

Mycoblitz: Beating the Weather

Ron Petersen and Jean Lodge

As the month ended, the *Knoxville News-Sentinel* newspaper lamented about the fifth wettest June on record. Nearby campground owners cried the blues as day after day brought afternoon thunder-showers. But a small band of renegades was pleased, and as the pattern continued into July, they began to gather for a unique event called, appropriately, the "Mycoblitz." The intent was to take a "snapshot" census of the mushrooms and other fungi fruiting in Great Smoky Mountains National Park over a short period (July 12-14/2004), and to augment the fungi records for the ATBI. Rain and warm weather generally bring out a flush of mushrooms, so the wishes of participants were answered.

Professional mycologists and amateur mushroom hunters descended on Knoxville, where Karen Hughes and Ron Petersen led "Mycoblitz I", operated out of the University of Tennessee (UT). Another, larger group of 40 professional, amateur, and student mycologists (including the Asheville Mushroom Club and two volunteers from DLIA) gathered at the Cosby campground and the new UT Greenbrier Field Station, where "Mycoblitz II" was housed. The third group of seven, led by Steve Rehner and Joey Spatafora, specialized in *Cordyceps* fungi, and converged on the Cosby motel later the same week after searching the Cataloochee area of the National Park. There was a total of 70 participants in the three groups, many of which were world experts on certain groups of fungi, ranging from tiny, obscure black dots on rotten wood, brown spots on leaves, thin crusts on the undersides of logs, woody shelves on dead trees, to the many shapes and colors of organisms recognizable as mushrooms.

The groups were international in profile. Some mycologists were already familiar with the diverse fungi of our southern mountains, while others were exposed to this rich resource for the first time. While collecting took place over only three days, the specimens will furnish material for study for months and years to come.

The "snapshot" revealed over 200 species which were immediately recognizable; a number which may be as much as 10 times higher after all identifications are in. All species are included in a database which will become part of the Park inventory. Some of the species collected were rare finds (e.g., the waxcaps, *Hygrocybe purpureofolia*, and *H. appalachianensis*), and at least one was a species new to science (*Tomentella* n. sp., found by Urmaz Koljag of Eustonia). Once collected, specimens are preserved by drying, and within a few days, these preserved specimens will be distributed to workers all over the globe. In addition to names and voucher specimens, the experience has already spawned new interest to revisit the area by some mycologists (especially the international folks) and perhaps to repeat the event. If this should happen, mycologists will again lobby for a rainy June. Campground owners stay in touch!

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Catherine Aime sorts collections.



Coleman McCleneghan explains mushrooms. Ron Petersen in background,



Meredith Blackwell examines a specimen.

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