



a fascination with fungi



TEXT AND PHOTOGRAPHS
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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*



Some 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