

'Liberty Cap' mushroom

by Walrus Oakenbough

The Liberty Cap *Psilocybe*

From the moment that Earth's northward swing aligns the Sun directly above the equator autumn begins (September 22nd); the conditions are ready for *Psilocybe semilanceata*'s North-West coast appearance.

Regional variations in summer moisture and heat are tempered with the will of people in determining the exact time of the expression of this messenger *psilocybe* — the Liberty Cap or *semilanceata*.

By now, from Oregon to the Queen Charlottes this mushroom is ready to meet those who seek her teaching.

Several other kinds of *psilocybe* grow throughout the lower mainland, none as abundantly or as recognizable as *psilocybe semilanceata*.

Amanita Muscaria

The *Amanita* mushrooms, especially *muscaria* and *pantherina* are already well known to North-West coast mycologists. These are popularly referred to as "extremely toxic", yet abundant, and for that reason most common mushroom guides carry beautiful colour prints of them — showing people what not to collect.

The *Amanitas* contain a series of centrally-acting molecules completely different to *psilocybin* related compounds. To date modern research has only determined that previous theories as to the chemical nature of *Amanita* "poisoning" are inadequate and that little is really known about this remarkable herb.

Perhaps the most extensive ethnopharmacological invest-

igation of man and *Amanita* has been undertaken by R. Gordon Wasson. It is available in paperback form under the title: "Soma—Divine Mushroom of Immortality", about \$9.25 in Canada.

The only way to learn how to identify and then know the various psychedelic herbs available to West coast dwellers is to find people willing to take you on a gathering adventure. The "Magic Mushroom" has in the past, served to bring interested people together in its own particular way, so that seekers are able to go about their quest with some indirect knowledge and an emphasis that it is a gift to be accepted with respect. There is no way Walrus can instill the proper "code of ethics" or whatever in anyone who seeks only a cheap high...neither may I question the workings of this mysterious universe which sometimes takes a naive person and does wonders to him or her. For me, writing about the Liberty Cap is always an awesome task.

The Setting

Liberty Cap *psilocybes* tend to grow in clusters that exclude other mushroom varieties: their "habitat" consists of low fields of grass, clover or hay. Frequently neighbors include plantain, chamomile and sometimes even moss.

Generally they are found almost anywhere throughout the lower mainland and Fraser Valley. The Haida Indians, by living on the Queen Charlotte Islands for thousands of years, are protectors or guardians of perhaps the most abundant zones of *P. semilanceata* on the N.W. Coast, if not in all of America.

When investigating a field and part of the covering is tall foliage, follow mouse trails. Trace the hidden valleys and really get into exploring this micro-environment...along these pathways one should soon discover the tiny Liberty Cap if it is present at all. Generally such Liberty Caps will be moist and vary in colour from those found in fields of short grass where the mushrooms have a chance to emerge into direct sunlight.

They may not show the characteristic bluish stain that sometimes rings the lower portion of the cap (pileus) in mature sun-exposed *Psilocybe*. Every time I seem to conclude anything approaching a "law" governing Liberty Cap habitat and appearance one will pop along throwing all previous assumptions to the wind.

Psilocybe semilanceata stops sending forth new buds as soon as the temperature drops below about 43 degrees with the rainy season and winter. However, the mushrooms remain until December in the lower mainland and in certain spots along the Fraser, people last year were finding Liberty Caps well into January.

Appearance

Mature *psilocybe semilanceata* are generally about one-half to three-quarters of an inch across the cap, the stalk about three inches long. A mini-variety is common and a super-strain rare. One "super" Liberty Cap I had the pleasure of meeting was two and a half inches across and seven inches tall.

All Liberty Caps have a similar shape: a tiny nipple or bump at the apex of their pileus; a conical cap mostly taller than broad although the base may flare out in old large ones; a stem

that is thin, not hollow comprised of tight fibres and opaque not transparent. The gills yield purplish-brown spores when mature. In moist mushrooms gill lines are visible through the lower rim of the cap when seen from above but these should not be confused with the marked gill-line striations characteristic of a similar shaped non-poisonous mushroom sometimes brought to the Straight in the hopes of *Psilocybin* identification.

Colour characteristics vary with age and wetness. Dry, mature Liberty Caps are cream-buff in cap-colour, the nipple is darker — a tan buff, as may be the lower perimeter of the cap which also may be stained a turquoise blue around the edge; mature stems are creamy coloured directly underneath the cap but increasing in darkness to a tan colour below.

Stalks reach into a mass of underground mycelium that is white. This network of hair-like fibres should be left intact as it has taken all spring and summer to grow before it could send forth the budding mushroom which is its fruiting body. That is: just break the stem off above ground when gathering.

Moist Liberty Caps are darker in every respect and opaquely translucent to a certain extent. Mushrooms containing *psilocybin* turn bluish if crushed and set aside awhile — this is one key to identification. Metol, a commercial film developing agent will speed up reaction time!

Qualities

In the field about seven Liberty Caps should let you know what they are all about or at least hint at it in a rather powerful, organically-feeling, LSD type of way. Gather in jars and store dried or fresh frozen. Ten in an omelette is a beautiful way to start a day but don't make any other plans.

