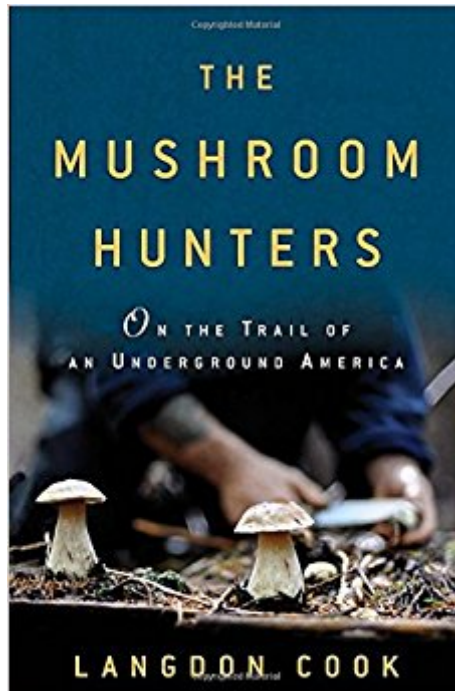




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The Mushroom Hunters: On The Trail Of An Underground America



Synopsis

In the tradition of Michael Pollan's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Susan Orlean's *The Orchid Thief*, and Mark Kurlansky's *Cod*—a renowned culinary adventurer goes into the woods with the iconoclasts and outlaws who seek the world's most coveted ingredient . . . and one of nature's last truly wild foods: the uncultivated, uncontrollable mushroom. Within the dark corners of America's forests grow culinary treasures. Chefs pay top dollar to showcase these elusive and beguiling ingredients on their menus. Whether dressing up a filet mignon with smoky morels or shaving luxurious white truffles over pasta, the most elegant restaurants across the country now feature an abundance of wild mushrooms. The mushroom hunters, by contrast, are a rough lot. They live in the wilderness and move with the seasons. Motivated by Gold Rush desires, they haul improbable quantities of fungi from the woods for cash. Langdon Cook embeds himself in this shadowy subculture, reporting from both rural fringes and big-city eateries with the flair of a novelist, uncovering along the way what might be the last gasp of frontier-style capitalism. Meet Doug, an ex-logger and crabber—now an itinerant mushroom picker trying to pay his bills and stay out of trouble; and Jeremy, a former cook turned wild food entrepreneur, crisscrossing the continent to build a business amid cutthroat competition; their friend Matt, an up-and-coming chef whose kitchen alchemy is turning heads; and the woman who inspires them all. Rich with the science and lore of edible fungi—from seductive chanterelles to exotic porcini—*The Mushroom Hunters* is equal parts gonzo travelogue and culinary history lesson, a rollicking, character-driven tour through a world that is by turns secretive, dangerous, and tragically American. Praise for *The Mushroom Hunters*

• "A rollicking narrative . . . Cook [delivers] vivid and cinematic scenes on every page." • "The Wall Street Journal" • "The Mushroom Hunters lends fresh, sharp illumination to a little-known but vigorously contested patch of gastronomic turf. . . . [It's an] entertaining ramble through the woods with a group of ragtag characters." • "The Washington Post" • "Like Susan Orlean in *The Orchid Thief*, Seattle author [Langdon] Cook shines a light on a shady subculture operating at the seam between wilderness and commerce. Like author Michael Pollan, he knows that every bite of food these days has a complex, often unsavory backstory. Like the late Hunter Thompson, he not only goes along for the ride with the shifty characters he's writing about, but drives the getaway car. After reading *The Mushroom Hunters*, you'll never look at a portobello the same way. . . . [A] beguiling, surprising book." • "The Seattle Times" • "Not simply about mushrooms, this book examines human behavior, economics, food, society, and nature. In the end, readers will have learned a great deal about U.S. economic and social structures—all while being entertained and enlightened by stories of gastronomy and mushrooms. Highly recommended." • "Library Journal" •

Intrepid and inspired. Publishers Weekly "Uncultivated mushrooms are one of our last truly wild foods; it often takes truly wild and rough mushroom hunters to bring them to our table. Cook travels and hunts with them in a riveting, crazy undertaking, told in often-poetic prose." Shelf Awareness

Book Information

Hardcover: 320 pages

Publisher: Ballantine Books; 1st Edition edition (September 10, 2013)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0345536258

