

SPRING 2024

covertsIDE

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE MASTERS OF FOXHOUNDS ASSOCIATION OF NORTH AMERICA

Inside:

Coyote Versus Fox

Rural Roads

Fair Weather Riders Beware



RINGWOOD '22

JCM

If I don't have it, I know where to find it.



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The cover of this issue is a painting by Deep Run Hunt member Jordan Muniz, age 20, depicting Deep Run Ringwood 22. Jordan is the winner of our Drawing Contest.

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Greetings fellow MFHA
Masters and Pack
Members,

As your new president, I wish this first hello was happening where we all love to be—in the hunting field with horses under us and hounds around us. You could be pointing out your favorite hounds, while I try valiantly to commit them to memory. My hope is to visit as many member hunts as possible over the next three years. Yes, to meet your hounds, but also to hear what's important to you and how the MFHA can best serve you.

There's an article later in this issue that gives some background on me. The short version is that I'm a fourth-generation foxhunter and have been an MFH for 30 years. But of course, this sport teaches you something new every day!

During my term I want to listen to and learn from you, my fellow foxhunters. Then let's share knowledge and experiences that have served MFHA member hunts well. Our new "Notes from the Field" is part of that initiative. The MFHA is collecting and sharing smart practices from member hunts about safety, fundraising, engaging subscribers, and more. So far, each MFHA monthly newsletter this year has provided a good idea from member hunts. If you know people who are missing the newsletter, please encourage them to become MFHA Pack Members.

Additionally, the MFHA plans to interact with other equestrian disciplines to promote mounted hunting, and also to explore how together we can nurture all horse sports. How satisfying it would be to bring new participants to the equestrian world—to improve horsemanship and riding ability, but also to share our love of the open countryside!

Here's hoping to see you at the MFHA's Symposium on Hunting with Hounds, July 26-28 in Charlottesville, VA (see "Events" on the MFHA website for details).

With all best wishes,



Penny Denegre, MFH
President, Masters of Foxhounds Association of North America



MFHA Headquarters and Museum. Photograph courtesy of the MFHA.

Coyote Versus Fox:

How Environmental Changes Decide What We Hunt

By Andrew Barclay



Photograph courtesy of Marvin Langer

Every generation seems to encounter something that spells the end of foxhunting. In generations past, the railroads, wire fencing, cars, roads—all were predicted as the end of the sport. Indeed, they did change the way the sport was conducted, but through adaptation, our sport continued. We are faced with many challenges today: loss of country, the influx of urban folks buying their place in the country and not understanding the country way of life, and public perception toward sports that involve animals. All this and many more of the staples of modern life seem to conflict with a fox hunter's way of life. However, in my 50 years of foxhunting as either a professional or as an interested party, I have never seen anything change hunting the way the coyote has.

I started my career in hunt service in 1974 as a whipper-in to Les Grimes, renowned huntsman for Green Spring Valley Hounds in Maryland. This was a hard-riding field, hunting in some wonderful country with big fences, lots of steeplechase influence and no second field. It was an era of "go on with it" or go home. We had red foxes, lots of red foxes. In my 27 years as staff for Green Spring Valley, we had one grey fox for about half a season and then he was gone. If hounds were running, you knew that it was a red fox (unless a puppy was screwing up!) This was before cell phones or radios, so you would occasionally lose hounds and have to work hard to get back with them. There were some scary days but we always found them again. That old saying that "nobody lost their pack forever" held true.

The first time I heard of anyone east of the Mississippi running coyotes was at a Biennial Staff Seminar that was hosted by Green Spring. It was 1981 and I had just been put on as huntsman, and it was the first time (of many) I had attended one of these events. Ben Hardaway of Midland fame was on one panel explaining that he had started running coyotes out of necessity after they had pushed the foxes out of the country. He found it too hard to keep in touch with hounds; in order to do so, he did something unheard of and that most of us "fox hunters" were appalled by— he was using radios to keep in touch with hounds via information from whips!!!

On another panel was either Marty or Daphne Wood from Live Oak, and they too were talking about running coyotes. I was intrigued since I had hunted with both Mr. Hardaway and the Woods and knew them to be as hard-core hunters



Photograph courtesy of Jeremy Hynes

as could be found. By the time I attended the next Biennial Seminar, there were even more people east of the Mississippi starting to run coyotes, and with that, using radios.

I am fairly certain that in my tenure as huntsman for Green Spring I ran a coyote only once. We were hunting in our northern country and having a pretty nice day when we found and almost immediately lost touch with the hounds.

My whip at the time came to me and said we were running a German Shepard (which I believe I made a statement about this individual's powers of observation,) and I commented that my hounds might make a mistake from time to time. But I was fairly certain that they wouldn't run a house dog. When I caught up with hounds they were milling around looking lost. Ten years later while mowing my lawn, I realized that we had run a coyote and they might have caught up with it, recognized that it was different and "tagged" him (a term used for hounds coming in contact with a coyote but not being aggressive and accounting for him) and then left him alone. (Apologies to my whip for what I might have said.) Since then, I have been fortunate to have been on many coyote runs, and I must say that we are lucky that they arrived at the same time that technology came up with radios and tracking collars.

As the coyote spread across the east coast so did the technology needed to hunt them successfully and keep hounds safe. By the time I "retired" as a huntsman, more and more packs were using radios, and there were some rudimentary tracking devices being used in some countries. These things looked like little portable satellite dishes, and you could triangulate where a hound might be. They would get pulled out at the end of the day and the huntsman would try to locate any hounds that had the collars on and were still out. At a 2008 MFHA seminar in Reno, Nevada, I was lucky enough to ride in a vehicle with a Garmin representative who demonstrated a new innovation—a tracking collar using GPS technology. It was the first time most of had seen them and now I dare you to find a current picture of hounds hunting without the antennas hanging from them. Only a few packs don't have at least some tracking collars. Along with this innovation came the road whip. While some hunts were using them already, it was just the radio and luck that got them to the right place at the right time. Now they have a video screen showing real-time where each individual hound is!

So, from a technological perspective, the coyote has brought radios, tracking collars, and road whips with a moving nerve center for a hunt. What has it done to the hunting for the field? Probably the biggest change is that there are now two or three fields in most hunts. This is partly due to the aging of most hunt fields, but it was also propagated by folks that didn't want to go the speed that hounds were running. The second field is a financial necessity with most packs, it gives a place for the young and the old and allows them to get a good start hunting or continue hunting when age or nerve might have caught up to them. This is a whole different subject.

How have the coyote changed hounds? Between the coyote and Hardaway's generosity, the Crossbred hound quickly became the breed of choice. In that era, Midland bred large quantities of Crossbred hounds that Mr. Hardaway generously gave to most who asked. And a lot asked! The Crossbred hound that ran fox exclusively tended to be a smaller hound with much more American hound influence than you see today. With the invasion of the coyote, the Crossbred hound became much rangier, faster, and also more uniform. In the early days of the Crossbred, you could see the influence of the American hound but in some packs more than others. When Mr. Hardaway, the Woods and others decided to breed good coyote hounds, they changed the Crossbred hound. In most cases now, it resembles a modern English hound. The other hound change is that more and more packs are moving to the Penn-Marydel hound. Although they can be as fast as any pack on a coyote, they also will tend to run slower and more methodically, therefore not pushing the coyote out of the country every time you find one.

The coyote is now established in every hunt country in North America. There are a few packs, mainly in Virginia and the Mid-Atlantic, that have a large enough fox population that they can run fox exclusively, but they are becoming more of a rarity. In many countries, when the coyote appears they kill or push the red fox out of the area. The fox will eventually return but it takes time. In countries with lots of food for both the coyote and fox, they can exist in proximity; however, it changes the way foxes run and also where you will be apt to find them. They will tend to run shorter and go to ground quicker, and they will be found closer to human populations, barns and sheds and other places where a coyote isn't apt to go.

For my generation, the coyote has been the biggest change in hunting, to the point that the MFHA now refers to our sport as "mounted hunting with hounds." There are now many people out hunting that have not been on a red fox hunt and almost no staff that have not had to quickly discern the game they are running to stay in the chase. It is, however, anything but the end of our sport. It adds a new level of adrenaline and skill sets to keep with hounds and if you are lucky enough to have

the country to handle a sharp pack of hounds running a good coyote, there is nothing quite like it!

Foxhunting (mounted hunting with hounds) is facing and will continue to face many challenges, but it is my hope that we will adapt to them as well as we have to the coyote, and that many more generations will be able to partake in this wonderful sport.



Photograph courtesy of Tiffany Dillon Keen.



A PASSION TO PRESERVE RURAL ROADS

How Advocates in Virginia's Loudoun County Are
Working to Protect an Historic and Recreational Asset

By Emily Houston
Photography by Douglas Graham



As MFHA President Penny Denegre promised with the new “Notes from the Field” initiative, the MFHA plans to regularly share useful information not only from member hunts, but from other valuable resources as well. The following article offers initiatives that hunts can take to preserve “hunt-friendly” rural roads and perhaps slow development in their territory.

FIFTY MILES TO THE WEST OF THE NATION’S CAPITAL,

Loudoun County, Virginia, is the fastest-growing county in the state, and has been for decades. As its population has swelled from about 170,000 in 2000 to more than 430,000 today, suburban (and now even urban) development has marched westward across the county at an aggressive pace.

Despite this, the western part of the county is still home to spectacular rural landscapes. This combination has made the area a hotbed of battles to preserve those landscapes, its rural ambiance, and its deeply ingrained history.

The county is also blessed with Virginia’s largest network of unpaved roads. The crunchy sound of tires rolling over the gravel, whether those of a car, bike or under one’s shoes, envelops one completely into the rural countryside. The roads’ imperfections annoy some, but their authentic and warm feel, the natural traffic calming effect and their sense of place, have

created dedicated fans and made the gravel roads the focus of efforts to preserve this unique slice of the rural landscape. Roughly 250 miles of these meandering byways remain, a vital resource for the county’s four hunts and its thriving equestrian community. An unpaved road surface provides the traction needed for riding, reduces traffic volume and speeds, and the roads often cross through hunt fixtures in this prime hunting territory.

According to the most recent economic impact study available, Loudoun is home to over 14,000 horses (more than

any other county in the state) and the horse industry has an annual economic impact of over \$180 million per year in the county alone. Horses are clearly a force not only in the economy but in the county’s “hunt country” culture.

A Living Museum

Many of these routes pre-date America, carved out of Virginia’s hilly terrain by Native Americans and early European settlers who helped shape our nation and build prosperous agricultural communities.

Some of Loudoun’s rural roads follow sunken lanes, evidence of the workmanship of laborers repeatedly digging out the road surface over centuries, in an attempt to reach a stable base. Others follow remarkably straight lines – ignoring change in grade and water obstacles – always taking the shortest route and establishing a sense of order in what was then a chaotic wilderness.

