### Speaker for February 20 MSSF Meeting



S. Coleman McCleneghan

Fungal Stories from the Great Smoky Mountain ATBI: Documenting Friends and Foes

S. Coleman McCleneghan, Ph.D., will discuss The All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory (ATBI), an effort to catalog all living diversity in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park (GSMNP). In this presentation we will try to understand why the Smoky Mountains are so diverse, peruse some of the mushrooms, and discuss changes and threats to this ecosystem. McCleneghan became interested in mycology in

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# Mycena News

The Mycological Society of San Francisco February 2007, vol. 58:02

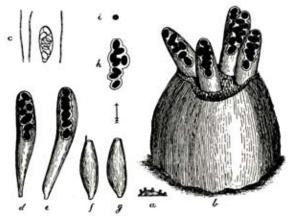
### **MycoDigest: Spore Guns**

Else C. Vellinga

Elfin saddles have, despite their romantic name, a violent way of sending their spores into the world. They belong to the very diverse group of fungi known as ascomycetes, which includes cup fungi, morels, earth tongues, cramp balls, and many others. The spores in this group are arranged, often in a single row, within an elastic, liquid-filled tube called an ascus (plural, asci). These balloon-like tubes stretch only lengthwise and are arranged side by side, like the bristles on a brush, in the cup of the fruitbody or on the outside of the head of the morel, elfin saddle, or earth tongue. Pressure mounts on the walls and the top of the asci during the development of the spores; when the time is ripe, the spores shoot off, along with the liquid, in one big squirt through an opening at the top. Some asci have a lid—others just a weaker spot in the ascus tip—that breaks open. You can easily see the release of the spores. Just put a ripe morel, elfin saddle, or other cup fungus in a box; let it sit for a few minutes, and when you open the box, a cloud of spores is released. More surprisingly, you can even hear the sound of the spores being fired by putting your ear close to the fruitbody! (Do not forget to wash your ear afterwards!) Expect to hear a fizzing noise, like the bursting of bubbles in a glass of soda.

Some ascomycetes, however, do not follow this general pattern. For example, there is no reason for truffles to maintain this elaborate apparatus when all they want is to have their spores eaten and dispersed by animals. Accordingly, there is no squirting or shooting, and the ascus walls just degrade.

The distances travelled by the ejected spores are small—just enough to get through the layer of still air around the surface of the asci and into nearby air currents. You can indeed pick a morel without being hurt by a bombardment of spores, but it



Ascobolus immersus: (a) fruitbodies on dung; (b) fruitbody enlarged with asci sticking out; (c) ascus and cells before spore release; (d) & (e) asci with ripe spores, ready for launch; (f) & (g) empty asci after spore release; (h) a cluster of spores shot out of the ascus; and (i) the ejected lid of the ascus (Buller, 1909)

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MycoDigest is a section of the *Mycena News* dedicated to the scientific review of mycological information.

# THE PRESIDENT'S POST

I would like to announce two recent changes to the MSSF Council. Mike Boom has resigned as Education Chair, and will now redouble his attentions to moderating and enhancing our MSSF YahooGroup. Thank you, Mike, on behalf of MSSF, for all your invaluable service—past, current, and future. Alice Sunshine and Paul Koski will be taking over the Education Committee as co-chairs, having already initiated a new myco-educational outreach program to our local school systems. Expect plenty more from them as they develop their fresh educational perspectives. Also, feel free to contact them with any ideas or support you may have for their school outreach or upcoming in-house membership educational programs and events.

At our January council meeting, we voted to create a new Merchandising Committee, acknowledging the hard work and great value represented by the production and sale

of t-shirts and other mushroom related commodities. Merchandising is a very important revenue source for MSSF, helping fund our various mycological endeavors. Thank you, new Merchandising Committee co-chairs Ron Pastorino and Lou Prestia, for offering your skills and energies to help promote the MSSF operation!

In last month's post, I touched on the broad relationship between MSSF and the scientific community. That relationship is truly the foundation upon which MSSF is built, but it hardly encom-

passes the entire MSSF experience; there is so much more. We are a mycological society: The "mycology" part of that name refers to the scientific aspect of our organization, whereas "society" reflects the remarkably gregarious quality of our mycophilic membership.

