

Margaret Dilly (1927–2021)

Fred Rhoades

Our esteemed member, Margaret Dilly, has passed away. We will miss her. She and her husband Claude have been Northwest mushroomers for a long time and active members of the Northwest Mushroomers Association since the mid-1990s.



Photo by Vince Biciunas

She was born Sept. 3, 1927, in Schenectady, New York, but moved at the age of seven months with her family when her father got another General Electric job in the Puget Sound area. Margaret met Claude and they were married in Seattle where they lived until the mid-1990s. At the Seattle World's Fair in 1962, the Dillys were intrigued by an exhibit of wild mushrooms. They began to hang out with a wine group that included UW mycologist, Dr. Daniel E. Stuntz, Ben Woo (first president of the Puget Sound Mycological Society, PSMS), naturalist Joy Spurr, and Dixie Lee Ray (at the time, science director at Seattle Science Center, later director of the Atomic Energy Commission and then Washington State governor).

PSMS was founded in 1964 largely under the mentorship of Dr. Stuntz (who passed away in 1983). The Dillys soon joined PSMS, and Margaret was an active participant in the running of the group from the earliest days. Claude did less direct work with the club but avidly supported Margaret's interests. He supplied the wine and since both wine and mushrooms are outputs from the Fungal Kingdom, they have a natural attraction to each other. Claude happened also to be a master beekeeper. Among Margaret's many mushrooming activities with PSMS were a stint as vice president in 1974 and later president in 1984 when she presided for the club's 20th anniversary. Throughout this period Margaret oversaw tray arranging for the annual show. She brought this expertise up to our club in Bellingham when the Dillys moved to Oak Harbor in the 1990s. Three years ago they moved from Oak Harbor to a Solstice Senior Living apartment here in Bellingham and then to Orchard Park Assisted Living.

During the early years of PSMS the more dedicated members, Margaret included, became quite frustrated with the incomplete state of knowledge about our Pacific Northwest mushrooms. Always proactive in the search for understanding about these organisms, PSMS members were participants in two projects. The first was the infamous PSMS Morel Committee.

Under the direction of Dr. Stuntz, this group took on a study with the goal of unraveling the true identities of the local members of the springtime genus *Morchella*. PSMS members had collected these on both sides of the Cascades for years and it seemed obvious that the European names being used for our species were inappropriate. But how many species were there? and what were their distributions? To get at these questions, the committee compiled dried samples and records of many of the collections made by members: recording photographs, physical descriptions of the mushrooms, and their microscopic features. It soon became apparent that they had bitten off a major project and the project was never finished. The samples are still lurking in the UW fungal herbarium and all the written



Margaret Dilly sorts *Agaricus* at the Wild Mushroom Show in Bellingham. Photo by Vince Biciunas

records are in a box somewhere. It was only very recently (2011) that others, using DNA analyses (data unavailable to the Morel Committee), have begun to unravel the taxonomic mysteries of Pacific Northwest morels. However, there may still be secrets of other new species hiding in that data from the original Morel Committee.

A second project Margaret was very active with was the Pacific Northwest Key Council. This group of professional and amateur mycologists formed in 1974 under the direction of Dr. Stuntz, with Kit Scates as the group's organizer, principal



The morel committee in Dr. Stuntz lab, Margaret lower left

recruiter, and first president. Margaret Dilly and other members of PSMS as well as the Oregon Mycological Society (Portland) were among the first 15 members. The goals of the Key Council were several: to compile an accurate list of Pacific Northwest fungi, to gather photographs and other information about them, to prepare macroscopic identification keys to groups (genera and sometimes larger groups, for example, “pleurotooid species”), and to involve both professional mycologists and dedicated amateurs all along the way. In those days there were no good resources available to the avid mushroomer. Ever the brave soul, Margaret Dilly took on the unenviable job of creating a key to the genus *Agaricus*. This key is still available at the Key Council, <https://www.svims.ca/council/Agari1.htm>. You can learn more about the Key Council and see a photo of both Claude and Margaret on the North American Mycological Association website, https://namyco.org/the_pacific_northwest_key_coun.php.



Margaret Dilly (right) examines a wily *Morchella*, 1974

Margaret got involved with mushroom politics while still living in Seattle. She lobbied against commercial pickers in Olympia and for recreational pickers, such as ourselves. She advised during the process of formulating Washington State regulations and the foraging restrictions bear her imprint today.

As mentioned, it has been the great fortune of the Northwest Mushroomers Association to benefit from the expertise of Margaret Dilly. When the Dillys moved to Oak Harbor, they began attending our meetings since Bellingham was effectively closer than Seattle. Margaret brought her skills to greatly help with the running of the club and especially organizing the annual wild mushroom show. For many years it was Margaret who deftly explained to members how to collect and save mushroom specimens for the show. Margaret introduced a system of maintaining labels for identified show collections. It was Margaret who, up until the last couple of years, had overseen arranging the species trays for the annual mushroom display you see at the show.

Margaret was an active participant in the club's annual ID classes. In that class and everywhere else, her overriding focus was always to educate others and share in the experience she so much loved. Margaret was a generous soul, always happy to share her knowledge and pick you up when you were feeling down. The Dillys loved to host visiting mycologists who came through the Northwest, and if you dropped in on them, you couldn't leave without getting a bite to eat.

We continue to celebrate Margaret and Claude each fall with our final foray of the season, the Dilly Foray, at Deception Pass State Park.



Margaret shares her knowledge, photo by Vince Biciunas