

(Continued from page 1)

will lead you to the coyote (in his case, fox). I've never seen so many rabbits fly about in so many directions. It was as though the balls had escaped a pinball machine. The hounds also split up. Then one gave voice, the others flew to it. Lovely, lovely hound work. The whippers-in: Angela, Dee, Wendy Croslee (hope I have not forgotten anyone-forgive me) were just as I would wish: in the right place, unobtrusive and up on a hound's shoulder, if need be. As many of you know, I abhor a noisy whipper-in. Sometimes, noise must be made, but the rule of thumb is: ask, command, lastly crack the whip. I heard no whip cracks, ever a good sign.

The run was brief and by now, we'd been out forty-five minutes, the snow fell heavily and the thermometer was 17°F when we started. I suspect it was falling, too. We pressed on and I was bringing up the rear, riding off balance. Thank god, I have some. Mercedes, a marvelous girl who followed the hounds with her eyes and ears, knew just what to do. I, however, couldn't get a leg on her so as I said, balance, balance, balance. This is why my mother threw me up on Percherons with no tack. Thanks Mom, wherever you are.

Two ladies also taking their own line were also falling back. One, Jackie Gallagher, couldn't see. Her glasses were fogged up and covered with snow. I looked up front and realized Mercedes couldn't see either. Her eyelashes had become pasted shut. I reached around and cleared them as best I could but it didn't last. I still could hear the horn. Lynn had to have been not a football field in front of me. I couldn't see any better than Mercedes. My eyelashes were getting stuck, too.

The three of us decided to head for home although we couldn't see. I figured if we struck straight down, we were now up on the flat long top ridge, we would eventually come to the creek. Sharon Appoloni had a walkie-talkie and Angela gave her directions. Down we went. Within twenty minutes we hit the creek. How Jackie stayed on her horse, I don't know. She's a good rider but at that point she was blind as a bat, cheerful, too. What else could we do but laugh?

We crossed the creek, by now slippery, made it to the other side and out on the road which already had a good two to three inches on it. The storm had become a true blizzard. We turned right because through windy gusts we saw a street sign. The sign read "Dixie Lane" so I told Jackie and Sharon to leave me there. I was home.

About that time along comes a cowboy in a silver Dodge dually. He put down his window and I saw one of the best looking men I'd ever seen in my long life. I wondered if fainting produced the same effect on cowboys that it does on cavaliers? A ruse, I know, but when a girl gets old as dirt, she has to cheat.

He and the ladies discussed a tree fallen down the road as a landmark. About this time I recognized my duty. Usually I can recognize my duty in time to avoid it but not now. So I stayed mounted and mournfully watched Adonis drive off. As we rode back down Dry Valley Road onto which we'd turned (these are all dirt roads) I realized, the tree was the only tree. No wonder it was a landmark.

We reached the trailers just about the time some of the hounds came in. Audrey, one of Angela's children, had brought them in. She dismounted, put hounds up then started working on her horse. We all dismounted and Jackie took off her glasses to clean them but they fogged up the minute she put them back on.

Gayle Horn, Jt-MFH came down the road and Pat Hodges, as well. We heard the horn and Lynn was back with the pack about ten minutes after we came in. There had only been seven people in the field since the weather report deterred the sensible. Lynn is no more sensible than myself and it was a joy to recognize she has some Red Rock people that are pure diehards.

One of the whippers-in Wende Crosby was missing. Turned out she'd crashed climbing the creek bed. She couldn't have been more than two hundred yards from where we crossed but the snow obscured all view. The wind drowned out sounds. She made it back on her own steam. The crew got her in the clubhouse (really wonderful), propped her leg up and gave her some bracing spirits. She maintained conversation throughout, ignoring what had to be damned painful.

Seems to me anyone studying in any medical school should be taught by other doctors that foxhunters are a different breed. We'll ignore pain, even denying it. Wende recovered in time to go out next week although I bet she was black and blue.

Once horses were put up, food eaten, we repaired to the various places we were staying. Dee had rented a room near the airport as she had a very early flight. Well, turned out to be one of the biggest blizzards in ten years. Flights were canceled. I didn't get off until Tuesday and poor Dee sat on the tarmac, although she finally did make it to Salt Lake City.

Difficult as conditions were, we both carried away wonderful memories of a good pack of hounds, amazing terrain and damned tough people.

We hope to return and we hope many of you can come along. You'll be glad you did.

While I'm remarking on a blizzard, our weather has been dreadful. Still, we've gone out more than many other hunts and I am trying to make up the lost days. We've pushed out foxes each time, often with views. Our Wednesday afternoon hunt on December 23 was pretty good and Wednesday, January 13, with snow, ice and slush gave us the remarkable sight of a big red fox speeding over pristine snow. If I got those Wednesday dates wrong, forgive me. I lost my notes, but I didn't lose them for Sunday, January 24 at the Run-In Shed. What a hunt, one of the best of the year. It was muddy but not as bad as it could have been and we pushed out a red who gave us a run for an hour and fifteen minutes. Hounds finally put him to ground up behind

Hilary Wilson's old house and I called them down. They came in a line to Route 611. I put them in on the north side and we picked up another fox but it was hunt and peck by then and it was also nasty cold and wet as we'd gone out in a steady rain which never let up. Finally at 12:30 PM we headed home which took another twenty some minutes. The music filled you up just like a Brandenburg Concerto. Best of all, most of both fields got to see the hound work.

