

29 Years of the Northwest Mushroomers Association: A Brief History

by Vince Biciunas

Take yourself back to the years of 1988 and 1989 in Bellingham. We seniors were younger, went on more hikes, and started studying the mushrooms that we found both in the woods and around town.

This author had taken mushroom identification classes with teacher Dave Jansen in the evenings at Northwest Freedom University at Western Washington University. It was an informal class structure at the time, where Dave brought in a camp stove, cast iron pan, and some butter for cooking, and encouraged students to taste the wide variety of edibles he'd collected earlier that day. Dave encouraged his students to join Puget Sound Mycological Society (PSMS) and visit their fall wild mushroom show in Seattle, which this author did, and then joined their club. I've been a member ever since.

Meanwhile, Professor Fred Rhoades was teaching mycology as a for-credit class at Western Washington University, where Kathi Marlowe and Lee Whitford were students. Buck McAdoo remembers that fast friends Kathi and Lee met him on the sidewalk downtown one day and suggested starting a mushroom club, inviting the students of both Fred's and Dave's classes to join. Lee says she found Vince's address and phone number in the PSMS membership list, and sent an invitation. The rest is history!

Northwest Mushroomers Association (NMA) was incorporated in the State of Washington on August 21, 1989.

The purpose of the association, per the By-Laws was: to encourage and develop the understanding

of mycology. In furtherance of this goal, the Association shall provide for the collection of data and the dissemination of information to the scientific community and the general public. The Association shall also promote an educated approach towards the collection and consumption of edible mushrooms.

The first meeting was held in June, 1989, at Bob and June Mooers' home, with eleven attending. The name of the organization was voted on at that meeting:



Meeting of the newly formed Northwest Mushroomers Association at Sam and Ada Leathers' home. Photo by Bob Mooers. Lee Whitford, first president, is at center. Buck McAdoo is kneeling, far right.

Northwest Mushroomers Association—7 votes, Fourth Corner Mushroomers—3 votes, and Whatcom County Mycological Society—1 vote. NMA it is.

The second meeting was held July 11, 1989, at Sam and Ada Leathers' home, where officers were first elected: Lee Whitford, President, Buck McAdoo, Vice President, Kathi Marlowe as Treasurer, and Cheryl Roberts as Secretary, Bob Mooers for Trustee/At-Large. The decision was made at that meeting to plan for and hold a Wild Mushroom Show in October, loosely based on the style of Seattle's PSMS show. Their bylaws were also the basis for the NMA bylaws

Besides meetings, forays, and the fall Wild Mushroom Show, we've added Mushroom ID classes in recent years, with great success.

adopted that summer. The membership list numbered 16 households by September. See the photograph from that afternoon meeting, taken on the patio of Sam and Ada's home.

Regular meetings and forays were scheduled starting in September, for the second Thursday of the months of September, October, November, and December, taking up again in March, April, May, and June. Forays were scheduled for the Saturday following each month's meeting. In later years, the December meetings and forays were cancelled.

A club-members-only potluck supper named Survivors Banquet was scheduled for February or early March, which served as the General Meeting of each year, featuring election of Officers and planning for the coming season.

Another regular club event was Morel Madness, a weekend getaway to eastern Washington for morel hunting. This was always a popular event, whether it involved camping or not. A Saturday night potluck supper, followed by a Sunday breakfast featuring morels, was always memorable. As of last year, we've renamed this event Mushroom Mayhem, since the morels are sometimes elusive.

Of the 'founding members' Fred Rhoades, Buck McAdoo and Vince Biciunas are still active members in the club. Fred has been our official Scientific Advisor since the very beginning. Buck has been an avid foray identifier, editor, board member, and author. Vince has held every elected office, except Treasurer, over the years.

Others who are still active members since the early years include Margaret and Claude Dilly, Fien Hulscher, Sue Blethen, Stas and Carol Bronisz, Evan Sanford, Pam Anderson, Erin Moore, Harry Ota, Tim Johnson, Maggie Sullivan, and Harold Mead.

The newsletter, "MushRumors" was an early means of communicating with club members, sent by US mail, in paper form. This was years before we had

the internet! Buck McAdoo has written for almost every issue, with a Mushroom of the Month feature article, adding his own wry wit to serious and exacting mushroom identification and study. Newsletter editors over the years, besides Buck, have been Bob Mooers, Ken Davies, Dan Crape, Lee Whitford, Eric Swisher, and Jack Waytz.

Besides meetings and forays, we've added Mushroom ID classes in recent years, with great success. The highlight of every autumn has been the Wild Mushroom Show, an all-volunteer staged exhibit of fresh, wild mushrooms, displayed and identified by scientific and common names, and open to the public for a small entry fee. This event is the club's main income source, besides the nominal yearly dues. When Margaret Dilly (a past president of PSMS) joined the club in the early 1990s, her expertise in organizing the mushrooms for the show took us to a higher level. The Show is still incredibly popular and well attended.

In 2009, to celebrate NMA's 20th Anniversary, we held a special November foray at Cama Beach State Park on Camano Island. We rented one of the larger cabins for our Saturday evening potluck, and many members rented small cabins on the beach. We forayed the many trails in the park. One of the family members who owned and then donated the land and cabins to the State of Washington was a club member at the time, making it all the more memorable.

Today, we can be proud of the educational benefit we have provided to our community, for 29 years, in the study of fungi. We are still fulfilling our Mission. More than that, I am personally grateful for the years of friendships made and kept.



Original NMA logo art by Sue Blethen

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