The dry stack stone walls lining many of Loudoun’s rural roads quietly endow the countryside with a sense of place and identity, offering up an extraordinary wealth of historical and cultural data. Many of the stone walls have been built and rebuilt over the centuries. Field stone litters Loudoun’s rich soils and in order to plant, farmers had to clear fields of stone. In the 18th century, Lord Thomas Fairfax’s land grants mandated that stone fences be built to protect livestock and orchards from wild animals and marauders. By the 19th century, the reverse was true—the walls were required to keep domesticated livestock from marauding other farmers’ fields.

The need for these gravel roads to function as part of a transportation network in the 21st century has highlighted the quandary of how to preserve them as authentic historic assets and a recreational resource without succumbing to the demands for high-speed, efficient travel. Of the 700 miles of public roads in the western part of the county, more than a third are unpaved. Will they be able to remain that way?

America’s Routes: Citizen Advocates

Over a decade ago, it became apparent to local preservation/conservation advocates that the roads were worth preserving both as an integral part of the threatened rural landscape and as an obstacle (it was hoped) to the westward march of suburban development.

A group of citizen advocates has been working to change attitudes towards the roads, countering the widely-held tenet that paving equals progress, creating appreciation for their history and beauty, working on practical methods to improve them, and cultivating the political will to protect them.

Calling itself America’s Routes (to emphasize the roads’ place in not only local but national history), this group of Loudoun preservationists banded together and created a nonprofit to produce several initiatives aimed at elevating the profile of the road network’s status as a “living museum.”

The group achieved a significant milestone on this effort in 2020, when the Virginia Department of Historic Resources declared the road network “potentially eligible” for National Register listing. (The work to obtain full National Register recognition is ongoing today.)

Virginia Legislature Gives Foxhunters Two “Wins”

This year, Virginia's legislature passed two bills of significance to foxhunters and both received assistance on their path to passage from Mike Pearson, a lobbyist hired by MFHA Virginia hunts to look out for their interests in the state capital in Richmond.

The first bill became known as the "rural roads bill" because it directs state funds that have traditionally been used to pave unpaved roads towards other non-paving improvements. This bill will help to ensure their preservation in a way that makes them useful to mounted foxhunters, who use them during hunts and also for conditioning their horses.

Pearson testified on behalf of the rural roads bill before the General Assembly's Transportation Committee, pointing out that speeds are lower on unpaved roads, making them safer. He also made certain that the annual delegation of junior foxhunters who visit the State Capitol every year brought the bill to the attention of the legislators they visited. This visit, which includes some well-behaved foxhounds, has become very popular, giving legislators some great photo ops and opening the door for the foxhunting community to have constructive conversations with elected officials.

A second "win" for foxhunters came from a piece of legislation Pearson conceived several years ago and finally got passed this time around. The "amber lights bill" expanded the list of vehicles entitled by state law to use flashing amber lights to include those used by "road whips" who may activate the lights to warn vehicles that the hunt is in the area and may be crossing the road.

Pearson had tried several times before to get this passed, using different legislators as patrons. Last June, he brought the idea to Delegate David Reid, who was also the chief patron of the rural roads bill, and pitched it purely on the basis of public safety. This year, the bill was approved with unanimous votes at every step of the way, as it moved through the various subcommittees and committees of both branches of the legislature.



That same year, Preservation Virginia, a non-profit advocating for preservation across the Commonwealth, named Loudoun's rural road network one of the state's top ten most endangered places. In 2019, a documentary about the America's Routes project, called "The Long Road Home," won an Emmy for America's Routes photographer Doug Graham and local TV reporter Jay Korff.

The Practical and Political Side of Road Preservation

Complementing the efforts of America's Routes is the work of the Rural Roads Committee, also a group of citizen volunteers. The Rural Roads Committee works with the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT - Virginia is one of only a few states in which the roads are owned and maintained by a statewide agency) to lobby for improved care of the roads and works with local and state elected leaders to produce legislation to protect the roads. Because roughly one-third of all the road miles in the U.S. are unpaved, there is a large body of knowledge about how to construct and maintain them, and the Rural Roads Committee has pressed VDOT to put that to work in Virginia, and Loudoun County in particular. Its work with VDOT and state officials has yielded several successes including:

- identifying a better surface material to reduce dust and maintenance;
- producing a state budget amendment to fund continued testing of surface material;
- producing legislation that directs state funds toward repair of the roads without paving;
- engaging the public to advocate for protection of gravel roads;
- and encouraging more objective and technical decision making regarding how to improve gravel roads.

The efforts of both groups have drawn media attention to the issues surrounding preservation of the roads. This year, the passage of the bill containing the new state code garnered plenty of local press (print and TV), and the quest to obtain National Register listing put the cause on the front page of the Washington Post. Comments on the Post story (which also appeared in the digital edition with videos, drone shots and beautiful photography) came from all over the country, indicating that the subject struck a chord felt far and wide.

Lessons Learned

What, then, might be the advice Loudoun's unpaved roads crusaders could give to others? How might other foxhunting communities find their territory increasingly suburbanized work to prevent paving of their gravel roads?

Changing The Tide On The Ingrained Attitude (Very 20th Century) That Paving Equals Progress Takes Time.

For those of us who love and depend on our gravel roads, their benefits are obvious. But as we discovered, our elected officials and the public in general may never have thought of these roads as something of value. You are not likely to change their minds overnight. And you will never change everyone's mind.

Make Friends With Your Local Department Of Transportation.

While it has often been tempting to paint our DOT as the villain for not properly maintaining the roads, we found that when you open a dialog at every level of the agency (top and bottom), you can find allies who might be as interested as you are in finding a better way.

Find Other User Groups Who Are On Your Side.

In Loudoun's case, it has been cyclists, particularly the fast-growing contingent of gravel cycling enthusiasts. Loudoun's unique web of unpaved roads attract gravel cycling enthusiasts from all over the world. The ability to ride loops of up to 100 miles with a high percentage of those miles being on gravel is a big draw for participants in this burgeoning sport. Loudoun now hosts very popular gravel cycling events that draw attention to preservation of the roads and the countryside in general. By making an effort to publicize the proper way to share the roads with horses, equestrians and cyclists have achieved a détente that recognizes that peaceful coexistence is the key to preserving our mutual playgrounds.

Identify The Obstacles To Road Preservation And Focus On Those.

In our case, it has been the poor condition of the roads—it's hard to defend them when, after a big rain, the potholes rattle the bones of drivers and in dry times, the dust clouds hang in the air. These conditions need not be inherent to unpaved

roads. The folks that hate them can be turned around if they are shown that properly constructed and maintained unpaved roads can perform well for 21st century transportation.

Connect With Elected Officials To Present Your Case For Practical Solutions.

As anyone who has operated in the political realm knows, you can't "just say no." You need to demonstrate that you have ideas that can solve a problem, and that there is a way to achieve a "win-win" for everybody.

Have The Efforts Of America's Routes And The Rural Roads Committee Helped Slow The Spread Of Suburban Development?

The jury may be out on that. Sadly, current zoning regulations have allowed suburban developments to be built on unpaved roads, creating a situation in which the newcomers lobby their elected officials for paving, and those new residents outnumber the original property owners who prefer things to remain as they are.

This has led to some unfortunate neighbor-versus-neighbor friction, and culminated in what one county supervisor dubbed the "road wars" of 2023 that ultimately resulted in the paving moratorium when county officials were caught between the two sides and opted to declare a truce. But as one of our top county officials has stated, moving to a development on an unpaved road then complaining about it is akin to moving next to Dulles Airport and complaining about the noise.

The good news, as demonstrated by the Loudoun County efforts just described, is that progress can indeed be made to preserve our rural roads. MFHA member hunts with unpaved rural roads in their territory are invited to learn more about what has been accomplished in Loudoun by contacting America's Routes at "Americas.Routes.com" and the Loudoun Rural Roads Committee at emilyzs@yahoo.com.

The next challenge is to improve our historic rural roads so that there will be nothing to complain about and only moments to enjoy! 🐕

A Labor of Love

Myopia Hunt Continues a Longstanding Tradition of Conservation

By Wendy Wood, MFH, Myopia Hunt

The MFHA Foundation's Hunting Habitat Conservation Award recognizes those hunts who have made significant and enduring contributions toward the preservation of habitat and biodiversity of its flora and fauna. The MFHA Foundation seeks to reward hunts who work to preserve land and habitat for the future of the sport.

The 2024 award, consisting of a trophy plate and \$5,000, was presented to Myopia Hunt Club at the Annual Members Meeting in New York on January 26. This award has been donated annually since 1997 by C. Martin Wood III, MFH and Daphne Flowers Wood, MFH, Live Oak Hounds and Chair of the Conservation Award Committee. A full list of previous winners can be found on the MFHA website.

Wendy Wood, MFH, represented Myopia at the Members Meeting and gave a well-received presentation on the conservation efforts that led to their selection as this year's winner. Here, she describes these efforts and the work they continue to engage in for the protection of their countryside:

We were absolutely delighted and honored to receive the Hunting Habitat Conservation Award this year. As I was gathering the photographs and video footage and talking with some of the key individuals and organizations to prepare our presentation, I was struck again and again by how fortunate we are to be able to continue the tradition of hunting in New England. The work done here by previous generations was amazing. Their foresight and commitment to open space has left us a wonderful legacy that we are proud to maintain. There are so many members who have passed away that I wanted to thank personally. It was very humbling.



Daphne Wood, MFH, Live Oak Hounds and Conservation Committee Chair presents the 2024 Hunting Habitat Conservation Award plaque and check to Wendy Wood, MFH, Myopia Hunt Club. Photography courtesy of Helen Houghton.

We are continuing to work with the wonderful land conservation and open space organizations in our area. Most important of these have been the Essex County Greenbelt, which has helped landowners, farmers, municipalities, and organizations protect over 21,500 acres of land in Essex County; The Trustees of Reservations, who own some of the key properties in the region such as Appleton Farms and Crane's Beach; and the Essex County Trail Association, which has deeded access to and maintains many of the key links in our territory. Several pieces of hunt territory have been protected through conservation restrictions by Hunt members and others in the past year, and we continue to work with other landowners and friends on other projects.

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"The work done here by previous generations was amazing. Their foresight and commitment to open space has left us a wonderful legacy that we are proud to maintain."


Many of us are active in our town government and planning boards. To keep good neighbor relationships and ensure that we are recognized as adding value to our community, we are always willing to parade hounds or give demonstrations and tours of our facilities. We take our reputation very seriously. This focus has been a great help to us as we work to keep the public lands open and maintained, as well as the private lands which connect them accessible to horses and to others.

In an area like ours, the property values are very high, and purchasing tracts of land is quite difficult. Some towns would honestly rather see development that would increase their tax base, which can make conservation a tough fight.

In 2020 the real estate market here exploded. So many farms and properties with land sold very quickly. Keeping track of

this was a challenge! Many of those folks had moved here from more urban areas and were unfamiliar and sometimes uncomfortable with allowing the access across their land that we had always been allowed. It has been necessary to constantly educate and reassure them that we are all good neighbors.

We are so grateful for the land we have here. Our mission of Promoting, Preserving, and Protecting our wonderful sport and our beautiful countryside is truly a labor of love.

For more information about the Hunting Habitat Conservation Award and to learn how to apply for the 2025 award, please visit the MFHA website. 

