

# The North American Truffler

*Journal of the North American Truffling Society*

Volume 35, Issue 2

Spring 2017

## TRUFFLE FORAY

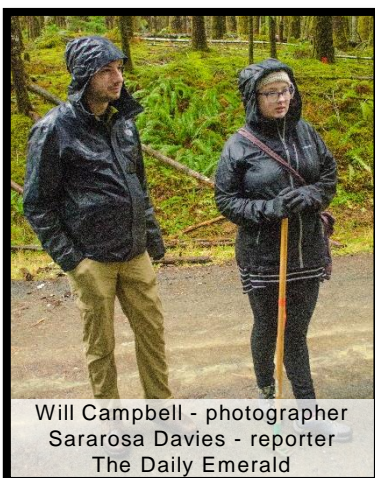


Dr. Matt Trappe led a group of truffle hunters into the forest west of Corvallis on January 21, 2017. He demonstrated how and where to rake to increase the odds of finding truffles. Over a dozen people wore raincoats and brought their rakes.

Sararosa Davies, a reporter from the Daily Emerald, a University of Oregon student newspaper, asked Matt how many truffles people find on forays like this one.

Matt said that on the last foray only one truffle was found. He also said that a trained truffle dog on a previous foray found more truffles in a half hour than Matt found by raking in his whole life.

Two people brought their dogs on this foray, but neither was fully trained. Only one truffle & a puffball turned up all day.



Will Campbell - photographer  
Sararosa Davies - reporter  
The Daily Emerald

Mycologist Matt Trappe said, “The truffles we found were *Hymenogaster subalpinus* (brown malodorous interior) and what I thought might be a *Rhizopogon* (with hyphal tuft). When I looked at it closer, I think it is an immature puffball, just happened to be a little buried.”

The Internet said, *H. subalpinus* is: “The most common winter species in the Pacific Northwest, it is related to the mushroom genus *Hebeloma*. The odor may be pleasant to squirrels, but it definitely is not to humans. That, together with its soft texture, leaves its culinary appeal strictly to wild creatures.”



Lee Yamada  
and one of  
the dogs

# Fresh Truffle Marketplace



Dan Luoma & Joyce Eberhart (back row) and Carolina Piña Paez & David Pilz (front row) worked the North American Truffling Society's table at the Marketplace in Newberg, Oregon.

Culinary truffle fans gathered at the Chehalem Cultural Center in Newberg, Oregon on Sunday, January 22, 2017. The NATS table was a busy place, distributing information and offering books, T-shirts and truffle infused goodies. A wide array of other vendors provided wine tasting, cheeses, confections, oils, photo cards, baked goods and more. In the afternoon there was a truffle dog demonstration outside on the Center's lawn.



The Tucker's Truffle Oil table was one of many vendors offering a great selection. Deb Walker is a certified truffle dog trainer. Bob Walker's business card says, "*Always insist on dog-harvested truffle products.*" Deb was the judge at the truffle dog joriad in Eugene the weekend after this Marketplace, and Bob was the Master of Cermonies at the joriad.

In 2006, Dr. Charles LeFevre and his wife, Leslie Scott, founded the Oregon Truffle Festival, which includes this Fresh Truffle Marketplace. Its purpose is to celebrate both the native Oregon truffles, and the burgeoning truffle cultivation industry in North America through a variety of culinary and educational programs. Since its inception, this festival model attracted scientists, authors, farmers, dog trainers, and gourmands from around the world.

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During the afternoon, Charles LeFevre buried truffles in the Chehalem Cultural Center's lawn, so expert truffle dog, Stella, and her human, Sunny Diaz, could show several dozen people how a well trained dog can find many truffles in a relatively short period of time. Stella is a champion truffle dog.



