



Raoul Van Den Broucke cuts up some Chanterelles found during a mushroom hunt in the Forest of Dean

the apricot-like scent they give off when warm.

Honey fungus, with their speckled brown caps, were also plentiful: Raoul selected the smallest and cut them at the top of their long stalks to ensure only the tasty tops made it into the cooking pan.

Several other edible mushrooms came to light during the afternoon's search, several of which had intriguing names.

They included the "witch's egg", the precursor of the unappetisingly-named "stink horn", which contained a delicious, nutty, radish flavoured 'yolk'.

Another was the ink cap which should always be harvested before it starts secreting the black liquid from which it gets its name.

"It's a bad year for mushrooms," sighed Raoul as we searched for tasty specimens.

"It was looking like it was going to be a good year with all the rain in August but then we had September as dry as anything."

The foraging trip finished at the dining table with a tasty dish of pasta and wild mushrooms in a cream sauce conjured up by Raoul and Tom Harverly from Taurus Crafts.

"I've been interested in mushrooms all my life and I always consider three things: can I eat it, is it nice and can I sell it?" said Raoul, whose wide-ranging business career has seen him working in the hospitality industry and running his own airline as well as selling foraged foods to fine restaurants in the UK and Europe.

"A lot of people find mushrooms confusing – which is great news for foragers like me as it keeps me in a job forever.

"In some countries you keep quiet if you find a good site as everybody goes out mushrooming but here it's all right because people don't know what to look for.

"Now that I'm retired I go foraging with people who want to learn: I have knowledge and experience from over 60 years of mushrooms and wild food and I want to pass it on."

Mushroom hunters who joined Raoul in the Forest of Dean included Ruth Adams, a Gloucestershire College Support Worker, from Barnwood.

"I thought it was really beneficial to look for mushrooms with somebody who knows so much about the subject," she said.

■ For future events, keep an eye on the website www.tauruscrafts.co.uk

Pictures: Peter Chatterton

LOCAL FOOD HEROES

Picture: Paul Nicholls 981035_11



Stephen Wheeler with some apple juice produced by Martin Harrell at Hayles Fruit Farm

STEPHEN WHEELER,

commercial manager at speciality food company Mise en Place, now part of Cheltenham-based Creed Foodservice, is responsible for sourcing the best food ingredients for top chefs across the country.

Increasingly the demand is for quality, local produce – a task which puts him in touch with a wealth of food producers. In a new weekly column, he'll be sharing some of their successes and challenges

HERE in Gloucestershire we're surrounded by wonderful farmland and a huge variety of independent food producers – who we should support and celebrate. Over the next few months, I'll be introducing you to some of my local food heroes, all of whom play an important role in the regional economy but who also have a fascinating story to tell.

Climate change is perhaps the biggest challenge that fruit farmer Martin Harrell has had to face in recent years.

Martin is the second generation owner of Hayles Fruit Farm near Winchcombe, which his father David bought in 1950.

Back then, Bramley and Cox's English apples were quite literally, flavour of the month. But the onward march of global warming now threatens the future of the traditional Cox's, as the species dislikes mild wet weather and much prefers the kind of cold, hard winters that today are just a dim and distant memory.

To overcome this, Martin is constantly researching and establishing new varieties that flourish in today's climate and crop well both in terms of yield

and flavour. Look out for the Freckles and Red Gloss varieties coming soon.

Globalisation of apple production and the oversupply of cheap imports is another ever-present threat. But Martin believes there's no substitute for quality produce with minimal food miles, so much of the 100 tonne crop produced by the farm is sold either to local wholesalers such as Creed Foodservice, direct to local supermarkets or from the farm shop.

But it was a freak hailstorm in June 1999 that gave Martin a golden opportunity to capitalise on what could so easily have been a disaster.

The hailstones damaged the tender skins of his entire crop – leaving them marked and unsaleable – so Martin brought in a juicer and the rest as they say, is history. Hayles Fruit Farm now sells in the region of 30,000 bottles of apple juice a year.

Martin has proved that by reacting positively, diversifying, and staying true to the company's core values, he is well-placed to withstand any of the challenges that the 21st century may care to throw at him. A true Local Food Hero.