

From the Mushroom Basket:



a bitter trap

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A, can you help me with this bolete? I thought at first it was *hydnum* but its teeth have been pulled and all we see is empty sockets. Ciao! Peter

An innocent enough e-mail with a photo attached (Fig. 1). Polypores are often many-headed, but not boletes, and the pores did not “feel” quite right for

a bolete. In the face-on view the poremouth surface looks smooth and even, a characteristic of *Albatrellus*. These observations led me to advise my friend that he had that good edible. Because it is not common here, I asked if he would donate it to my herbarium instead of his pot. Generous beyond the call of science or friendship, he agreed.

Unaware that he had sent more photos, I did not scroll down, missing Fig. 2. The side-on view clearly shows the jagged poremouths that stop at the cap-coloured stem, not characteristic of *Albatrellus*, but of *Jahnoporus hirtus*—a fleshy polypore usually found singly at the foot of conifers, decomposing buried wood.

My mistake could have remained undiscovered, had we not found a patch of *Albatrellus ovinus* a few weeks later (Fig. 3). *A. ovinus*, genetically a *Russula* relative and not a polypore, is mycorrhizal with conifers and usually fruits in large groups. Its small pores have a smooth poremouth surface, and run down the white stem. Its cap varies from white to tan and often cracks. The flesh stains yellow with age, injury, and handling. It turns golden yellow in the pan and, like *Hydnum repandum*, is liked even by people who usually do not like mushrooms.

Peter’s generosity saved him from confirming that *J. hirtus* is repulsively bitter and unchewably tough. We cooked him real *Albatrellus ovinus* as a reward.



Fig. 1. *Jahnoporus hirtus*



Fig. 2. *Jahnoporus hirtus* in situ

Lessons: Questioner: By all means, use e-mail for help in identifying mushrooms, but do not depend on identification of e-mailed pictures for edibility. Learn new edibles with an expert *in vivo* (live mushroom + live expert = live you). Responder: Check ALL information and request more if needed. Do not give specific advice on edibility lightly. Both: There are many lookalikes, whose confusion is not always innocent.



Fig. 3. *Albatrellus ovinus*