The popularity of Oregon's culinary truffles grows rapidly. Charles LeFevre is a major influence in this business. Next year's 2018 Festival is January 19-21 in Newberg / McMinnville and January 25-28 in Eugene. Here is a link to an excellent article with photos and a video about Charles's success in a commercial truffle farm:

<http://registerguard.com/rq/video/35143827-82/homegrown-p%C3%A9rigord-truffles-coming-to-oregon-plates.html.csp>

# Internet Links for Trufflers

Sararosa Davies, a reporter, and Will Campbell, a photographer, put together an article in the Daily Emerald, a University of Oregon student newspaper. They participated in the NATS' foray reported earlier in this newsletter. Here is a link to their article, "**Trekking for Truffles: The Rise of the Oregon Truffle**": <https://www.dailyemerald.com/2017/01/26/trekking-truffles-rise-oregon-truffle/>.

Breanna Wilson, a travel journalist, wrote "**The Best Truffle Hunters In Italy: Behind The Family Who Found A \$330,000 White Truffle**" in Forbes. It is an entertaining read at this link: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/breannawilson/2017/01/19/the-best-truffle-hunters-in-italy-a-morning-hunt-with-the-family-who-found-a-330000-white-truffle/#4f4fa6d84742>.

An excerpt from *The Physiology of Taste* by Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin, translated and edited by M.F.K. Fisher, 1949, appears in the Smithsonian Magazine and is titled "**On the Dangers of Erotic Truffles: A 19th-century investigation into the power of the aphrodisiac**". Read more at: <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/travel/dangers-erotic-truffles-physiology-taste-transcendental-gastronomy-book-excerpt-cultural-travel-180961646/#UGjuLOikTHdET276.99>. It's hot!!

A fifty four and a half minute long podcast, titled "**Why Truffles Are Like Drugs | Restaurant Playlists | Rethinking The Microwave**" is on Oregon Public Broadcasting at this link: <http://www.opb.org/news/article/four-top-podcast-truffles-restaurant-playlists-microwaves/>.

Read "**Tracking Truffles in Oregon's Forests**" by Sophia McDonald with photos by Kjersten Hellis in 1859 Magazine at this site: <https://www.1859oregonmagazine.com/food-drink/farm-to-table/oregon-truffles-2>

Visit the North American Truffling Society page at: <http://www.natruffling.org/>. There are FAQs, foray reports, a photo gallery, truffling accessories, a newsletter's archive, a truffle key & lists, specific habitats, recipes, a field data card and more.

Our thanks to **Ricardo Small** for putting this issue together before his resignation as editor. Welcome to new editor **Sarah Shay**.

# Educational Speakers

The North American Truffling Society (NATS) has monthly meetings in Corvallis, Oregon, except during the summer months. Speakers provide entertaining information about truffles and fungi.

On **January 10, 2017**, Jim Trappe, a world renowned truffle expert, talked about the history of truffles and their distribution around the world. Jim authored and co-authored 490 scientific papers, as well as three books about truffles. Over the course of his career he reshaped truffle taxonomy by establishing a new order, two new families and 40 genera. The image below shows Jim describing an Aboriginal woman excavating a truffle with the traditional stick in desert sands of the Aboriginal Reserve at Uluru National Park in Australia's "Red Center". Jim and NATS member Todd Elliott, were privileged last June to join six wonderful Aboriginal women, the traditional truffle hunters in that culture, in a desert truffle hunt. Todd Elliott made the photograph on the screen of the woman digging.



On **February 7, 2017**, Benjamin Hart, a graduate student at Oregon State University, presented an excellent slide show titled "*Eastern Oregon: A Mycorrhiza Perspective*". His conclusion is: "In essence, healthy host trees ensure the continuation of their mycorrhizal fungal species, and healthy fungi ensure the survival of host trees."



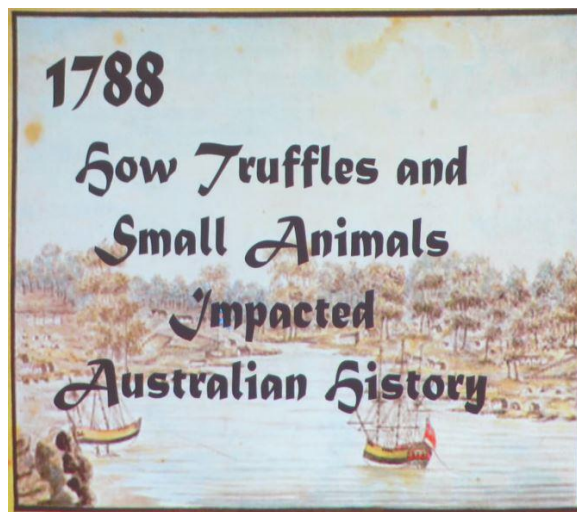
## Educational Speakers ... continued from page 5

The speaker for the **March 7, 2017** meeting of NATS was Dr. Jim Trappe, one of NATS founders. Dave Pilz sent the following report to the Truffler.

