

FUNGI FORAY

Written by PAUL MORRIS

AN NSTG COURSE held on Sunday 28th September 2008
- at Tyrrell's Wood (aka Big Wood TM2089) at Long Stratton.



What is a good way to spend a Sunday afternoon, with congenial company and interesting conversation? The Pub? – nope! A Fungi Foray with the NSTG.

As new members of the Group, this was the first event that my wife, Janette and I have attended

since joining at the summer show. It was a really pleasant afternoon with the bonus of mild, dry weather. Although, I must admit, it might not have been quite so pleasant had it been teeming with rain. The paths were mostly dry with just a few boggy places. After wet weather I can imagine it could be quite sticky with wellies being essential footwear.

The foray was lead by Tony Leech of the Norfolk Fungus Study Group who is something of a local expert in these matters. He had other members of the group to assist him, so there was more than one expert to ask.

The event started with a chat in the car park where introductions were made – nothing formal, just getting to know some of the other members. Tony started with a caution on edible fungi – most aren't, some are, and a few are deadly poisonous. So the general advice was don't eat any findings. And as an added caution, we were reminded that the woods are a favourite with dog walkers so even the edible ones might be less than wholesome!

Apparently, this particular wood is quite good for fungi as there is plenty of old rotting wood – many woods are too tidy with all the fallen wood removed by firewood scavengers or the 'health and safety' spoilsports. Being new to the area I did not know that there are few woods in Norfolk. Thinking about it I should not be surprised as much of it used to be low lying marshy ground.

The foray consisted of a leisurely stroll through the woods, keeping mainly to the paths with small diversions into the undergrowth – mostly brambles. It was not long before our first impressive specimen was spotted. This was

a stinkhorn. Luckily, it was a young specimen that had not quite reached the mature, stinking phase.

All the time, members were finding specimens and bringing them to Tony and the other experts for identification. Having struggled with identification in the past, I thought the experts would be quite positive about the specimens, so I was quite surprised at the caution exhibited. Some were identified straight away, others were stroked, prodded, sniffed 'smells of potatoes', cut, bruised and examined with a hand lens. 'This could be...' 'It seems like, but there is variation ...' - all these Tony would take back with him for more positive identification, which could include microscopic identification of the spores. It is lot more subtle than I had thought.

Each specimen identified was marked on a list. Although it was all very informal, the experts were keeping a tally on what was being found – they had not worked this wood before – and the details would go into the local fungi databases.

Everybody (except us so it seemed) had a wicker basket to keep the specimens that they picked. Mine went into my camera bag which was less than ideal for both the fungi and my camera equipment – one lesson learned for the next time. One of the best gatherers was young Rebecca Rushforth, daughter of our esteemed Editor. Her basket was soon overflowing with specimens. I claimed it was because she was closer to the ground so could see better and bend over to pick more easily !

As the stroll progressed, more and more different fungi were being presented for identification: bolette, false death cap, sulphur tufts, birch polypore, honey fungus – the list goes on. I think Tony may have started getting fed up with the number of false death caps being



Rebecca Rushforth



Edible wood mushroom

named because they are black and are of finger shape and size. And right next to these was spotted a tiny fungus about 1/8" across; this needed a hand lens to see it properly.

I cannot name that fungus because the other lesson I had learned by this time was to have some method of making notes. I was taking plenty of photographs, finding specimens, getting them identified, seeing others identified, then forgetting what was what. So don't

expect all my photos to be labelled ! Next time I will take a small portable recorder so that I can catch the Latin names as well.

Although the foray was scheduled for a duration of two hours, it was three hours before we returned to the car park. Tony summed up some of the highlights and noted that about 50 different specimens had been recorded. Not a bad count for a group of novices ambling blindly about the woods. Tony has since provided us with the complete list of the **56** specimens we found in Tyrrell's Wood and the star of the day was identified as ***Hygrophorus persoonii* - NEW TO NORFOLK**. Another feather in the cap of the Norfolk Smallholders !

I will certainly go to more of these events.

You can see more of the photos I took on the web at <http://www.pmstudios.co.uk/pauls/nstgff080928/pauls.php>

presented – but no real death caps, not until the very end when one was found on the way back to the car park.

At one point we stopped to admire quite a large (4 or 5 inches across) white specimen – it turned out to be the edible wood mushroom. And right beside it was some 'dead man's fingers', so



Dead Man's Fingers.