FOR THE NEW MFHA PRESIDENT,
PENNY DENEGRÉ,

IT'S FAMILY, HORSES, HOUNDS AND THE LAND

By MFHA Staff

For the past 30 years Penny has served as a Joint Master of Virginia's Middleburg Hunt. Since the age of four she's been on ponies and horses, foxhunting and showing hunters both astride and sidesaddle. She's a 12-time National Ladies Sidesaddle Champion and recently was named a "Devon Legend" by the Devon Horse Show. If her horsey granddaughters continue on their path, they could be the fifth generation of foxhunters in the family.



Photography courtesy of Middleburg Photo

As a child, Penny took riding lessons from Jane Marshall Dillon at her Junior Equitation School, along with her sister Hillary and others including a budding talent named Joe Far-gis. It was there she learned not only the basics of riding, but the grooming and overall care of horses. "Mrs. Dillon taught us to treat animals with respect, and that the well-being of your pony or horse always comes before your own," explains Penny. She became a Joint MFH of the Fairfax Junior Hunt at age 14.

In addition to her love of horses, music has been a steady passion, with piano playing, and singing in high school and church choirs. She pursued her love of choral singing at Duke University, where she majored in history and French.

Following college, she spent some years with a leading political fundraising and direct mail advertising company, becoming a company vice president. All this time she rode with the Fairfax Hunt, where her mother, the Hunt's Honorary Secretary, continued to inspire her.

In 1981 she married John Denegre, who shares her love of horses, hounds, foxhunting, sailing, history and music. Not shared is John's love of sports cars, and she avoids getting strapped into his race car. After a time playing polo and many years of foxhunting, John is drawn to race track driving. "It's safer," he laughs, "I have a roll bar and a fire extinguisher. How many horses have these?"

In 1984 they moved to Middleburg, VA, and built a horse farm with a fine view of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Inspired by the surrounding stunning countryside, they became involved with local land preservation efforts, including the Goose Creek Association, the Land Trust of Virginia and the Piedmont Environmental Association. Most recently they've supported the work of America's Routes to preserve Loudoun County's historic network of gravel roads (see the rural roads article in this issue). "It's especially gratifying to see how much foxhunters have done to preserve land in our region and elsewhere," Penny states.

After 12 years hunting with the Middleburg Hunt, Penny was appointed a Joint Master and has shared the task with MFH Jeffrey Blue for over 30 years. Speaking of her partnership

with Jeff, Penny states, "We've had an exceptional relationship based on trust, open dialogue, sometimes brutal honesty, and our love of the sport and the land we hunt across."

In 2017, Penny had a serious accident while hunting which resulted in more than a few broken bones. Her fitness as a rider helped her recover after many months. But the first time back in the saddle was daunting. She took a breath, and said to her horse, "If you get me back, we'll be pals forever." As they moved off, she recalls feeling "I'm home again."

Penny and John love visiting their daughter Alden and family on their farm in Wellington, FL. Alden and her husband, Grand Prix rider, Gavin Moylan, import, train and sell horses. He also trains equitation, hunter and jumper riders. When visiting, Penny shows her gray mare "String of Pearls." Together they have won Adult Amateur Hunter Championships at Upperville and at the Washington International Horse Show. "But the icing on the Florida cake is visiting our granddaughters Evelyn and Sybil," says Penny.

During her term as president, she wants to listen to and learn from fellow mounted hunters, and share the best practices that have served MFHA member hunts well. Through its newsletter, the MFHA is now showcasing smart ideas from member hunts about safety, fundraising, engaging subscribers, land conservation, hound care and more. Penny explains, "I see the MFHA becoming very active collecting and sharing valuable conversations—kind of a clearinghouse of smart ways to preserve mounted hunting." The MFHA's new "Notes from the Field" is part of that initiative.

Penny concludes,

"I truly believe that by carefully listening to our members, we will find new ways to be true to our mission to promote, preserve and protect our cherished sport." 🐾

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*“As indescribable as it is,
presence is the first thing I notice when a hound comes in the ring.”*

Steven Thomas, MFH, Fort Leavenworth Hunt

THE HUNTSMAN’S CHOICE, PART II: CONFORMATION

By Sheri Buston



Photograph courtesy of Joanne Maisano



Photograph courtesy of Joanne Maisano

The Spring 2023 issue of Covertside included the article on Huntsman's Choice on a hunting day. This time let's talk about a show day judging or just conformation in general and its importance to the breed.

Share why we breed, show and hunt hounds not only for their hunting abilities, but the importance of good conformation. What are your preferences? What describes your type? What stands out to you when you look at a hound?

We all look over these conformation points but I've asked huntsmen to describe what they like about those points. If they were to judge hounds or even as you judge your own hounds - tell me what your eye looks for - at the end, describe your conformation of the "perfect" hound.

We have all been around a show ring and made our own judgement on hounds. Let's talk about your choice.



Steven Thomas
MFH Huntsman at Fort Leavenworth Hunt

What foxhound breed do you hunt?

Crossbred hounds, with my ideal being ~70% English. This is more because that breed mix best fits my personality, not specifically because of conformation.

What hound conformation point catches your eye first?

As indescribable as it is, presence is the first thing I notice when a hound comes in the ring. I can see and feel that before I even get a chance to look at all the parts and how they fit together.

In a ring judging, describe how and where you start?

It all starts with the feet and moves upward. Each part of the hound's anatomy needs to be proportional and symmetric, and the hound needs to be able to stand balanced with a minimal amount of positioning by the handler. That being said, once you have seen all the parts and determined that they are proper and put together as they should be, movement is the final determinant. That's what will tell you if your assessment of the conformation is correct because if you have missed something in your initial appraisal, it will show up when the hound starts to move.

Describe your "perfect" hound. It can be in your kennel already...tell me about it.

Far better judges than me have said that the perfect hound has not yet been bred and I agree. That being said, to approach perfect, a hound must have tight, balanced feet and toes, straight front legs, a deep chest that goes to the elbow, a sleek, balanced head that blends into a graceful, balanced neck and joins the withers with fluidity. The shoulder should be sloped to allow for a long stride. The back should be smooth and blend well with the stern. The loin must be strong enough to propel the hound forward. The hind quarters should be well muscled and symmetric, and the hind legs should be properly angled with hocks let-down to allow for maximum propulsion.

Why do you think conformation is important outside of the show ring?

Although there are exceptions, ideal conformation will allow a hound to go farther, faster and have a longer hunting career than one with flaws. An extra season or two can make a huge difference in the amount of work it takes to maintain a balanced pack, especially for hunts with fewer hounds in the kennel. Adding new entry most, if not every season is important to keeping consistency and for smaller packs, that means fewer hounds to enter each year. Obviously, there are other critical factors in the decision to breed that cannot be assessed in the show ring, such as nose, drive, cry and biddability that are essential to an exceptional foxhound.



Grand champion hounds at the Southern, Virginia and Bryn Mawr hound shows consistently meet the criteria I have discussed. But Live Oak Trusty '19, winner of the 2023 Southern Hound Show checks all my boxes!
Photograph courtesy of Kari Fulford



Erin McKenney
Huntsman at Millbrook Hunt

What foxhound breed do you hunt?

We have mostly PMD/American crosses with a few crossbreds.

What hound conformation point catches your eye first?

When hounds first walk into the ring I look at overall appearance, how they hold themselves and how they move. You could have the prettiest hound but if they don't show themselves, it makes it difficult to show well.

If you were in a ring judging, describe how and where would you start?

I look at feet first, they should have nice tight feet with straight legs- no turning in or out.

Nice sloping shoulder that moves freely. A strong hind end and top line helps to propel them forward. A neck of appropriate length to the rest of their body but long enough that it's easy for them to get their nose on the ground. A dome head, with moderate set ears and a smart eye.

Why do you think conformation is important outside of the show ring?

Correct conformation leads to the longevity of a hound and its hunting career. That being said, give me a hound that has brains, heart and drive. Conformation is irrelevant if you don't have these traits.

Photograph courtesy of Lindsey Baldwin



Don Philhower
former Huntsman at Millbrook Hunt

What hound conformation point catches your eye first when you look at a hound?

If you were in a ring judging, describe how and where would you start?

When they first come in a ring I look first at overall appearance and movement, then I start with feet and top line, then shoulder, neck set, head, back- and hind quarter (how it slopes off), then tail set.

I like a nice tight foot- not long toes. I like a nice sloping shoulder- not straight. Their head should be dome shaped, moderate set ears with a nice clean throat that should lead to a longer neck that helps them to get their nose on the ground.

Top line I like to see a nice round top line, deep girth. Not too long in the back. The hind end should have a nice sloping strong hindquarter and well let down hocks. Tail set- not too high or low.

Why do you think conformation is important outside of the show ring?

Correct conformation plays a huge role in the longevity of the hounds hunting career.

"I like the hound to come into the ring looking sharp! I want them on their toes and looking like they own the place."

~ Paul Wilson, Keswick Hunt Club



Paul Wilson
Huntsman at Keswick Hunt Club

What foxhound breed do you hunt?

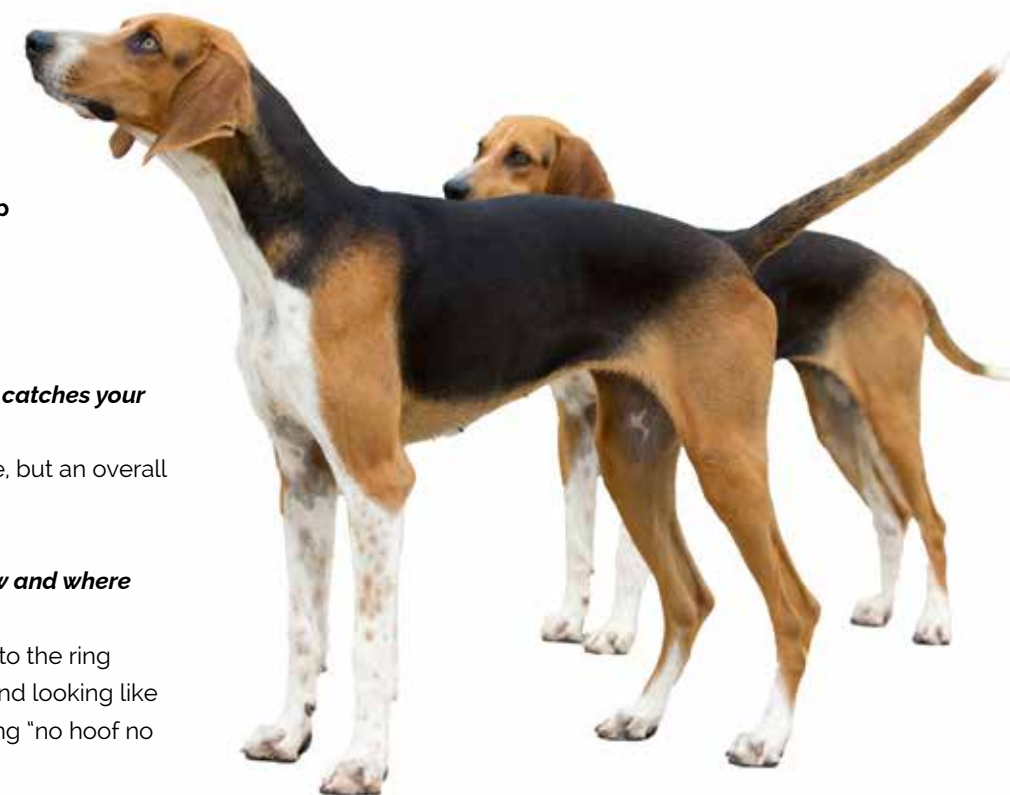
I hunt American Foxhounds

Is there a hound conformation point that catches your eye first?

