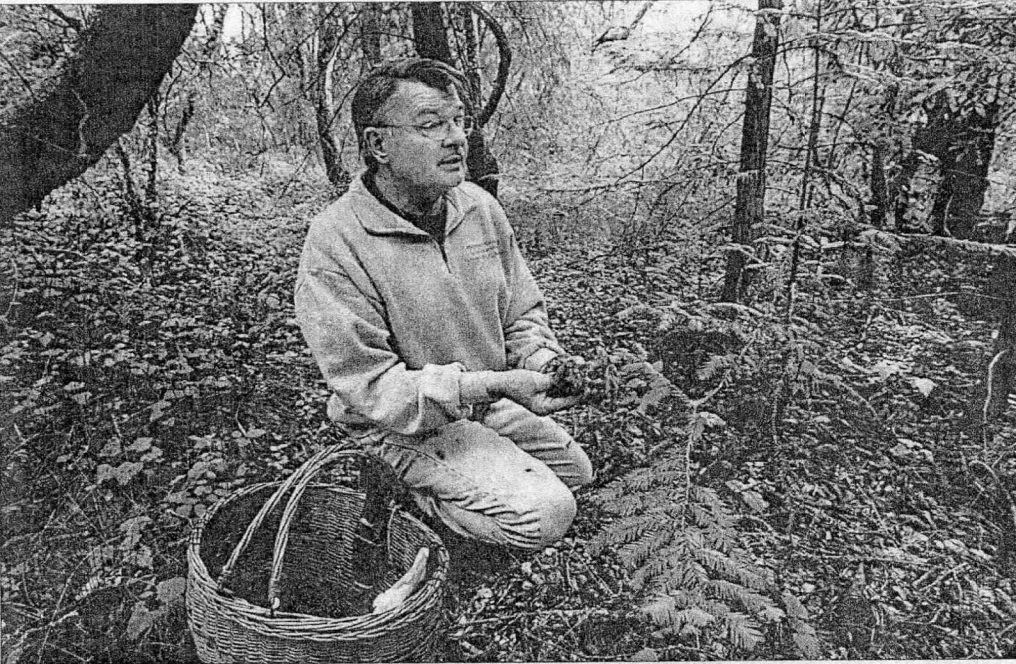
FUNGUS FAIR

SANTA CRUZ — Collecting corals, turkey tails and cow-boy's handkerchiefs is all part of a morning's work for Philip Carpenter, a retired chemist.

Carpenter isn't on a mission to amass weird artifacts, he's an obsessive mushroom

hunter foraging for choice specimens for the 36th annual Fungus Fair this weekend in Santa Cruz. The fair, which runs today and Sunday, boasts fungus-fun for the whole family, from informal lectures

SEE FUNGUS ON A2



Retired chemist Phil Camarota spends much of his free time hunting for mushrooms

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FUNGUS

Continued from A1

and cooking demonstrations to fungus clay sculpting and face painting.

Traipsing around Marshall Field on the outskirts of UC Santa Cruz, the most popular fungus hunting spot in Santa Cruz, Carpenter was hoping for bounty.

"This is an incredible year for mushrooms," Carpenter said. "Boletes are up by the ton."

As if on cue on Wednesday's hunt, Carpenter bumped into Dario Margheriti and Luca Lorenzini, who were carrying baskets laden with chunky thick-stalked boletes. They planned to wash, chop and fry them in olive oil and garlic.

The conditions in Santa Cruz, "relatively warm and yet also relatively cool," are ideal for fungi, Carpenter said.

Most fungi hunters are interested in the edible kind, Carpenter said. But he is just as interested in the "weird and wonderful" varieties.

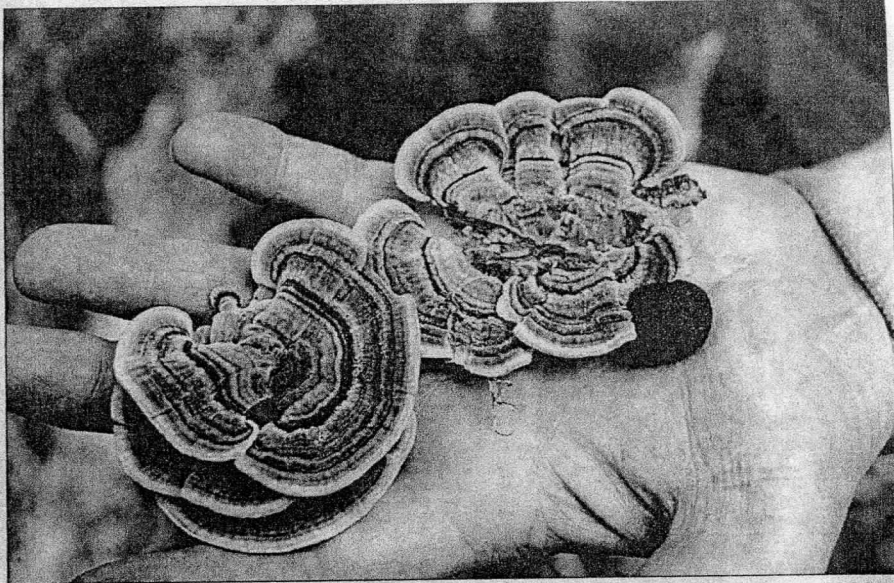
Each week in the mushroom season, Carpenter holds local foraging expeditions for the Fungus Federation, an informal group of enthusiastic fungophiles. Equipped with a basket, a knife and a stout pair of boots, he rummages through the undergrowth in search of the edible and the lesser-known mushrooms.

