

# Attending COMA's Clark Rogerson Foray

By Jessica Benson Evans

I began the summer with plans to attend both the NAMA foray at Paul Smith's College in New York and the COMA foray in Hebron, CT. Unfortunately, unexpected illness kept me from making it to NAMA. By the end of August, I was feeling much better and more than ready to make my way to COMA's Clark Rogerson Foray. This foray was held from August 30th to September 2nd and was hosted by the Connecticut-Westchester Mycological Association. COMA members Joe and Kathy Brandt served as welcome ambassadors and event coordinators, and a whole team of club members and others volunteered to make this event an incredible one!

I arrived at Camp Hemlocks early Saturday morning, missing out on the Friday afternoon/evening festivities but ready to jump right in to all the foray had to offer. I quickly signed in, found my room for the weekend, and laced up my boots. Several walk locations were offered for the morning, and club member Brenda Clark and I signed up to visit Day Pond State Park in Colchester. We hitched a ride with Bolete Bill, known to many as PVMA friend Bill Yule, and headed off for a morning of foraging.



Brenda Clark with corals.

Brenda and I have forayed together before, and we have a similar style. We're "off-the-beaten-path" kind of hikers, and we usually leave the pack and head off together in search of hidden treasures. At Day Pond, Bill suggested that we might find our kind of "trail" by following the stream beyond the dam. His suggestion was a good one; we traversed rocks and fallen trees for about three hours and never encountered any other hikers but found a wide variety of fungi to

collect and share. All was quiet in the deep woods, except for our calls back and forth to each other to insure we didn't get separated. I usually call "Marco," while Brenda responds with "Polo!" from somewhere off in the forest. Ridiculous to some, perhaps, but we haven't lost each other since developing this comical system. It's fine to foray away from the group, but important not to become lost.

We returned to the other forayers for a simple bag lunch, provided by the excellent hosts of this year's foray. None of us was quite ready to call it quits for the day, though, so we headed back out via car to the other side of the park. Brenda spotted a collection of boletes along the side of the road and called out, "There's boletes over there!" Surprisingly, Bill kept driving, but Brenda and I made a point to journey on foot back towards her automobile-assisted find. It was worth the

extra effort: Brenda's collection of *Aureoboletus innixus* is pictured below. I'd never seen these before in such pristine condition!



*Aureoboletus innixus*

Tired but happy, we journeyed back to Camp Hemlocks to sort and identify the day's finds. One of the best things about this particular foray is its casual pace; there was no rush to be back on site for any particular event unless we set those parameters for ourselves. Brenda and I settled in at one of the cafeteria tables to begin working on our various treasures. As we labeled our fungi, we brought them in to the identification room to be checked and sorted by the team of foray mycologists and registrars. This was an area in which I volunteered my time; I carried identified and registered fungi over to their places on the ID tables, which was a great way to support my growing knowledge!



Brenda consulting the experts at the ID table. Left to right, Arleen Bessette, Dianna Smith, Brenda Clark, Robert Gergulics and Terry Stoleson

Saturday evening's potluck was incredible; the ninety or so foray participants brought a wide variety of food options for all

preferences. There were vegetarian, vegan, and gluten-free delights, including a delicious vegan pozole by The 3 Foragers. I am certain that no one went hungry after a long day of fungi foraging! Overnight accommodations were equally delightful; although the rooms were dorm-style with shared bathrooms, I slept soundly and awoke refreshed and ready for another day of hiking.

Sunday's schedule of events brought more enjoyable mushroom foraging and delicious dining. In the morning, Brenda and I accompanied Robert Gergulics to Blackledge Falls, part of Gay City State Park, and scrambled up and down hillsides in search of interesting fungi. We didn't have to search long; Brenda spotted a new-to-us species early on in our hike. Our novel find turned out to be *Claviaradelphus pistillaris*, an uncommon club-shaped Basidiomycete. These bitter-tasting clubs are found in beech forests. Robert was delighted to see these as well: their gregarious fruiting offered great photographic opportunities!

Sunday evening concluded with a mycophagy banquet featuring numerous fungi, including stuffed mushrooms, vegan lasagna, and more. Awards were also given that evening, for most interesting finds of the foray. Brenda and I received awards as well, for the "most diligent amateur identifiers" of the foray. We'd spent several hours each afternoon working on our finds, with the goal of identifying each mushroom at least to genus. For me, that's the best part

of a foray – spending time with friends working on finding and identifying fungi. In all, the foray brought in 353 distinct species of fungi and lichens!

From my perspective, this was the most enjoyable foray I've attended. A small number of participants, a foray location with all facilities located in a small area, and excellent natural areas for hiking make the Clark Rogerson Foray at Camp Hemlocks a must-attend event for me in the future. My deepest thanks to PVMA for awarding me a scholarship to attend this incredible foray. I highly recommend this foray to club members next year – hope to see you there!



Robert Gergulics at the bolete table