

My First Chanterelle!

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Serendipity is a fancy word for chance or luck. The word was coined by Horace Walpole, an 18th century English novelist, to describe the fortuitous adventures of three fabled Persian princes who traveled to the island of Serendip, (Sri Lanka). In the tale, the princes “were always making discoveries, by accident and sagacity, of things they were not in quest of,” wrote Walpole in a 1754 letter to his friend Horace Mann.

Since then, the meaning of the word serendipity has expanded to include “the pleasure of finding one thing while looking for something else,” an apt description of what life is often like, especially when searching for mushrooms.

My most memorable serendipitous mushroom quest happened three years ago while looking for boletes on a trail I rarely walk. In the back of a clearing, I stumbled upon a troop of mushrooms I had never seen before: *Craterellus tubaeformis*, my first chanterelle!

Craterellus tubaeformis (Bull.) Qué! fruits from the end of August to frost in Newfoundland and Labrador, hence its common name, the winter chanterelle. Its preferred habitat is older wet coniferous forests and the rotting softwood logs and stumps found there. It is a small to medium-sized mushroom with a waxy, rough, brown cap 2-8 cm in diameter. Convex



at first, its cap develops a funnel-shaped center and enrolled margins, giving the mushroom a trumpet or goblet appearance, hence the genus name “crater,” from the Latin meaning vessel. With age, the cap becomes convoluted and sports a lighter colored trim along its margin. The stem of *Craterellus tubaeformis* is typically 5-10 mm thick and often grooved or slightly flattened. The stem is yellow to dull yellow-orange in color and typically becomes brownish with age. This yellowish stem gives *C. tubaeformis* another common name: yellowfoot. The stem is hollow from the funnel-shaped cap (hence the specific epithet *tubaeformis*). Photographing *C. tubaeformis* produced another serendipitous discovery. I laid my camera on a bean bag, wiggled it into position for the best composition and, using a remote cable, took several shots, changing the aperture a little each time. When I checked the camera’s LCD, I was completely surprised. Instead of blade-like gills typical of other agaric mushrooms, the underside of the cap was covered in forked ridges often called “false gills.” A closer look revealed they were, blunt, widely-spaced, decurrent and connected to one another by a cross-veined pattern of shallower ridges.

Many guide books describe *Craterellus tubaeformis* and a similar looking *C. infundibuliformis*. If your reference is old enough it may even list them as being in the genus *Cantharellus*. Molecular studies have reclassified them and other hollow-stemmed chanterelles into *Craterellus*. These studies have also shown that there are two distinct genetic populations of *Craterellus tubaeformis*: one in Europe and eastern North America, and another in western North America. Furthermore, *C. tubaeformis* and *C. infundibuliformis* have been determined to be the same mushroom although, again, many older field guides list them as separate species. The only other *Craterellus* closely resembling *C. tubaeformis* in Newfoundland is *C. lutescens*. It is distinguished from its cousin by a smooth to slightly wrinkled hymenium on the underside of the cap, a deeper yellow stem and a preference for calcareous soils. Mycologists differ on the ecology of *Craterellus tubaeformis* considering it mycorrhizal or saprobic or both. Either way, it associates with coniferous wood. *Craterellus tubaeformis* is one of our choice edibles. I have not found it since my serendipitous off-trail adventure several years ago, despite searching in several places, including the clearing of my first encounter. Maybe serendipity will play a role in my next find.

[Text and some images excerpted from an essay that originally appeared in the January 13, 2013 *Omphalina*, the newsletter of Foray Newfoundland and Labrador. Image of *C. tubaeformis* (right) by J. Cornish, close-up of *C. tubaeformis* false gills (facing page) by P. van Heerden, and *C. lutescens* (top, right) by A. Voitk.]

