

Fungi

The fungi are an important group of living things that fall between the plant and animal kingdoms. Most of us know them as the mushrooms that we eat and as toadstools in the meadows and woods. In fact, these structures are only the reproductive organs of the fungus and the main 'body' of the organism is rarely seen. Fungi are decomposers; they break down and gain their nutrition from other



organic matter, be it decaying wood, soil, tree roots or stale bread!



They play a very important role in breaking down dead plant and animal matter, and releasing the minerals and elements in these dead things back into the soil for use again. Many species of fungus are closely allied to particular species of tree, e.g. Fly agaric, and gain 'spare' sugars from the tree roots in exchange for assistance in scavenging other nutrients,

usually phosphorous, from the soil. Many fungi are edible, but unfortunately, many are also highly toxic, and only specialists can tell the two types apart.

Fungi come in all kinds of strange shapes and colours. They are always great fun to find, as they only appear for a day or two, in order to spread spores that will give rise to new individuals, and then are gone! There are likely to be many hundreds of types of fungus in Gleninchaquin. Look out for them in the spring and the Autumn, especially after rain.

