

AN UNUSUAL MUSHROOM OF REGINA AND TRISTAN DA CUNHA

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Tristan da Cunha is a group of three small islands in the south Atlantic Ocean, belonging to Great Britain, and situated in latitude 37°06'S., and longitude 12°01'W, about equidistant from South Africa and South America. The islands are named Tristan, Nightingale and Inaccessible, and are peaks of submerged mountains of the Mid-Atlantic Ridge. On my desk globe the islands are, roughly, 6,700 miles from Regina, as the American Crow flies but none of our Crows make such a lengthy journey in one trip. Remote as Tristan da Cunha is from my doorstep there is, to my mind, a connection albeit a tenuous one.

On 21 June 1984 I noticed some strange mushrooms growing among the Lilies of the Valley under my front window. Although I have a slight acquaintance with the world of fungi I knew I had never seen these before.

However, Robert Kreba, of the Saskatchewan Museum of Natural History, has studied mushrooms for years, and a telephone call brought him over on his way home. He did not recognise the mushrooms so he gathered two mature specimens and a couple in the button stage. The Museum collection contained a specimen of the same species which Bob had collected at Ille a la Crosse a few years ago but which he had not seen since. The mushrooms were *Agrocybe praecox*.

A search of some fungi literature disclosed that is of the Order Agaricales, Family Bobotiaceae, Genus *Agrocybe*; some years ago it was known as *Pholiota praecox* (Pers.) Fr.

Their common name is Early *Agrocybe*, and they are described as edible. They usually appear following good rains in May and June. Regina had been blessed with heavy rains after a dry spring and practically snowless winter previous to my discovery.

Bob Kreba has been a mycophilatelist (he collects postage stamps showing mushrooms) for some time and, as an interesting footnote to the discovery of Early *Agrocybe* in Regina he showed me a postage stamp from Tristan da Cunha, value 10 pence, issued in 1984, depicting *Agrocybe praecox*, but of the variety *cutifracta*, indicating that the skin cracks when mature as our species does not.

The Encyclopedia of Mushrooms by Colin Dickinson and John Lucas (Orbis Publishing, London, 1979 — out of print) gives the common European name of Spring Agaric to this mushroom, and describes its range as: "common in Europe, northeastern North America and South Africa, and cautions that the caps only are to be eaten. So my doorstep mushroom had not only colonized a remote speck in the south Atlantic Ocean but was also pushing at its western limits in Canada. Such is the romance of natural history!



Tristan da Cunha stamp