



Mesophellia trabalis — stone truffle

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Truffle-like or hypogeous (*hypo*:- below, *geo*:- earth) fungi such as *Mesophellia trabalis* fruit below the ground or immediately under decomposing litter. They are generally spherical or nearly spherical in shape. Truffles are an important food source for woylies and other native animals in the south-west, especially after bush fires. Some species have a distinct odour that's believed to help animals locate them. Species of truffle-like fungi have a symbiotic relationship with many native plants. They form structures called mycorrhizae (*myc*:- fungus, *rhiz*:- root) on the roots of trees and shrubs, which enhance the plants ability to uptake nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorous.

Mesophellia trabalis and similar truffles are generally 1–3cm diameter, more-or-less spherical and have a hard sand encrusted casing that's often embedded with small stones and plant roots. They are generally found 15–30cm below the surface. Mycophagous (fungi feeding) animals dig them up and eat the fleshy inner contents (*inset above*) and subsequently ingest the powdery spores (*pale green mass in cut specimens*), which are then dispersed in their scats. If you look closely at animal diggings in the bush, you may see some discarded casings or remains of these or other truffles within the soil mound.

The scientific name describes the texture and internal structure of the fruit bodies. *Meso*:- middle, *phell*:- cork (referring to the corky central core – see inset), *trabalis*:- beamed (referring to the beam-like projections, called trabeculae, which extend from the central core to the outer casing—see inset)