We don't just study mushrooms. We also get together with great regularity to cook, eat, paint, photograph, talk about, write about, read about, dream about, poke, prod, cultivate, dye with, and crunch into paper our beloved mushrooms. Many of us indulgently assuage our hunter-gatherer instincts with fungal foray jaunts to the local or distant woods and Continued on page 4

# Footing It and Foraying from the Pyrenees to Galicia

George Collier

For five weeks in September and October 2006, six intrepid MSSF members walked most of the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route from the French Pyrenees across northern Spain to Santiago de Compostela in Galicia.

The Carvajals, Colliers, and Hellums trekked some 300 of the route's 500 miles, on a pilgrimage not so much spiritual as cultural and culinary. We sampled Romanesque and Gothic architecture as well as *tapas* and wines of luscious variety, including many that never make it to the United States. And we forayed, especially upon entering into Galicia, Spain's westernmost province, where weather blown in from the Atlantic sheds as rain.

The foraying fun began as we descended west into Galicia from the 4,500-foot pass at O'Cebreiro. In the woods

and fields along the trail

we began to find parasol mushrooms(Lepiotaprocera), abundant champignons (Agaricus campestris), and manes (Coprinus shaggy comatus). Further along, we encountered king boletes edulis)—smaller (Boletus their California than brethren—and cauliflower mushroom (Sparassis crispa), among others, including many puffballs.



Alvaro Carvajal with cauliflower mushroom (Sparassis crispa) he found near Arzua (Galicia)

Eating our finds was more than half the fun.
The chef at the excellent

restaurant of the Hostal Residencia Roma in Sarria welcomed Al Carvajal into the kitchen to cook up one day's haul. Al was such a hit in the kitchen that he and George were invited back in for two additional nights. In an apartment we rented in San Paio, in the countryside just west of Santiago de Compostela, George Collier invented a risotto of *Sparassis crispa* and eel—the inspiration for his cooking demo at the recent Fungus Fair.

Overall, the Galicians are among the more mycophobic Spaniards. (In Andalusia on an earlier trip, we found many types of wild mushrooms in markets and restaurants.) We wrote to the MSSF YahooGroup that Galicians were especially Continued on page 3

## Our Secret Spot

#### **Bob Sommer**

If you are reading this to find a new foraging location, you can stop now. I understand your pain, especially if you live, as we do, in an area where private land is fenced and public land is off limits to collecting. About 15 years ago we were driving west toward coastal forests. As I checked the map seeking an alternate road, I noticed a tiny green square buried among the map detail, and in mapspeak, green indicates public land. The location lay four miles west on a minor road; the turnoff unmarked, with no signs to indicate the existence of public access. Always hopeful, we followed our noses to what we hoped would be a good foraging opportunity.

The green dot turned out to be land donated to the state by a local rancher, but not yet developed; and perhaps not likely to be in view of its unfavorable geography and remote location. A winding, unimproved road took us past small ranches and homesteads, which were often mobile homes. The soil was too poor to support farming, but cattle and sheep grazed in cleared fields. The only indication of public access at the green spot was a mossy picnic table chained to the ground. The area was cold, dark, and damp, consisting of two sides of a steep, narrow canyon bisected by a small stream. This was bare bones forest land, lacking paths, trails, and amenities. In the years we've been coming here, we have never seen anyone on the site. Occasionally, a pickup drives past, but nobody stops.

Fungi turned out to be predictable, pedestrian, and meager. If we arrive before the second heavy rain, or when the temperature dips into the 30s, there will be no fungi. Only when there have been mild temperatures and recent moisture will we find an abundant fruiting of familiar fungi, most of which Arora describes as "boring varieties" of *Lactarius*, *Russula*, *Collybia*, and *Suillus*. There is little here to tempt the pothunter. Almost all the varieties are inedible—the Agaricus is *hondensis*, the *Lactarius* stains yellow, the *Russula* are tasteless, and the *Suillus* watery. Over a 15-year period, we have collected a handful of chanterelles, *Dentinum*, and *Cornucopoides*, with our take recorded in specimens rather than pounds or baskets.

