

Room mushing in the North ... ugebrev nr. 10 b, 8.august 1999

Studies in mycology are a new discipline at Zackenberg this year. The main purpose is to collect and describe the greatest possible number of mushrooms from different plant communities. One qualified guess is that you will be able to find at least 300 species in the area. To begin with, it is my goal during the field work to try to break the record on 152 higher plant species. When this is going to happen I will truly enjoy the champagne I bought on board the aircraft.

In spite of the fact that the growing season has been more than two weeks delayed because of late spring and extreme loads of snow, I was very busy already from the beginning of my field period, as there were plenty of mushrooms also on the normally dry heath. While writing this, the mushroom peak is decreasing" in the moist, species-rich grasslands. However, meadows and heaths are not at all at their best - it is still summer there, seen from the mushrooms' point of view.

The first weeks went by while I dared get further and further away from the station, concurrent with my decreasing fear of hungry polar bears and aggressive muskoxen. When I talked about my fear, Hans Meltofte cheered me up that the risk of getting seriously hurt is equal to the risk of being hit by a falling tile in Copenhagen. I could easily imagine that although I live in Paamiut, where the tower blocks" have eternit roofs.

Luckily, the mushrooms have caused really good problems. - I can recognize 1/3 of the species in the field and hopefully determine just as many afterwards. Colleagues, who are experts in the field, will have to look at the rest. However, some are common, easily characterized and most probably nameless. Optimistic as I am, I believe that one day someone will describe them scientifically.

One of the mushrooms, a *Cortinarius* in the *Phlegmacium* family, is new to the High Arctic and is probably edible. As they grow in communities, you can easily collect enough for a meal. I have dried some as I intend to find out later on if they really ARE edible. A die-hard rumour, even here at Zackenberg, tells that there are no poisonous mushrooms in Greenland. I have found a handful of *Inocybe* and *Clitocybe* species in an edible size and they can certainly get you hospitalized, which is not very wise, as the nearest hospital is 450 km from here.

But why take any risk by blindly eating poisonous mushrooms when you can find delicious mushrooms easy to recognize. Champignons (*Agaricus*) are very common here, and you won't find poisonous champignons in Greenland contrary to more temperate parts of the world. The biggest (18 cm in diameter, 260 g, is a white, coarse-squamous one with the appropriate name *Agaricus aristocratus*, recently described from Svalbard. I collected just enough to let everyone at Zackenberg have a taste the other evening.

This season is an early season as it seems to have its peak mid July. Another one I used to recommend is Nordic Fairy-ring Mushroom (*Lepista multiformis*), a big grey-brownish mushroom which is seen in huge amount further down south on disturbed soil (road sides etc.); I have seen it only twice here. One of them pulled my leg as I did not realize before my return to the station that I had collected two species - one was real and the other one only looked like it, but is unknown to me - this gives me something to revise. Another one of the edible mushrooms is Golden Munkehat (*Melanoleuca cognata*), quite common

in early July. It has been a lovely experience to get the opportunity to study mushrooms full time, even in the National Park where I am for the first time.

We have all been pretty busy, and therefore a party came in handy. Some VIP guests from the Danish Ministry of Environment have been visiting for a couple of days, and everybody here felt it was nice to get an opportunity to show their projects to the coordinating people. After the scientific excursions we enjoyed a three-course-dinner and coffee 'avec' under the sky of a balmy summer evening followed by a volleyball match at midnight. The last Zackenbergers went to sleep at seven in the morning.

Yesterday, I was once again with the Swedish botanist Bengt Jonsell at Ulvehøj. It was quite an experience for both of us because we found the sparse Greenlandic bluebell (*Campanula gieseckiana*). Very convenient, however, as a Norwegian botanist has been inquiring about bluebell specimens for genetic studies with the purpose of examining immigration routes of this plant species into the High Arctic.

/Torbjørn Borgen Lindhardt