Jim has traveled extensively and repeatedly in Australia to study their native truffles and how marsupial mycophagy has shaped the ecology of their native forest ecosystems.

The topic is so multi-faceted that Jim presents the topic in several talks. He presented Part 1 at the NATS meeting in January. See the preceding page for more about that informative presentation.

This presentation in March was Part 2, and was titled: *“How Truffles and Small Animals Impacted Australian History.”* [Think of these small animals as well-diggers breaking the crust of water repellent soils to get at truffles, thus allowing much more rain infiltration.] After an hour of fascinating ecology tales, Jim had still not finished with the topic and will follow up at a future date.



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## BEGIN OR RENEW YOUR ANNUAL NATS MEMBERSHIP ONLINE

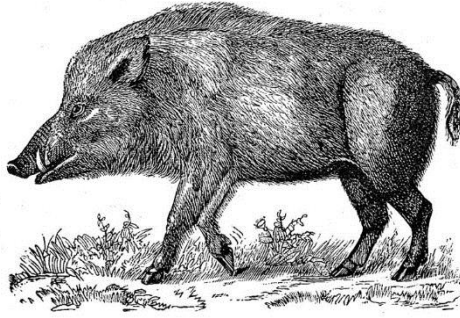
The North American Truffling Society membership includes guided forays, informative speakers at meetings in Corvallis Oregon, a quarterly newsletter, many opportunities to meet world renowned mycologists and much more! Membership renewals are due in January of every year. Annual dues are only \$15 for individuals (plus \$10 for each additional family member) and \$20 for international memberships. Here is where to go for memberships:

<http://www.natruffling.org/renew.htm>.



# WILD BOAR, RADIOACTIVE MEAT AND TRUFFLES

by Ricardo Small



Dr. Jim Trappe is the person who deserves credit for this article. Jim sent an email to me suggesting that I Google key words “*wild boar, radioactive meat and truffles*”. He wrote that I would see articles about monitoring boars, mushrooms and truffles in areas of fallout from the Chernobyl meltdown.

Jim wrote, “The radioactive cloud blanketed much of the central and northern European countries. That was 30 or so years ago. In Sweden the affected central area of that country has been monitored every year for radioactivity. The danger area is posted to warn citizens not to pick wild mushrooms. Mushrooms and truffles that are ectomycorrhizal fungi have long been known as mineral accumulators, one reason they are so important to animal nutrition.”



Learn about some frightening information at the following links that popped up, when I Googled “*wild boar, radioactive meat & truffles*”:

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-02-23/many-wild-boars-roaming-czech-forests-are-radioactive/8295400>

<http://www.seeker.com/radioactive-wild-boars-increase-in-number-1765087275.html>

It is NOT just Chernobyl. Here are links about radioactive boar near Fukushima in Japan:

<http://www.zerohedge.com/news/2017-03-09/caught-video-radioactive-wild-boar-roam-fukushima>

<http://duluthreader.com/articles/2016/04/14/7056-contaminated-wild-boars-echoes-from-chernobyl-to>

# Developing a BLM Truffling Permit

by Peter Oviatt



In 2015, the BLM began issuing truffle harvest permits to individuals foraging on BLM land accompanied by trained truffle dogs. The project of issuing these permits was conceived by Jim LeComte, one of the special Forest Products Coordinators at the BLM Salem office, who saw the need to give clear guidelines to truffle harvesters who wanted to collect, or continue to collect, truffles on BLM land. Working as a truffle-enthused outlier in his office, Jim took it upon himself to fast-track this permit through federal bureaucracy (still, it was a seven-month process). Here's a look at Jim's work setting up the permit, and where it is headed after his retirement later this year.

