



A Kids' Guide to

# FOXHUNTING



MFHA FOUNDATION






## To Learn More About Foxhunting

### *Websites*

[www.mfha.com](http://www.mfha.com)

[www.ecovertside.net](http://www.ecovertside.net)

[www.ponyclub.org/?page=Foxhunting](http://www.ponyclub.org/?page=Foxhunting)

 Masters of Foxhounds Association of America

### *Books and Magazines*

*Introduction to Foxhunting*, the Masters of Foxhounds Association

*The Centennial View*, MFHA

*Whipper-in* by Dennis J. Foster

*Letters to a Young Huntsman*, by Andrew Barclay

*On Hunting* by Roger Scruton

*Covertside*, The Magazine of Mounted Foxhunting, published by the MFHA



## HISTORY

The word “foxhunting” means chasing an animal—sometimes a fox but not always—with hounds while riding a horse. Foxhunters chase red fox, gray fox, coyote and bobcat. Sometimes hunts even chase wild pig or boar.

Families have been enjoying foxhunting in North America since colonial days, when the first British immigrants left the United Kingdom for the shores of the colonies. The earliest record of hounds in America is from June 30, 1650, when Robert Brooke arrived in Maryland with his family, his horses and his hounds from England. By the early 1700s, foxhunting was growing in Maryland, Virginia and the other Mid-Atlantic colonies.



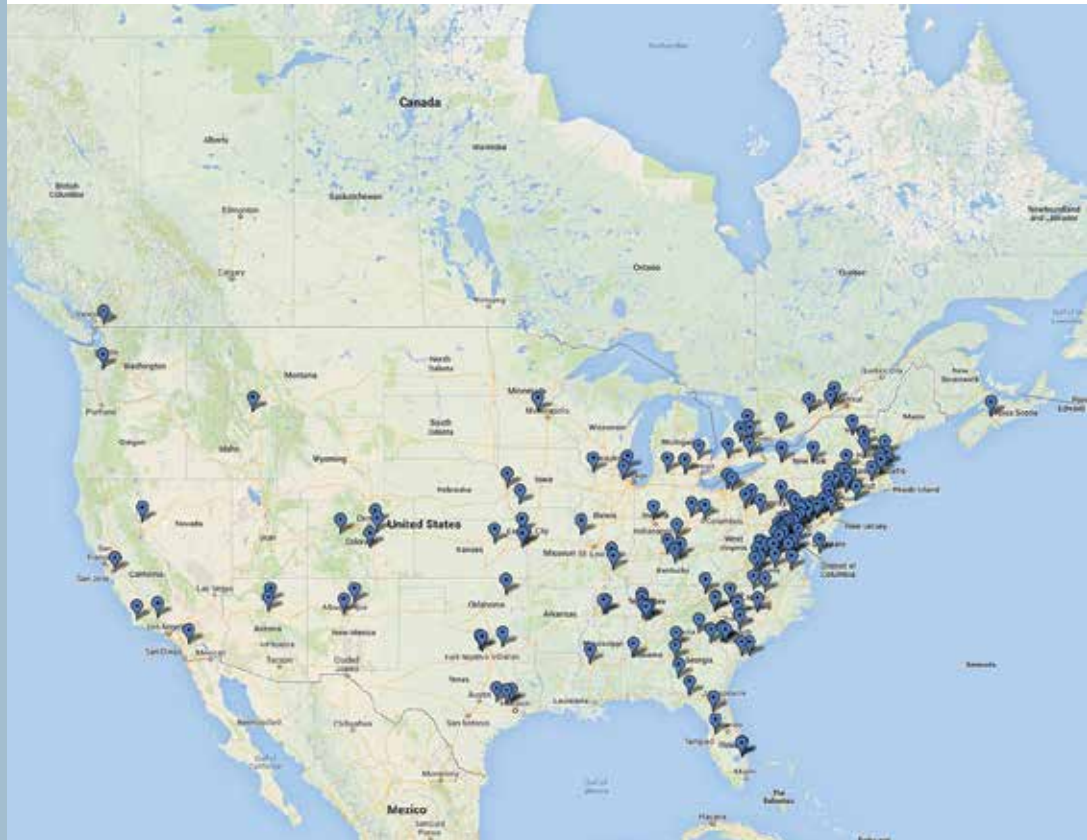
George Washington, the first President of the United States, spent all his spare time foxhunting.

Hounds even sometimes ran on the capital lawns. Sometimes, congressmen ran outside to watch hounds and some jumped on their horses to join the chase.