As this tiny area is so unproductive, why do we keep returning year after year, and why won't we reveal its location? The explanation of this seemingly irrational behavior is complex. In my view, discussions of the psychological basis of mushrooming have placed too much emphasis on pothunting and thrill seeking. There is more to mushrooming, as evidenced by the many booths and tables at the recent Fungus Fair. Here

are the reasons why we will keep to ourselves the location of our Secret Spot:



Collybia by Bob Sommer

Contrast. We live in the Central Valley where wild mushrooms are limited to lawns, parkways, and city parks. There isn't much undeveloped land, and what remains is fenced and posted. We take wildness in small doses where we can find it. In our Secret Spot, we are enclosed in a natural setting where the human presence is almost nil. We follow old animal trails up the steep hillsides. We deeply inhale the moist, verdant air and feel the stillness of the forest.

Familiarity. There is an "old friend" satisfaction seeing the

same varieties fruiting in the same locations year after year. This includes the stand of stately *A. hondensis* near the stream and yellow-staining *Lactarius chrysorheus* on the hillside. Neither variety is edible, but there is pleasure in discovery and identification. I paint what I find independent of its edibility. Some corts, such as the velvety *C. violaceus*, the viscid *C. vanduzerensis*, and the raggedy *C. collinitus*, are much more interesting to paint than less complex but edible meadow mushrooms and morels.

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#### Footing It

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horrified that we eat puffballs, which they refer to as *pedos de lobo*—"wolf farts"! As Herman Brown pointed out in his reply message #9380 of October 4, 2006, *pedo de lobo* can refer to the "pear-shaped" puffball, *Lycoperdon pyriforme*, (in Greek, *Lyco* means "wolf"; *perdon* means "to break wind"; *pyriforme* means "pear shaped"), but the Galicians we met identified all our puffballs as *pedos de lobo*.

Our most memorable meal, however, was not mycophagic. It was *pulpo a la Gallega*—fresh cooked octopus served with rustic wine and fresh-baked bread in the monthly market of Triacastela, where we lunched on our first descent into Galicia.

Indeed, the ancient Camino de Santiago pilgrim path has many wonders to savor, spiritual or otherwise. Ask us about it at the next General Meeting or Culinary Dinner!

#### THE PRESIDENT'S POST

mountains. Sometimes we go alone and share the stories later; other times in groups, building campfires in the woods over which to grill our morels or boletes, laughing and telling tall tales of our fungal exploits; or profoundly engaging in cutting-edge mycological discussions, deep into the starry nights....

In short, there is virtually nothing having to do with mushrooms that is not covered under the umbrella of the MSSF

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experience. We embrace all aspects of our members' interests in the greater world of fungal pursuits. If your area of interest is not being addressed, perhaps it's time you took the lead. As I have stated before, the MSSF is exactly what we the members make of it; nothing more, and certainly nothing less.

-DC

#### MycoDigest: Spore Guns

seems wise to be a bit more careful around dung, as we'll soon discuss.

First, one more fascinating tidbit of information: The asci direct themselves towards the sun. It has been shown that when the asci are on the steep side of a cup, they may not be able to turn far enough, so that the whole tip faces the sun; the lid of the ascus through which the spores escape is not mounted centrally on the tip, but on the *edge* of the tip nearest the light. The purpose of this orientation is, presumably, to have a clear line of fire.

A special case is presented by ascomycetes growing on dung. Here, the whole purpose of spore dispersal is to get spores beyond the substrate (the cowpat) into the grass, where they will be eaten by a cow or other herbivore. In due course, they emerge in a fresh dropping, where they can germinate and form new individuals.

One species, *Ascobolus immersus*, has been a subject of study for almost a hundred years, starting with Buller in 1909. This species

forms fruitbodies that are only a few millimeters across, but its asci and spores are enormous. Every day, a few asci ripen and stick halfway out of the top of the fruitbody. The spores are dark and have a sticky layer around them. This jelly serves several purposes: It keeps the spores together when they are ejected and increases the mass of the projectile; it makes the spore mass stick to the grass when it lands and keeps it there while the spores wait to be eaten; and it serves as some protection when the spores get inside the cow. The upper half of the asci of this fungus points toward the sun, guided by light coming through the top of the ascus. The spores are shot off around noon, when the sun is highest. (This works fine in temperate regions but is not a good strategy in the tropics, where the spores might be slowed by heavy air and land back on the firing ascus.) At the optimum angle, the spores may land up to 40 centimeters from the launching pad. Later, in the cow interior, the spore package

#### Continued from page 1

dissolves and the spores disperse, to prevent inbreeding in the cowpats. (The literature mentions a record distance of 70 centimeters, but this is almost unbelievable. I have not been able to discover what the species was—or whether it had been taking steroids.)

