

ASEROË RUBRA—THE STINKING STARFISH FUNGUS

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In the middle of last century a Professor of Botany, Dr William Henry Harvey, from Trinity College Dublin, Ireland, visited the southern states of Australia including Tasmania. He travelled only in the coastal regions because his main aim was the collection of seaweeds but like all good botanists he was also interested in other 'productions of the vegetable kingdom'. While in Sydney, in May 1855, he walked in the Domain near Mrs Macquarie's chair and found 'a solitary specimen of a remarkable fungus called *Aseroë*—like a cuttlefish'. He also gathered a fresh batch of luminous fungi *Pleurotus nidiformis*. The light of this, he wrote to his sister in Dublin, 'was like a very white, ghost-like moonlight & was so strong that I could see the time by my watch by it'. He amused the folk staying at Petty's Hotel with these eerie agarics. They, although country people, had never seen anything like it. He reported all this in a letter to his sister and included a sketch of the *Aseroë*.

I found it an extraordinary coincidence that in the same month that I published this letter from Harvey to his sister (Ducker 1995) I was walking in Sydney in the park nearby to the Domain and my eyes were attracted by a bright red batch of 6 to 8 *Aseroë* in varying stages of development and decay. They were growing at the juncture between the litter under the Moreton Bay fig trees and the grass. Almost half a century ago I had collected it previously from a grassland on the Bogong High Plains.

Aseroë has the distinction of being the first fungus ever to be recorded, described and illustrated from Australia, where it is indigenous. Starting at the end of the eighteenth century the French mounted a number of exploring expeditions to Australia and the Pacific. The first was that commanded by La Pérouse (1785–88) who after exploring in the Pacific and visiting Sydney disappeared without a trace. The riddle of the fate of La Pérouse and the scientific interest in New Holland led Louis XVI to send two more ships to the Pacific under the command of D'Entrecasteaux. The expedition (1791–1794) had only two landfalls in Australia but was most successful because they had a formidable botanist J.-J.H. Labillardière on board. He collected higher plants, ferns and seaweeds in Esperance bay, in south western Australia and in Storm Bay, Tasmania. Labillardière (1800), indeed, was first to collect a fungus in Australia and reports and illustrates *Aseroë* in the account of the expedition. He says: 'I was agreeably surprised by the singular form of a new species of fungus, which grew amongst the mosses with which the ground was covered. I named it *aseroë*, on account of the disposition of its radii.' It is believed that he chose the name *aseroë* for the Greek meaning of star or starlike. Later Labillardière gives a description of the plant in the first flora of New Holland ever published (Labillardière, 1804–1806).

But how did Harvey know this extraordinary plant, he, a total newcomer to this country? Harvey resided for some time in South Africa and had collected there a number of new fungi which were described and illustrated back in England by Berkeley (1844). In this same paper of Berkeley a collection of *Aseroë* from Australia sent by Ludwig Leichhardt was also described and illustrated. It all goes to show that there is so much to see for those who care to look.

References

- Berkeley, M.J. (1844). Decades of fungi. *London J. Bot.* 3, 185–194.
Ducker, S.C. (1995). W.H. Harvey in New South Wales *Proc Linn. Soc. New South Wales* 115, 213–225.
Labillardière, J.-J.H. (1800). *Relation du voyage à la recherche de la Pérouse ...* Paris, H.J. Jansen, 2 vols and atlas.
Labillardière, J.-J.H. (1804–1806) *Novae Hollandiae plantarum specimen*. Parisiis, D. Huzard, 2 vols.

MYCOSURFING ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB

Some useful web addresses dealing with mycology are:

<<http://muse.bio.cornell.edu/taxonomy/fungi.html>>

This will lead to the mycological resources on the internet that include in part:

(note that the symbols <> are not part of the internet address).

American Phytopathological Society (APSnet): <<http://www.scisoc.org/>>

AnaNet (a quarterly newsletter on the taxonomy of anamorphic fungi: <seifertk@ncccot.agr.ca>

American Type Culture Collection: <<http://www.atcc.org/>>

Directories of mycologists: <<gopher://nhgoph.si.edu:70/11/botany/myco.directory>>

Mycologists Online: <<gopher://muse.bio.cornell.edu:70/11/directories/mo>>

Update your own address and send new entries to the editor Pavel Lizon at <PL1@cornell.edu> or to the co-editor Erast Parmasto at <erast@iozb.tartu.ee>

Econet's Mushroom and Mycology Resources: <<http://www.econet.apc.org/igc/www.mycology.html>>

FUNGUS home page: <<http://www.mtjeff.com/fungi>>

Mycological Society of America Bulletin Board:

Messages can be posted here and the most recent are at the bottom of the list. This includes new internet mycological resources, fungal photos, meeting dates, course announcements, job openings, book dealers and mycological discussion groups via the internet. To post a message or for more information or help, send email to <gopher://huh.harvard.edu/1m/project_information/msa-bbs>

Mycelium: <<http://www.econet.apc.org/mushroom/welco.html>>

Mycopage: <<http://w.inf.univr.it/~mflorian/mycophage.html>>

Spores Afield (monthly newsletter of the Colorado Mycological Society): <<http://www.igc.apc.org/mushroom/welco.html>> and <gopher://gopher.igc.apc.org:70/11/environment/misc/>

Spore Print (journal of the Los Angeles Mycological Society): <gopher://gopher.gc.apc.org:70/11/pubs/sporeprint>

The Snohomish County Mycological Society Newsletter (SCMS Mushroomer), Everett, Washington: <<http://www.eskimo.com/~igor>>

<<http://www.eskimo.com/~igor>>

MycInfo: <gopher://gopher.igc.apc.org:70/11/environment/misc/mycolgy/mycoinfo>

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23-28 June 1996	Wageningen, the Netherlands	XI International <i>Botrytis</i> Symposium	J. Kohl, IPO-DLO, PO Box 9060, 6700 GW, Wageningen, the Netherlands