

Fungal Foray by **Dr Owen K Wilby**

A mild damp autumn day after a drought* is the best time to hunt for fungi, overnight the fields and woods can fill with strange and mysterious growths. Here are some I found earlier::



A This is the Beefsteak fungus (*Fistulina hepatica*), a common brown bracket fungus 5 to 30 cms wide, shaped somewhat like a hoof or tongue with a pinkish-white edge. Found on old tree stumps. The flesh looks and feels like red meat and is edible, but “best after boiling and hardly exciting” according to my guide book! Don’t eat anything you are not absolutely sure off.



B Another common bracket fungus that I have found is *Polyporus squamosus*, known as the Dryad's Saddle or the Pheasant's Back mushroom. It can form large clumps up to a metre across with individual caps 10 to 30 cms wide. “Worthless!” says my guide book (Lange & Hora, Colins Guide to Mushrooms and Toadstools) so don’t bother to collect it! Always use a guide with pictures and full descriptions.



C The best edible mushrooms on site are some Chantarelles that grow on the roots of our Silver Birch trees – apricot yellow caps up to 10 cms across with up-turned wavy edges. “Edible and excellent with an apricot

smell”



D All around site there are “Fairy rings” in the grass, not the nocturnal haunts of line-dancing ethereal beings, but the result of years of concentric growth from one central germinating spore of the fungus *Marasmius oreades*. As the fungal caps burst through the turf they certainly disrupt the grass’s growth and produce a “parch ring”, inside this, however, is often a ring of lush growth where the decaying fungal hyphae are releasing their nutrients back into the soil. To get rid of a fairy ring, dig round outside the current ring and treat with a copper fungicide. Alternatively, collect the pinkish-tan to buff coloured caps when 2 to 6 cms in diameter and fry lightly in butter – “edible and good”!

Two more bracket fungi turned up on old stumps, the multicoloured:



E *Trametes versicolour* and the pinky-grey



F *Trametes gibbosa*. Neither is edible!

And finally, the weirdest of all the fungi I found around site – the G & H Jew's Ear (*Auricularia auricula*), shaped like a floppy, horizontal human ear 3 to 10 cms across and only growing on elder stumps. The flesh is brown in colour, gelatinous when moist and bone-hard when dry. "Edible and good" says my guide, but I for one don't fancy it!