The spores are pushed out by the huge osmotic pressure inside the ascus, caused by glycerol and, to a lesser extent, proline in the *Ascobolus*. The ascus sap in another species, *Gibberella zeae*, was also analysed; mannitol was found to be

the main component. (Mannitol is also the substance in Buller's drop, which forms on the spores of basidiomycetes just before they launch, but that is another mechanism and another story entirely.) As the asci of Ascobolus are huge, the pressure within them just before the asci shoot their spores off can be measured. It turns out to be three atmospheres, which is comparable to the pressure in car tires. This is why you need protective clothing to approach them (just kidding)! The asci collapse as soon as their contents shoot off, and shrink to half their former size.



A typical cup fungus (*Peziza*) Photo by John Lennie

Another ascomycete on dung, *Sordaria fimicola*, has a different but equally fascinating way of getting its spores out into the world. This fungus has flask-shaped fruitbodies with very narrow necks. One by one, the asci grow into the neck and, when they have reached the top, the spores shoot off. In this species the neck of the fruitbody, like the barrel of a cannon, is aimed at the sun. After the launch, the ascus shrivels at the bottom of the flask, and the next one follows suit. Just as in the *Ascobolus* species, the spores are dark, covered in jelly, and are shot 10 to 15 centimeters beyond the dung into the grass.

These are just a few examples of the ingenious ways in which ascomycetes disperse their spores. For further reading, I especially recommend Ingold's *The Ballistics of* Sordaria (the

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#### Our Secret Spot

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Mad hope driven by desire. I admit to having succumbed to the Gambler's Fallacy, the incorrect belief that if a card hasn't been dealt in several shuffles, it is more likely to appear in the next hand. In truth, each shuffled deck is independent of every other shuffled deck; and if one has lost all previous hands, there is no greater likelihood of winning in the future.

Translated to the world of fungi, a place that hasn't paid off in the past is not more likely to yield a big haul next visit. Rather, it means that this is a poor place to hunt mushrooms.

#### Territorial Imperative. No one knows our Special Spot or visits it. We won't find cut stipes, kicked-over Russulas, discarded buggy boletes. We can openly carry baskets, though in view of the meager fruitings, there is little reason to do so.

Having a secret place



Melano by Bob Sommer

is very satisfying. We could mark its boundaries with urine or etch dead tree trunks, but there is no competition as yet and we'd like to keep it that way, thank you.

#### Officers: 2006–2007

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#### February Speaker

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1988 when she stumbled into a king bolete that was as tall as her knees. Shortly thereafter she did a mycological master at Humboldt State University. Moving east in 1991, she continued her mycological endeavors at the University of Tennessee in Knoxville where she spent years collecting fungi in the Great Smoky Mountains for graduate research in the genus *Pholiota* (Family Strophariaceae). Over the last decade she has taught numerous fungal courses including mycology, fleshy fungi, and lichen courses at Appalachian State University, the Smoky Mountain Field School, and the Smoky Mountain Institute at Tremont.

Coleman also leads walks for the annual Wildflower Pilgrimage and the Roan Mountain Naturalist Rally. Her current research involvement is with the ATBI being conducted in the GSMNP, and cliff-face studies in the Cumberland Plateau. Coleman has been involved with amateur mushroom clubs, including North American Mycological Association (NAMA), Asheville Mushroom Club (AMC), and Blue Ridge Mushroom Club (BRMC). She has been giving presentations and leading forays for the Asheville Mushroom Club annually, since 1995.

#### MycoDigest: Spore Guns Continued from page 4

MSSF library has a copy) and those by Buller. Buller has particularly beautiful illustrations, and my husband tells me that Ralph Emerson's account 25 years ago of Buller's work is still the most memorable MSSF talk he ever heard.

