

December 2018

the spawn run

Journal of the South African Mushroom Farmers Association

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FROM THE EDITOR



the
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It has been an 'interesting' year in South Africa and unfortunately, it will come to a close with as much uncertainty about the future as the last. With almost daily revelations of corruption and poor governance emerging, one can only hope that there is something better on the horizon.

Christmas and the end of the year seem to have yet again rushed upon us and once again this time of year is a hive of anxious activity. It may be difficult, but I hope that we all can look back on this year and bask in some success and achievement or, if not, at least some progress.

In this issue of The Spawn Run we report back on the first SAMFA conference which did not include Denny Mushrooms as a member. The group was however represented and we hope that the benefits of belonging to the association were apparent. Despite this loss, the conference served as a platform to welcome back one of the stalwarts of the

industry. Mr Roddy Cairns has joined the industry again after a ten year break and brings with him energy, enthusiasm and over 30 years of experience.

As Roddy left the industry just prior to the Spawn Run launching the 20 Questions questionnaire I felt it only apt that Roddy fill us in on some personal details. Thanks Roddy!

On behalf of SAMFA I would like to sign off for 2018 by thanking all of the contributors for your efforts over the past year. Thank you to all the advertisers in The Spawn Run, sponsors of the industry and all our members for your dedication.

I hope everyone has a happy and peaceful Christmas and I wish you all safe and hopeful New Year.

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SAMFA

SAMFA Conference 2018

Greig Wishart, Cape Mushrooms

Despite having entered the South African Mushroom industry in 2011 this was the first time I was to attend the conference. Cape Mushrooms has always been represented by my brother Mike who on this occasion was unable to attend.

Having listened to stories of previous conferences from the likes of Dr Martmari van Greuning and Dave Marock I was forewarned of what to expect at these gatherings. I was somewhat re-assured however, by the fact that this was going to be a short 1 day event and that if my endurance was going to be tested by the likes of Rob Stewart (who I had previously shared time with on a tour of Ireland) it would at least be just for the 1 day. I had already planned an early escape back to the Cape the following morning so I was relatively safe.

But first, the business of the day:

Ross Richardson, our seemingly tireless and dedicated chairman opened proceedings. I can't remember his words exactly but I do remember the theme of his address: Although as producers of the same product we are always going to be competitors, first and foremost. We are however also compatriots in dealing with the challenges we all face in our industry. By uniting as an industry, we are



much better placed to deal with many of those challenges and identify and advance solutions for those that are specific to our South African environment. There are many areas where we need not give away any competitive advantage to each other, but where we stand to gain a huge collective advantage. For example: the negotiation of employment concessions, the maintenance of a central list of chemicals registered for use on mushrooms or simply in the competition for shelf space for our product in the country's retail stores.

A presentation by **Wim van Vugt** of **Christiaens** started things off and left me wondering at the scale of developments in other parts of the world. A single farm in Russia, for example, that can match the entire weekly South African production in just 1 day, and they are building 3 of them concurrently!!



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samfa conference



Nathan Jones then dug deep into the mysteries of the compost analysis sheet. While analysis will give you the information about your raw materials and end product that you need in order to make good decisions, never make those decisions without also smelling, looking, feeling & squeezing.

The scientists from the Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, University of Pretoria then took to the floor:

Dr Naz Siyoum presented a review of the Mushroom Disease Outbreak Prevention Service (MushDrOPS) initiative.

Kololwetu Cetyiwe presented the results of a study into the prevalence and diversity of the Trichoderma disease on our farms.

Zama Zulu then took us through a demonstration of how different cultures are actually collected and grown out in the laboratory.

Prof Gerrie Du Rand and **Dr Nadene Marx-Pienaar** then illustrated how we can have access to a much wider scope of expertise within the university by describing how the Department of Food Sciences had been involved in developing a mushroom based 'Pringle' style chip. Examples were handed out to us for tasting. More salt for me next time please.

As an industry we are extremely lucky to have the services of such dedicated individuals at our disposal. What better example could there be of how, through SAMFA, we are able to set up a collaboration with a 3rd party and then, as individuals, have equal benefit from the results of such a collaboration.

It was then the turn of **Roddy Cairns, Tim Crawley, Nichol Muller, Rob Stewart** and **Nathan Jones** to provide us with an entertaining investigation into how our livelihoods depend on our understanding of our raw materials, their availability, quality and consistency. The subject of straw



took centre stage both subjectively and physically as examples of it from different parts of the country were measured and left lying all over the floor.

