



TRUFFLE CHASERS

Mushroom hunting is as old as humanity

By **MAGGI WHITE**
BOOMER & SENIOR NEWS

Steve Schmidt's education is forestry and his trade is horticulture, but a chance invitation to go truffle hunting resulted in a whole new adventure.

"After that hunt, I was hooked – hook, line and sinker," he says.

Schmidt now owns and operates Tours with Steve, leading adults and families on a day of hunting on Mount Hood National Forest.

Mushroom hunting is as old as humanity, he says, "and many cultures still engage in hunting and gathering. Usually a family affair, the older folks teach the youngsters the mysteries of finding elusive mushrooms."

He organizes hunts on a seasonal basis. In the spring it's a hunt for boletus or morels; in the fall they're looking for chanterelles, the most popular. Truffles are reserved for winter hunts. In all, there are 1.5 million species of mushrooms.

"Mushroom hunting is a chance to get out in our great woods, to be in fresh air, to go places you would never go and see things you never see," says Schmidt, who lives in Eagle Creek.

There are some cultural differences regarding views on mushrooms.

"Americans are mushroom phobic," Schmidt says, compared to other cultures. However, "mushrooms are one of the best health foods out there with almost no fat and almost as much protein as meat as well as lots of minerals and vitamins."

Occasionally someone will have an allergic reaction to a mushroom eaten over a long period of time. And while most mushrooms aren't poisonous, some can kill you.



A chanterelle mushroom is carefully sliced from its base while foraging for them north of Carson, Wash., in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

This is why he recommends doing your research beforehand. He can't educate and show everything on a hunt, but after a couple of times, it becomes easier to recognize the dangerous ones. "It would be overwhelming to try to learn everything, the habitat and identification."

He recommends reading "All the Rain Promises and More" by David Arora, which, he says, has good pictures, descriptions and stories



Photos by L.E. Baskow

Steve Schmidt of Estacada shows off his mushroom hunting technique at one of his favorite spots on the Mount Hood National Forest. Schmidt leads educational tours to hunt for mushrooms.

with a sense of humor.

For Schmidt, it's all about the adventure. Hunts often are weather-dependent and he's constantly scouting for new places to find.

As a Boy Scout, Schmidt learned how to navigate the

woods by the time he was 11 years old, but even he has gotten lost. "If you spin in a circle and are asked to point north on a rainy day, you could have a problem," he says.

That's why he talks about personal safety. "One of the

first skills you will learn is using a compass. The forests are beautiful places but have their own share of unseen hazards. Navigating through thick brush can have challenges such as blown-down

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trees, rocks, thick brush, streams and lack of trails, making walking in a straight line often impossible. While GPS's are technical wonders in open ground, they may not work effectively in closed canopy of dense forest or if your batteries die."

He also cautions about wearing the right clothing, staying dry and bringing water and food along. "Always be prepared and check the weather before you go. Let someone know you are going and where you are going so if you get lost they can send for help."

"Don't wear blue jeans in the rain," he continues. "You need food, water and shelter. Shelter can be a garbage bag. If you stay dry you will stay alive. Have fire starters and know how to use them before you go."

If you're planning to go this year, be prepared to do a lot of looking. Schmidt says mushroom hunting "is less than stellar" this year due to little rain.

On his tours he teaches about the proper equipment to carry in the forest when going alone as well as identifying mushrooms by learning to



Mushroom-hunter Steve Schmidt lets out a laugh while talking about a mushroom hunting story. A basket (right) of freshly-picked chanterelle mushrooms, and other varieties, found in Washington's Gifford Pinchot National Forest.



Photos by L.E. Baskow

read the forest. Lastly, he teaches how to prepare mushrooms to eat, which he describes as "the best part."

The hunt for mushrooms combines Schmidt's love of horticulture with another love — cooking. His website includes some of his favorite recipes because he cooks mushrooms all the time.

"I dry them and use them in soups and stews or dehydrate the mushrooms and use them in scrambled eggs," he says.

He enjoys turning people on to the fun of mushroom hunting. He teaches gardening classes at Clackamas Community College and Mount Hood Community

College. He has introduced and named mushrooms, authored articles and taken photographs for national magazines and for international publications. He's also appeared on TV and radio and given more than 100 lectures nationally and internationally at conferences, symposia and workshops.

Overall, Schmidt has been involved in horticulture for

more than 40 years, with family involvement going back to his great-grandfather. He said his parents had the best-landscaped yard in their neighborhood.

Schmidt leads tours for the Estacada Mushroom Festival, which occurred for the first time last October and will be held again this year.

The website, www.tourswithsteve.com, also has information about the tours, Schmidt, his history, and other information including his blog and questions and answers. He can be reached at 503-334-8077.

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