## WHY THE PERMIT

The motivation for a BLM dog-led harvesting truffle permit did not result from Jim LeComte's truffling enthusiasm alone; he was largely responding to an uptick in calls from what he described as a "disappointed public." The calls followed a 2013 decision by Oregon's Board of Forestry to replace the word "mushroom" with "fungi" in the definition of special forest products, a move that indisputably brought truffles (along with mushrooms) under state regulation. But how to legally harvest truffles from state land remained unclear. Thus inquisitive trufflers began to call Jim: how might one legally harvest on BLM land? He found his inability to answer the question frustrating. When I asked Jim why the state of Oregon performed the semantic sleight of hand, he told me how state officials "put in that law because they were having trouble busting people who were stealing truffles. Cases were being thrown out of court." He continued emphatically: "But, nobody did anything to come up with a mechanism to issue permits. They just said, 'now you need a permit to harvest but we're not going to sell you a permit, we're just going to bust you if you harvest without a permit.'" The move was a de facto ban on commercial harvesting on state land (note: some ODF districts are now rectifying this issue). This caused Jim to go the other way. As he put it, plainly proud of his accomplishment, "people want 'em, and there's no reason why we can't find a way to issue permits."

The de facto state ban was just one of several reasons why Jim's phone increasingly rang with truffle hunting inquiries. Jim and I discussed a range of factors behind the rise of truffling in the region: "Unearthed," the overly dramatized "reality" Discovery Channel show on commercial truffling in the PNW; state tax breaks over the past few decades for planting conifers (e.g. Christmas tree farms) coupled with a recession and volatile markets that left many acres of Douglas fir in the ground; the increasing popularity of the Oregon Truffle Festival, and its boosting of "hound found" truffles and the shaping of Oregon truffles into luxury products. And of course, there was raking.

Jim also found that his email inbox was filling up with photos from landowners whose property abuts BLM land. The photos depicted worst-case scenarios of raking. As Jim shared horrific shots of tennis-court-sized areas of forest soil stripped some ten inches down, he explained how economic, and less so ecologic, arguments brought the permit into fruition. It was less a point of raking being inherently bad than of dogs being superior resource extractors. Jim stressed that the BLM is required to get top dollar for BLM products. Commercial harvesters without trained dogs tend to take most or all of the truffles they find; it is difficult for them to weed out the unripe from the ripe. And a market filled with unripe truffles stymies prices (not to mention the overall reputation of a regional product). Jim provided an analogy: "If you have a thirty-six inch tree laying on the ground, one-hundred feet long, you sell it as sawtimber, not as firewood. And if you're selling dog-harvested truffles you're going to get a lot more money than you'd get from raked truffles." This comment led to a more nuanced conversation on the likelihood of harvesters—intentionally or not



— collecting unripe truffles, even after their dog has zeroed in on a neighboring mature sporocarp. It also raised the question: when is the ideal time to harvest truffles? They should be allowed to reach peak ripeness, of course, but they must also not be too ripe; dealers and chefs will need *some* time before rotting begins. Jim then shared a second analogy, to be sure that I understood why, above all, he included the dog clause: “Instead of selling mature timber to the mills (ripe, delicious truffles), we’re selling Christmas trees (unripe, tasteless truffles). So that’s why. *It’s not just a damage to the ecosystem, it’s a damage to the market too.*”

### **THE PERMIT EVOLVES**

Jim’s disappointed public began calling his BLM number just as the 2013-2014 season ended. The following season he hastily pushed through a permit that allowed truffle harvesting (using rakes or dogs) on lands slated to be bulldozed for logging roads. This made the original NEPA paperwork a breeze: “I mean soil disturbance was big time anyway,” Jim said in jest. That first year, Jim realized that this permit had no future, and reversed course to work on a permit allowing dog-led harvesting on young Douglas fir stands (old enough for canopy closure which prevents truffle-competing brush) across wider swaths of BLM land. To revise the NEPA paperwork he had to prove two points: first, that truffles in fact grow on the lands highlighted on his truffle maps, and second, in Jim’s own words, “that harvesting truffles with a dog doesn’t do any more damage than happens out there with wild creatures.” Proving the latter point was not a straightforward process. Jim related one story in which he came across a piece of land that had been dramatically torn up. Investigating what had happened, and who had caused the destruction, he found the area to be “full of bear scat that reeked of black truffles.” We laughed over the truffle-eating bear before Jim concluded, “I’m pretty confident that that’s what was going on.”