The underlying message I took away was: **know your raw materials, their source, their quality and their availability.**

Unfortunately, the effects of lunch which followed have clearly taken their toll on my memory of the presentations thereafter. **Prof Lise Korsten** challenged us to identify boundaries that limit our achievements and 'go beyond' them to achieve excellence. Although I have to confess to not being able to remember the details of her presentation, what I do take away is that she sets a fantastic example of leadership within her department and although I have already said it, I think it is worth saying again: we are extremely lucky to have her department at our disposal and we need to make sure that we take advantage of that as much as possible.

Dennis Dykes, Chief Economist at Nedbank rose to the challenge of delivering at least an entertaining slant on what, to my limited understanding of these things, seemed to be a worrying economic outlook. And all this on the very day that the country's Minister of Finance was replaced!

Riana Greenblo then wrapped things up with a detailed report on how we are getting value for the money we spend on raising the profile of our product in what is a very crowded and competitive environment. As I have already said, this is an area where our pooled resource and centralised effort can achieve a much more focused and co-ordinated end result than the otherwise fragmented, disjointed initiatives that would be the alternative.

The AGM then followed. My lasting memory was being kicked under the table by Rob Stewart, who was clearly suffering from dehydration, when I attempted to suggest other items that might be managed centrally by the association.

Happily, it wasn't long before we were all at the bar to begin the serious business of 'knowledge exchange' and renewing of old friendships. For me it was an opportunity to finally meet the characters behind the legends of the industry.

I am not sure what time it was when I finally made it back to my hotel (*thanks for the lift Roddy*) and I was able to make my early escape the following morning.

Until next time then...



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Why test and how to interpret results?

Presented by Nathan Jones, SAMFA Conference, 9 October 2018

Adapted for print by Nathan Jones

While there is certain empirical data in terms of compost analysis, as in most forms of metrology, there is a large portion of subjectivity. Method of analysis, references and standards, sampling and interpretation all play a role in defining the analysis and what it means.

When asking the question of why test compost at all, it is important to first address the issues of what exactly it is and how you can use it within your operation.

Blindly analysing compost and using prescribed values of parameters as a target, will only end in frustration and ultimately failure to achieve your goals. The results of analysis should be seen as an indication of the direction of your process and not necessarily your position relative to a desired destination or target.

While the 'absolute' values have their place, more important, is to monitor changes in ratios and relationships, as this is representative of what is taking place in the habitat of the compost mass. It is vitally important to understand that the compost is host to a multitude of microbial organisms and it is they that are responsible for both the physical and analytical changes you see. To relegate the importance of their life cycle, biological requirements and role in the process, is to overlook what composting actually is. There is certainly much we still do not know and understand and no doubt in time new revelations will change our outlook, but once you appreciate what the analysis of compost portrays it becomes a little less daunting in using the information it provides. With this approach the testing of compost can become a useful tool in mapping out and predicting changes in the process.

When studying the results of a compost analysis it is important that you have confidence that the result has stemmed from a representative sample. Sampling of the mass has a direct effect on the integrity of the analysis results. A single, random handful of compost is unlikely to be representative of the bulk, unless you have near perfect uniformity. Samples should therefore be taken at a point of maximised mixing and blending. Multiple samples should be taken over time and then blended to create the final analyte. This "specimen" should then be assessed and compared visually and physically to the mass to ensure there are no obvious differences or deviations.

The sampling process should be set up as a protocol and only once it is reliable can you begin collecting and analysing data with any sort of confidence.

Interpretation can only take place over a range of data points so the consistent collection of data is necessary. A data point should also never be isolated from the whole. Compost analysis must fit the puzzle of what is observed by the senses in the process and vice versa.

As data is accumulated, outliers, deviations and errors

will be seen. These need to be identified and then validated or correlated. This is not always easy due to the myriad of both interrelated and external influences that exist. If no viable cause can be identified it is best to exclude outlier as an aberration. Over time, trends and time lines could be established to coincide with weather, seasons, raw materials.

When these trends develop, it will become apparent that analytic goals and targets can be quite fluid and will require adjustment based on changes in for example, the condition of the raw material.

The aging and changing of raw materials (particularly straw) is one aspect that makes interpretation difficult and this is due to the fact that most analysis of compost only takes place well into the composting process. Analysing close to the beginning of the process is difficult due to the inherent lack of homogeneity, but this is in fact your baseline to monitor changes.