The whole picture. I want to see presence, but an overall balanced picture

If you were in a ring judging, describe how and where would you start?

When judging I like the hound to come into the ring looking sharp! I want them on their toes and looking like they own the place. We all know the saying "no hoof no



Photograph courtesy of Paul Wilson

horse," it's no different looking at a hound. Having said that, you're likely not going to tell immediately what the particular hounds' feet are like straight away but they are of critical importance.

I want to see a balanced hound and by balanced I want to see equal angles at both ends of the hound, a nice sloping shoulder and a moderately long upper arm (this gives reach in the front end), then equally in the rear you want drive.

The hound's croup needs to have a moderate angle, too short and steep there is a restriction in the amount of forward motion, if it's too long then the transmission forward dissipates and a loss of power happens. The hound should have a strong second thigh with decent length and nicely let down hocks, this is where the power is generated to be transferred to the croup and thrust the hound forwards, a good balanced hound should hold a firm topline with balanced angulation both front and rear and moving with a solid firm topline. A hound of moderately good construction can generally out move a hound with just a good front or just a good rear, some may disagree, but I find it to be true.

Obviously, you want an attractive intelligent head with a kind darker eye that is representative of its particular breed/type. If it's a male I want him to look like a male. I like females to be feminine.

Describe your "perfect" hound. It can be in your kennel already...tell me about it.

My perfect hound would be all of the above things, ring presence, well put together with balance.

I have a bitch in kennels, Keswick Mayfly '22, that is certainly not perfect but has so many of the things I like: she's beautifully feminine, lovely shoulder that arches into a lovely neck, nice angles behind and just unexaggerated, which is what you want. I know it doesn't sound like a way to describe your perfect hound, but it is what you want. You don't want extremes of any kind.

Why do you think conformation is important outside of the show ring?

I think it's critical that we breed as correct a hound as possible as it generally gives them longevity in the field, a hound that's made correctly should cover the most amount of ground with the least amount of effort, therefore reducing the wear on its body and hopefully making it last longer.

Having said all this, exceptional hounds work in spite of their shortcomings, without heart and desire all of the perfect conformation in the world isn't going to make a good hound.



Martyn Blackmore
Huntsman at Princess Anne Hunt

What foxhound breed do you hunt?

Since coming to the USA, I have been lucky enough to have hunted many breeds of foxhounds (even a pack of PMDs for 4 years) but my passion is the Old English.

What hound conformation point catches your eye first?

I don't think it is just one conformation point. PRESENCE would be the best way to describe it. Think of walking somewhere, lots of people go by and someone catches your eye enough to turn your head to get another look. She is beautiful or he is handsome. When you first evaluate a hound, it must catch your eye as the whole package. Enough so, to make you want another closer look.

If you were in a ring judging describe how and where you would start?

Whenever I have judged, as explained, presence is first. A flowing free movement comes next with a good length of stride.

Then I work from nose to front toes. Checking the head, the shape should be considered by sex, I don't want to see a bitch with a big block dog head nor a dog with a petite bitch head. The neck needs to be long enough for the nose to get comfortably to the ground (watch it run to a biscuit and scoop it up) and it also needs to tie the head to the shoulders gracefully.

Follow the shoulder, down the legs to the feet and toes and then back up the leg, being sure to look from the front and both sides. Along the back (top line) check how the stern is set. Look down the back legs, again from both sides and behind, and finally the underline which is least likely to be faulted unless the hound has a full belly.

Describe your "perfect" hound, it can be in your kennel already...tell me about it.

The question should be, has the perfect hound ever yet been born? My answer would be, all depends on who is judging it!

My personal favorite to look at, conformation-wise, was a puppy I gave away. At a major hound show, I showed his sire, Santa Ynez Valley Auger '05, and after the class the judge deemed he was just an average looking dog. The dam was Toronto & North York Helpful 03, a fantastic working bitch. After her class, and when asked by another exhibiting huntsman as to why Helpful had not placed better, the judge's abrupt retort was that she was a common-looking bitch. Oddly enough their son, Amwell Valley Heythrop '08 won the unentered. In the following years Heythrop '08 was actually Best in Show at Bryn Mawr. So, you can make a silk purse out of a sow's ears.

As a huntsman I try to breed the best WORKING bitches in the kennel that carry least conformation flaws. Choice of stallion hound will be the best available whose blood lines nick in with the bitch. Best available would be a good working dog with least conformation flaws that I can get the bitch warded with.

Why do you think conformation is important outside of the show ring?

Conformation is important for a hound's longevity. Meaning if it is built correctly, it will function correctly, and hunt many seasons.

Incorrect conformation will cause excessive wear on the joints. Bad feet and toes will result in lameness and early onset of arthritis which will result in the hound being unable to hunt and not worthy of breeding.



Photograph courtesy of Commonwealth Artists

“Follow the shoulder, down the legs to the feet and toes and then back up the leg, being sure to look from the front and both sides. Along the back (top line) check how the stern is set.”

~ Martyn Blackmore,

Princess Anne Hunt



Photograph courtesy of Liz Callar



Chris Burrowswood
Huntsman at Windy Hollow Hunt

What foxhound breed do you hunt?

Here at WHH I have what some would call crossbreds. Using PMD dog hounds on WHH Bitches that are American x modern English with some fell blood. You could call them "Modern American Fox Hounds." In fact, by chance my main lines here go back to fell blood I used to hunt back in the early 1980's in the UK.

What hound conformation point catches your eye first?

Balance and proportion. Balance in movement. It doesn't matter how good a hound looks if it can't move and run. Most faults will show up in movement.

If you were in a ring judging, describe how and where would you start?

I first look to see if everything is in proportion and pleasing to the eye. Then I start at the front feet and legs up to the head and back from there. Though the power and drive come from the back and hind quarters.

Describe your "perfect" hound. It can be in your kennel already...tell me about it.


In short, one that hunts! At shows, I have seen many a nice hound that I would never take home and hunt with the pack I was with at the time. Due to the fact it probably wouldn't be the type for the country, though a good hound will hunt anywhere. In recent years of hounds that I have seen, I liked the Orange County Kermit '15 dog. If you are looking for a nice type of a modern hound, the MFHA Pack Junior video of Hillsboro Barbie '22 is a nice balanced bitch.

Two of my own Dogs Roland16 which we have used here was 4th in the crossbreeds class in the on line show, though I have never taken him to any of the major MFHA shows. His son is a future stallion hound, WHH Glider '20. I like them both for their work and what's in between their ears as well as what you see on the flags. They both have strong feet, the neck and head are well proportioned and sit nicely on strong shoulders. Their chest comes back from the elbow and is carried by a powerful back. Their hind legs are set well, though not perfect in the hocks to drive and power forward. Faults, yes there are a few, and they would not be to everyone's liking but they handle the WHH country well.

Why do you think conformation is important outside of the show ring?

Longevity. A well conformed hound will stay sound longer with less wear and tear. Let's face it, if you breed a good hound that hunts well, you would want it to hunt for many seasons.

They are also more pleasing to look at! Everyone likes a nice level pack, that's the hard part of breeding hounds especially if you only have one litter every year and have a few different blood lines you wish to keep going.

A good friend who was a Master of a pack of Hill Hounds in Wales had a saying:
"Many Masters, Many Minds, Many Hounds, Many Kinds." 

*"In breeding hounds for work
the first essential is a hound
that is of good constitution, for
without it, a hound is of little value, and it
is a dangerous thing to introduce bad
constitution into a kennel; then work,
necks, shoulders, and quality."*

*~ Reginald Corbet, late Master of the South
Cheshire Foxhounds*

Photograph courtesy of Joanne Maisano



MFHA MILESTONES

Headquarters moved from Boston to Leesburg, VA



1991

Subscribing Membership Program established

2010

MFHA Educational Foundation (Established in 1984) became part of the MFHA Foundation

IUHH established



Headquarters moved from Berryville, VA to Middleburg, VA

2019



Lt. Col. Dennis Foster retired as Executive Director and David Twiggs entered the position

Online studbook launched

2021

New logo and organizational branding introduced



Dr. John B. Glass appointed the Association's office clerk. (He served until his retirement in 1995.)

1973

"FoxDog", a computer program to manage the registration of foxhounds is created by Dr. John B. Glass

Hunting Habitat Conservation Award established

Professional Development Program introduced

2006

2013

Fairly Hunted Award introduced

Leishmaniasis Vaccination Study

Whipper In Seminar

2017



1907

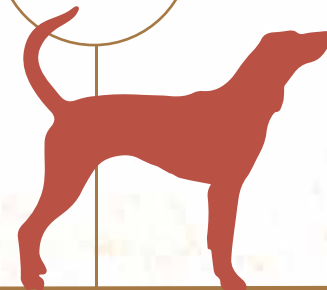


Masters of Foxhounds Association formed

1984



1997



2001

2002

Headquarters moved from Leesburg, VA to Berryville, VA

First woman to lead the Association, Mrs. C. Martin Wood, III

2012

Ian Milne Award introduced

2014

MFHA Hunt Territory Maps digitally recorded

2020

Andrew Barclay appointed as Director of Hunting and Billie-Jo Pearl appointed as Director of Operations

2023

Andrew Barclay named as Executive Director



A history of the Association is published, titled "Masters of Foxhounds", written by Alexander Mackay-Smith

1980



1994

First issue of Covertside is printed

2000

MFHA Foundation established

2007

MFHA celebrates 100 years with Centennial celebration



National Horn Blowing Championship moved to Leesburg, VA



Fund established to benefit hunt employees. (Renamed Hunt Staff Benefit Program in 1938)

1930

Promote
Preserve
Protect

2024 MFHA Symposium on Hunting with Hounds

July 26th-28th
at Boar's Head Resort
Charlottesville, VA

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We're preparing an engaging program for the **MFHA Symposium on Hunting with Hounds** this July 26-28 at Boar's Head Resort in Charlottesville, Virginia, and we don't want you to miss it!

The weekend will include tours of three area kennels, a BBQ at Keswick Hunt Club, and a full day of sessions to expand your knowledge and provide practical takeaways for you and your hunt.

You'll also have the opportunity to attend a dinner honoring Tot Goodwin, MFH, Goodwin Hounds who will be presented with the inaugural MFHA Distinguished Lifetime Retired Professional Staff Award.

For full event details, see the schedule on our website. All current MFHA members received email invitations where you can RSVP and purchase your tickets. Be sure your membership is up-to-date to receive your personal invitation! You can renew your membership on the MFHA website. And remember that with your MFHA membership, you'll receive Covertside magazine, our monthly email newsletter, and invitations to events like the symposium. Your membership helps the MFHA in its mission to protect mounted hunting, support research for hound and horse health, preserve countryside, and offer educational opportunities.