ISBN-13: 978-0345536259

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1 x 9.4 inches


Shipping Weight: 15.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 142 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #119,003 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #36 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Plants > Mushrooms #275 in Books > Science & Math > Agricultural Sciences > Food Science #282 in Books > Cookbooks, Food & Wine > Cooking by Ingredient > Natural Foods

Customer Reviews

An Best Book of the Month, September 2013: In your neighborhood grocery store sits a bin of nondescript white mushrooms, unthreatening and clearly-of-this-planet fungi that might have been plucked from the pages of Beatrix Potter tale. But for accomplished forager and outdoorsman Langdon Cook (Fat of the Land), the story goes much deeper. He took a long walk in the woods and returned with *The Mushroom Hunters*, a collection of delightful stories of a mycelial underground filled with eccentrics and obsessives who at first seem strange (and maybe even unsettling), but grow more charming by the page. This book is a ton of fun--equal parts adventure, natural history, and gastronomy. Naturalists (who aren't necessarily foodies) will learn about some of the more exotic fungi and their uses on the table, while foodies (who might not be naturalists) will find the loamy details of the mushroom trail enlightening. Above all, *The Mushroom Hunters* will make you hungry. --Jon Foro Author Langdon Cook on *The Mushroom Hunters*: On the Trail of an Underground America The idea for *The Mushroom Hunters* came to me while harvesting morel mushrooms in July, 2007, during an episode that's briefly recounted in my first book, *Fat of the Land*. I was in the North Cascades of Washington State near the Canadian border, in one of the last

truly wild regions of the Lower 48, home to wolves and grizzlies. A friend and I heard strange voices in the woods. Moments later we came face-to-face with two men, both wearing impossibly large packs filled with morels, maybe eighty pounds apiece. Unlike us, these men were picking mushrooms to sell, spending months in the bush working in abject conditions that would test the mettle of anyone. I had heard that commercial mushroom pickers often packed guns into the woods and guarded patches with territorial vigor. They stared at us and we stared at them. Nothing was said. Then, just like that, they turned on their heels and disappeared back into the timber. It was like a Bigfoot sighting. After that I was determined to infiltrate the commercial wild mushroom trade, a scrappy, mostly hidden and itinerant enterprise that follows the mushroom flushes year-round, with echoes of Wild West frontier-style capitalism and Gold Rush days gone by. I was amazed that no one had ever written a book-length account of it, and was fortunate to meet a number of pickers and buyers who allowed me into their world. Over the next few years I traveled from my home in Seattle as far north as Yukon Territory and, come winter, camped with pickers on the Lost Coast of California. I went to Oregon and British Columbia, to Michigan, Montana, Colorado, and New York City, among other places, to follow the invisible food chain from patch to plate. I got on the mushroom trail and embedded myself in a subculture that is, for better or worse, indelibly American. The Mushroom Hunters weaves together food, natural history, and outdoor adventure. It's the result of thousands of hours spent with pickers, buyers, and chefs; hundreds of hours of taped interviews; and my own compulsion to work this first-hand material into a narrative that readers can appreciate, whether or not they've ever tasted a wild mushroom or even taken a walk in the woods.  Images by Author Langdon Cook

With the arrival of spring, North America's woodlands begin to echo with the footfalls of stealthy and secretive hunters who aren't after any animal. They are on the prowl for fungi springing from the awakening forest floor. Morel hunters eventually give way to other adepts foraging for later-arriving porcini and chanterelles. These hardy souls then meet up with even more shadowy types, dealers and middlemen, furtive guardians of mushroom supply and demand, who resell their booty to restaurants, greenmarkets, and the export trade. This gray market runs on cash only, and serious players in this secretive society are frequently armed. All this is in service of the fifth taste, umami, a prime flavor that mushrooms supply in such abundance that chefs willingly pay astronomical prices to please themselves and well-heeled guests. Cook's sketches of these unique and idiosyncratic characters aren't always wholly sympathetic, but he makes every one of them real. --Mark Knoblauch