At the end of the day, analysis can be a valuable tool so long as it is not used in isolation and is allowed to fit into the story that the compost and the process itself is telling.

Interpretation Tips

The first law of thermodynamics, states that energy can neither be created nor destroyed; energy can only be transferred or changed from one form to another.

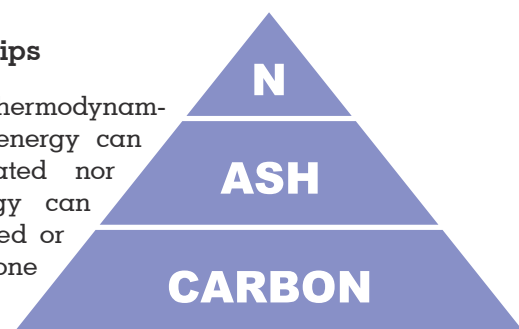
When one considers that the compost mass is a closed system and all the inputs are the result of the recipe it is important to note what transfers of energy take place.

Nitrogen forms the nutritional building blocks for the micro-organisms and generally undergoes conversions without alteration of the gravimetric value.

Ash is essentially inert and remains unchanged through the process.

Carbon is consumed through respiration of the micro-organisms to produce energy, carbon dioxide and water vapour.

When you look at how each component changes through the process and compare it to a compost analysis and the recipe, one can derive useful information as to what is happening in the mass, the ideal relationships between the various elements and what processes have more or less effect on them.



the mushroom calendar

Important Dates on the Mushroom Calendar



2019

Master Class -
Mushroom Composting and Growing

18th - 23rd February 2019

Mushroom Office, Horst, The Netherlands

www.mushroomoffice.com

25th North American
Conference (NAMC)

14th - 16th February 2019

Huatt Regency, Orlando, Florida

www.mushroomconference.org

Dutch Mushroom Days

22nd - 24th May 2019

the Brabantallen, Den Bosch, The Netherlands

The 10th International
Medicinal Mushroom
Conference (IMMC10)

19th - 22nd September 2019

Nantong, China

To ensure that your event is included in The Spawn Run's Mushroom Calendar,
please email all the pertinent details to nathan@highveldmushrooms.co.za

Brave New Worlds of Bunker Composting *part 2*



by Ray Samp,
Agari Culture Mushroom Consulting Services

[Reproduced from the June 2001 issue of The Spawn Run]

Composition of an In-Vessel Bulk Phase I Process

Earlier in this presentation I roughly outlined a general bulk composting process. I mentioning and defined the prewet, phase 0, phase I, and reinoculation. In closing this presentation I will describe in more detailed fashion each of these processes and offer photographs of each. It seems characteristic of our industry that there are about as many options for any procedure as there are mushroom farms and mushroom growers, and this characteristic is kept alive and well in the emerging bulk composting arena. Consequently there are many more options than there is available space to show in this presentation. As such, I will only show a few examples of each process and leave the rest for some future opportunity.

Once again, prewet is the time when water is introduced to the raw materials and terminates when they are blended together. Accordingly the period of time is as long as 7 days or as short as hours. The largest period of time is the wetting of the straw component of the compost whether it



Figure 9

is baled straw or stable bedding. Depending on the operation this may take 2-7 days. This is accomplished either by a watering boom that applies large volumes of water while moving back and forth over stationary bales (Figure 9), via sprinklers spraying on the bales or bulk stable bedding, or through the use of a vacuum hydrator. The hydrator can incorporate water into a batch of straw in a matter of hours. The objective is to incorporate as much moisture as possible into the straw so that optimum mois-



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Figure 10



ture is achieved at the time of blend of all raw materials. In some cases the straw is dry at the time of introduction of poultry and gypsum, but the resulting medium is rarely wet enough. I personally like to see bales near saturation at time of blend. At blending, the straw component of the compost is mixed thoroughly with the nitrogen component (usually poultry manure) and gypsum. The blend itself is usually executed by a stationary blending line (Figure 10) or a mobile prewet machine (Figure 11), which provide

Figure 11



excellent blend of raw materials by design. Initial bulk density adjustments can also be made at this time by mixing the materials to the extent that will chop straw to the desired length. Exceptional blend and straw length modification are critical due to less opportunity to do so later in the process. A turner can also do a reasonable job using several runs, but time and space is a factor.