Renew your support of the MFHA today!

Promote. Preserve. Protect.

MISSION

The Masters of Foxhounds Association of North America's mission is to promote, preserve and protect the sport of mounted hunting with hounds.

VISION

The Masters of Foxhounds Association of North America welcomes a diverse and growing membership of foxhunters and supporters of all ages while fostering relationships and partnerships with like-minded organizations and the community. Emphasis is placed on animal health and habitat conservation for the betterment of the sport. The MFHA promotes, preserves, and protects the sport of mounted hunting through a tradition of high standards and education to empower its members.

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The Hunt Staff Benefit Foundation's Professional Development Program

By Karin Winegar
Photography courtesy of
the MFHA Archives

"PDP gave me a toolbox of questions I could ask myself during a difficult hunt or great hunt, things that could provide a different dynamic to a day's hunting," said instructor Ryan Johnsey. "Everybody knows hunting from a unique perspective whether galloping over stone walls in Virginia or drag hunting in Minnesota or riding after wild coyote in Tennessee. The program broadens that scope and offers more resources you'd not experience on your own, so you can fine tune and crank up the quality of experience in your own hunt."



“Hunting is the soul of a country life : it gives health to the body, and contentment to the mind and is one of the few pleasures that we can enjoy in society, without prejudice either to ourselves or our friends.” ~ Peter Beckford, Thoughts on Hunting, 1781

Where can a keen rider with an interest in hunting get hours of boots-in-the-irons learning from mentors in a range of hunts, immerse themselves in core texts on hunting, and call on seasoned huntsmen for guidance and support? Each year, the Professional Development Program (PDP) gives six professional or honorary staff exposure to the distilled knowledge of centuries. Founded through the MFHA in 2006, the program runs from May 1 to May 1 and is intended to culture more hunt professionals by training in the hunt field, the kennels and through online and in-person classes. “Vocational training is the thought,” said Andrew Barclay, MFHA Executive Director, who ran the PDP from its launch until 2023. “In this country hunts tend to be so far apart that on your day off you can’t go watch somebody else hunt and learn that way. This is an ideal way to meet and network with hunt staff.”

To date, the program has graduated 80 students from 23 states and Canada representing 57 hunts. In addition to students from the hunt-dense southern, eastern and mid-Atlantic states, PDP students hail from as far west as California (Santa Ynez Valley Hunt) and Washington state (Woodbrook Hunt) and as far southwest as Texas. Canadian hunts have supplied students from Nova Scotia, Ontario and Montreal. “Randy Waterman, Mason Lampton, Sr., Tony Leahy and Lt. Col. Dennis Foster had this idea,” said Barclay. “When they told me, I thought it would be a phone call here and there. It was much more involved.”

At the beginning, students came to MFHA headquarters in Middleburg, Virginia where Lt. Col. Dennis Foster, former MFHA president, used studbooks, talked about ethics, explained how MFHA administration works and how it is involved in legislation and animal rights.

Foster explains: “It has evolved over the years, but we have held to the principal that if an individual (whip or huntsman)

would be an asset to the sport and hunt they are involved with, we would want them in the course. While we look toward the younger folks because we get more years for our investment, if someone who is older is in need of help we will consider them for sure, and have had numerous people in their 40s and 50s. Physically candidates must be able to ride, and ride many different horses. Somebody animal-wise and terrain-wise is good, and it’s a definite plus if they have worked with dogs and if they are a hunter. And they have to show a desire to stay in and make a career of it.”

“This codified program is the only one of its kind in North America,” said Ryan Johnsey, MFH and Huntsman of the Tennessee Valley Hunt. Johnsey is a PDP graduate and succeeded Barclay as PDP instructor in 2023. “It’s both unique and necessary.”

“England is fortunate in that it has a culture of hunt service,” he explained. “You come in as a teen and work the flesh rounds, feeding, cleaning tack and riding second horses. It’s a more gradual system to bring people through service. Prior to the PDP program talent was just observed and promoted; through it we can now give folks an opportunity to learn more. It won’t make you a good huntsman or whip—a lot of that is natural talent—but it engages you in a way that turns things on that were not stimulated just learning by yourself.”

Candidates apply in December and January and are notified in early February. The course runs from May 1st to May 1st, with the first obligation being the Virginia Foxhound Show. Once accepted, each student is matched with a top huntsman-mentor for kennel visits and hunts and receives topical DVD’s and a reading list that includes A Huntsman’s Log by Isaac “Ikey” Bell, Letters To A Young Huntsman by Andrew Barclay, Whipper-In, The Art and Science of Whipping-In by Lt. Col. Dennis Foster, The Foxhound Kennel Notebook by the MFHA, and Thoughts on Hunting in a Series of Familiar



Letters to a Friend by Peter Beckford. The latter, while written in 1781 and republished in 1899, has proved timeless.

“We’ll budget an hour-long Zoom call about Beckford’s book,” says Johnsey, who keeps a copy in his kennel truck for quick reference. “Then we’ll spend three hours taking it apart because we are so engaged and it is so applicable to today. This text continues to be relevant even in kennel design principles from drawings in his book.”

Between November and January, Johnsey visits students in their home hunts to see things they have implemented and put into practice.

“I got a lot out of it when I took the course in 2014,” said Red Mountain Hounds huntsman Andrew Daly. “I was very green then and just took the horn. My country is wooded so when they asked me where I’d like to go in the PDP mentorship I said Deep Run with Richard Roberts who has similar country. I really enjoyed the kennel visits, seeing the facilities and riding with professional huntsmen and hearing them talk about hounds and hunting was very absorbing. The course reading

🌀 The program started in 2006, we are now starting our 18th year, of which two were particularly challenging Covid years.

🌀 At the end of this class in 2024, we will have graduated over 80 students from 23 different US states and Canada, representing 57 different hunts.

was very important; that information came back to me as I matured as a huntsman and it all started to fit together."

Daly began mentoring PDP students in 2023. "I try to make it warm and friendly," he said. "I show them my way of handling, feeding, washing down, walking out, the importance of getting hounds out for discipline and mental reasons, keeping a day-to-day routine, how to maintain a good pack. They ride with me in my hip pocket, and I communicate every moment: How I start my draw, consider the conditions, how hounds react to things, how to provide best sport. I love teaching and sharing, so it's beneficial for me to have the privilege of being a mentor."

Emily Melton, Huntsman for New Market-Middletown Valley Hounds participated in the 2013-14 program. She was mentored by huntsman Marion Thorne, MFH of Genesee Valley Hunt.

"I learned a lot from the PDP experience," said Melton.

"Andrew made the course very interactive. You get knowledge from so many people and bring it together to make it your own. I also learned that sometimes you get more from a not-so-great day of hunting than from a fantastic day. When things are not going the way they should you actually are learning how to deal with them."

According to Tony Leahy, MFH, Fox River Valley Hunt and Massbach Hounds, "You can't do a, b, c, and d and become a huntsman. You have to live and breathe it, have experiences and lots of failures. We support students and expose them to different people, country, hounds, dynamics and more broadly to hunting in North America. We want people to succeed in their path and we want candidates to experience an inside track."

Leahy credits PDP popularity and credibility to contributions of experienced huntsmen and masters that began with Barclay--"one of the absolute great professionals in the sport worldwide. He brings expertise, and he's an accessible, good, and caring person. It could never work without Andrew." He also credits the assistance of Stephen Portch, MFH, Hardaway Hounds; Randy Waterman, Ex-MFH, Piedmont Fox Hounds; Mason Lampton, MFH, Midland Fox Hounds; and C. Martin Wood, III, MFH, Live Oak Hounds.

"The mentality of the mentorships is to encourage young people who have an interest to think about this as a career, to get to them to know the main players, and get very good professionals to rally around young people," Leahy explained. "We focus on trying to broaden the experience of the young person coming to the sport, open their eyes to what else is out there and what the sport is."

While there are many components to learn during the PDP year, he added, it is also "tremendous fun."


"I have learned from the students, too" said Leahy. "They have been a pleasure, and some coming to the sport have such unique views. I am just blown away by how people come to this sport."

Marion Thorne, MFH and Huntsman for Genesee Valley Hunt in Pennsylvania and Rose Tree-Blue Mountain Hunt in South Carolina, New York has been part of the program for a decade.

"The students have very different upbringings," said Thorne.

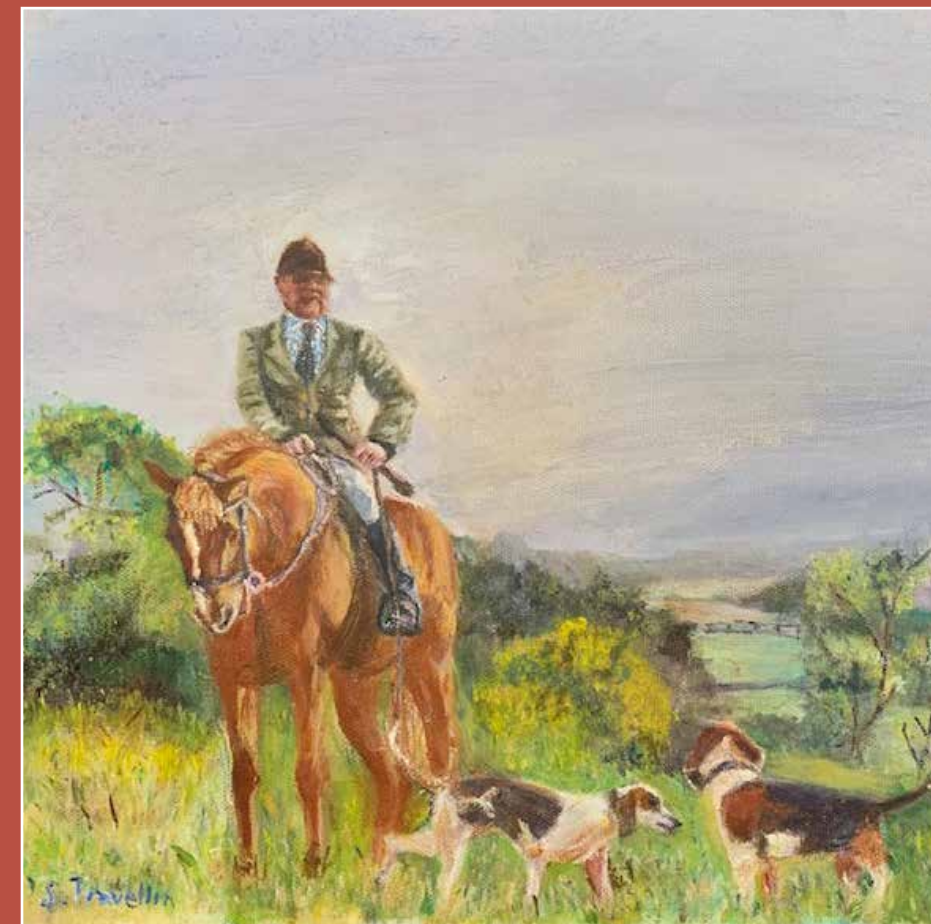
"People get into it from other horse sports, polo, rodeo or show jumping. As long as you are a good horseman, you can pick it up fast. Being actual staff is a mindset as well. It requires someone tough and strong who has a lot of grit, someone who will not worry about the weather and just carry on even if injured."