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## Introduction to the MSSF Culinary Group

If you are new to the MSSF, you may not be acquainted with one of its most lively subgroups, the Culinary Group, open to all members interested in the gastronomical aspects of mushrooming. Each month on the first Monday night, with a few exceptions, from September to May (except for December when we have the general group's grand holiday feast) we meet in the Hall of Flowers of Golden Gate Park to enjoy each other's company and have a delicious meal. Dinner meetings are announced in the *Mycena News*.

We are united by our love of cooking as well as our love of mushrooms. All participate, either as part of the team that prepares the dinner or by bringing an appetizer to share (incorporating mushrooms, if possible). At the dinners, members contribute ideas and suggestions for the upcoming menus and prepare food that they, with help, would like to cook. Traditionally, the dinners have been designated to take advantage of the wild mushrooms available at the time, as well as the best and the freshest food of the season. Generally, the menus are centered on mushrooms, ethnic foods, a particular main ingredient, or a holiday near the time of the dinner. The aim is for "chef for the night" members to prepare menus and cook foods they love. And we usually have a lovely punch served with the appetizers.

To be part of the fun and food, you must be an MSSF member in good standing. There is a Culinary Group membership fee of \$12 (\$6 for seniors). Additionally, each dinner costs \$14 to cover the cost of using the facility and the dinner's ingredients. Members participate at least once a year in the preparation of the main dinner.

The Culinary group is a participatory cooking group, not just an eating group. Expect to cook for dinners; help with special MSSF fund-raising events, such as the Holiday Dinner, the Mendocino Woodlands Foray, and the annual Fungus Fair; and join in the fun. Come forth, you lovers of cooking and conviviality! For more information, contact Pat George at (510) 204-9130 or email plgeorge33@yahoo.com.

Deadline for the March 2007 issue of Mycena News is
February 15.
Please send your articles, calendar items, and other information to:
mycenanews@mssf.org

### Foray Toolkit for the Amateur Mycologist

- Water (more than you anticipate needing)
- Whistle
- 2-way radio
- Compass
- Local-area map (if available)
- Knife
- Brush
- Cheap, light-weight scissors
- Small magnifying lens
- Pocket identification guide (e.g. All That the Rain Promises, and More by David Arora)
- Basket and/or wax paper bags for speciman collection
- Poncho or light-weight rain gear, as the weather demands
- Brimmed hat for sun/bramble protection
- Stick to poke or lift duff, marked with brightly colored tape (so you only ever need one!)
- Bug spray
- Sunscreen
- A small emergency kit, including granola bars, bandaids, and matches/lighter

# Teachers!

Do you have or know of lesson plans or teaching resources about fungi that you would like to share with others? The MSSF is preparing a sharing web page to promote teaching K-12 students about the often mysterious, widely misunderstood Kingdom of the Mycota. Please contact Paul Koski at pkoski04@yahoo.com or Alice Sunshine at asun1@pacbell.net.

# Membership Corner

Thanks to all of you who have renewed your memberships for 2007!

We have a vibrant membership with some 700 individuals and 30 institutions or societies with which we exchange newsletters. Kudos to our 17 Honorary Members and 8 Life Members! Digital greetings to our 175 "electronic" E-members! We have 337 Adult/Family members, whom we welcome, large and small. A special thanks to our 143 Seniors, who share their wisdom with us all, and to our 20 current Student Members.

Take note of the new password (below) for login to our Members Only section on the website at www.mssf.org. And if you have email, consider signing up for our MSSF YahooGroups listsery discussion group. It's very lively!

Meanwhile, we always welcome your suggestions for the Membership Committee. Write to us or call at: membership@mssf.org or (866) 807-7148.

Finally, special thanks to Polly Shaw and Jeanette Larsen for helping staff the Membership desk at the Fungus Fair; and to Alvaro Carvajal, who designed and fine-tuned our membership database.

-George & Jane Collier

## Password Change!

Effective February 1, 2007, a new password will be required to access the members-only content at www.mssf.org. The new user ID and password are:

ID: mssf

Password: XXXX (effective Feb. 1)

The ID and password in use through Jan. 31 are:

ID: mssf

Password: XXXX

(Login information is case sensitive)

#### Join the MSSF On-line Community

One of the best parts of a mycological society is sharing information among members, so we can all learn more about fungi. What do you do, though, when you've got questions or reports in between newsletters, meetings, and forays? If you're on-line, you join the MSSF mailing list.

