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A CHAT WITH DAVID SUZUKI
BIKING P.E.I.'S CONFEDERATION TRAIL

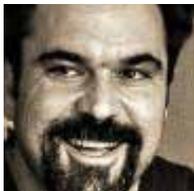


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NICOLE ROBERTSON is a competitive equestrian, facilitator, voracious reader and storyteller with a healthy disregard for the ordinary. She has an overwhelming fondness for common sense and crème brûlée. As the owner of Caberneigh Farm, Nicole continues her lifelong learning as a student of the birds and the bees. She lives with eight horses, six cats, six dogs, 25 chickens and one pot-bellied pig named Olive. And her better half, PJ.



JASON SANTERRE's involvement with *Harrowsmith* goes all the way back to 2001. When he's not sourcing photos for us, Jason is the editor-in-chief of *Montréal enSanté*, a health and wellness magazine based in *la belle ville*. Although an urbanite at heart, he plans to return to country living and the quiet life one day.



KEPH SENETT is a freelance writer from Toronto, whose passions for travel and soccer have led her to play the beautiful game on four continents. Her work has appeared in various publications, including the *Globe and Mail*, *Ms.* online and *Sports Illustrated* online. When not writing, Keph spends her free time trying to figure out how to qualify for a soccer squad in Asia, Australia or Antarctica.



Having enjoyed a decade in the United Arab Emirates, where she worked as a financial regulator, **JADE SHYBACK** was very happy to forgo camels and sand for the crisp, clean air of Canada. A farmer at heart, from her childhood on the Prairies, Jade has embraced horticultural hobbies, like beekeeping and gardening, and she's continuously concocting backyard products that she can gift to neighbours and friends.



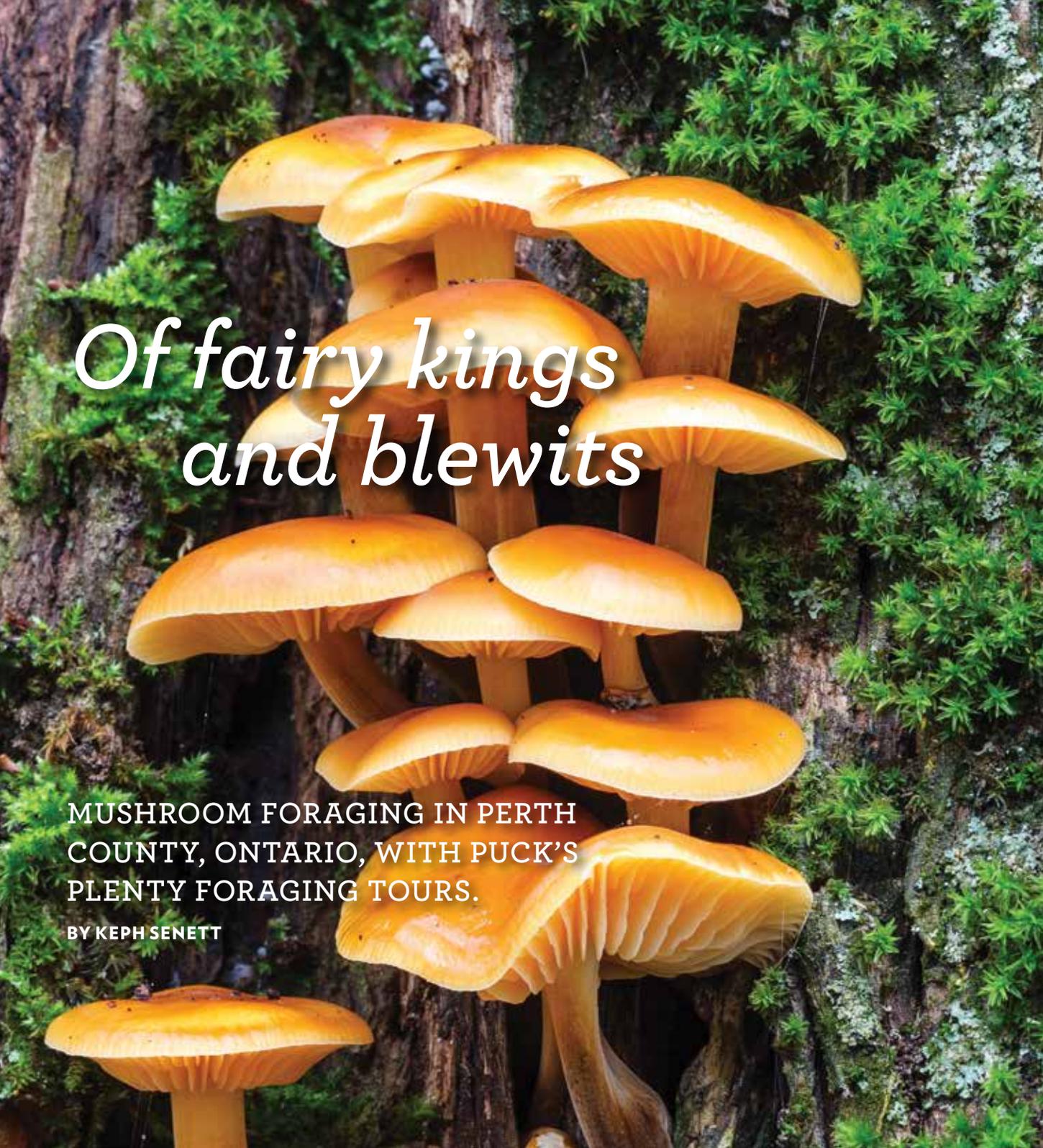
KILEY TORTI is a health and fitness professional living in Banff, Alberta. She is an Ontario refugee who is happiest when wandering through the backcountry in pursuit of a "Rocky Mountain high." Hiking, biking, paddling or skiing, she is always on the lookout for new adventures in far-flung places or her extended backyard. You can follow her on Facebook @mountainmissfit.