This is an entertaining story about some white guys who have helped put wild food on the tables of top restaurants and their interactions with the majority of mostly immigrant mushroom pickers. Cook explains the difficulty in getting inside this close to the ground community, but explains his choice to see the mushroom hunters through an atypical example as a necessary one due to the semi legal nature of the business. The story told, that of an exceptional mushroom hunter/buyer named Faber gives us much information about the ways mushrooms get to our tables, from their semi legal picking by foragers, to their use in restaurants. I now have a better idea how to cook with and value mushrooms, but the story is really carried by its individual protagonist, Faber, and his challenging, hard working life, rather than the lives of the majority of mushroom pickers without his access to the top of the food chain. This focus may have been what leads to an abrupt end focusing on a closing of part of Faber's life, rather than a drawing together of the various elements that effect mushroom hunters generally. I enjoyed the book and its information about life in the wild, mushrooms, and some of those who pick them. Just remember it's more of a year in the life of a mushroom picker, rather than the story of the workers in a fascinating, under table, cottage industry. Finally, an observation which is not really a criticism. The Mushroom Hunters never mentions the deaths that come from picking the wrong mushroom, or how the pros avoid mistakes. In a book supporting and encouraging foraging I would have an explanation if not a warning about how to distinguish the delectable from the dangerous.

Really fascinating book about a subculture I knew little about. Also changes my view of what I thought was the pristine Northwest. Apparently there are thousands of mushroom hunters trampling the woods -- makes it sound more congested than Central Park lol. The writing is pretty good but I did feel like the timelines sometimes got a little convoluted. Also, the one chapter I kept waiting for that never appeared was one on poisonous mushrooms. Some poisonous mushrooms were mentioned here or there but nothing really informative. While rare, poisonings do occur and there were several serious episodes this year in CA. Would have liked more info from this author. Something I really liked about the book was the fact that the author was a real gourmand. I loved some of his meal descriptions. As someone who normally sticks to the supermarket varieties (and loves them) I'm looking forward to getting a little more creative in my cooking and restaurant dish ordering now that I feel a little more educated. He had me drooling over descriptions of a butter saute of mushrooms over pasta or a good steak.. yum. So, to sum up, I would say a great read if you like the woods, like learning about some of the unique ways people on the fringe make a living,

or enjoy food. With so much focus on how farmed beef, poultry, fish, etc., make their way to our table it was very interesting to learn something about the paths taken by foraged wild edible food.

Interesting and informative about a part of mushroom hunting that was new to me. Well written and interesting side stories. I would have rated it 5 but it seemed just shy of a 5 star book.

As a land manager on the west Olympic peninsula, and a mushroom hunter, I really enjoyed this book. To the point that i bought another copy to pass on. And the bolete stories-- lets just say i heard a twig snap behind me once and there they were. Combat shroom hunters. There's a plus- we all love to see hard work pay off. And a minus- these guys vacuum the forest floor. You will only find scraps and trimmings after they've gone through. Thankfully the mycorrhizia is below ground and there is no impact to the real plant body.

As someone who loves wild mushrooms and has done some recreational foraging in the Pacific Northwest, I found it fascinating to learn about this nuanced underground industry that involves so much hard work by such a diverse set of characters. Langdon Cook is a wonderful storyteller who makes you feel as though you're right there with him throughout every twist and turn of the plot. I found the book to be as informative as it was engaging -- from the ecology of mushrooms, to the logistics of their journey from the forest floor to the restaurant table, to the amazingly dedicated people who make it happen despite long odds and often miserable conditions. While I may never encounter any of these commercial mushroom pickers or buyers in action, I will surely think of them any time I order a restaurant dish containing wild mushrooms, truffles or other foraged foods. Good action!

For mycophiles, good addition to your library. Inside look at the less than glamorous life of professional foragers. Langdon Cook keeps the story moving.

An exhilarating read from start to finish! Like the best adventure, travel, nature or food writing, this book combines just the right blend of ingredients for a satisfying multi-course feast: excitement, wild characters, appreciation of nature, innovative 21st century cuisine, but most of all, entry into the chthonic underbrush world of that most magical of earthy delights, the mushroom, and the people who pick, buy, sell and prepare this gift from the forest floor. Entertaining and informative, the vivid writing had me riding right alongside the author as he explored the commercial subculture of the

^shroom. I didn^t want the book to end!

If you love picking mushrooms and just plain out have love for nature and to those who share that same passion; read this book. I felt like I was there picking beside him. Good story's and this will somewhat describe how it feels to be obsessed and utterly enthralled by the lure of the mushroom. Was sad the book had to end.

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