"It's important to get them experience outside of their current setting," she added. "They should experience red fox on the east coast, run coyote in the south or the west, and drag hunters benefit from seeing live hunting. It's intense, we expose them to how people do things differently, methods of walking out, of deer breaking puppies, of different technology. Homework includes land conservation and wildlife, and I always stress how our hunt uses our conservancy and keeps our land open."

"I enjoy watching the quality of the people and seeing them blossom," said Thorne. "Mostly we go on masters' recommendations and take people we don't know, and we've had a lot of success, which is a testament to foxhunting itself: it does attract great people." 



The winner of the Under 18 category is Virginia Nance, age 11



MFHA Drawing Contest Results

The winners of our drawing contest have been chosen...the overall winner is Jordan Muniz, age 20, with Deep Run Hunt, whose artwork is featured on the cover of this issue! Thank you to all who submitted their artwork for the contest.

The runner-up in the Over 18 age category is Susan Travellin.





FAIR WEATHER RIDERS BEWARE

Foxhunting Skills Are Handy In Patagonia

Written By Linda Vegher

Photographer Richard Dunwoody

“Fox hunters make great competitors in our Gaucho Derby because they’re used to riding in all elements, at high speed and crossing some seriously gnarly terrain,”

according to Erik Cooper, Director of Operations for the Gaucho Derby.



If you've never heard of the Gaucho Derby, consider yourself a sane person. For seekers of unknown territory or more precisely, thrill seekers of mountains you can only see on horseback, this race would suit. "The Gaucho Derby is an adventure on a massive scale. It demands a quiver of characteristics from the very top drawer, encompassing sportsmanship, determination and the ability to laugh in the face of severe hardship," claims the Equestrianists, who also run the famous Mongol Derby. So naturally, this race lures fox hunters, and to no surprise they have been successful. "Fox hunters make great competitors in our Gaucho Derby because they're used to riding in all elements, at high speed and crossing some seriously gnarly terrain," says Erik Cooper, Director of Operations for the Gaucho Derby.

2020 THE PIONEER JOURNEY

This journey in February of 2020 was the true and first test, and participant feedback contributed to what competitors experience today. The organizers interviewed and selected the greatest adventurers who they knew would survive, firstly, as well as give constructive feedback to this new race format. Most were past Mongol Derby competitors, natives or true mountain or navigational pioneers.

The race started with an authentic gaucho action, ponying another horse to swap out when the mounted one gets tired or to carry your supplies, making for fewer horse stations and more time in the wilderness. This is no longer part of the current race, as it proved too difficult to get all horses back safely, and for visitors the terrain was challenging enough. Some other lessons were learned in this pioneer run, including the mountain's ability to quickly change weather, 50 degrees difference in the blink of an eye. It was a wild ride. Here's what some of my fellow foxhunting participants from past races have to say about their reflections of the adventure.





HORSES & WELFARE

Hundreds of horses, some of Criollo descent, are delivered for the race, some have to be herded into the check points as they are so remote, others trucked in. Another challenge is the riders draw a number and have to catch them in the large corrals, this can sometimes be half the battle. The station managers keep the horses grazed and watered throughout, as well as cares for the returned horses after their trek is finished.

Horse welfare comes first. Entrants have a proven ability to manage themselves and their horse, and need to do so while racing. At each vet station the veterinary team will scrutinize every horse ridden in and have the power pull a horse or rider. The horse should be a) sound, b) reasonably hydrated, and c) return to a resting heart rate no higher than 56bpm within half an hour of coming in. Vets and race managers also have the power to impose penalties between horse stations. Trained, vaccinated (a requirement of moving horses in Patagonia) vetted by one of our excellent vets and transported to the horse changeover stations with plenty of food and time for rest.

“Crazy attracts crazy or a common bond of crazy. In a way, you become blood brothers with everyone. Patagonia, I would love to go back,” says Griffis.

MARIE GRIFFIS: Winner 2020

Marie is a Montana native, whose tracking skills developed at a young age elk hunting with her dad in the mountains. She resides in Montana and has whipped for Big Sky Hounds. She partook in illustrious three day coyote hunts at the beginning of hunting on horseback in the West, where you'd show up to a ranch in a western saddle with no helmet and just chase the hounds for days.

Speaking about foxhunting she says, "Be it hounds or horses, you've got heart beats to take care of. You do everything you can to get to where you want to go." She compared the experience to counting hounds, the need for constant awareness and no relaxing on the job. Your senses need to stay sharp at all times while riding across unknown terrain.

Other whipper-in traits Marie claims contributed to her success include always looking back and constantly marking where the trailers are. She continues to look back and makes a mark so she knows the way home. She also doted on the horse's ability and recollected an epiphany she had leading horses across a huge slick rock face, "praying that we all make it."

THE LEDBURY LADIES: Laura Redvers Featured

Foxhunting icons on the pioneer journey included the famous "Ledbury Ladies," Laura Redvers and Louise Daly, or "Weasel." These ladies were comical and understood the true meaning of sportsmanship. Laura grew up hunting in Scotland with the Fife Foxhounds. Since then, she's hunted for the last 26 years with the legendary Ledbury Foxhounds and is married to the Senior Master. She has organized the Ledbury 'Fox Rocks' Balls for 20 years. The Ledbury Hunt is one of the oldest fox hunts, dating back 300 years, and continues to hunt around Ledbury on the Hereford and Gloucestershire borders.

Laura claims, "Camaraderie. I do believe the Gaucho Derby cannot be done solo. Hunting you must always help others, because you never know when the tables will turn, and it will be you in need of help. You need to grin and bear it, whatever is thrown at you."

Laura mentioned observing the natives, like Jakotango, and realized they needed to ride Argentinian style! His riding style was similar to the best Fieldmasters in the UK. You have to adjust to the task and the terrain!



THE GAUCHO DERBY DETAILS

LENGTH

The race is approximately 500km long (roughly 310 miles.) Riders have an average of 7 horses the entire trip, unlike the Mongol where you have 3+ a day as you are covering an average of 75 miles a day at speed. Here you hope to go about 30-40 miles per day.

RIDING HOURS

These are from 08:00 to 18:00.

LOGISTICS

The riders meet in El Calafate then travel to an estancia, or base camp, for two prep days and race start. The end is approximately set at the famous back drop at Mount Fitz Roy outside of El Chalten. The steep entry fee is proportionate to the scale of the logistical operation and the ambition of the event.

COURSE

Riders will find out the exact race course once at base camp and it is never the same as the year before. There are 6-8 horse stations, several vet checks (approx. 3 with each horse) and markers. All required points the competitors must visit.

NAVIGATION

And you have to navigate from point to point with a Garmin GPS supplied by the crew at base camp. Note despite the required points that are loaded, you will not be able to follow the direct routes (as straight line) most often because of the terrain, like mountains, bogs and thick brush, etc. that does not show on the GPS in detail. Most participants say that navigation is the hardest part.

TACK & KIT

All riders receive the same tack which includes saddle, bridle, saddle pad, girth and hobbles. Your additional survival equipment and riding kit will have to fit in the supplied bags.

WEIGHT LIMIT

The upper weight is 85kg / 187 lbs dressed to ride and this rule is non-negotiable. You're also allowed 10kg / 22 lbs of kit in your saddle bag and a limited number of resupply bags which you swap out at designated horse stations.

EMERGENCY AND NAVIGATION SUPPORT

Each rider receives a personal satellite tracker. This allows the headquarters to pinpoint their locations; it also has a function where a help team can be alerted. Full training on this piece is provided at the start line and the race crew will check your device is still tracking correctly at the horse stations.

Although adventure and a race exist, the welfare of the horses comes first. The SPIRIT OF THE RACE encompasses sportsmanship, determination and the ability to laugh in the face of severe hardship.



HANNAH BICKETTE “SPANNER”: Competitor

This young lady at 6 years old, after begging and begging and begging her folks, was gifted a naughty little 12.2-hand pony, Dumpy. From Pony Club to hunting occasionally with her aunt and the New Forest Hounds as well as eventing, while in university she managed to have some great days with the Cattistock down in Dorset and even a trip to Ireland to hunt with the Limerick and the Duhallow. A year after university she was a pioneer in the Gaucho Derby. Now living in London she is a civilian support rider for the Household Cavalry and rides the Cavalry Blacks in Hyde Park before work.

Bickette claimed, "Having the awareness to know if you were strong enough to help or struggling and needed help. During the storm, I knew I was on the best horse and was perhaps struggling the least from the cold. I took charge. However, several hours later, I was in a terrible way, and the roles reversed. Thankfully the Ledbury Ladies were guardian angels and took care of me. I believe this is frequently shown on the hunting field: Everyone has good and bad days, and it is up to those on a good day to help those on a bad."

I had to ask, "What was the one skill that you believe got you to the end?" "Opening very tricky gates!" replied Bickette.



“The Gaucho Derby has certainly changed my perspective on riding. It’s boring now.” says Maude.

CHRIS MAUDE “MAUDIE”: Competitor

Chris Maude, a retired English jockey, who rode 300 winners over jumps including winners over the National fences aboard Indian Tonic (twice) and Young Hustler, as well as, Make A Stand in the Tote Gold Trophy and Dom Samourai in the Greenalls. He grew up in Dartmoor breaking in ponies for his parents' small thoroughbred business. At a young age he frequented trips to the Devon & Somerset Stag Hounds, often getting back in the dark to a village hoping his mum was there with the trailer to pick him up! Maudie also hunted with the Mid Devon Foxhounds. He also completed the Mongol Derby. Having ridden much of the race with Maudie, the comic relief was always there, from his horse "Trigger" to just carrying on with light hearted humor.

When asked what fox hunting skills applied, "Having grown up in Dartmoor, a very barren, full of bogs area, I became quite adept at crossing them on hairy ponies across the moor, a skill I hoped would be useful on the Gaucho Derby. How wrong I was!!! I really didn't expect to find such vast bogs on top of a "#\$@%\$! mountain!!! There is no doubt that the best way to see the more remote parts of the world are on horseback. Even if the horse in question is trying to kill you!" he says.



RICHARD DUNWOODY, MBE: Photographer

The famous retired Irish jockey, two-time Grand National winner, the only jockey in that generation to win the Grand National, Cheltenham Gold Cup and Champion Hurdle, Dunwoody also received the Lester Award for "Jump Jockey of the Year" on five occasions. Not to mention, Dunwoody was appointed Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) in the 1993 Birthday Honors for services to horse racing.

As far as hunting goes, Dunwoody from the ages of 4 to 8 hunted with the North Down Harriers in Northern Ireland. "Finally off the leading rein at 6," he says, "Then hunted with the Beaufort 8 until 12. While I was race riding, I would go the odd day cubbing with the Old Berks and had a full day with another jockey, Jamie Osborne on horses supplied by David Tatlow with the Heythrop (winner of many showing titles at HOYS etc.)," says Dunwoody.