I consider the start of phase 0 immediately after the addition of water and the blend of raw materials. This is when full water absorption, microflora build-up, and initial heat-up and softening of the straw occurs. Phase 0 may be accomplished on a normal slab, an aerated slab, or in a bunker and may be as short as a day or two or as long as a week. There are some that believe an extended phase 0 and even a period of anerobiosis is critical to the production of a good mushroom compost, hence the operations that feature long phase 0's. In most operations this period is executed on a normal concrete slab very similar to a conventional phase 0 in large bulk pyramids or "A" piles (Figure 12). The piles are usually moved, aerated, and blended on alternate days by loader or by prewet machine. In a few cases the material is re-turned through the blending line for more mix and water addition, then returned to the bulk pile. After the phase 0 process has been accomplished for the operation in question (and once again the procedures and durations are variable operation to operation) the compost is filled into a bunker or tunnel for phase I.

Having achieved optimum blend of raw materials, full water absorption, and microflora build-up it is time to commence conversion of the raw materials in earnest. The compost is filled into the vessel either by loader, bunker filler, or gantry system. The vessel is filled similar to a



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phase II tunnel to give a consistent profile for consistent air percolation through the mass of compost. A loader can do the job, but the finish and consistency is inferior to that of



Figure 12

the dedicated bunker filling machines available such as the bunker filler or the gantry. In brief, a bunker filler is a mobile piece of equipment fitted with a hopper, a leveler, and an oscillating belt that stacks the compost evenly into the bunker (Figure 13). A gantry is a stationary overhead system of belts that piles the compost onto the aerated floor by an operator at floor level (Figure 14). The bunker may be filled to a height of 4 to 5 and even 6 meters, across the width of the vessel, and to as much length of the vessel as is necessary (up to 50 meters). Once the bunker has been filled the air introduction program commences to supply the microflora with enough oxygen to generate metabolic heat to raise the temperature progressively up to the 70+C (160+F) degree goal. I very much prefer systems with computerized programs that work off of oxygen concentration since it is really the oxygen concentration in the compost that really drives the system. However it must be noted that oxygen probes only seem to last ~6-12 months. During leveling and heat up, the first two phases of the process, oxygen concentrations of 9-12% seem to be best to support the microflora without overwhelming heat generation. Once fermentation at 70+C (160+F) degrees has been achieved less oxygen is necessary since the process is largely chemical. During fermentation 6-10% oxygen is usually the target. Usually 70+C degrees is achieved in 24-36 hours after initial filling and the compost is kept in this state for 2-7 days depending on the operation.



Figure 13

After the first bunker period, in some cases (especially tunnels) the compost goes to phase II, but in most bunker operations the compost is moved or shifted to another bunker for additional fermentation time. At this time, the compost is removed by loader and filled into another bunker by the loader, bunker filler, or gantry. During all subsequent bunker periods attempts are made to convert any bits of the compost that weren't converted during the first period. Most bunker operations have 2-3 bunker periods usually totaling 8-12 days to provide consistently acceptable compost. However, it is possible to make a compost more docile or more decomposed by extending the duration and number of bunker periods. This can be an expensive proposition since more bunkers are required to extend the time/moves in bunkers beyond 13 days, but it has been done. To some extent extended bunker periods this has been a consideration of the American industry since high bulk density for higher yields in minimal bed/tray space is characteristic of the industry. It is true that in general, bunkered compost tends to be longer and "greener" than conventionally made compost because of the reduced opportunities to physically abuse the straw. In this case the density problem has to be addressed at initial blending or at the bunker shifts to shorten the straw enough to fit enough weight in a given amount of space (beds or trays in phase II). Blending lines and prewet machines have good straw shortening abilities while bunker fillers and gantries have lesser abilities to shorten straw.



Figure 14

Finally, bunker operators from the time of final empty of the bunker to filling phase II usually use a period of reinoculation. Because the bunkers, and especially tunnels, are so efficient there is little firefang in the compost during phase I. It therefore is advisable to put the compost aside for as little as 6-8 hours after final bunker empty to allow the actinomycete population to recolonize the compost. Many composters allow a full day for microbial recolonization of the compost to insure a proper ecology for phase II and some even inoculate the finished phase I material with left over phase II compost. This seems unnecessary, but it does occur. A reinoculation pile is usually just an irregular, bulk pile, but I prefer an "A" pile. A bunker filler may be used to stack the reinoculation pile to provide a final blend and to wet the compost for proper phase II filling moisture.