Drying can be accomplished in an oven, quickly, or slowly in the air. There are esoteric principles involved that simply cannot be written about but the mushroom itself will reveal in her teaching...if one knows how to listen.

Friends living in Panama have experimented with the expelled juice of *Psilocybe* varieties — frozen, it makes an incredible popsicle! Their intention though was to isolate differing methods of incorporating *psilocybe* ingestion into a ceremony akin to the Native American Church which focuses through Peyote buttons or powder as the medium sacrament.

Medicinally, the various races of *psilocybe* have been extensively used throughout America by priests and medicine people for ages. The practice continues today throughout Mexico and Guatemala in accordance with very ancient teachings.

We are of course learning anew some of what this is all about. Traditionally, each mushroom is considered a messenger being — whose influence guides an awakened perception of one's purpose and place in our unfolding universe.

Fasting has always been preparatory to meeting the messenger. In Aztec the *Psilocybe mexicana* was called *teonanacatl*: God's flesh.

Psilocybe semilanceata acts therapeutically upon the respiratory system: it expels accumulations of mucous and greatly

enhances one's ability to breathe — with a feeling that vital breath penetrates directly into every part of the system. Circulation is stimulated and sluggish organs regain strength of function.

While each cell is triggered to rid itself of waste deposits, after effects may include symptoms of cold or flu. This is because liver, pores, lungs and kidneys are suddenly given so many poisons to eliminate all at once.

A Healing Ceremony with Liberty Cap as sacrament should acknowledge this process of purification by consciously seeing one's body go through the stages of cleansing and rejuvenation. Motion is an important aspect of the study — the mushroom shows a way to express purity through a kind of dance.

This is an affirmation of higher laws of energy channels operating throughout one's body and connecting to to beyond.

The Dance and awareness of Vital Breath have been basic to every system of yoga or higher forms of martial arts and to acupuncture, massage and zone therapy for thousands of years.

Inherent in all of this is the key to what concerned nutritionists would call "the danger of Vitamin depletion through use of mind altering drugs". They of course do not know of the organic therapeutic qualities of powerful herbs such as Liberty Cap or Peyote. Therefore, one should realize that any powerful medicine that acts to rid every body-cell of accumulated waste is going to place an incredible strain on eliminative organs which require organic vitamins and minerals to properly function, especially when rapid elimination must occur. Once the blood stream has been stimulated to draw out itself body poisons, they must be eliminated or one will feel the symptoms of disease i.e. headache, cough, fever, flu, whatever.

That basically, is why a preparatory fresh fruit with raw vegetable diet and fasting should be part of any ceremony with Liberty Cap.

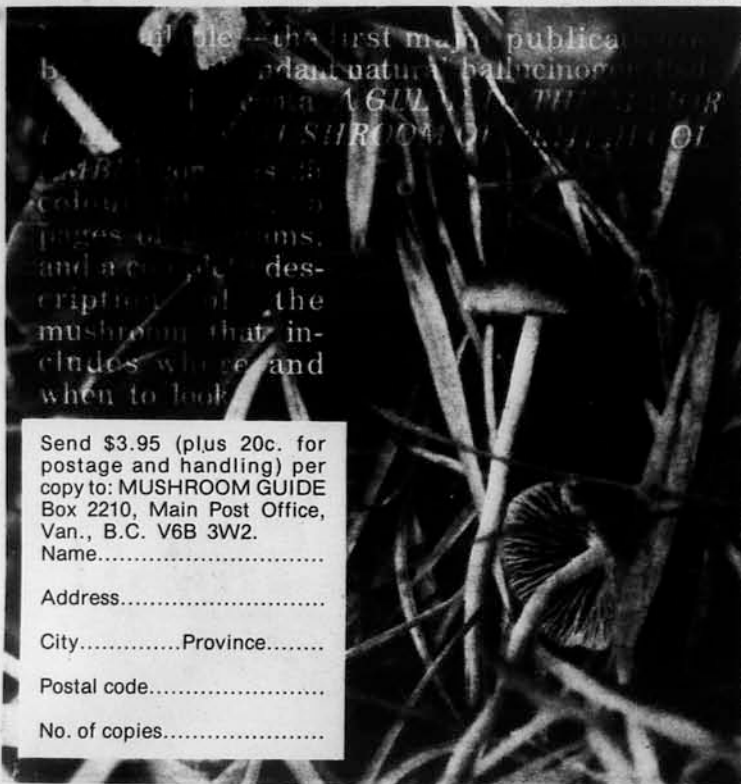
Sweat lodging is important too, and this should proceed with safeguards to assure dehydration doesn't occur. Kelp powder is a valuable herb containing organic salts essential to proper nerve functioning as well as efficient sweating, simply take some prior to and following a ritual sweat lodge ceremony.

Liberty Cap will tell you all of this directly through one's own awakened awareness but, only so long as the setting is conducive to this "seeing within". The "high" awakens perception of the "without" as well, a fact which sometimes takes precedent over one's willingness to follow the inner teachings at the expense of simply having a good (temporary) trip.

The real trip begins later. Successive journeys may temper one's will to actualize more aliveness in everything. It is time to forge our community.

Earth is making available her tools for the People as never before.

Possessing Liberty Cap mushrooms is perfectly legal — be discreet anyway. There is much more at stake than a mere bust. See the writing in the trees. *



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