Despite wanting to pass on his lifelong passion for fungi, Carpenter's first priority is to educate people to put safety first.

"It is important to learn the ones to avoid and then you can focus on the ones you can eat," Carpenter said.

When it comes to foraging for edible mushrooms, Carpenter suggests learning just a few types very well and adding to that foundation over time. Although a few mantras exist — "Growing on wood isn't good" — there is no substitute for knowledge, he said.

"Everyone is always looking for a shortcut and there is no shortcut except for knowing what



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

These turkey tail mushrooms are commonly used in Asia for medicinal purposes.

IF YOU GO

SANTA CRUZ
FUNGUS FAIR

WHAT: Mushroom identification, cooking demonstrations, medicinal uses

WHEN: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. today and Sunday

WHERE: Louden Nelson Community Center, 301 Center St., Santa Cruz

COST: \$7 for adults, \$5 for seniors and students, \$6 for Fungus Federation members, \$12 for two-day pass

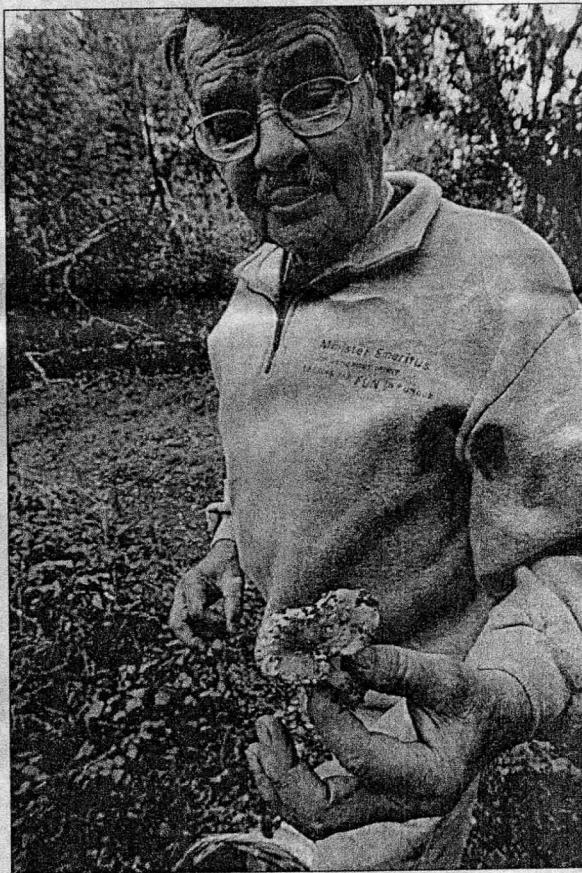
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the mushroom is," Carpenter said.

Poison aside, Carpenter is a scientist on a mission to communicate the bizarre world of mushrooms. He cut hand-sized milk caps, genus *lactarius*, so that they exuded a white juice that quickly turned yellow. He uncovered greening goat's foot, which were nestling shoulders with velvet-capped midnight-blue *leptonias*.

While boletes and chanterelles are the main edibles, other mushrooms have medicinal properties. People can dry and eat the coral mushrooms to cure constipation, he said.

The attractive red-capped sickeners, *russula silvicola*, belie their poisonous properties. Carpenter said they taste hot and spicy — a warning sign.



DAN COYRO/SENTINEL

Phil Carpenter shows off a beautiful red mushroom commonly called 'the sickener.'

"If you taste it and it is peppery spit it out," Carpenter said.

Carpenter feels at home with his passion as a member of the Fungus Federation, whose group motto is "Keeping the fun in fungi."

And although a central

message of the group is to educate, they also enjoy a strong camaraderie. Ultimately, they are proud of being as quirky and bizarre as the mushrooms they hunt.

"We are a weird and wacky bunch," Carpenter said.