CONCLUSION

As was mentioned at the beginning of this talk, in-vessel bulk phase I composting is not a cure all for all composting problems, but I believe it is a viable option for the production of *Agaricus* mushroom substrate. The process has several advantages to the conventional system, but does not necessarily make the end product any better. I believe in the systems, however I am also quick to point out that, like any other process, there are techniques and procedures that need to be learned. As an analogy, in my consulting experiences I have come across growers who could not come to grips with shelves or bulk phase II or tray growing after bed growing. It seems to be a reasonable extension that a change from conventional to bulk systems could have the same results if the differences are not appreciated. Some of the key aspects of successful bunker operation that I have recognized are:

1. Complete and consistent saturation of all raw materials.
2. Near perfect blend of all raw materials.
3. Build and distribute microflora and each movement.
4. Expose all raw materials to 70+ degrees Celsius for at least 3 days.
5. Build bulk and maintain moisture throughout the process.

These may be some of the big generalities, but there are also many small details that need to be addressed to make a system successful. As always, a change to these systems has to be approached with some degree of caution because the operator must be adaptable to the new way of doing things. As I mentioned earlier the principles of conventional and bunker systems are the same, but that doesn't mean the approach to achieve those principles are the same. I suppose thus is the way of the successful mushroom grower -- to make any process work while considering system, raw material, and environmental variations. Maybe that's why our vocation is so much fun -- when we get it right anyway!



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Mushroom Project update: University of Pretoria Mushroom Disease Outbreak Prevention Service

Siyoum, N and Korsten, L
University of Pretoria, Department of Plant and Soil Sciences;
Department of Science & Technology /
National Research Foundation,
Centre of Excellence Food Security, Pretoria, South Africa

3. Zulu, Z. 2018. Demonstration of laboratory methods for MushDrOPS. SAMFA Conference, October 9, 2018.
4. Korsten, L. 2018. Going beyond the boundaries to achieve excellence. SAMFA Conference, October 9, 2018.

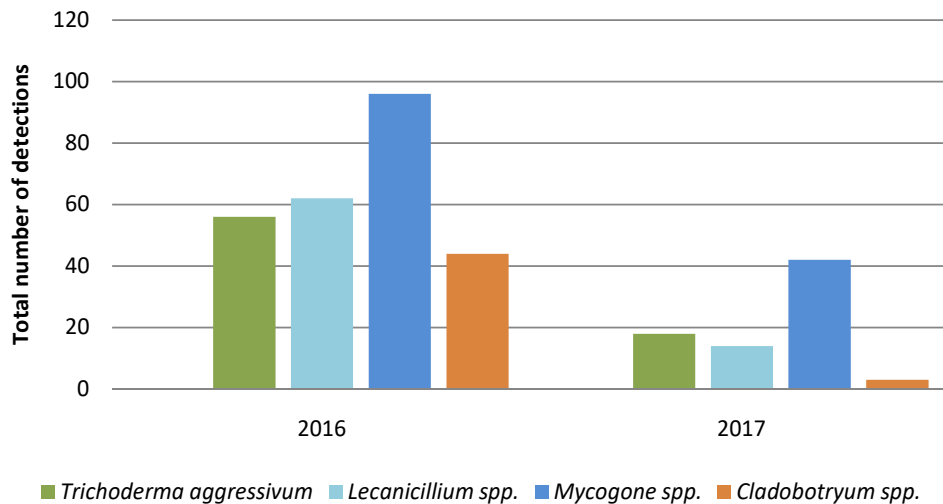


Figure 1. Comparison of overall detections of the four major fungal pathogens, *Trichoderma aggressivum*, *Lecanicillium spp.*, *Mycogone spp.* and *Cladobotryum spp.* during 2016 and 2017 MushDrOPS cycles (copied from The Spawn Run, September 2018).

The University of Pretoria (UP), Department of Plant and Soil Sciences, Plant Pathology Division provides mushroom Disease Outbreak Prevention Service (MushDrOPS) to SAMFA member farms. Each member farm receives one free service annually as reported in the 2018 September edition of The Spawn Run. The development of mushroom health checks and MushDrOPS over the past six years (2012 – 2017) and the trend of the four fungal mushroom diseases green mould, dry bubble, wet bubble and cobweb was also reviewed. Inspecting the 2016/2017 disease testing cycles, the wet bubble pathogen *Mycogone sp.* was most persistent in the farms (Figure 1). On the same note, the cobweb pathogens *Cladobotryum spp.* were the least detected compared to the other three pathogens (Figure 1).