Our mailing list is one of the country's oldest lists devoted to mycology. It's an on-going discussion about mushrooms for beginners and experts alike, a place where you can pose questions that other members might be able to answer, share mushroom experiences and report fruitings, and read about the latest MSSF activities. It's a great place to catch up on last-minute changes for forays and meetings, and a chance to make connections with other mushroomers.

The list is limited to MSSF members and invited experts, and is moderated by Mike Wood and myself. We maintain the focus on mycology and the MSSF, while keeping spam and advertisements out.

If you're an MSSF member, it's easy to join the list:

- Point your web browser to:

http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/mssf/

- Click the Join This Group! button in the upper right corner of the page. If you're not already a member of Yahoo!, you'll need to sign up by clicking the Sign Up link on the new page
- Sign in and follow Yahoo!'s instructions

Once you're a member of the list, you'll start to receive messages as they're posted, and you'll be able to post your own messages, as well. The list has all the standard YahooGroups features that you can take advantage of through our mailing list web page. Members can post photos and files for other members to share, and they can browse through numerous past email chains. They can change the email addresses they use in the list, set up to receive a daily digest instead of individual email, and control other facets of YahooGroups membership.

All of this is a mouse click away. Just point your web browser our way and join the conversation, which is already in progress.

Mike Boom MSSF Mailing List Co-Moderator Mycological Society of San Francisco c/o The Randall Museum 199 Museum Way San Francisco, CA 94114 First Class Mail U.S. Postage PAID Oakland, CA Permit No. 1451



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# MSSF Calendar, February 2007

Monday, February 5, 2007, 7pm. Culinary Group Dinner. Hall of Flowers, Golden Gate Park, SF. This will be a crab dinner. The price will be \$20 rather than the usual \$14. Reservations are required and must made be no later than Friday, Feb. 2nd. Call Pat George at (510) 204-9130 or email plgeorge33@yahoo.com to make your reservation. Bring your own tableware, beverage, and an appetizer to share. Future dates for Culinary Group Monday dinner meetings are March 5, April 2, May 7, September 10, October 1, and November 5.

Saturday, February 10, 2007, 9am. Foray: Soquel Demonstration Forest (above Santa Cruz) to find black trumpets. We will meet at 9am in the parking lot. Free permits are necessary and can be obtained by calling (831) 475-8643. Foray leaders: Tina (tina@sypherslaw.com) and Thomas Keller.

Saturday, February 10, 2007, 10am. Salt Point Foray and Potluck Lunch. Salt Point SP, with Darren Murphey and Mark Lockaby. Bring rain gear and collecting basket or paper bags. We will collect for three hours, meet for potluck lunch at the picnic area, and then collect more after lunch. Some people may stay overnight, but Mark

will not. Reservations are not necessary for this foray. Questions? Contact Darren at Bugsbunny@sbcglobal.net or Mark at marklockaby@sbcglobal.net / (510) 387-5957.

Saturday, February 17, 2007, 12pm. Identification Walk at Alhambra Creek Staging Area. Come walk with Norman Andresen and Scott at the famous Briones Park. There are good views of the surrounding country, plenty of good forest, and, most likely, interesting mushrooms. No picking is allowed. This is a moderate walk, with some steep trails. Beginners and old time pickers are welcome. Email bsustained@yahoo.com or n.andresen@comcast.net for more info. A map of the area is available online at: http://www.ebparks.org/parks/briones.htm

**Tuesday, February 20, 2007, 6:30-7:30pm.** Randall Museum. NAMA slide program: "Non-Gilled Mushrooms I." Prepared and recorded by Dr. Michael Beug, featuring chanterlles, boletes, hydnums, and polypores. All are invited, but the program is geared toward beginners and new members.

**Tuesday, February 20, 2007. MSSF General Meeting.** Randall Museum. 7pm mushroom identification and refreshments (provided by the Hospitality Committee). 8pm, S. Coleman McCleneghan will discuss **Fungal Diversity in the Great Smoky Mountains**.