

## A Hunting Guide

Trail Hunt - this involves using hounds to hunt a trail laid with a rag steeped in a fox-based scent.

Hound Exercise - basically lots of people taking a large group of hounds for a walk.

Flushing to a bird of prey - using a pack of hounds to flush to a bird of prey.

### **The Hunting Year**

Officially the Hunting Year begins on May 1st which is the date upon which new staff or Masters begin their duties.

### **Autumn Hunting**

In this very early part of the season meets are held early in the morning before the temperature rises and evaporates the scent. Meets are held at least four times each week and are part of the process of preparing horses, hounds and the country for the coming season.

### **The Main Season**

The 'formal season' starts on the last Saturday in October/first Saturday in November with "The Opening Meet". This is one of the highlights of the year when several hundred supporters gather to enjoy the hospitality of the host.

### **The 'Closed Season'**

There are those who think that the summer months are a 'quiet time' for hunts - they are grossly mistaken!

Summer brings The Puppy Show - an 'invitation event' when the latest recruits to the pack are shown off to Subscribers, Supporters, Land-owners, and most importantly, the Puppy Walkers.

For the enthusiasts there are opportunities to support the pack at the various Hound Shows around the country! Hounds are also paraded at various events such as shows, country fairs and Point to Points. August sees Hound Exercise starting in earnest as hounds are brought to fitness in readiness for the new season.

### **Hunting**

In theory the "running order" is: Quarry, Hounds, Huntsman, Masters, The Field.

The basic idea is that the Huntsman is hunting the hounds who are pursuing the quarry. Whippers-in assist the huntsman while the Masters maintain a 'General's view' of the whole process. Everyone else is a spectator!

The spectators can be divided between:

- ‘The Field’ - those on horse-back
- ‘The Foot-followers’ - those following in cars and motorbikes

The Field have a ‘Field Master’ who knows the country and ensures that they do not stray from the acceptable path.

The Masters are the people in charge - they make the decisions about where to go and when to pack up. The Gentleman Masters normally wear pink (scarlet) and Lady Masters normally wear Black. It is not acceptable to overtake the Field Master.

### **Hunt Staff**

The huntsman hunts hounds – it is their job when hunting to control, assist or monitor the pack.

### **Hounds**

These are astonishing animals - bred for purpose over generations they each have their own characters with associated strengths and weaknesses. Soon after they are weaned pups are ‘put out to walk’, usually in couples. This means that they spend time living at the home of a hunt supporter where they learn ‘manners’. Once the lessons have been learned (or when the puppy walkers have come to the end of their tethers!) pups return to kennels. After further lessons from older hounds the pups are ‘entered’ which means that they go hunting for the first time.

### **Dates and Times**

Autumn Hunting (September & October) can start from anytime after 6.00am. This normally lasts 3-4 hours but in October can last up to six hours.

Main season (October - March) a meet usually starts at 11 am and finishes in time for people to get back to their horseboxes in good light. Some followers take second horses from 1.30pm onwards.

### **What to wear**

#### **Foot and Car Followers**

Warm, weatherproof clothes. Wear ‘country colours’, you should blend in with the environment. For ‘lawn-meets’ especially, it is regarded as good form to dress ‘smart casual’ as a mark of respect to the host.

#### **Riders**

- boots (leather ones recommended), or jodhpur boots with gaiters/half chaps.
- jodhpurs or breeches – beige or cream.

- shirt and tie or stock (strictly speaking wear a tie before the opening meet and a stock afterwards). Pony Club Members should always wear their PC tie or stock and their PC badge.

- Hacking or show jacket (tweed or dark blue/black) - again, strictly speaking, wear tweed jackets before the opening meet and hunting coats or show jackets afterwards but as long as you are smart it does not really matter which type of jacket you wear these days.

- Riding Hat - these are usually to one of the currently approved 'safety' designs with a plain, black or dark cover.

## **Horses**

Tack should be:

- clean and in good condition - your neck depends on it!
- Black or brown - no bright colours.

Many people still plait their horses before coming hunting. Although this looks very smart it is not in any way obligatory.

## **The Meet**

### **Getting there**

It is very important that utmost consideration for other road users is given. Whether driving or hacking to a meet please make sure that you do not create a traffic hold-up - pull over from time to time to let traffic pass. Give yourself plenty of time.

Most meets have an associated place to park and un-box. It is always worth checking with one of the Secretaries until you 'get the hang of it'. Wherever you park make sure that:

- Other traffic can safely use the area
- Local residents are not inconvenienced in any way
- You do not damage trenched verges

It is always good practice to arrive in good time for the meet because a) it is courteous to the host b) you can hear the Master's announcements about where you will be going etc. You should NEVER join half way through the day without permission.

### **At the Meet**

Once you are parked safely and considerately, make your way to wherever people are gathering. Try to locate one of the Masters and introduce yourself.