The 2018 MushDrOPS cycle will be completed in February 2019. Eleven farms have been visited and two farms will be visited in January 2019.

The following outputs were achieved during 2018:

Four papers were presented at the SAMFA conference October 2018 by the UP Mushroom Project team. The presentations included:

1. Siyoum, N. 2018. South African Mushroom Disease Outbreak Prevention Services (MushDrOPS) review. SAMFA Conference, October 9, 2018.
2. Cetyiwe, K. 2018. Prevalence of *Trichoderma* species in South African commercial mushroom farms. SAMFA Conference, October 9, 2018.

Mushroom Research

Mushroom research at UP is ongoing and includes the following topics:

1. Investigation of the prevalence and diversity of *Trichoderma* species on South African commercial mushroom farms
2. Determination of the diversity of *Trichoderma* species and *Mycogone* species on South African commercial mushroom farms
3. Exploring the microbiome of compost, casing and mushrooms for disease control.



UP Mushroom Project team, 2018 student graduation: (front row) Ms Kololwetu Cetyiwe (left) and Dr Alinesi Chakwiya (right). (back row) Ms Zama Zulu (left), Prof Lise Korsten (middle) and Dr Nazareth Siyoum (right)

THE GOURMET TREND: MUSHROOMS AND GIN

'cause gin's just dandy and mushrooms are marvellous!

by Riana Greenblo
from Riana Greenblo Communications

South Africans are true trendies and in 2018 even our homegrown craft beers had to do a little sidestep to make way for an abundance of brand new (and very sexy) local craft gins!

Much to our delight, mushrooms immediately went onto foodie lists as one of the "perfect food complements" to trendy gins! The main reason? They're not only umami-rich, they actually intensify and balance the flavour of every dish they're used in and enhance the flavour of drinks they're paired with.

Armed with the irresistible information that South African craft gins would come to life when combined with the endless possibilities of earthy, meaty, marvellous mushrooms the SAMFA PR team developed a series of recipes.

Enjoy our innovative mushroom and gin pairings. The recipes are on the website (www.mushroominfo.co.za). They were designed to amp up the festive season, so enjoy!



20 Questions with Roddy Cairns

Non-executive Director, Highveld Mushrooms

How did you get into Mushrooms?

By mistake - I studied computer engineering after school but did not enjoy working in the space.

How many years have you been in Mushrooms?

From 1979 until 2009 and now back in the compost again from July 2018.

What is most difficult task you have had to undertake while in Mushrooms?

Justifying a VERY BIG over spend on a capital project to the board... I tend to be good at overspending on capex!

What is your greatest strength/talent?

I think a high level of energy and an ability to stay focused.

What is your favourite pastime?

Riding mountain bikes in exotic locations.

If you could change one personality/character trait you have, what would it be?

Slow my temper.

As a student, what did you want to do or be after your schooling?

An electronics engineer, certainly not a mushroom farmer!

What was the most significant event in your whole career so far?

Facilitating and successfully completing three management buy outs of companies and riding a wooden bike in Rwanda.

What do you feel is your greatest achievement in life?

Marrying my wife and still being with her after 38 years!

If budget was unlimited what car would you drive?

A Specialized Carbon Comp full suspension 29er mountain bike.

Who has had the greatest influence in your life and why?

In my life my wife and in my mushroom career Jim Dicks.

What is the craziest thing you have ever done?

Arrived at the start of the Cape Epic 9 day mountain bike race never having ridden in a mountain bike race.



What are you addicted to?

I like to think I am not addicted to Millers Genuine Draught but, man, I enjoy the odd one every now and then.

Do you have a nickname and if so what is it and why?

At school, Budgie, due to my bent nose that was broken and the doc could never make it straight. Now Roddy, as my real name is Roderick.

What is your favourite movie?

I don't tend to watch many movies; I think the last one I saw was The Titanic.

What cheers you up?

Life and living in South Africa.

If you could be or were to describe yourself as an animal, what animal would it be and why?

A Cocker Spaniel, they tend to have lots of energy and are friendly by nature.

What is your greatest fear?

I honestly don't have any.

What is your favourite meal?

A good Bunny Chow from Cindy's in Umhlali on the KZN north coast.

What is the best life advice you have been given?

Be positive and view life as half full glass of beer.



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