LINDA WHITE has written several features and a column for local newspapers and the *Page and Spine*. She stays active riding her Canadian horse, playing pickleball, swimming and sailing (and sometimes accidentally swimming while sailing). She lives with a princess Yorkie and a lizard in Neustadt, Ontario.



Now a lighthouse keeper, author **CAROLINE WOODWARD** was raised on a homestead in the North Peace region of British Columbia sans electricity, a telephone and indoor plumbing. Her most recent books are *Light Years: Memoir of a Modern Lighthouse Keeper* and a new edition of *Alaska Highway Two-Step* (Harbour Publishing).

A cluster of bright orange fairy king mushrooms (Gyromitra esculenta) growing on a mossy tree trunk. The mushrooms have smooth, convex caps and gills, and are surrounded by vibrant green moss. The background shows the rough bark of the tree trunk.

Of fairy kings and blewits

MUSHROOM FORAGING IN PERTH
COUNTY, ONTARIO, WITH PUCK'S
PLENTY FORAGING TOURS.

BY KEPH SENETT

Stooped, we fan out into the woods, armed with paper bags and paring knives, treading carefully to avoid crushing our quarry. A shout from our guide, Peter, and we converge on a cluster of brown-capped mushrooms, nearly invisible against the autumn underbrush. “Fawn mushrooms,” Peter says, and he demonstrates how to sever the stem without disturbing the bulb. “You want to leave all that energy in the ground,” he explains. It’s a sunny, clear day and surprisingly mild for mid-November—most of us aren’t even wearing gloves—a perfect end to the season for Puck’s Plenty Foraging Tours.

Even before he moved to Stratford, Ontario, in 2005, owner Peter Blush was an avid hiker, but it was the woods of Perth County that got him interested in wild edibles. “I’ll never forget stepping into the forest and noticing right away that the ground cover was wild leeks,” he recalls.

On his next walk, he brought a friend, local biologist Linda Walton. “Something curious happened during that outing,” says Peter. “Linda hardly ever looked at the ground. She seemed



to constantly be studying the trees.” Linda had noticed that they were in a were in prime mushroom forest.

Peter began to supply restaurants in nearby communities with locally foraged wild edibles. In the spring, he could provide wild leeks, fiddleheads, trout lilies, cattail shoots, marsh marigolds and pheasant back mushrooms. More varieties of mushrooms appeared in the summer, along with puffballs, wild watercress and pineapple weed. Autumn produced blewits, velvet feet, wild ginger, and honey and red pine mushrooms.

The bounty was extraordinary, but over time, Peter worried about the environmental impact of his activities. “I began to feel uncomfortable taking that many wild foods—especially plants—from the forest,” he explains. Looking for a way to mitigate the effect of his activities without giving up his passion for foraging

and wild edibles, Peter opened Puck’s Plenty in 2010.

Every Saturday, Sunday and on holidays from mid-April to mid-November, Peter guides small groups on his Forage Only tours in the region around Stratford. His Forage & Feast events take place seven times annually, adding a meal made with wild edibles at a local restaurant to end the day. As for the name, it’s as tied to the region as everything else in the area is. “Many business names derive from the Stratford Shakespeare festival,” Peter says. “I chose Puck because he is a character from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He foraged for medicinal plants for the fairy king, Oberon.”

Even before we’ve left the first trail, most people’s bags are overflowing. “We should find some blewits at our next stop,” Peter says, and we follow him out to the road, eager to see these blue-tinged mushrooms for ourselves. After a short convoy to



a second location, our group hikes through a marshy area, popping out on the edge of a wood.

An eagle-eyed forager spots something bright and round in the underbrush. “A puffball,” Peter says. “One of the last of the season.” He slices it open to expose the spongy white flesh—perfect for sautéing. We would never have spotted our next species without Peter’s expertise. He approaches a dead maple and finds a seam in the callused bark. With gentle pressure, he pulls it back to reveal a cluster of orange mushrooms. “Velvet foot,” he says.

Foraging is nothing new, of course, but modern living has divorced many of us from nature, and our knowledge has been lost over time. Indeed, it’s an increasing interest in local and sustainable foods that has

encouraged many of us out here to forgo our couches for the surprises of the woods. But while there’s romance in and relevance to the idea of living off the land, there is a caveat: the forests are home to things both nasty and nourishing—and often it’s not clear which is which.

“Especially for mushrooms, there is no set rule,” Peter says, adding that something as slight as the veil under the cap might be the answer to which is which. If you’re hunting for wild plants or mushrooms, he recommends carrying a well-illustrated book like the *National Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Mushrooms*. “Too bad Socrates didn’t have one before he ate poison hemlock,” Peter says, wryly. Or have a guide like Puck. **H**