The weather's been against us. We missed Friday at the Dairy Barns January 29 because I did go out Sunday before and then Wednesday, got soaking wet and cold, really cold Wednesday and paid for it Friday. Sorry, I should have changed but it was too much fun at the tailgate and, really, Sunday's hunt was worth all manner of bone chills.

Onward,

Rita Mae

P.S. Wichita showed up at mile marker 100 on the Skyline Drive fit as a fiddle. We'd love to know how he did it.



STARS



This season we've thrilled to the young entry and second year entry who have stepped up to the plate. Taz, Trident and Trooper have done wonderfully well. Auto and some of her youngsters (blue tick, weedy hounds) have shown phenomenal drive. Heart has really been impressive. She's the hound who, on the cold day in mid-January, put her nose down to the snow and ice, blew out hot air and warmed scent which only she knew was there. By the time we lifted, her nose was bloody. She's fine now but I have never seen a hound do that. She's a wonderful, wonderful hound.



Brainpower

As many of you know, Oak Ridge provides all the services of a large club without large dues, without an initiation fee (which can run thousands depending on the club), without a paneling assessment or an-end-of-year assessment to make up shortfall.

I am not asking you for money. I am asking you if, once conditions improve, would any of you be willing to hand walk puppies, work with hounds?

We desperately need a kennelman but have no funds. I do what I can, as do John, Toot and Melvin (who do not work for the club) and Emily. But truly, we need a full time person. As that does not appear to be a possibility in the near future, would any of you be able to help in the afternoons in the cold weather, the mornings in the summer? It's wonderful to be with hounds but you get dirty and you must be quiet, gentle and very, very patient. A harsh person can ruin an American foxhound in an hour. This type of hound is like an artist: brilliant, dedicated, *sensitive*. If you can help, let Lynn know. I'll be in touch.

The other thing we need is wire for the cleared run which has been sitting there for almost a year now. Page wire or turkey foot would do it, plus the posts. The cost would run about \$3000 and again, I know we're all feeling the pinch. But maybe some of you have an idea, a fundraiser, something. We very much need to move some hounds around.

Thank you for your consideration.

A New Partner

Fox Hunting is, in my opinion, an Extreme Sport! It is fun, fast, thrilling and dangerous. For those of us who love this sport, it is hard to imagine not getting ready ourselves and our horses ready for Cubbing. However, for those of us who didn't grow up in the saddle, this sport is not only dependent on our riding ability but also our partnership and confidence with our mounts. For years, I have been confident that my riding skills were sufficient enough for me to face the danger and enjoy the beauty and thrill afforded in the Hunt Field. Then I had my comeuppance. With my mares Zip and Babe in their 20s, I started looking for a "replacement horse". I found a lovely buckskin named Buttermilk, whom I had known and watched in the Hunt Field for years. He is smallish, sweet, cute and very athletic. He seemed a perfect transition away from the moody mares (whom I love dearly) and who knows, perhaps my ticket to first flight. So Buttermilk joined our family and the mares love him! I



had a summer of trail riding to get to know him and then Cubbing 2007 started. On the first day out, I quickly realized that I couldn't control him. This sweet, cute horse was a different beast in the Hunt Field. Not only couldn't I slow and stop him, but he kicked sweet Haley Osborne's horse and dumped me at the trailers. Good Lord, I missed my mares! Not to be deterred, I came back on the second day of Cubbing 2007 and again found that my skills and Buttermilk's athleticism were not matched. After about 30 minutes, I dismounted and walked him back to the trailer. My frustration was compounded with humility when the field reversed and came bounding by with me on the ground holding my wild pony boy as he screamed to join in. Still, I knew that I was lucky to have my feet on the ground and my body intact.

I made the decision to keep Buttermilk, based on several trail riding skills he possesses. I sensed him to be a good citizen with good ground manners. Thus began a 2 year regime of reprogramming Buttermilk to my way of riding and upping my skill to meet his. We walked for one year. Then we trotted. We went to training seminars. One cowboy even told me that he was exactly what a cowboy looks for in a horse. But with a neck like that, the only way to stop him is if he wants to stop. That was my cue. I needed to find the way to get him to pay attention to me instead of the horse in front of him. So we walked and trotted some more.

