

What's the Purpose of a COMA Walk?  
By JJ Murphy

Are they a six-month field class best experienced by attendance at every walk? Are they a menu list of seasonal mushroom discovery? Perhaps they're an opportunity to learn from our many "edu-tainers" - gifted mycologists who make learning fun and memorable. Or maybe it's nibbling the pot luck offerings, while identifying our collected findings.

The answers are as varied as our members.

In trying to sort out whether to schedule one or two weekend walks, my one guiding thought is that I seek optimal mushroom discovery. So, time of year and habitat provide a clue to what the weekend walk is likely to offer attendees.

As a relatively new COMA member, I find that leading a walk provides an opportunity for our experienced members to explore new sites while opening my eyes to what is fruiting on my favorite trails. All I need to know to lead a COMA walk is how to get to and from the parking lot.

In 2008, I offered to lead a walk at Goose Pond State Park, where I've been hiking for more years than I care to admit. The payoff for our COMA members was the discovery of morels. I had never connected the elm trees and ash trees with morels and I certainly never noticed those mushrooms hiding in plain site.

When I offered to lead that site on one of my regular hiking trails, all I knew was it has ample free parking, footing appropriate for some of our mobility-challenged members, and mushrooms I wanted to learn to identify.

Maybe I'm a lazy walk coordinator, but if scheduling one walk per weekend makes it possible for our members to apply their learning most effectively - so be it.

As for our members who attend walks, but feel unprepared to lead - if you can walk, you can lead. Sometimes that strategy pays off in amazing ways.

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