2022 THE SECOND RACE: AFTER COVID

ANNA BODEN: Winner 2022

Anna Boden, the 2022 winner (the race did not happen in 2021), has fox hunted since birth. She now hunts in the UK with the Blackmore and Sparkford Vale Hunt, and the Cattistock Hunt, who she Field masters for occasionally. She hunts 25 days a year and has competed in the Race the Wild Coast. She's looking to do the Mongol Derby next. Anna's upbeat and kick-on attitude gave her an advantage no doubt.

What skills contributed to her success? "Being really organized, and you have to have your kit ready and timely," she says. "Organization helped. As well as being willing to attempt trial sometimes ending in error. With the different horses, you needed different approaches constantly."

At the end of the race, a navigational decision was decisive for Anna. She and Holly Rivers had formed a team, but there were five serious competitors at that point. As Boden would describe it, "Have great team work, but keep your independence. But also rely on them to keep you going. The balance of the two: independence but being able to have others to help you go as far as you can. Ultimately, the winning decision was a navigational choice to go through the river bed. I saw cattle parts, so knew we could get through. The horses would follow us as we climbed on foot up a rocky river bed, horses behind, and they willingly followed!" So fox hunting seems dull now? I asked. "Foxhunting does not seem dull now – [it's a] most incredible way to spend a full day."

RIDER QUALIFICATIONS: CAN I GO?

ENTRY BY INTERVIEW ONLY

All applications are based on a range of criteria. If you're selected for and interview you'll be contacted by a Derby veteran. This interview can go into detail of the applicant's history and current ability, which may ask for more information or evidence such as photos. In turn this gives an applicant ample time to ask a prior competitor any questions.

MENTAL PREPARATION

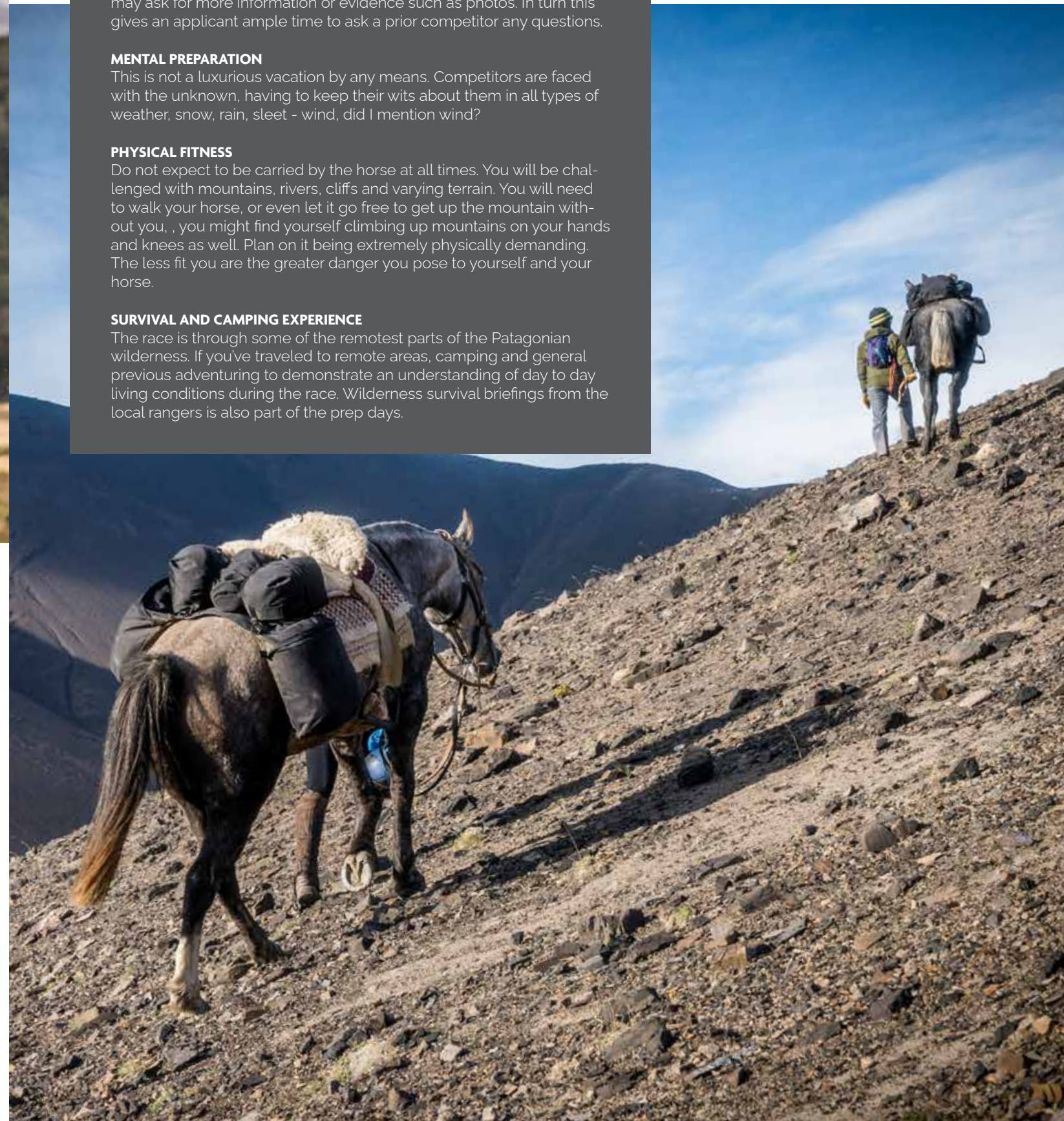
This is not a luxurious vacation by any means. Competitors are faced with the unknown, having to keep their wits about them in all types of weather, snow, rain, sleet - wind, did I mention wind?

PHYSICAL FITNESS

Do not expect to be carried by the horse at all times. You will be challenged with mountains, rivers, cliffs and varying terrain. You will need to walk your horse, or even let it go free to get up the mountain without you, you might find yourself climbing up mountains on your hands and knees as well. Plan on it being extremely physically demanding. The less fit you are the greater danger you pose to yourself and your horse.

SURVIVAL AND CAMPING EXPERIENCE

The race is through some of the remotest parts of the Patagonian wilderness. If you've traveled to remote areas, camping and general previous adventuring to demonstrate an understanding of day to day living conditions during the race. Wilderness survival briefings from the local rangers is also part of the prep days.



FOXHUNTERS CONSENSUS

So all of these riders made it through the race. And most everyone attributed to time in the hunt field applying to the mountains of Patagonia. I attest to them myself.

1. *“Just get on with it!”* You’ve got no choice but to jump ahead. It’s only temporary, be it a snowstorm or...” says Boden. Across the board all the fox hunters attributed learning how to deal with difficult situations comes from hunting. You’ve got no choice but to jump ahead. It’s pure determination and grit.

2. *“Save your horse.”* “Know how to navigate the horse’s vet check. I think I am much more in awe of horses in general,” says Boden. The pace of hunting is really helpful in teaching a rider how to measure your horse’s endurance and pace it over time.

3. *“Not being overwhelmed by the unknown,”* claims Griffis. The ability to adapt to all different terrain and the unexpected. Whether it’s a change in weather conditions and the need to just grin and bear it.

4. *“Horses can do way more than we give them credit for,”* says Griffis. The horses in Patagonia could [go] a lot with no real food or what appears real to us. Having the ability to get on anything and build a relationship in a short amount of time and trusting your new horse was key to survival.

5. *“Hunting teaches you to adopt a secure seat at all times,”* says Redvers. Having a seat over every type of terrain, sheer time in the saddle gives you the stamina and endurance to survive all the derby throws at you.

6. *Navigation.* “Understanding the land, being able to read it while looking at terrain and assessing the options of left or right, north or south. Be it counting hounds or noticing the slight change in footing that could immediately drop you into a bog,” says Griffis.

7. *Sportsmanship.* Lastly, hunting is all about communication and awareness, and these collaborative skills are paramount during the Derby where team work is vital at times. No man is left to fend for himself if suffering, and hopefully there will be an equal amount of laughter to the suffering! “Definitely doing it with my really good friend was the best incentive. With any challenge like this, the most important thing is to be able to dig deep when needed and laugh - which is what we did a lot of!!!” says Redvers.

Having done the pioneer race in 2020 and working as a station and social media manager in 2022, I can attest to all of these skills being mandatory for the Gaucho Derby. It is not for the faint of heart, and if you truly want to be out in the mountains with not a soul in sight, this is the race for you. The landscapes are breathtaking, and the horses are not what they appear. Your admiration for your steed grows with every step, as does your appreciation for your fellow fox hunters and the bond of following the hounds. True partners, equine or human, take care of each other in the elements of the wilderness.

For more information, go to <https://equestrianists.com/gaicho-derby>. 



Middleburg Welcomes the Museum of Hounds and Hunting North America

By John Head and Daphne Wood, MFH



Tom Seabright, *Huntsman of the New Forest Hounds and Jasper*.

Since its founding in 1985 at Morven Park in Leesburg, Virginia, the Museum of Hounds and Hunting has enjoyed a unique relationship with the Masters of Foxhounds Association. Together they share a common goal to promote, preserve, and protect the history of mounted hunting now and for future generations.

In March 2024, the Museum opened a branch location in Middleburg, Virginia. Andrew Barclay, Executive Director of the MFHA, called the new location "a welcome addition to Washington Street" adding, "Now on a single day, fox hunters will be able to visit the MFHA headquarters gallery, the new branch of the Museum and the National Sporting Library and Museum. That's a great opportunity for folks to stay involved with our sport."

Daphne Wood, MFH at Live Oak Hounds, and the first lady Master to be elected President of the MFHA, recently joined the board of the Museum. When asked why she agreed to add this commitment to her busy schedule, she explained, "as long-term Life Members of the Museum, decades-long contributors, and annual attendees at the Morven Park exhibitions and festivities, my husband Marty and I are familiar with the important work done by Sherman P. Haight, Jr., ex-MFH, Dr. Joseph M. Rogers, ex-MFH and other establishing members, and we greatly admire the efforts of current board chair Nancy Bedford and her team. Our founding father George Washington was an avid fox hunter, and we realize the importance of educating the public about the long tradition surrounding this greatest of all field sports, which I have relished and participated in for 58 years. By learning more about the sport, visitors might be tempted to give it a try but, at the very least, support our goal to promote, preserve, and protect this very inclusive, family-oriented, healthy, joyous activity. It is vital to share all aspects of the fun and history of hunting in America with fellow riders and the many non-riding visitors to the Middleburg area. We believe the future of this sport depends on personal involvement."

The Museum's collection includes fine art, bronzes, decorative arts, books, foxhunting artifacts, clothing, and memorabilia, a variety of which will be on display at the new Middleburg location. Here are four unique items that illustrate the depth and breadth of the collection.



A posting chair, also known as a Chamber Horse.