Foxhunting can be found in just about every area of the U.S. Hounds hunt red fox along the sand dunes of Long Island Sound. They hunt red and gray foxes, coyotes and bobcats in the pine woods of Alabama, Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Mississippi, Florida and the Carolinas. The forests of New England make perfect covert for the red fox. Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware offer countryside closer to the traditional English landscape. Here, the fox is plentiful.

Moving westward, there is hunting on the great plains of the Midwest, in the high altitudes of the Rocky Mountains and along the shores of the Pacific Ocean. Coyotes are more common quarry as one moves westward. Wild boar or wild pigs are hunted by some hunts in Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Louisiana, Carolinas, Texas, Arkansas, and California. Canada's geography and quarry are similar to that of the US as one travels from the eastern provinces of Nova Scotia and Quebec, to Ontario and out to British Columbia in the west.



Today, foxhunting continues in 37 U.S. states and five Canadian provinces. Can you find your state on this map? Is there a foxhunt near you?

## WHAT HAPPENS AT A HUNT?

A foxhunt is organized by a club and members pay a fee to participate. It is a bit like belonging to a swim club or golf club. The hunt club staff takes care of the hounds and the members come to the hunt on certain days of the week to participate.

The hunt takes place at a “fixture”—a piece of land that is assigned for that day’s hunt. Some fixtures are a collection of farms next to each other. All the riders (called field members) gather at the appointed time. The huntsman then takes the hounds to the place where he thinks a fox or coyote might be hiding—called the covert. (cover)

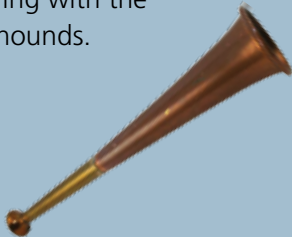
Foxhounds have an excellent sense of smell, and can pick up the scent of a fox by sniffing the ground. Once they have the scent, they will “speak”—bark or howl, and the chase is on.



The riders who participate in the hunt are called “The Field.” They follow behind the field master. The field master keeps the field out of the way of the hounds and huntsman.



Every hunt has staff members who organize and manage its activities. Just as your school has a principal, teachers, and teachers' assistants, hunts have **Masters** who organize the hunting days and manage the business activities of the hunt. Foxhunt clubs also have **huntsmen**, who are in charge of the hounds and lead the actual activities of the hunting day. They carry a horn, which they use to signal to hounds and to the field. The huntsman has assistants, called **whippers-in**, who keep track of the hounds as they travel across the country in search of quarry. **Field masters** lead each group of riders. The field master is a good rider who knows the country, safety issues in the field, and understands how to follow the hunt without interfering with the huntsman and hounds.



## HOUNDS AND QUARRY

Foxhounds are always referred to as hounds, although a hound is a member of the dog family. Hounds are wonderful animals. They're sensitive, friendly and happy animals, often great with children.

Hounds are bred for their scenting ability (called their **nose**), **cry** (the sound of their bark), **speed** and **drive** (they must cover vast distances, often for many hours), and **biddability** (their willingness to do what's asked of them and to hunt as a pack, rather than as an individual).



(call me)  
hound



Did you know . . . hounds are always counted by two and that they are called a couple?



# HOW CAN I LEARN TO HUNT?

To start, you must first have access to a horse and you must be a confident rider, able to post the trot and canter for some distance. Knowing how to jump and having a horse that jumps is helpful but not always necessary.

To find the hunt closest to you, check with the MFHA or go to their website ([www.mfha.com](http://www.mfha.com)), where you can also become a member for a small fee.

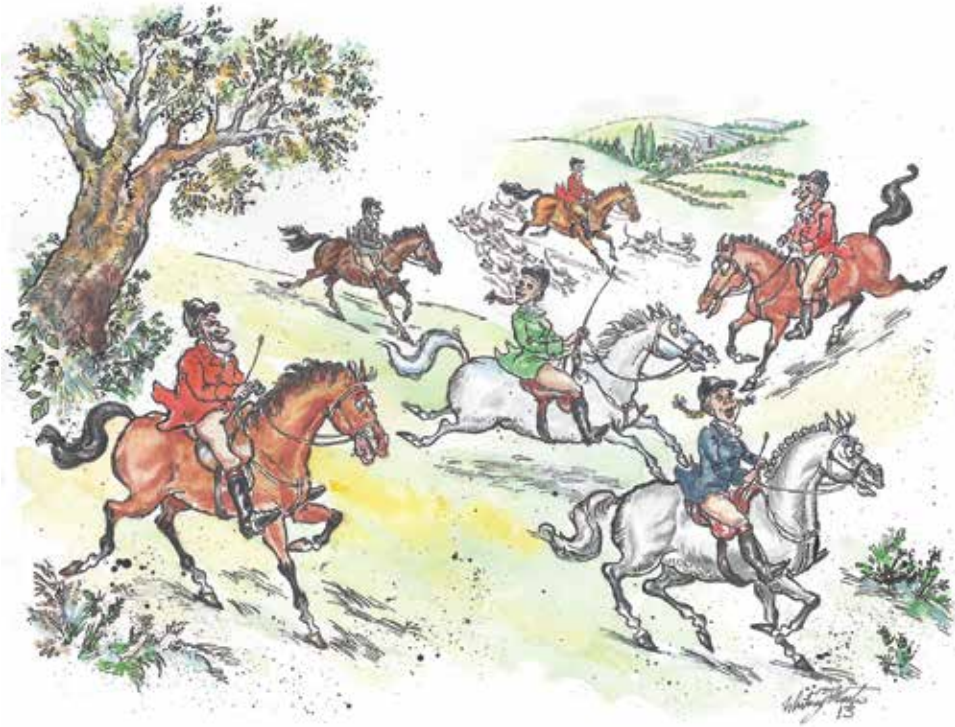
Hunts will often have junior days where they invite kids to hunt. And, if you have your own horse and you do not know any one in the hunt, you may call the hunt secretary or a Master and ask to ride with the hunt.

