

A monstrous mushroom on the Millenium Green

The remarkable specimen illustrated below was found by Dinah Griffin on her village's Millenium Green. It was sizeable (10 cm diam.) and very tough, but not 'monstrous' in the sense of 'very large'. It was in fact a monstrosity, more technically phrased as 'exhibiting teratological development' (Greek: *teras* = monster). That is to say it was abnormally formed - undoubtedly a specimen of *Infundibulicybe* (formerly *Clitocybe*) *geotropae*, but not as we know it. For collection details see

photo caption.

The gills on this specimen merge into a pitted meruloid/poroid zone partially covering the cap. This zone was found under the microscope to be every bit as fertile as the gills themselves and devoid of any further abnormal elements or alien contents. I am indebted to Brian Spooner for his recognition that this distortion resembles a phenomenon known to commercial mushroom growers as 'rosecomb'. Brian directed me to the relevant literature and also reminded me that a comparable development in a *Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca* was illustrated in FM a few years ago (Spooner & Ainsworth, 2014) which had been previously reported as a *Clavariadelphus*. Such distortions, an occasional problem for mushroom growers (at least in the past), seem to be rare in other genera in the wild, though the further literature cited by Spooner & Ainsworth mentions a few instances reported over the years in a range of other agaric genera.

In their book *Mushrooms: Pest and Disease control*, Fletcher *et al.* (1989) describe rosecomb in a chapter on abiotic diseases. They write "This may be described as a specific distortion when pink gill tissue, often with a porous appearance, develops on the surface of the cap ... Mushrooms so affected are grotesque and unsaleable". They go on to say "The cause has long been attributed to contamination by hydrocarbons, phenols and other compounds. Diesel oil and the exhaust from diesel or petrol engines and some of the ingredients of creosote are thought to be the cause of this type of distortion". This could well be relevant.



The specimen illustrated here (the only one seen) was found growing under a raised walkway of wooden planks surrounding a pond. The planks had not of course been treated with creosote (nowadays a banned carcinogen). Dinah ascertained that they had in fact been 'tanalised' - i.e. treated with a proprietary preservative 'Tanalith'. This can be googled for much detail on its many ingredients. Several more *I. geotropae* around 30 yards from the walkway were unaffected. It seems highly probable that it was the Tanalith that did it!

References

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Teratological form of *Infundibulicybe geotropae* found on 10 Nov. 2019 by Dinah Griffin on the Millenium Green of her village: Inkberrow, Worcestershire. K(M)263639. Photo © G. Kibby.