The other person to locate is the Secretary - the person who is responsible for collecting your cap (your contribution towards the hunt's cost). For foot-followers the Meet is a good time to

find out roughly where the trail has been laid enabling you to plan your day. As the appointed time nears the Secretary will go from rider to rider collecting their Cap, but it is your responsibility to make sure you pay.

The Master will address the crowd, thanking the hosts and giving out the arrangements for the day. At the meet it is announced who will be “Field Master” for the day, if it is not the speaker. It is the Field Master’s job to guide the mounted riders (The Field) across country. He will know where the hunt is welcome and which route to take and it is essential that everyone follows his advice. Then the Huntsman blows his horn to gather hounds and they set off to begin the day. Do remember to keep your pony/horse facing the hounds at the meet, as well as when moving off. New riders are best advised to ride towards the back of the Field.

A horse that might kick must have a red ribbon in its tail and a young or inexperienced horse a green ribbon. These are warnings - it is not the responsibility of others to avoid these horses but the responsibility of the riders to make sure that their mounts do no harm to others. So please don’t think wearing a red ribbon allows you to ride in the middle of the field – keep out of the way of harming anyone else, especially the hounds.

### **The Chase**

The whole point of ‘going hunting’ is to “Follow Hounds”. For some this is about a good walk or ride in the country while for others it is about the wonder of hound-work. A hunt can only hunt with the support and good will of landowners and so it is imperative that their wishes are respected.

### **From horseback**

The Field Master will guide the riders across country making best use of tramlines and headlands to avoid any damage to crops. Sometimes it is not possible to take the most direct route and this must be respected. As well as crops proper heed must be paid to the welfare of stock - forty galloping horses are not good company for sheep that are about to lamb. Many days involve some jumping. Please leave room for others at a jump and, should you have a refusal don’t circle immediately in front of the obstacle, holding others up, but withdraw before you try again. If things are not going well then do not hesitate to ask another rider for ‘a lead’.

Once in pursuit you should listen out for warnings and instructions. The commonest are explained here:

- “Beware hole” - It is good manners to repeat the warning for those behind.
- “Hounds please”, “Master please” are called to alert the field to move out of the way for the passage of those who have been announced.
- “Gate please” is another call that is passed ‘down the line’ to alert the next rider to close a gate or perhaps to open the gate to let the Master or Huntsman through.
- “Hold Hard” may be called by the Field Master and is an instruction to stop immediately.

If you break, a fence or do any damage that you cannot repair, you should report it at once to the responsible officers of the Hunt so it may be made good. You won't get in trouble but if you don't report it the landowner may not allow the hunt to hunt over the land again.

### **Foot Followers**

Foot-followers do not have a Field Master to guide them but are best guided by common sense. The guiding principles are:

- Make sure that you do not inconvenience other users of the country including those who are driving down the same lanes. It does nothing for the image of hunting people if someone is held up by a long row of followers' cars that have pulled up in the road to look for the hounds!
- Remember that you are a guest on other people's land - this includes verges so please be careful how you park.
- 4x4's and any motorised vehicles are not usually allowed to follow the hunt off-road without express permission. The terrier men and land owners whose land the hunt are crossing are usually the only persons allowed off-road to follow the hunt.

### **Good manners at all times**

As a newcomer you most probably do not want to stand out as 'different' and good manners are very much a sign of belonging. Always thank those who move over to allow you to pass by smiling and raising your hand but never the one with your whip. Hold gates for people when you can and always thank those who hold gates open for you.

Good Morning and Goodnight are used at the beginning and end of the hunting day respectively whatever the time. It may seem odd when, at 11am when a morning's Autumn Hunting might end, people call "goodnight" - but that's the way it's done!

At the beginning of the day you should always go and find the Master and say "Good morning". Equally if you go home before the end of the day, you should always say "Goodnight" to the Master or at least let someone know that you have gone.

Everyone who hunts is able to do so because of much hard work by the Masters and the Hunt Staff. It is nothing but common courtesy to thank them at the end of the day.

### **Glossary**

A few of the most commonly heard terms are explained.

Cap - The daily charge for non-subscribers. Please offer your cap, do not wait to be asked for it.

Casting - When hounds are looking for the line they are said to be "casting". The Huntsman may direct the hounds then he is casting.

Check - When the hounds lose the line.

Couple - Two hounds. Also two collars linked on a chain seen hanging on the hunt staff's saddles.

Covert - Pronounced "cover" - the place where the huntsman thinks the line might begin.

Draw - To send hounds through a covert to find.

Field - The mounted followers.

Field Master - The person who leads the mounted field during the day's hunting.

Foil - Any smell or disturbed ground, which spoils the scent line of the quarry.

Line - The scent left by the quarry.

Speak - Hounds do not bark, they speak or give tongue when they are hunting a scent.