## At the meet

When you arrive at a hunt meet, introduce yourself to the Master and thank him or her for the opportunity to participate. When the day is over, say "Goodnight Masters, and thank you for letting me join you today."







### **How to behave in the field**

Sometimes the Masters will invite young people up to the front so they may enjoy watching the hounds work. No matter where you are riding, keep a horse's distance between you and the horse in front of you.

Once the field starts to move out, you should try to keep the same riders around you. If the person in front of you is too slow, it is appropriate to pass them, but be sure to pick a place with plenty of room. When you are approaching a jump, give riders in front of you enough room should their horses refuse to jump, or in case they fall at the jump.

Jumping obstacles, bushes, walls or fences is a lot of fun when hunting, but it is not polite to jump more than you really need to jump. Doing so is called 'larking.' Jumping when not necessary tires out your horse and other hunt members do not like it. Some of the worst and unnecessary accidents happen after the hunt, when hounds are coming home, and someone decides to take a jump that they really don't need to take.



## When to leave the hunt

During the formal season, most hunts stay in the field for three to four hours and sometimes even up to six hours. If you have to leave the field before the end of the day, ask permission from your Field Master. He or she will let you know which way to return to the meet so that you don't interfere with hounds or ride through land where you don't have permission to be. Back at the meet, remember to thank the Masters again before you leave.







formal

ratcatcher



## PROPER CLOTHING/ ACCESSORIES

In foxhunting, there is a formal season and an informal season. The formal season has a formal dress code. The informal season, called cub hunting (or autumn hunting) is when young hounds are introduced into the pack. Hunt members can dress in less formal clothing, called ratcatcher, during the autumn hunting or cubbing season. If you are joining a hunt, always check with the hunt secretary to learn what is the correct clothing for your hunt.

Clothing for foxhunting developed as a mix of practicality and tradition. In general, young people wear tan or buff breeches, paddock boots or tall boots, and a dark formal coat during formal season. It is up to the Master to decide how formal the dress will be for juniors in your hunt.



MFHA FOUNDATION  
540-955-5680  
PO Box 363  
MILLWOOD, VA  
WWW.MFHA.COM  
OFFICE@MFHA.COM

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## SOME HUNTING TERMS

**Cap:** When you visit a hunt that you are not a member of, you pay a **capping** fee to the Secretary of the Hunt before you leave the meet.

**Cast:** When the huntsman sends hounds into a cover or brings them together and then sends them another direction, he is said to be **casting** his hounds.

**Cover/Covert:** Any somewhat thick place that will hold the quarry.

**Cubbing or Cub Hunting (also Autumn Hunting):** Very early in the year, when hounds first start hunting. Young hounds are learning to hunt; older hounds are getting exercised; young foxes are learning to stay away from the hounds, and horses and riders are getting in shape. It is a time when hunt clothing is ratcatcher (informal) and the hunt usually does not stay out as long because they do not want to exhaust young hounds.

**Couple:** Two hounds

**Draw:** To send hounds through a covert to find a scent

**Field Secretary:** The person a hunt chooses to collect caps when people arrive at the meet; they also get waivers signed and direct parking.

**Full cry:** When the whole pack is running hard after the quarry and howling and barking (see speaking below).

**Ratcatcher:** The clothing worn during a hunt before the formal season begins or on days the hunt allows these less formal clothes to be worn—also called informal attire.

**Speaking:** When hounds make noise in response to a scent

**Stern:** A hound's tail.