



Morel Tales

Gary Alan FINE

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In this thoughtful book, Gary Fine explores how Americans attempt to give meaning to the natural world that surrounds them. Although "nature" has often been treated as an unproblematic reality, Fine suggests that the meanings we assign to the natural environment are culturally grounded. In other words, there is no nature separate from culture. He calls this process of cultural construction and interpretation, "naturework." Of course, there is no denying the biological reality of trees, mountains, earthquakes, and hurricanes, but, he argues, they must be interpreted to be made meaningful. Fine supports this claim by examining the fascinating world of mushrooming.

Based on three years of field research with mushroomers at local and national forays, *Morel Tales* highlights the extensive range of meanings that mushrooms have for mushroomers. Fine details how mushroomers talk about their finds--turning their experiences into "fish stories" (the one that got away), war stories, and treasure tales; how mushroomers routinely joke about dying from or killing others with misidentified mushrooms, and how this dark humor contributes to the sense of community among collectors. He also describes the sometimes friendly, sometimes tense relations between amateur mushroom collectors and professional mycologists. Fine extends his argument to show that the elaboration of cultural meanings found among mushroom collectors is equally applicable to birders, butterfly collectors, rock hounds, and other naturalists.

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