By Cubbing Season 2009, I felt we were ready to try again. I went to Gretchen Robb and begged her to babysit me. She agreed to look after me and so with my heart in my mouth, we tried again. He was perfect. All through Cubbing, he was 95% perfect. We were still a bit out of control at the canter and had one mishap over a log at Foxden. I didn't fall off, but I think that was because Buttermilk pushed me back up into the saddle. I was pleased, but wondered if I should attempt Opening Hunt. Perhaps I should put one of the mares up for that special day. After all, nobody wants an unplanned dismount at Opening Hunt. All those people are watching. On regular days, it's just the field and everyone knows what a dismount is all about. Still, I couldn't shake the feeling that I needed to know what Buttermilk was made of. So the decision was made and the braids were tied. Then the weather turn foul on Sunday night. Rain, boat loads over night. Cold rain! I awoke early and thought; crimony, only a fool would go out in this. I called Gretchen Robb, she said she and her family were going. For me to get ready and go! So I did. After all, I always do what Gretchen says. I got my good kit ready, loaded the horse and off we went. All the trailers had trouble getting into the fields because of the rain, but still trailers pulled in one after the other. It was amazing to see how many people braved the elements in order to mount their beloved horses and ride in the mud. After the blessing we left the mansion and took off across the front field. I could tell Buttermilk wanted to roll, but he listened and followed my (or Gretchen's) lead. After 2 hours of rain and mud we returned to the trailers. He never put a foot wrong. As a matter of fact, I was glad of his skills and athleticism. I was extremely proud of how hard that little buckskin worked to make us a team in difficult conditions.

Many times this year I found myself smiling with joy as we rode through woods and fields during our Hunts. Even though Buttermilk and I still have a ways to go in our training, it sure feels good to know that he was worth the effort. For it is truly a remarkable experience to build a partnership with an animal. You have to trust them with your life, just as they have to trust us with theirs.

It's not too late...

Oak Ridge Fox Hunt Club Hunt Ball

Saturday, March 20

Oak Ridge Estate Carriage House

Music by **Abbey Road**

6:30 pm Silent Auction, cocktails

8:00 pm Dinner, cash bar

Deadline for RSVPs has been extended to March 13. Please contact Lynn Stevenson if you wish to attend 434-361-2331.

Gone to Ground

Our New Year's Hunt, bitter cold, only staff showing, actually turned into a pretty nice hunt. After two hours, though the 12°F had risen to maybe 20°F, it began to tell on fingers, toes, noses and ears.

One of the funniest things a hound has ever done occurred after that frozen day. I'd walked into the house and slipping right in behind me was an older hound, Doc. He's a thick-built tri-color, sweet and dedicated. Not a brilliant fellow but very steady, the kind of soldier that makes for a good company. He had to go down to the kennels but I was so cold all I wanted to do was change my clothes and get my feet warm.

The cats put Doc in his place so he patiently sat while I peeled off layers which took time since my hands were not working well. I walked into my bedroom for warm clothes, he was right behind me just thrilled to have individual attention. Suddenly Doc rose on his hind legs and gave tongue, I mean they heard him in Crozet. I have a stuffed fox, a large fellow I found on the road years ago and took to the taxidermist because he was so beautiful I couldn't bear to leave him by the side of the road. I often wonder how people can hit animals and leave them but then again, so many slide in between the front and back wheels, perhaps people don't know they've killed or hurt an animal.

Doc, on his hind legs, just carried on high. The music was beautiful. The cats remained unimpressed but you know how they are. The house dogs ran in and joined in and Doc was in his glory. I'm standing there in my birthday suit so cold all I want to do is put on warm clothes. I couldn't get him to give up his marking the fox.

I have an extra horn in the closet, the one Vester squashed but it still works. So I blew "Gone to Ground". Do you know, that's all it took. He stopped, looked at me and felt he had done his duty.

Finally, I put on clothes, put him in the truck with me and off to the kennels we went where, I am sure, Doc told them of the huge red fox in the house which he, and he alone, accounted for.

You've got to love foxhounds.

ware squirrel!



Speaking of new partners, my new mare got her test last Sunday. We were strolling through the woods at Oak Ridge, while the hounds were trying to get up some scent, when suddenly a grey furry ball dropped from the heavens. A large squirrel must have missed his branch, fell from the tree and bounced right onto Loretta's neck, then onto the ground. She jumped sideways about 3 feet, but luckily, did not lose her composure nor her passenger. Back at the trailers, we agreed that she has earned the right to have the green ribbon removed from her tail. You just never know what is going to happen in the hunt field!

Becky Birnbaum

Hounds at Almost Home

As many of you know, our master is an avid supporter of the Almost Home Pet Adoption Center, a no-kill animal shelter, run by the Nelson County SPCA. Unfortunately, many hounds end up at the shelter, and they currently have many up for adoption. Won't you consider taking one in? Many of our members can attest that they adapt well to being family members. Here are a few that are available. To see others, or find out about other ways you can help, go to <http://www.nelsonspca.org/>



Dr. Rita Mae Brown, MFH, with Duchess, a young spayed female Hound mix



With Trudi, a young Walker hound mix and Junior, a Plott Hound/Beagle mix

With two very shy hounds that love each other: Petey a black and white hounds mix and Sadie a tri-color hound mix

