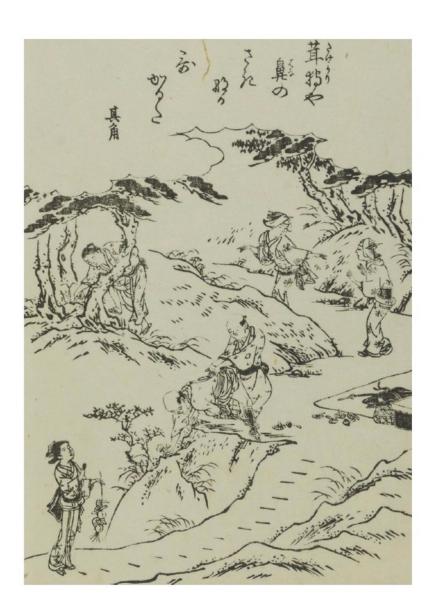


a fascination with fungi TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN ASHBURNE

Hito wo toru kinoko hatashite utsukushiki

The mushrooms that kill men Are, sure enough, Beautiful

—Kobayashi Issa (trans. Blyth)



We are unthinkable without fungi

—Merlin Sheldrake, author of Entangled life: how fungi make our worlds, change our minds & shape our futures

ome years ago, wandering in the mountains in search of fungi, one of our group, an old timer turned to me and, apropos of nothing, announced "Kore wa shumi de wa nai yo, byōki desu. Naoranai byōki desu." "This isn't a hobby, it's a disease. It's incurable." And with that, bear bells jingling a merry accompaniment, he disappeared into a bamboo thicket. For all I know, he's still there. Searching.

Humankind's fascination with mushrooms and toadstools is ancient. The
earliest reference to fungi in Japan is in
the *Nihongi*, the book of chronicles, some
13 centuries ago. By the Edo period, when
Issa penned his fungi-celebrating haiku—
he wrote at least sixty on the topic—the
West had discovered the microscope, and
in Cambridge the Reverend M.J. Berkeley

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