Jim conducted the truffle survey work with Kris Jacobson and Kelly Babbitt—and their dogs Ilsa and Goose—at Umami Truffle Dogs. Upper Management only granted Jim a nominal sum for this work. In the interest of aiding Oregon’s nascent truffle industry, Kris and Kelly had no qualms with continuing the survey work, gratis. As Jim told me, “without the Umami folks’ donated time, it may have taken years, instead of months to complete the process.” Jim’s next task was to call around (to chefs, gourmet food vendors, wild mushroom dealers, truffle-dog companies) to find the going rate for cleaned and sorted truffles, which he determined to be twenty-five to forty dollars an ounce. With this work complete, Jim’s new dog-harvested truffle permit was ready for the 2015-2016 season. Even so, he had few takers that first year, a point he attributes to his restriction of one permit holder to each ten- to thirty-acre harvest area. He loosened this restriction for the 2016-2017 season (all permits are valid in all truffle harvest areas). But still, as of March 2017, he has sold only a few permits.

### **THE FUTURE OF BLM DOG-HARVESTED TRUFFLE PERMITS**

Despite previous disinterest, Jim continues to bring in his truffle finds for sampling at the BLM Salem office. Most of his colleagues still scoff at what they perceive as pungent, even repugnant, squirrel food. A growing minority, however, have a weak spot for the Oregon black truffle infused butter and cream cheese Jim makes. And two employees are now training their dogs to hunt truffles. But these positive signs may not be enough. Jim is set to retire in October, and if the permit is to survive, further changes are needed. The first change involves pricing. Recently, when out with a commercial harvester, Jim asked how he might improve the permit. The harvester explained that unlike mushrooms, which are relatively easy to clean in the field, truffles are typically taken away full of duff and soil, with wormy and inedible portions removed at home. Instead of having harvesters pay for this non-truffle and inedible matter, on March 8th of this year Jim

## BLM Truffling Permit – continued from page 9

adjusted the price to twenty dollars per pound, to reflect “dirty weight.” Additionally, the BLM’s Salem and Eugene districts recently merged, which means the paperwork for truffle permits (not to mention all forest products) must be redone. Jim has his fingers crossed that employees in the Eugene office will “come on board.” If they do, this would bode well, since the majority of the calls Jim receives are from interested harvesters (as well as from landowners who have been victims of truffle poaching) in the Eugene area.

In short, it remains unclear whether and how this federal oversight of truffling will continue. And if we consider the work of social researchers such as Eric Jones and Rebecca McClain, who have conducted extensive research on the impacts of federal regulations on commercial mushroom harvesters since the 1980s, what these laws accomplish (beyond enhancing federal revenue and control) is also uncertain. Namely, to what extent do they aid forest ecologies, struggling Oregonians whose livelihoods depend on “special forest products,” landowners, and other interested parties, human or fungal? To be sure, measures are needed to curb irresponsible raking. But, as I’ve inferred from my near year-long immersion in Oregon’s truffle community, the raking-bad/dog-good narrative is an oversimplification. Such simplification neglects the reality of harvesters’ practices and even what constitutes human raking or scratching and dog sniffing and digging. Considering the growing popularity of Oregon truffles, it is likely that federal regulation of truffles and truffle lands will continue, in one form or another. A point over which the multifaceted truffle community should discuss in earnest.

### OBTAINING A PERMIT

First time truffle permits are issued by appointment and in person only. The current BLM price is twenty dollars per pound “dirty” weight, plus ten percent of total purchase for road maintenance. For first timers, Jim estimates the process to take roughly twenty minutes, “not counting time spent on dog and truffle stories.”