Tom Seabright, Huntsman of the New Forest Hounds and Jasper, an early donation from Mr. and Mrs. Paul Mellon, is especially significant, capturing a quiet moment in the kennel when hound and huntsman connect. Mr. Mellon, a fox hunter himself, intended this painting by Ben Marshall (1768-1834) to serve as a cornerstone of our sporting art collection.

A rare, early 20th century wooden breeches tree was donated in 2003 by Farnham Collins, ex-MFH of Millbrook Hunt. Farnham recalled that his grandfather, Dr. Howard D. Collins, MFH, used it for shaping and drying his doeskin breeches after wet or snowy hunt days. We believe it to be unique. Please let us know if you are aware of another.

A posting chair, also known as a Chamber Horse, is one of many items donated by Bruce E. McCashin. Odd as it seems today, the Hepplewhite George III mahogany chair, with its leather covered "springy" horse-hair stuffed seat, was used for exercising riding muscles in inclement weather. This example, c.1800, was donated by Mr. McCashin in memory



A rare, early 20th century wooden breeches tree was donated in 2003 by Farnham Collins, ex-MFH of Millbrook Hunt.

of his mother Mrs. Arthur Bedford McCashin, MFH of Fairfield County Hounds in the 1930s. A similar chair is found in the Victoria & Albert Museum in London.


The Museum's collection includes a series of aquatints and other works by the well-known American artist Franklin B. Voss (1881-1953). A particular favorite shows Dallas Leith (1908-1990) and his hounds crossing a meadow on the Voss family's Atlanta Hall. Leith served as huntsman of the Elkridge-Harford Hunt, Monkton, MD from 1938-1978 (except three years of active duty during World War II) and was an inaugural inductee into the Huntsmen's Room.

The Museum's mission is to preserve the rich North American heritage of hunting with hounds now and for the future. Here is how interested Covertside readers can become a part of this important work.

To join the Museum, log on to mhhna.org, click on Join or Donate and select the membership level that's right for you. It's secure, easy, tax deductible and ensures that the Museum will remain strong.

If you have foxhunting art and artifacts and would like to learn more about donating to the Museum, email the Museum at mhhna.org@gmail.com, or contact a Museum board member.

Purchase of Museum Gift Shop items also supports our mission. These are available at Morven Park, the new Middleburg branch, and on the website.

The Museum website is also a great way for people to stay in touch, by clicking on the Museum News section. Select items from the permanent collection, recent donations and profiles from the Huntsmen's Room are featured. 

Why All Foxhunters Should Support the Museum of Hounds and Hunting North America

by C. Martin Wood III,
MFH Live Oak Hounds
2017 Huntsmen's Room Inductee
Past President, MFHA – Trustee, MFHA Foundation

The Museum of Hounds and Hunting is the only repository for historical items and the history of organized hunting in North America. It contains the history of our beloved sport in exhibits of the clothing worn, the horse tack used and the accoutrements utilized by masters, huntsmen, and all foxhunters. Numerous paintings and photographs give any visitor a chance to view how the sport has been conducted and how it has evolved over the years since the Masters of Fox Hounds Association was formed in 1907. By giving a look back into the past, a greater appreciation of the wonderful sport of riding to hounds can be instilled in the museum visitor, as well as an appreciation of what has gone before to make the sport what it is today. Foxhunting is truly the most exciting and eclectic of all field sports.

The huntsmen's "hall of fame," the Museum's Huntsmen's Room, pays homage and honors each great man and woman who has led the way by hunting a pack of quality hounds and providing great sport for their hunt's followers over many seasons. To be inducted into the Huntsmen's Room is a singular honor. These select professional and amateur huntsmen have served long years in the sport, producing a level of sport that may never be equaled as time passes and country sports have to deal with rapidly encroaching civilization and loss of territory. Honoring these great leaders is a wonderful way to pay homage to what they have done in order for mounted foxhunting to continue and expand into the 21st century and beyond.

Tally Ho Forever!



Photograph courtesy of Willis Henry Auctions, Inc.



FUNDRAISING AND “FRIEND-RAISING” AT THE CHESHIRE VIXEN HUNT

By Anabel Barnett
Photography by Mark Jump

When it's just the vixens hunting, you know it's going to be a special day. And for the ladies attending the 2024 Cheshire Vixen Hunt, it was an exhilarating three hours of epic hunting, trays of champagne (delivered by dutiful husbands), all to the soundtrack of Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun."

This year's Vixen Hunt, held coincidentally on International Women's Day, attracted an enthusiastic group to the small town of Unionville, Pennsylvania. The goal: sharing how special the land and the hunt are with friends new and old while fundraising for the hunt. In total, Cheshire County drew 106 riders representing 25 different hunts from across the United States, a sight that captured the attention of landowners and local community members alike.

27-year-old Rachel Wilkoski worked hard to create this kind of turnout. As the chair of Cheshire's Vixen Hunt Committee, Wilkoski teamed up with five other female hunters and landowners to plan the event. As a member of the 2023 Vixen Committee, Wilkoski took what she learned and sought to expand the Vixen Hunt this year.

"After last year, [the committee] agreed that we didn't want to make [the Vixen Hunt] a one-day event. We wanted to make it an experience. Because we are in the heart of horse country here in Pennsylvania, we have a lot of generous landowners who offered beds and stabling. Riders can come and stay in the country before the hunt. I wanted people to feel like they not only could come, but that we wanted them to come," she said.

The committee began an outreach campaign, connecting with various hunts and shared friends from across the American hunt community. Wilkoski created Instagram and Facebook pages to share details and to get the word out. She even connected with

some folks on TikTok. While Wilkoski believed social media outreach assisted in increasing attendee numbers, making more personal contact with other hunters and hunt clubs facilitated the biggest change.

While Wilkoski was busy emailing and connecting with various current foxhunters, some of her fellow committee members solicited a different group of VIPs: landowners, retired hunters, and "friends of the hunt."

"Our intent, of course, was to have a great Vixen Hunt. But building community was our number one priority in addition to a great day for the ladies out on horseback. Because, if people can be with the hunt and feel recognized, feel appreciated, then the community will prosper overall," said Colleen Mooney, a member of the Vixen Committee and landowner.

"It's hard to go from being super involved in hunting and riding to not riding but still being a landowner – you still want to have that involvement," Wilkoski added. "Just because people aren't riding anymore doesn't mean they don't want to be included in events. It's not only about boosting morale, membership, and our local community, it's about maintaining and reviving relationships with landowners and the like."

The Vixen Committee determined that crafting an experience begs for a certain aesthetic, at which point they tapped the

shoulder of fellow committee member and landowner, Mamie Duff. Duff, who assisted in the planning, organization, and execution of the Vixen Hunt Tea in 2023, knew she wanted to elevate the festivities this year – and that happens in the details.

"You're starting with a blank slate," said Duff. "There's hardly any electricity – it's a hayloft. It takes many yards of fabric, a giant chandelier, and an entire half of a magnolia tree to try to make this happen. That said, when you do make it happen, it really is magical. People respond to that. I don't know how I'm going to top it next year!"

Much has changed since Cheshire's first Vixen Hunt in 2020, as articulated by Jennifer Arms, one of Cheshire's three Masters, alongside Sanna Neilson and Phoebe Fisher. "It started small and was successful. Each year we've done it, it's built upon itself to become an event. The first year was a kind of potluck with picnic tables, and now there's a party the night before and this wonderful tea afterward. We've created a significant opportunity for community building." Arms continued: "We at Cheshire are a bit spoiled by the countryside we're able to ride on; we're very aware of the riches all around us, and it feels great to be able to share that with the broader hunting world. I think sometimes there's a bit of a mystique around Cheshire hunt country. People may have heard stories

“Because, if people can be with the hunt and feel recognized, feel appreciated, then the community will prosper overall.”

about post and rail fences and steeplechase jockeys, and they might feel like it's incompatible with their style of fox-hunting.

So, it is amazing to have this many riders who hunt all kinds of different territory make a day of it and be successful. It's good for foxhunting, and it's good for Cheshire."

Adding a little Hollywood glamor to the event this year was international eventer and three-time Olympian Boyd Martin. Leading first field with assistance from Cheshire Master Sanna Neilson, Martin guided the vixens over many famous landmarks not only sacred to foxhunters but also the event and racing community.

"For you out-of-towners," said Martin, "we just crossed some pretty memorable country: we went past the 1978 world champion Bruce Davidson's farm. We rode on a special piece of property home to Plantation Field Horse Trials – that's a premier location for the sport of eventing. And we jumped the famous "Brooklawn Double," which is part of Mrs. Hannum's house, who was the mastermind behind the Cheshire Hunt.

It's a very famous region and the reason why equestrians flock to this area. It's turned into one of the very special spots in the equestrian world."

Martin and whipper-in Oliver "Buzz" Fisher were the only two men riding that day: Cheshire's new huntsman, Mary Taylor Miller, took the hounds. Dr. Cindy Buchanan and Mary Ellen De Ruschi led the second field, while Sharon D'Amico escorted the third field.

Beyond the opportunities for communal connection and fundraising is the chance to expose the younger generation of foxhunters to this kind of event.

Annie Rodgers, 23, typically hunts with Radnor Hunt in nearby Willistown Township, expressed appreciation for the opportunity to ride in Cheshire hunt country. "This country is a little different than what I am used to with Radnor. I was really happy to see the effort for land conservation and hear different stories from people from all of the East Coast – and the country – who came here for this. It just makes me very thankful that this is something I get to do," she said.

Audrey Buchanan, also 23, and a long-time member of Cheshire, added: "There were a few people who I talked to today that have never hunted before – this was their first time hunting. I think it was a great way of introducing people to hunting in a very engaging manner. We met people who have been hunting their entire lives and somewhere this is their first time, and it's really great to see."

Both Rodgers and Buchanan emphasized the importance of conservation and connection and what events like this offer the entire foxhunting community. "This is not only a huge fundraiser, but it gets traction and communication amongst different hunts and countries," Buchanan said. "It's very helpful for land conservation and seeing how important it is in different places."

Rodgers summed up the event with this, "It shows folks, front and center, why it's so important to keep this land open so we can do this. It encourages us to be very good guests and stewards of the land. I think it's extremely important."





*T*here is hunt season and everything in between is just waiting.

We asked our membership for favorite photos to mark this past year and you did not dissappoint.

And while horses and hounds rest up for the next call of the horn, remember...

With your support, the MFHA is working to preserve the land you call home. In the past three decades, we have actively conserved 1.5 million acres of land, preserving habitat and biodiversity across North America.

Join us in our mission to ensure a bright future for our sport.



Photograph courtesy of Kyle Nadler



Photograph courtesy of James Tipton



Photograph courtesy of James Tipton

encore, encore

Photograph courtesy of Walter Grenade



Photograph courtesy of Kyle Nadler

Photograph courtesy of Meg Trunzo



Photograph courtesy of Karen Kandra



Photograph courtesy of Brenda Black



Photograph courtesy of Emma Welch





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Photograph courtesy of Tiffany Dillon Keen

2024

MFHA Symposium

*on Hunting
with Hounds*

July 26th-28th

at Boar's Head Resort

Charlottesville, VA



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OF NORTH AMERICA

Promote. Preserve. Protect.