In the first year or two of the permit’s existence, Jim was more stringent in how owners demonstrate their dog’s truffle nose. He now more loosely says that “proof of a dog’s ability *may* be required,” noting that “so far, no one has been denied a truffle permit.” He honors “graduation certificates” from commercial dog trainers, which typically come in the form of “a photo of a smiling truffle dog team, with their first truffle find.” He has also met with “self-trained truffle dog teams,” in areas known to have truffles, to watch the team work, and has issued them permits on site. Perhaps his least preferred route is to set up “test truffle dog teams” at the office, using frozen truffles or truffle oil hidden in the landscaping. Finally, in some cases, Jim will allow harvesters to hire a truffle dog team.

Permits are valid from December to the end of March; expiration dates are extendable with a brief email. Jim is accommodating with this point, explaining that “the BLM wants harvesters to get what they paid for.”

Although Jim told me that he doesn’t stay awake at night thinking about people “stealing” truffles from BLM lands, and insisted that if he were to find someone harvesting without a permit he would merely give them his card with a suggestion to call to obtain a permit, still, he noted that BLM lands are patrolled by local Sheriff Deputies, and by Federal Law Enforcement Rangers.

*Peter is a PhD candidate at MIT. His dissertation examines truffles and the people who work with them in the Pacific Northwest and France. Send any comments or inquiries to [oviatt@mit.edu](mailto:oviatt@mit.edu). Read more about his research at <http://web.mit.edu/hasts/graduate/oviatt.html>. To read, please cut/paste this link into your browser.*



## What do you do with the truffle you can not identify?

You can send them in dried to the Oregon State University Forestry Sciences Lab. Fill out a field data card, which you can find at the Field Data Card button (<http://www.natruffling.org/>) or describe where you found it on your own piece of paper. When possible, include a color digital image showing the surface view and an interior section cut top-to-bottom through the center to:

Dr. James Trappe  
USFS Forestry Sciences Lab  
Corvallis, OR 97331

The data that Jim likes to have included are significant characteristics of the habitat in which a truffle is collected. Please provide the location (GPS data if available) and describe the dominant vegetation species in the immediate area and the slope / exposure.

Please dry the specimens thoroughly before sending them. If you would like to be notified of the identification, you must include your email address or a self-addressed stamped postcard with the specimen you send in.

If you don't have a food dehydrator, truffles can be dried by leaving them in the refrigerator in a loosely closed paper bag for a couple of days. They'll dry much faster if you cut them in half first. The outer skin serves to keep moisture inside.

**WANTED:** Your suggestions for newsletter topics, comments about articles, your opinions about any truffle and/or fungi related topic are wanted. Please send to:

**NATrufflingsociety@gmail.com.**

Newsletter editor: Sarah Shay.

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

**April 4: Plants that Eat Truffles for Lunch.** Dr. Dan Luoma will describe the fascinating interactions between forest plants and their associated mushroom and truffle fungi. Dan will give special attention to those plants without chlorophyll that depend on truffle forming fungi to meet their nutritional needs. He is an Assistant Professor, Senior Research Department of Forest Ecosystems and Society, OSU.

**May 9: Growing Oyster Mushrooms at Home** by Kim Kittredge of NW Mycological Consultants. "Many *Pleurotus* & *Hypsizygus* species can be grown at home. We will provide spawn and a substrate for the edible saprobits. Take home a bag to grow and fruit."

**June 6: Dr. Patrick Long's successful *Tuber melanosporum* truffle orchard.** Dr. Long is a retired veterinarian.

All general meetings are held at 7:30pm in room 2087 at Cordley Hall on the OSU campus in Corvallis. Cordley Hall is reached via Orchard Avenue east of 30th St; [click here for a street map](#). Room 2087 is on the second floor on the south side of the building; [click here for a building map](#). Parking in any of the A1 lots is free after 5pm.

## Disclaimer

The information contained in *The Truffler* is to be used at your own risk. NATS Inc., its officers, editors, and members are not responsible for the use or misuse of information contained in the newsletter. If you are unsure of mushroom identification or safety, please consult an expert. Better safe than sorry!

In addition, attending and participating in a NATS event is entirely at your own risk. No person associated with NATS is either directly or indirectly responsible for anything that occurs during, or in transit to/from, a NATS event. Be responsible.